

## Christmas 2007

How do you gauge a good Christmas? Most of us, I would guess, have some type of scale that determines whether or not this Christmas, or any Christmas, goes down as one of the better ones. And, I would imagine, most of us probably already have a pretty good idea of where this Christmas will fit on the spectrum.

So how do you gauge a good Christmas? When I was younger, I measured Christmas by the amount of (and quality of) gifts I received. I remember the Christmas when I was given an electric train. And I can't forget the toy guns I had (called Fanner Fifties). I remember the record player and the records. Somehow over the years, the gifts I received stopped being toys and started being clothes. Later, as a parent, I also tended to gauge Christmas by the quantity (as well as the quality) of the presents we could give our children. Unfortunately, I think I have many times allowed the cultural festivities to obscure the real point of the Christmas season, and I have a suspicion that I am not the only one who has done that.

So here we are now, with Christmas just a couple of days away, and I'm wondering if some of us have already made the call on this Christmas. Maybe some of us are feeling pretty good about how many lights we've strung outside and how many boxes are under the tree. And maybe others are feeling discouraged, and you have already decided that this year's Christmas is not going to be a very good one. In all likelihood, we all need to take a closer look at what Christmas is all about. We need a biblical perspective on how to do Christmas.

## **DO CHRISTMAS IN A BIBLICAL WAY**

### ***1. DON'T EXPECT THINGS TO BE JUST LIKE YOU WANT THEM TO BE***

An expectation is a belief in a likely outcome. If you put your hand in a fire, you expect it to be burned. If you drop something, you expect it will fall to the ground. Expectations are also standards or outcomes we expect from ourselves, other people or situations, and many have huge expectations for Christmas. Dr. Elayne Savage, relationship expert said, "Two of the biggest stressors during the holidays are gift-giving and family get-togethers. Both of these share that same common problem: unrealistic expectations and resulting disappointments." There is an expression that says, "unrealistic expectations are future resentments."

## TWAS THE DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Twas the day after Christmas when all through the place, there were arguments and depression—even mom had a long face. The stockings were hung empty, and the house was a mess. The new clothes didn't fit, and Dad was under stress.

The family was irritable, And the children no one could please;  
Because the instructions for the swing set were all written in Chinese!

The bells no longer jingled, And no carolers came around;  
The sink was stacked with dishes, and the tree was turning brown.

The stores were full of people returning things that fizzled or failed, and the shoppers were discouraged because everything they'd bought was now on half-price sale!

We will always have expectations. The issue is where we set our standards. No Christmas has ever been perfect. The first Christmas had some things happening that could have been very disappointing.

*Matthew 1:18-21 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.*

Verse 18 says Jesus' mother Mary *was pledged to be married to Joseph*. This was a part of ancient Jewish marriages. First, the two families would agree to the union and negotiate the betrothal, including a price for the bride that would be paid to the bride's father. Next, a public announcement would be made. At this point, the couple was "pledged." This is similar to engagement today, except that it was much more binding. At this point, even though the couple was not officially married, their relationship could be broken only through death or divorce. During that time, the couple would live separately, with their parents. This waiting period would demonstrate the bride's purity. If she were found to be pregnant during that time, the marriage could be annulled. Otherwise, the couple would be married and begin living together. In the story, Mary was found to be pregnant. According to Jewish law, Joseph could have broken the relationship, and Mary could have been stoned. To remove his fear, an angel appeared to assure Joseph of Mary's purity in vs 19.

*Matthew 1:19, "Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.*

The angel told Joseph, "God has done a miracle." Just as the Holy Spirit moved over the earth in the beginning and gave life, He moved over the body of Mary and created the life of a child. Talk show host Larry King was once asked if he could interview anyone

across human history, whom would he choose. Without hesitation, he said, “I would want to interview Jesus Christ. I would want to ask Him one question, which would be: ‘Are you indeed Virgin-born?’ The answer to that question would explain history.” And Larry King is right. It does.

But as far as Joseph was concerned, this wasn’t the plan. This wasn’t what he had expected to happen, and things continued to become more complicated.

*Luke 2: <sup>1</sup>In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup>(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup>And everyone went to his own town to register. <sup>4</sup>So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup>He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup>and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

Caesar Augustus issued a decree that every family must return to their hometown for a worldwide census. So even though the baby is due at any time, Mary and Joseph must make the journey all the way to Bethlehem from Nazareth, and that trip is about 80 miles long. Slowly they traveled with all the complications of travel compounded by Mary’s condition. And once they arrived in Bethlehem there was no room for them in the inn.

Tradition says they stayed in a cave in the side of the hill behind the inn of the village that Christ was born in. No doubt, they were disappointed. Things haven’t changed. If you’re looking for everything to be “just perfect” this Christmas, you will probably be very disappointed. This Christmas will not be a perfect Christmas for any of us, but it can be a time when we receive God’s blessings on our family and friends, and that’s where our expectation should lie.

## **2. PAY ATTENTION TO THE SEEMINGLY INSIGNIFICANT THINGS**

If there is any word that we would not use to describe what goes on this time of the year, it would be the word “insignificant.” For many businesses, this is the most significant time of the year. This is the time when you either make it in business or you go under. Christmas is also highly significant with regard to the parties, the Christmas programs and all the rest. But if you study that first Christmas, you find it to be very different. The Christmas story is filled with people and things that would seem insignificant to the world but which were highly significant to God.

On the surface, there was a nothing significant about the baby named Jesus. His parents were very poor people. He was born in a place where they kept the animals, a stable. He

was not clothed in the fine clothes that wealthy parents would put on their newborn. If you would have looked at the baby Jesus in that scene, there would have been nothing impressive about him.

And then there were the shepherds. Luke 2 tells us about God's announcement of Jesus' birth to the shepherds.

*Luke 2:8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup>An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup>Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."*

Usually, when a couple sends out announcements concerning the birth of a new child, they send the announcements to people who are significant in their lives. Shepherds were among the last people to be considered significant in those days. First of all, they were religious outcasts because their work prevented them from participating in the feasts and holy days. Since they were constantly on the move to find new pasture for their flocks, they were looked on with suspicion, kind of the way people today might look at gypsies, or carnival workers. They were not permitted to give testimony in a legal proceeding, because their word wasn't considered trustworthy.

God was demonstrating by His choice of these humble shepherds to be the first to receive the news of Christ's birth that Jesus was not going to be the Savior of only the political and social and religious elite. Jesus doesn't give preference to any group or any class. Intelligence, education, or wealth, mean nothing to Him.

Even the place of Jesus' birth was insignificant.

*Micah 5:2, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past."*

Every little child in a Sunday School class knows about Bethlehem, but 2,000 years ago, it wasn't a very well-known place. It was a pretty obscure little village. In fact, Bethlehem hardly had the status of a country town, but it was God's appointed place for His Christ to be born.

The things that were really important to God that first Christmas were insignificant to the world at that time, and it is no different today. God is not impressed by the grandeur of some great Christmas program. And God doesn't look at some elaborate display of sparkling lights and say "wow! That's incredible!" God is still focused on the things that don't make the newspaper, things like a family Christmas gathering where the family member's love for one another is evident. God is focused on a father reading the

Christmas story to his children and teaching them the true meaning of Christmas. God's eyes are on someone who goes out of his way to do something nice for someone who is alone. God is interested in someone who gives money to a needy family so that they can have gifts to give to their children. God is interested in those "behind the scene kind of things that most never hear about but things that bring Him glory.

### **3. REMEMBER YOU ARE THE REASON FOR THE SEASON**

A slogan that is often heard this time of year says "Jesus is the reason for the season." That's true, because this holiday is about his birth. But it's also true that you are the reason for the season. That's because you are the reason that Jesus came to earth.

David Meece wrote these words ...

As little children  
We would dream of Christmas morn  
Of all the gifts and toys  
We knew we'd find  
But we never realized  
A baby born one blessed night  
Gave us the greatest gift of our lives

We were the reason  
That He gave His life  
We were the reason  
That He suffered and died  
To a world that was lost  
He gave all He could give  
To show us the reason to live

There's a sense in which Christmas really is all about you, because you desperately need what only the Christmas event can give you. 2000 years ago Jesus left his home in heaven to come to earth as a man.

*"Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing, he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form."  
(Philippians 2:6-7)*

This assertion seems almost illogical. It is like speaking about a square circle. The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, unable to do more than lie and stare and wriggle and make noises, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child.

A. W. Tozer, the great Alliance preacher, was also overwhelmed by this thought.

He wrote: "The coming of Jesus Christ into this world represents a truth more profound than any philosophy. All of the great thinkers of the world together could never have produced anything even remotely approaching the wonder and profundity disclosed in the message of these words ... He came ... The words are wiser than all learning."

### **Why did God do this?**

Because there was no other way for you to become fully alive in a personal relationship with God.

*1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and people. He is the man Christ Jesus."*

Jesus Christ came into the world to bring peace between you and God. Jesus bridged the gap that existed between you and God because of your sin. That's what it took to make things right between you and God. That's why Jesus came to earth. That's why we have Christmas.

### **4. TAKE A LITTLE TIME TO EXCHANGE GIFTS WITH JESUS.**

His gift to you is the gift of life. It includes salvation, love, forgiveness, grace, mercy, purpose, joy, peace, fulfillment, and eternal life.

Your gift to him is the only thing that is yours to give: yourself. This is the gift that he's hoping to receive this year. I encourage you to spend some time confirming, or reconfirming, your vows to him. Tell him -- either for the first time or the hundredth time that you want to know him, to follow him, to live for him ... that you want to give back to him the life that he has given you.