

The Spirit of Christmas

Tim Dubberly, December 19, 2004

Text: Luke 2:8-14

Introduction:

If a person looked to our world today for an explanation of the Christmas spirit, I am afraid they would think that playing on people's emotions to make a profit was the answer. Christmas has become commercialized until it is trying to remove Christ out of the picture and turn this time into a holiday to make money.

One has only to look at these verses to find the spirit of Christmas that God intended for the world to receive. He wanted them to receive the spirit of love to replace the spirit of fear. He wanted the world to know that He was bringing joy to the world, through His Son, that all might be saved. He wanted the world to be filled with singing and rejoicing that the heart of people would produce peace and goodwill toward men.

■ May the Christmas cheer remind you of Him who said, "Be of good cheer."
May the Christmas bell remind you of the glorious proclamation of His birth.
May the Christmas carols remind you of the song the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest."

May the Christmas season remind you in every way of Jesus Christ your King.

However, the spirit of this world has turned into a spirit of everyone for themselves, because it is a dog eat dog world. One day the church will be taken out of this world and God says it will not be fit to be a dunghill. That spirit is revealed in the life of a fictitious character named Scrooge, Ebenezer Scrooge. His character is visited by three Christmas angels who had come to try to save Him through their visit.

Today I want us to look at what they represented and what they were trying to do. They were trying to restore the Christmas spirit back into Him just like the true angels of God were trying to stir up in the hearts of the shepherds. Look with me now at their "assignments".

- I. The angel of Christmas past caused him to remember.
 - A. He reminded him of his life and those who had invested time and prayers in his life.
 - His sister loved him.
 - His boss introduced him to celebration.
 - His girlfriend encouraged him.
 - B. He was reminded of his choices and the spirit behind his choices.
 - He chose business over marriage.
 - His love was for money, not mankind.
 - He chose to live alone and be miserable.
 - C. He was reminded of what was really important.
 - He remembered the singing and dancing.
 - He remembered the fun and friendship.
 - He remembered the bathing in the spirit of Christmas.
 - D. Today we need to remember.
 - Remember where God found you and how lost you were without hope, joy, or peace.
 - Remember the joy of salvation that filled your life when Jesus came in and saved you.
 - Remember how much you loved God and wanted to do anything for Him.

If the following story were not true, it would surely be unbelievable. It is true, however, as you yourself will agree when you have read it.

There was once a great king. His love for his people knew no limits. Although the kingdom was very large, the king knew every person by name. Everything the people of the kingdom had was a gift freely given by the loving king.

So, to show their love and appreciation to the king for all he had done for them, the people decided to have a great celebration to honor his birthday. Everyone agreed it was a marvelous idea. Preparations for the celebration were very elaborate. No expense was spared by the people. They adorned their homes with lights, decorations, and expensive ornaments. There were parties, dinners, and celebrations throughout the kingdom.

All the people brought gifts for their friends and family. Many of the gifts which the people gave each other were quite expensive, involving considerable indebtedness. In fact, the people spent more on the birthday celebration than they spent at any other time of the year.

Many who were not citizens of the kingdom, and who did not even know the king, joined in the celebration. Their celebration of the king's birth was marked by excessive drinking. Since they did not know the king, they invented a good-natured, fat fellow in a red suit. He laughed a lot, but never said anything. But that didn't matter because they were too busy celebrating to listen anyhow.

The great day of celebrating his birth finally arrived, and some of his people did come bringing gifts and thanking him for his goodness to them. But to his dismay, most of the citizens never came to his house at all on the day of celebration. And the gifts brought to the king by those few who came were very meager when compared with the gifts they had given themselves.

For the most part the people said they had been so busy with all the celebrations and personal plans that they had forgotten about the king. Several said they had thought of him, but really could not work it into their schedules or budgets to come see him or bring a gift. A few were known to be quite put out when it was suggested that going to the king's house or remembering him with a gift was important.

Those people who did come to his house and who brought their loving gifts were welcomed and blessed by the king. But when they had gone and he was alone again, the king fell to thinking of the vast numbers of his people who had forgotten and forsaken him. How could they have forgotten? Had he not loved them all? How could so many of his beloved people who had found the time and money for shopping and feasting and partying and decorating and all sorts of celebrations--how could they possibly be so thoughtless, so ungrateful or selfish? Did they not know that he, too, had feelings? Was not the purpose of the birthday celebration originally planned to honor him?

When the king was alone, pondering these questions, he felt the tears well up in his eyes. And in his loneliness, he wept.

One thought brought some hope and consolation. Even though they had forgotten him, he had not forgotten them.

II. The angel of Christmas present was sent to help him realize.

- A. He realized that there were people hurting all around him and he had the power to relieve some of their suffering.
- He saw Bob Cratchet's home, poverty, and sick child.
 - He saw homeless, and orphans.
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- B. He realized that he was now greedy, lonely, and unloved.
- He saw his death and how it meant nothing to the people of his town.
 - He saw how empty his life was.
 - He realized that he was in the world but not a part of it.
- C. We need to realize some things.
- We have forgotten where God found us as we criticize others for their lifestyle instead of praying.
 - Many have lost the joy of salvation and wonder even if God is real, for the world has convinced them He is not.
 - Many will realize that they no longer love God's word; they no longer love to pray or work for the kingdom of God.
 - Life has become all about them, their desires, and their will.

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III. The angel of Christmas future helped him recognize.

- A. If he did not change he would die, and his life would have been wasted.
- B. He recognized that business and money were no longer important, but that people were important.
- C. He recognized that his heart had changed and God was giving him one more chance to find happiness.
- D. We need to recognize.
 - That, without a change some of us may die frustrated and lonely.
 - Money cannot solve problems, only God's peace can.
 - Our life can make a greater impact upon the world that when we die, what we left behind will be worth remembering.

■ Legend has it that a missionary, lost at sea, was by chance washed up out of the sea on the edge of a remote native village. Half-dead from starvation, exposure, and sea water, he was found by the people of the village and was nursed back to full health. Subsequently, he lived among these people for twenty years. During the whole of that time he confessed no faith. He uttered no songs. He preached no sermons. He neither read nor recited any Scripture. He made no personal faith claim. But when people were sick, he attended them, sitting long into the night. When people were hungry, he gave them food. When people were lonely, he was a source of company. He taught the ignorant. He was a source of enlightenment to those who were more knowledgeable. He always took the side of those who had been wronged. There was not a single human condition with which he did not identify.

After twenty years had passed, missionaries came from the sea to the village and began talking to the people about a man called Jesus, and after hearing of Jesus, the natives insisted that he had lived among them for the past twenty years. "Come, we will introduce you to the man about whom you have been speaking." The missionaries were led to a hut, and there they found their long-lost fellow missionary whom they had thought dead.

--James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), p. 361

Conclusion:

Luke's gospel gives us a picture of shepherds receiving joy, excitement, hope, and love from God's angels on high. They ran and found the child and rejoiced and returned to their flocks praising God for all that they had heard and seen.

Scrooge had a partner, whose name was Jacob Marley, He also appeared to him before the angels came and showed Scrooge the chain he had forged in life. Scrooge told him he had been a good businessman, and Marley's words, to him were powerful; he said, "Mankind was my business."

■ Nicholas was born of wealthy parents in A.D. 280 in a small town called Patara in Asia Minor. He lost his parents early by an epidemic but not before they had instilled in him the gift of faith. Then little Nicholas went to Myra and lived there a life full of sacrifice and love and the spirit of Jesus. Nicholas became so Christlike that when the town needed a bishop he was elected. He was imprisoned for his faith by Emperor Diocletian and released later by Emperor Constantine. There have been many stories of his generosity and compassion: how he begged for food for the poor, and how he would give girls money so that they would have a dowry to get a husband. The story most often repeated was about how he would don a disguise and go out and give gifts to poor children. He gave away everything he had. And in the year 314, he died. His body was later moved to Italy where his remains are to this day.

But the story of Nicholas has spread around the world. There are more churches in the world named after St. Nicholas than any other person in all the history of the church. Oh, people have done strange things to him. The poet, Clement Moore, gave him a red nose and eight tiny reindeer. And Thomas Nast, the illustrator, made him big and fat and gave him a red suit trimmed by fur. And others have given him names--Belsnickle, Kris Kringle, Santa Claus. But what's important about him is that he had the mind of Christ. Because of his gentle selfless love, he touched the whole world. And this same mind of Christ is to be in us.

--James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) pp. 85-86.

Today, mankind is your business. God still desires for the world to know his peace, love, and joy. However, he is no longer using the angels to reveal His message; He is using the church. Is He able to use you? Does He have access to your heart through His will?

My Challenge:

- Ask God to forgive you for any pride, greed, or selfishness.
- Ask Him to help you today to get the spirit of Christmas in your heart and keep Him there.
- Ask Him to help you remember what He has done for you, realize where you are today, and recognize what you can do with the rest of your life.