

The Gift

It was not with pretty ribbons or covered in beautiful wrapping. No wreaths or garlands or beams with holly entwined, no drummer boys, and likely no angry innkeeper. No reindeer and sleighs, or cedar boughs, and no bells to herald his arrival. But there was Joseph and Mary, and a baby in a manger. There were shepherds in the dark, and an angel with a message of where to find him, and a heavenly host proclaiming a Savior is born, "Peace on earth, good will to men!" To all men, the world over. Then there were the wise men from afar who knew the prophecy, saw the sign, and followed a star. They brought gifts, homage to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

It was a time of family returning home, of travel, and fulfilling the requirements for the census, to be taxed in the place of one's birth. No doubt many experienced tension and stress with the decree from Caesar Augustus, and all the travel that went with it. Perhaps, some may have had to borrow money for travel and tax, to support a government that many did not appreciate. Into this mix, God chose for his Son to be born.

He chose not to be born in a royal palace, clothed in robes and riches so fine. Nor was it with the wealthy or in a temple grand. He was not surrounded by kings or priests nor people of royal distinction. But he chose the humble folks, the common people, those that had hearts turned towards him. He chose the manger, the shepherds, and the wise men. He chose Mary to be his earthly mother, and Joseph to be his earthly father.

It was not his personage, but what he brought. As the angel sang, "Peace on earth, good will to men." It was the Holy Mighty God's promise of peace to all who would receive him, and the proof of how much God cared about the inhabitants of the earth. It was God's good will to man that sent heaven's best to a world full of darkness and sin. Love, Joy, and Peace, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a cattle manger. The Prince of Peace, the sacrificial lamb, the hope of all the world, was born that night.

While the world around celebrates with lights and trees and manger scenes; carols on the radio, and Merry Christmas wishes; may we rejoice that so long ago a baby was born, angels did come, and wise men gave gifts. Though it may seem like the gift is lost in the chaos, the questions are no doubt asked, "What is this all about?" and the story is told, over and over again; in homes, in churches, in story and song. In plastic figures of manger scenes, of shepherds, and wise men. The old gospel story of hope to a dark world. It may be tainted with paganism, and commercialism, and other unchristian traditions, but there are few celebrations that shape the lives of children, or cover as many lands, as celebrating the coming of the Prince of Peace. Wars and fighting have stopped on Christmas day, as enemies joined in carols of praise; and many a heart has turned to happier days, remembering the warmth of Christmas past.

We may not change the hubbub of the season, the expenditure of funds, the stress of programs, gifts, and travel. But in the middle, we can stop and consider what it is all about. God sent his Son into a world such as this. We can hate all the busyness, or we can consider that the Prince of Peace can give us peace in the middle of this time. If his power is strong enough to stop soldiers fighting for a day while thinking of past Christmases with family and friends and cause them to sing carols in the dark trenches, then he can stop our inner war with Christmas and show us what Christmas is all about.

The story of Christmas will change the atmosphere of our hearts. The Prince of Peace will give us the greatest gift, peace in our hearts. He will give us a story to tell that started many, many years ago, one dark night when a Savior was born.

The true essence of Christmas is lost in all the decorations, Santa, and the public displays. However, that does not change the story of his birth, nor dim the light to the dark soul longing for truth.

What would the world be like without celebrating Christmas; remembering the gift of Jesus so many years ago? Perhaps many who celebrate it do not know the true meaning of it. And then again, perhaps this season, a child will ask, and someone will explain the true Christmas story, and that child will seek the true meaning of peace. Or perhaps there is a lonely soul who many years ago knew true peace and is reminded again of bygone Christmases full of happiness, warmth, and joy, and turns his or her heart towards home, the heavenly home, and finds peace. And then there are the opportunities while meeting all the harried holiday shoppers, to give them a smile, which perhaps will make them stop and think of the Prince of Peace. A world without celebrating Christmas would be a dark place to be.

Before we write off the world's Christmas celebration, let us consider the words of the apostle Paul, which I think can apply to the commercial Christmas season.

Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. Philippians 1:15-18 KJV

I do not believe in the mythical Christmas with Santa, his reindeer and sleigh, nor the trees and lights which mean Christmas for so many. But I do believe in a Christmas in the heart with family and friends, remembering the Prince of Peace, the Messiah has come, and the message of Peace on earth, good will towards men.

This story never grows old nor loses its power. May we join in spirit with the shepherds of long ago: *And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. Luke 2:15-18 KJV*

May each of you be blessed this season with the Prince of Peace!

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