

## Christmas Celebration

There have been times in my life that I felt like I belonged in another world, in another place, even another time. Christmas has often captured my imagination and taken me into a fantasy world. When I was young certain singers and songs lifted my spirits; they transported me away, especially when I listened to Handel's Messiah.

The oratorio, Messiah, was completed in **24 days** of swift composition.

At the end of his manuscript Handel wrote the letters "SDG"—*Soli Deo Gloria*, "To God alone the glory". This inscription, taken with the speed of composition, has encouraged belief in the apocryphal story that Handel wrote the music in a fervor of divine inspiration in which, as he wrote the "Hallelujah" chorus, "**he saw all heaven before him**"

C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*,

"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."<sup>1</sup>

Randy Newman testifies,

"...before coming to faith in Jesus, I worshiped' music as my ultimate god... C.S. Lewis helped me see that Jesus was the Messiah I was looking for at those devotional times with the Philadelphia Orchestra. He was the one who could satisfy when Brahms could not. His sacrifice provided the open door to 'the other world.'<sup>2</sup>

I find a dilemma that the things that are meant to point us to Christ have become the end, instead of the means to the end.

Expectations and Reality: Christmas Celebration is about the birth of Jesus Christ. Everything else in the Christmas celebration points to Him.

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (1952; repr. New York: Simon & Schuster, Touchstone, 1996), 121.

<sup>2</sup> Randy Newman, *The Gift of Music: Common Grace and Common Ground*, (C.S. Lewis Institute: Knowing & Doing, Winter, 2016), 1.

The birth of Christ marks the time in history in which God became a man.

### **I. Many pictures:**

The Word became flesh. John 1:1-2, 14

The Creator joined His creation. Jn. 1:3

Light came to darkness. :4-5

John's testimony -: 6-13

Meekness and Majesty were joined as the King became a servant.

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;  
Come and behold Him – born the king of angels;

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,  
Born this happy morning,  
Jesus, to Thee be all glory giv'n;  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing.

O come let us adore Him... Christ the Lord.

### **II. Many Signs:**

Many signs pointed to the Birth of Christ

Matt. 1:18-25

Many specific prophecies of the birth of Christ are found in scripture,

- The angel announcement brought the shepherds to Jesus.
- The star led the wise men to Jesus
- The prophecies predicted the many aspects of Christ's birth,
  - especially that she was to be born of a virgin.
- The glory missing from Israel for over 400 years had returned.
- Prophets past and present at the time of Jesus birth heralded His birth.

Signs are events, connected with prophecies, that point to Jesus birth.

### III. Many People and Events:

Many key people and events are mentioned in Scripture that surround the birth of Christ. The entrance of light into a world of darkness and blinded people, God provided encouragement, announcements and inspiration to those without hope.

The shepherds left their flocks and found the Christ child lying in a manger.  
Luke 2:8-20

The wise men were led by a star to the new born King. Matt. 2:1-12

Simeon confirms Jesus as the promised Messiah that he would see before he died. Luke 2:25-32

Anna the Prophetess – identifies baby Jesus as the Christ. Luke 2:36-38

Zacharias, the priest appointed to burn incense in the Temple was visited by the angel, Gabriel. There he was told that his wife would bear a child who would be the forerunner of the Messiah. Luke 1:3-25

Mary – affirmed her willingness to bear the holy infant though a virgin.  
Luke 1:26-48

Elizabeth – confirmed Mary's child as the promised Messiah  
Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit when Mary greeted her.  
Luke 1:39-45

Joseph – After the angel's visit Joseph changed from a fretting husband to a dedicated husband and step-father to Jesus. Matt. 1:19-25

Herod, in contrast, lived down to his low level of existence, not only by rejecting Jesus at His birth, but by ordering the slaughter of all male babies two-years-old and younger in the Bethlehem area when he couldn't find Jesus. Matt. 2:16-18

The Exile to Egypt – Jesus, Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt to escape from Herod until his death. Afterwards they settled in Nazareth.  
(Matt. 2:19-23)

The events and people that surround Jesus' birth show that He was the long-awaited Messiah.

#### **IV. Many Experiences:**

People either find Christ and with it experience Christmas or they reject Christ and only experience the symbols of Christmas.

A woman who read a Billboard sign which said, "Keep Christ in Christmas."  
She remarked bitterly, "*They have to put religion in everything.*"

John wrote,

"There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:9-13

Receiving the Light of Christ results in an inward "enlightenment."  
Receiving Christ results in becoming a child of God. – "the new birth."

When Jesus was born as a human infant: God become a man.  
So when Jesus comes into our lives, causing us to be born again,  
we become God's child.

Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown  
When Thou camest to earth for me;  
But I Bethlehem's home was there found no room  
For Thy holy nativity;  
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus!  
There is room in my heart for Thee

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,  
that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

(John 3:16)

What began at Christmastime  
is only the beginning of God's plan for us.

Paul's words to the Corinthians confirm this,  
Things which eye has not seen  
and ear has not heard,  
and which have not entered the heart of man,  
all that God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Cor. 2:9)  
(from Is. 64:4; 65:17)

People will be disappointed with Christmas if they miss Christ.  
With Christ traditions have meaning and great significance.  
Without Christ other things cannot satisfy.

Isaiah wrote to God's people who were caught up in their own thinking and ways.  
Instead of finding God they were far from Him.

"Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live..." (Is. 55:2-3).

To again restate my thoughts:

*I find a dilemma that the things in Christmas that are meant to point us to Christ have become the end, in themselves, instead of the means to the end.*

Lewis calls them idols in "*The Weight of Glory*."

The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things – the beauty, the memory of our own past – are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, "*The Weight of Glory*," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1980), 29.

The Christmas hymns tell the story

God rest ye merry gentlemen  
Let nothing you dismay  
Remember Christ our Savior  
Was born on Christmas Day  
To save us all from Satan's power  
When we were gone astray

Oh, tidings of comfort and joy  
Comfort and joy  
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy

From God our heavenly Father  
A blessed angel came  
And unto certain shepherds  
Brought tidings to the same  
How that in Bethlehem was born  
The Son of God by name

Oh, tidings of comfort and joy  
Comfort and joy  
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy