

Billy Graham: A Star, a Song and a Savior

Christmas is a special time. It is a family celebration. Other holidays are different. Good Friday and Easter are usually celebrated in church. National days are honored with speeches, parades and the ceremonies of government. But Christmas is glorified in the home because it is the celebration of a birthday.

Yet there is irony in the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. He was born away from home, on a journey that symbolized the restless and the wandering nature of the world into which He came. He was born in the insecurity of a barn, a symbol of the fact that during His public ministry, He would have very little home life. He roamed the roads and towns of ancient Palestine. He died, taking the ordeal of the cross so that out of His suffering and His victorious resurrection mankind could find redemption.

Christmas means different things to different people. To some, Christmas is merely a means to make more money. People vie with each other in their preparation for the celebration of the occasion. Some of them do not believe in Christ; they may even hate Him. But Christmas has become big business. People are more concerned to hear about their profit from Christmas than to hear about the prophet from Bethlehem. The clinking sound of money is sweeter to some than the announcement of Jesus' birth by the angels to the shepherds.

Many people cannot hear Christmas carols today because their ears are attuned to different sounds. Their minds are riveted to Wall Street, and their eyes are focused on reports about the stock market going up or down.

Pleasure-seeking consumes the time and the thoughts of many

people. Some try to find a merry Christmas in what they call entertainment and fun. Instead of imbibing the spirit of Christmas, they choose to imbibe spirits at Christmas. For many people the holiday is an opportunity to celebrate in the wrong way.

The apostle Paul once said, "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection" (1 Corinthians 9:27, NKJV). He meant that he conquered his appetites and kept his passions and desires under control. We, too, need to conquer our hatreds, our fears, our doubts, our anxieties. We need to conquer selfishness—even the desire for special Christmas gifts for ourselves.

We cannot have a merry Christmas or a happy New Year when we have become slaves to the passions and vices that hound us. These things—materialism, money, artificial pleasure—are crowding Christ out of Christmas for multitudes. They are so busy with a thousand and one other things that they have no time to consider the message of the Baby of Bethlehem.

On that first Christmas, 2,000 years ago, the world experienced three phenomena:

First, the star. Many stars shone in the sky, but none like this one. This one shone with aura and brilliance! It was as though God had taken a lamp from the ceiling of heaven and hung it in the dark sky over a troubled world.

Second, a new song in the air. A world that had lost its song learned to sing again. With the coming of God in the flesh, hope sprang up in the hearts of people. Led by angelic beings, we can now take up the refrain, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:14).

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And third, good news—the Good News that at last a Savior had come to save men and women from sin: “You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Jesus was the central theme of that first Christmas. The star, the song, the gifts, the kneeling, the joy, the hope, the excitement—all were because of Him.

God’s star promised peace to the world if we will believe and trust Him. But having rejected Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, we have no peace in the world. Too often our synthetic stars bring only fear, anxiety and even more war.

In our world today are self-proclaimed saviors, people who claim to be God’s gift to the world. How different they are from Jesus, who “was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

The Scriptures say, “There is born to you this day ... a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). Heaven and Earth joined together! God and mankind reconciled. Hope for the hopeless, pardon for the guilty, forgiveness for the conscience-stricken, peace for those who knew no peace, Good News for those who have had nothing but bad news!

Yes, Jesus Christ can save us from despair. I have talked with many leaders, and one thing that most of them have in common is pessimism. The tensions, conflicts and seemingly insoluble problems of this world tend to make them cynical and doubtful.

Many cynics will blame God for the troubles of the world. We should blame ourselves. We have a spiritual disease, and that disease is called sin. Until sin is conquered, the world will not be a better place in which to live.

When people willfully reject the Prince of Peace, they pay a terrible price. A secular and materialistic society that has rejected the Prince of Peace yields to pessimism and despair. The blighting cynicism that has come as a result of our

rejection of God is reflected in our literature, our art, our films, our television programs and even our pulpits.

Christmas should be a time of renewed hope—not hope in a particular political concept, but Christmas hope; Christian hope; hope in Jesus Christ; hope that, despite our tangled bungling, God will bring order out of chaos.

But Christmas is even more personal. The angel who said, “He will save His people from their sins,” was touching the very heart of your need.

People today would rather not talk about sin. They don’t want to face the reality of their spiritual disease. I heard of a man who found conversation about cancer distasteful. When the subject came up, he would walk away. He would not consent to periodic examination.

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He would permit no X-rays. But one day, having experienced a loss of weight and appetite, he was persuaded to have a physical examination. The doctors found a cancer of massive proportions.

So it is with sin. Our reluctance to discuss it, our tendency to ignore it, our resentment of anyone’s talking about it, may be a revelation of our secret fear that we may be sin-filled.

Jesus Christ has a great deal to say about sin. He came on that first Christmas night to “save His people from their sins.” No doctor in the world can treat sin. No psychiatrist in the world can cure sin. They can work on symptoms, they can help the sinner to live with his sin, but they cannot get rid of the disease. Only Jesus Christ can heal the disease of sin.

This is what the cross and the resurrection are all about. And Christmas is not Christmas without the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. This is why He was born. This was

the message of the first Christmas night: "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." The Christmas message says that God's grace is greater than our sin. It says that the sin question was answered at the cross. Christmas says that the cross went as deep as our needs. The cross was the cure—offered, paid for and administered by a loving God in His beloved Son.

I never come to Christmas without thinking of the thousands of people who are lonely, diseased and troubled at this time of year. Christmas is a reminder from God Himself that we are not alone. The prophet Isaiah said that His name would be called *Immanuel*, which means God with us (See Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23). God revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus a reconciling love that rescues us from separation and loneliness.

At this Christmas season you can be assured that Jesus Christ is here. He is here to give us hope, to forgive our sins, to give us a new song, to impart faith and to heal our spiritual wounds, if only we will let Him.

The Christmas message has not changed after 2,000 years. Christmas still reminds us that God is with us.

In spite of all the pessimism and cynicism, in spite of all the headlines about murders, assassinations, riots, demonstrations and war, Jesus Christ is alive. He is alive to conquer despair, to impart hope, to forgive sins and to take away our loneliness. He is alive to reconcile us to God.

This Christmas, accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Give Him the gift that He wants—your heart, your soul, your life.

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