

Christmas in a Manger

What is Christmas all about? --- Grace.

Paul wrote in his letter to young Titus,

“For the grace of God appeared bringing salvation to all men.”

(Titus 2:11)

Grace means God offers us a Gift. Grace is all about what God has done.

Grace is favor that is undeserved and wholly based on God’s love and mercy.

Christmas has come and with it comes the offer of salvation.

The Apostle John wrote,

“In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it ... 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)

Chapter three includes,

“This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.” (John 3:19-21)

Jesus was born in a stable to a lowly peasant couple in an insignificant town in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire. It seems amazing that the Creator of all things would join His creation in such a humble manner, and for such a purpose.

We wish everyone a merry Christmas but realize that not everyone does. The first Christmas was no exception, but it was also filled with intrigue, surprise, angelic hosts and marvelous glory. Though humble in the extreme, the contrast of glory couldn’t have been greater. The Lord of Glory whom the universe couldn’t contain was confined in a teenager’s womb and laid in a manger at birth.

Luke 2: 1-7

The more one ponders the more difficult it becomes. Christ didn’t come into a world anxiously and expectantly waiting for Him. He was despised and rejected of men from the start.

Imagine a young girl who was very pregnant, being informed by a heartless government that she would have to make a 90-mile journey from where she lived to a small town, because it was the origin of her ancestors. When Mary and Joseph arrived she was already in labor and there was no room in an overcrowded inn. The only place was available to them was a barn-like cave, with all the comforts we might expect in such an establishment. There she gave birth and wrapped him in swaddling cloths- rags by another name.

Jesus is described as 'the True Light'.

His coming brought light into a world of darkness.

Anne Graham Lotz gave these thoughts,

“Our nation and our world are growing darker by the moment. Ignorance, defiance, rebellion, deception, violence, greed, anger, dishonesty, immorality and murder have become almost commonplace. I was wondering what you and I could do that would make any difference...”¹

In Genesis when the world was in darkness and void, “God said, ‘Let there be light;’ and there was light.” (Gen. 1:3). As a result, this planet and the cosmos were forever changed. God’s response to the darkness was to turn on the Light.

Thousands of years later, on a dark, starry night outside of Bethlehem, once again God spoke into the darkness and in essence said, “Let there be Light.” And a Baby was born – a Baby who was Himself the Light of the world. And human history was forever changed.

In the stories making up the many facets of the Christmas narrative we understand the difficulties these people had:

Joseph faces the crisis of Mary’s pregnancy;

Joseph and Mary’s are force to journey to Bethlehem; shepherds watching their flocks at night are frightened by the bright lights of glory as the sky is filled with UFO’s, or UFC’s – unidentified flying celestials –

Jerusalem greatly troubled by a Roman ruler named Herod (of whom his family said, ‘It’s safer to be one of his pigs than one of his sons.’), when an entourage of Magi came to town bearing news that a ‘new King had been born’.

Afterwards Herod sent solders to slaughter all the male babies, two years and under, in the region surrounding Bethlehem.

¹ Anne Graham Lotz, article, *Holes in the Darkness*, (Decision magazine, Charlotte: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Dec. 2017), P. 38.

Mary, Joseph, and Jesus fled to Egypt having been warned by an angel.

God's answer to all this evil and darkness was the Christ child
- the Light of the world.

The light of Christ is what illumines a dark world.

The Creator of light was the Light whose coming turned on the lights.

- **His light discloses**²: making itself known and revealing what the darkness covered. There is nothing like the frustration of searching for something in the dark. It can be out in the open, but cloaked in darkness. A little light and you have found it.

Christ came into the world to reveal God to men, and to overcome the darkness, destroying the works of the devil.

- **His light dispels**: Instead of coming against the darkness or attacking those unable to see the truth, turn on the light of Christ.

“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

- **His light divides** – light and darkness cannot abide together.

Paul wrote in his epistle to the Ephesians,

“...you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, ‘Awake sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’” (Eph. 5:7-14)

² Ibid., The five points given in Anne Graham Lotz' Bible study on light are applied here.

- **His light directs** – when we don't know the way the light of His truth guides us.

People lived as creatures of the night, lost in a maze of darkness – they don't even know over what they stumble, blind following the blind. Christ is the Light. The Star guided the magi.

- **His light draws** – people will be attracted to the light of Christ. Christ will draw them.

Luke 2: 8-20

Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." (John 8:12)

"While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light." (John 12:36)

The Christmas Hymn, Hark, the Herald Angels Sing, by Charles Wesley:

Hark, the herald angels sing, 'Glory to the new born King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations rise, Join the triumph of the skies,
With angelic host proclaim, 'Christ is born in Bethlehem.'
Hark the herald angels sing, 'Glory to the newborn King!'

Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold him come, Offspring of a Virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the God-head see; Hail, the incarnate Deity,
Pleased as Man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel!

Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace!

Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!

Light and life to all He brings, Risen with healing in His wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth.

So turn on the lights of Christmastime, especially the light of Christ.

Jesus said, "You are the light of the world... Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 5:13-16).

As always, let the light do its work.