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Facts and Faith

A Weekly Comment On Christian Life And Action

By Calvin H. Chambers

I wonder if we are brave enough to face the Christ of Bethlehem? He is not what the poets and the painters have made Him. When the artist has finished painting the manger scene at Bethlehem there is nothing unattractive about it. It is a sweet, lovely scene, speaking of gentility.

The Italian writer Papini, disturbs the thinking of all those who make Christmas into a sentimental thing. He writes, "Jesus was born in a stable, a real stable, not the bright airy parlor which Christian painters have painted for the Son of David, as if ashamed that their God should have laid down in poverty and dirt. And not the modern Christmas Eve 'Holy Stable,' either, made of plaster of Paris with little candy-like statues, the Holy Stable, clean and prettily painted, with a neat, tidy manger, ecstatic ass, a contrite ox, and the angels fluttering on the roof. This is not the stable in which Jesus was born. The poor old stable of Christ's poor old country is only four rough walls, a dirty pavement, a roof of beams and slate. It is dark and reeking. The only clean thing is the manger where the owner piles the hay and fodder. This is the real stable where Jesus was born. The filthiest place in the world was the first room of the only pure Man ever born of woman."

If we are really going to catch the spirit of Christmas, we must get beyond the sentimental traditions and national sentiments. They make Christmas into a nice festival, but they never bring home to our hearts in any forcible way the meaning of Christ's birth. The purpose of Christ's coming was to deliver man from sin. It was a ministry of redemption. The angel tells Joseph to call the name of the child "Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."

The idea of sin has never been popular. It is regarded as a sombre and depressing avenue of religious teaching, which one should avoid as much as possible. But the Christian faith forces us to face facts. This is one fact we cannot escape if our minds are open to truth. In the birth of Jesus, we see God humbling Himself and taking upon Himself the burden of our sin. This is what the great love of God was willing to do for us.

Yet human pride resists this gift of God's love and grace in Christ. We are not humble enough to ask for this all important gift, the gift of forgiveness. We never really make our way to the cradle of Bethlehem unless we recognize our need for what Christ brings. "Except a man humble himself and become as a little child, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." These are the words of Him who in infancy was the Christ child. But He grew up and lived and died and rose again for our redemption.

This season can only fill our hearts with true Christmas joy when we see beyond the glitter and tinsel which man has created, to the Child born to be our Saviour. The peace which He gives to a forgiven heart, is not something which can be folded up and put away once the celebrations of the season have ceased. His peace and joy will remain, steadfast, true, as we yield to the power of His love. His love seeks after us. What will be our response to His search at Christmas?

"Ye Who Now Will Bless The Poor . . ."

As is usual at this season of the year, the three service clubs of Richmond Hill, the Lions, Kinsmen and Rotary have joined forces to provide Christmas baskets for the needy in Richmond Hill and surrounding district. Under the direction of Lion William A. Wagner and other chairmen of welfare, Alf McLatchy (for the Rotary Club) and Ken Shields (Kinsmen) 45 baskets were packed last Sunday afternoon.

The Light of the World

In the little quiet places — in the large bustling cities, the Christian Church remains the Light of the World.

The triumphant fact of Christmas tide is that the light is still shining.

For 2,000 years dark forces of evil have sought to put it out. History is filled with the turbulence of war, malice and greed. The marching hordes of Antichrist have often seemed invincible. Yet they could not outlast the light of love and humility that shone in a forsaken stable.

How many times has it seemed that because of hideous fears and deeds, the blackness of night would never be penetrated. It may seem so now, with half of the world entrapped by despotism and titans preparing for Armageddon. Yet the light still beckons, refusing to go out.

Its central radiance is in the figure of a man born in a manger, dying on a cross and shaking the world to its foundations by the power of love. And every Christmas the glad tidings of this power comes to uplift and sustain us.

Christmas

Now is the season when we sing "Peace on earth." An inseparable part of the ageless Christmas message is the angels' exhortation to the shepherds outside Bethlehem: ". . . on earth peace, good will toward men." It is a goal which men of good will have sought through all the centuries of Christendom.

The quest has been beset by almost constant frustration. Wars have grown in scope as the world's population has grown, and their destructive ferocity has increased with the increase of man's scientific knowledge.

Nearly 2,000 years after the first Christmas, when the Son of God came to bring peace to the world, there is no peace. Even though there is no ominous nuclear flash on the horizon, no sound of gunfire in the streets, we know peace is still not with us.

There were wars and rumors of war, social unrest and injustices of all kinds when our Lord was born, and this condition has maintained. There are times when it seems we must surely conclude "time of troubles" is here to stay. No sooner were we momentarily "disengaged" from a Middle Eastern crisis in Jordan and Lebanon, a few weeks ago, than West and East found themselves on the edge of mortal danger over Quemoy. Canada saw its worst unemployment problem in years, last winter, yet we have had more strikes in the year now closing, than in any year since the end of the War.

Inflation is rampant. The cost of living index has risen by well over 50 points since the end of World War II and the actual wage index has increased

by 87 points. We have allowed costs and prices to spiral upward as if there were no limit to the amounts that could be expected from the consumers. The spending spree that began with the end of hostilities keeps on and on, and more money was spent on luxury buying these past few weeks than in any previous time in history. Officially and unofficially we have encouraged and unofficiously we have encouraged groups to demand and to collect more than an equitable share of the wealth we produce.

It may be asked what all this has to do with Christmas 1958.

Christmas is the season of the year when our thoughts, by the very nature of the event we celebrate, should cause us to think of peace and how best we can fulfill the mission that the Christ came to earth to perform.

The massive character of the Christmas celebration in our country, the Christmas trees alight, with all their trimmings, in such an overwhelming number of Canadian homes, the "Adeste Fideles" heartily sung by men and women who are anything but fideles — all this by itself constitutes a phenomenon of imposing proportions.

Too sombre a theme for the Christmas season? We think not. Before we become immersed in Yuletide pleasures should we not give sincere thought to the true meaning of Christmas? The least we can do, if we profess to be men of goodwill, is to honor the Christmas message and its Author. When we do this, we will then have every right to rejoice and be glad and join the heavenly throng in singing: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Over Hill, Over Dale

by Cicely Thomson

Do you remember the story of the trainload of dolls and toys and good things to eat that had to be got over the mountain for the good little boys and girls who lived on the other side of the mountain?

Well there was a little blue engine which came along to get this elegant cargo over the mountain, and after she had hitched herself to the trainload she started off merrily on her way. However before very long the mountain got steeper and she had to put much more real effort into the business, and then she had to keep up her spirit and cheer on her flagging engine by repeating over and over again, "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can, I think-I-can, I—think—I—can, I—think I can" until at last the top of the mountain was reached and then her whistle sounded merrily and her little voice sang out, "I know I could! I know I could! I knew I could!" And of course all the good little boys and girls who lived on this side of the mountain, had their dolls and toys and their good things to eat.

And that dear children, is the story of the little blue engine that could. And sometimes, just sometimes mind you, you are the good little boys on the other side of the mountain, and the mountain is all the special things that have to be done for Christmas, piled on top of all the things that have to be done every day anyway, and while the big freight engine (of course you remember the big freight engine that said he was much too important to pull a little carload like that and went off huffpuffing indignantly on his own tracks) just might be Daddy, there is no doubt about it at all that the little blue engine must be Mummy. And the story tells of course of how she (Mummy) has to keep up her spirits and pull for all she's worth because of course the good little boys and girls to whom she's taking the trainload of good things . . . well, they're her own little boys and girls . . . and of course things HAVE to be all ready for them bright and early Christmas morning.

Now I don't recall whether the story mentioned Christmas at all; but for our own little blue engine (Mummy of course) Christmas is the important reason why all these things must be done on time. And we all read all those cartoons in the magazines and papers which make it very clear how the big freight engine (whom we could call Daddy) feels about the extra special preparations that go on.

To be fair, we must tell you young folk, that of course the big freight engine was absolutely right! If he hadn't gone on about his job and done it just as well as he possibly could, much more important things than dolls and toys would have been missing for the little boys and girls on the other side of the mountain. So whenever we think that if he could have just taken time to give the carload of good things a friendly shove it would have encouraged the little blue engine so much, we must remember his important freight.

And do you know I think that the story does not quite follow real life when it comes to the big freight engine, because I'm sure our big freight engine (Daddy) does give the load of dolls and toys several helpful shoves and pushes while the little blue engine is struggling up the mountain. But of course he is much too proud to say anything about it.

And that, boys and girls, is the story of how one fairy tale can all be turned into everyday life. And who knows what other fairy tales, if you look into them and can turn magic wands into something everydayish, and fairy godmothers into someone we see every day, may turn out to be real-life tales after all!

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Three Wise Men

Out from the east, the wise men came,
And they had travelled far —
For they were the three of ancient fame,
Who followed the glorious star.

And the star led them to Bethlehem,
Where a King had just been born —
Strange, holy joy swept over them
That cold and frosty morn.

They worshipped the Babe in the manger there,
And gave Him the gifts they brought —
Then warned in a dream that they must dare
To withhold what Herod sought.

With joyful hearts and their empty hands,
They returned another way —
Bearing Good News to the eastern lands
Of that Blessed Natal Day.

— Elizabeth Dale Kelson

HELP WANTED

Applications will be received by the undersigned for the position of an apprentice with the Richmond Hill Hydro-Electric System. Application Forms and further details may be obtained at the Hydro Office, 56 Yonge Street N. Applications will be received up until 5 p.m. on January 5, 1959.

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