

Don't Miss Your Christmas Miracle

Many of us get so caught up in the mad holiday rush that we miss the point. Here's how you can stay focused on the reason for the season.

On December 17, 1903, Orville and Wilbur Wright made history by launching their rudimentary aircraft at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The man-made machine remained airborne, and the humble effort of these two young men launched the entire world into a new era of flight.

With great excitement the brothers cabled the news back to their local newspaper. In a postscript, they added that they hoped to be back in Ohio by Christmas.

The headline that appeared in the Dayton paper the next day gave not even a nod to the significance of the Wrights' successful flight. It read, "Prominent Local Bicycle Merchants to be Home for Christmas."

Talk about missing the point. Talk about overlooking the big story. Evidently the home folks in Dayton were too caught up in the excitement of the holidays to stop and ponder that something immensely important had just happened—something so important that their lives and the lives of generations yet unborn would never be the same.

Many of us are like the folks in Dayton when it comes to Christmas. We miss the big story. As a result, the season, which should be filled with tranquility and joy, is often laden with stress and sadness instead.

Many people—even many Christians—fail to experience a quality, Christ-honoring Christmas. The glitter of materialism smothers the babe in the manger, and their own holiday events take precedence over the “big” event.

Granted, it’s easy in the mad rush of the season to miss the point. Even some of the key players in the original Christmas story had no clue what God was up to.

Herod never got in on the Christmas miracle because he was too threatened and insecure. Yet we can give the pagan king this much: He did realize the potential power of the baby. Herod knew instinctively that Jesus challenges any person and any system that opposes His lordship.

Are you threatened by His rule in your life?

The priests missed the Christmas miracle because they were too religious. Steeped in dead tradition, they walked right past the source of abundant and eternal life.

I’ve often wondered about the priests on duty when Mary and Joseph brought the Christ child to the temple to be dedicated. No doubt those priests dutifully quoted Scripture over the baby as part of the ritual of dedication, yet they were totally disconnected from the words they were chanting.

They were reciting words over the living God—the light of the world—with no clue about the importance of this child. Don’t let mere religion blind you from a life-giving relationship with God.

What about the innkeeper? Is it possible that commercialism stole his Christmas miracle?

That when he could have played host to God's first night on Earth, the best he claimed he had to offer the king of the universe was a barn? Perhaps he was compelled to save the good rooms for "paying customers."

The innkeeper's attitude is the mind-set of many today: "Here, Jesus. I'll give you a little space in the back lot of my life. Now, just stay there. Your presence is not wanted in all my 'respectable' places."

Interesting, isn't it? Representatives from government, religion and business all missed the Christmas miracle.

Whatever you do, don't miss your encounter with Jesus.

Focusing on the Big Story

Mary stands in contrast to the other key players. Without a doubt, she experienced the Christmas miracle. Her willing heart kept her from missing it. "Let it be to me according to your word" was her obedient response to the angel's announcement that she would become pregnant with God's Son (Luke 1:38, NKJV).

And there was Joseph. Although not the physical father of Jesus, he had a caring heart. He put his own life at risk, first to protect Mary's reputation and later to protect young Jesus from would-be assassins. Joseph experienced the Christmas miracle.

Have you ever wondered what it was like to be one of the shepherds in

Bethlehem? Night after night, they would meditate with simple faith as they gazed into the heavens. There was time to cultivate a quiet heart.

And because they were listening, they were treated to the grandest worship event ever.

Though the noise of activity drowned out the sound for others, these simple shepherds had front-row seats to hear “a multitude of the heavenly host praising God” (Luke 2:13).

Because I love world missions, I especially love the story of the wise men. They were far away from Israel. Although well-educated, no teacher had enlightened these scholars about the one true God and, as far as we know, they had no access to the Scriptures.

So God took it upon Himself to bring the light to them. And as the light was revealed, they followed it until it led to Jesus Himself. Like many today who have not been reached with the gospel, these were men with honorable hearts.

Other than Jesus, perhaps my favorite character in the Christmas story is Simeon. He was an old man with a promise from God: “Simeon, you are not going to die until you see the Lord’s Messiah with your own eyes” (see Luke 2:25-26). When it came to God’s promises, Simeon had a trusting heart.

But the years passed. Faith had not yet been made sight. But then one day, one unforgettable day

Where was Simeon when he felt God's undeniable prompting? The Bible doesn't say. He probably hung around the temple as much as possible. But perhaps on this day he was at his own dwelling, going about his daily chores. Suddenly, that familiar voice came to his heart: "Go to the temple—now!"

Can you picture this little man with a big promise as he hurriedly pushes his way through the narrow streets of Jerusalem? Maybe the old man even sprints toward the temple as the promise pounds in his chest.

"I'm not going to have a heart attack," he remembers. "God won't let me die until I see His Messiah."

Simeon bursts into the temple—and there He is. To the other people milling around, Mary and Joseph probably looked like just another couple and Jesus like just another baby.

But God gave Simeon eyes to see what others didn't see. Others saw a baby, Simeon saw a Savior. It was Simeon's moment.

Imagine the thrill in his heart as he takes up in his arms God incarnate. Overcome with worship he cries out: "'Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring salvation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).

Like Simeon, you too can experience the glory of the Incarnation. You can keep your focus on "the big story," in spite of the busyness of the holiday season, if you are

willing to make time for:

Jesus. Use the Advent season to grow in intimacy with our Lord. Your miracle is wrapped up in embracing and experiencing the real gift of Christmas.

Family. Don't let the materialism and glut of activity surrounding Christmas steal this precious time for renewing your most valuable relationships.

Those who suffer. This holiday brings sadness, not gladness, to many people. Painful memories from Christmases past and challenging circumstances in the present make this a difficult time for many.

Be sensitive to the fact that people are often more open to the gospel during Christmas. Reaching out to those in need will bring a dual benefit: Those you touch will be blessed, and so will you.

Friends. Don't let the season come and go without carving out time to strengthen friendships. Give your friends the gift of your love and affirmation this Christmas.

Reflection. Still your heart before the Lord and reflect on His goodness and faithfulness to you throughout this year.

And remember, Jesus is not simply the "reason for the season"; He is the reason for everything! "All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" (Col. 1:16-17).

May you, like Orville and Wilbur Wright, have eyes to see the really big event. And may you have a quality, Christ-honoring Christmas.

David Shibley serves as president of Global Advance, a missions ministry that has equipped more than 300,000 church and business leaders in 70 nations.