

COMMUNITY CONTENDER

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THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS by R.G. Lee (1886-1978)

"The dayspring from on high hath visited us." —Luke 1:78

The birth of a little Child the Christian world at this season celebrates. Christmas Day is a holy and happy day when we commemorate the coming of God's Son into the world—the incarnation of God by way of the virgin birth. Never too happily can we sing. Never too eagerly can we ring the bells. Never with exaggeration can we express the Christmas benediction: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

With the coming of the "dayspring from on high," morning broke upon the world's darkness—in Bethlehem—while men and women, bruised and bleeding, were in a darkness unlighted by flickering philosophical tapers and sputtering Judaistic lamps. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Isa. 9:6). This prediction—most clear in application, most glorious in content, most consolatory in design, most gracious in purpose—points us to the time when God's Son assumed our nature, entering the world in circumstances of deepest humiliation.

With every detail of the Christmas story we are familiar: Herod of Judah, the last of Judah's kings; Israel, breathing her hope of Messiah's advent; Bethlehem, small and white upon its mountain slopes where Heaven put out its brightest star; Cyrenius, publishing the order of the emperor; the star, seen in faraway Persia by wise men of the East who were accustomed to study the heavens and who mounted their camels and journeyed westward over the desert to Jerusalem; the angels; the shepherds; the Babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger; the gifts from the wise men of gold, frankincense and myrrh. What is the meaning, we ask, of Christmas to the world?

Christmas Means a Manger

Coldly the world, which later cruelly thrust Jesus out on the point of a spear, received Jesus on a pallet of manger straw. Messiah's birth chamber was a stable—not a palace, not a human habitation. What abasement! How wonderful for us that the Lord of Glory was so humbled and abased for us, the vile and sinful progeny of Adam. Thinking of Christ stripping Himself of His robes and roles of glory, Flavel said, "If the sun had been turned into a wandering atom, if the most glorious angel in heaven had changed into a fly, it had been nothing to the abasement of the Lord of Glory." Born as the very poorest are born, without attendants, He was the One through whom God worked and works sublimities without display. Listen at the manger! You will hear the voices of Heaven's singers. Look upon the manger! You will see the Christ who came down from the heights of deity to the depths of humanity, down from Heaven's honors to earth's humiliation, down from Heaven's coronations to earth's curses, down from Heaven's delights to earth's defamations, down from the glory place to the gory place, down from Heaven's riches to earth's poverty. At the manger, we understand the apostle's words: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Cor. 8:9).

Christmas Means a Marking

The lowly birthplace of Jesus was marked by a star. "When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."—Matt. 2:9,10. That star marking the house to which the wise men from the East came



What is the meaning of Christmas to the world?



testifies that the fullness of time had come, that the prophecies were accomplished, that He who had a name “as ointment poured forth” had come with a coming that stirred earth and Heaven, the sea and the dry land. For no other child did the heavens assume a new star. For no other child did wise men come from the East “to worship him” (Matt. 2:2). For no other child did angels descend from glory. For no other child did Heaven and earth bear witness—being marked by prophecy and a star. But I mean something else by the marking. What mean I? I mean that this Christ, coming into the world by virgin womb, small enough to be held in a woman’s two hands and weak enough to feed at a woman’s breast, cradled in a manger, has Christianized the calendar of the world.

This Jesus, whom neither calendars nor clocks nor contemporary historians took note of, has bent the datelines of all nations around His lowly cradle. Today, as through all the days of all the years the world over, the dates on newspapers printed, the dates on checks drawn, the dates on deeds recorded, the dates on money coined or spent, the dates on cornerstones placed, the dates on monuments erected, the dates on documents filed, the dates on letters written, do testify.

The Greeks tried to date time from their Olympiads. The Romans tried to date time from the founding of their imperial city. Justinian tried to date time from the tax levies he made. Laplace tried to date time from conjunctions of certain planets. The French Revolutionists tried to date time from the year one of their revolution. And all failed—miserably, woefully. But what the Jews could not do, what the Greeks could not do, what the Romans could not do, what the French could not do in the matter of dating time, Jesus did gloriously. Before He came, the ages awaited Him. Since He came, the ages rise out of Him.

Christmas Means Music

“And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.”—Luke 2:20. As the sun went down in the western sea that day, the stars came out, and the Messiah’s star shone bright. As the temple shepherds watched their flocks by night, in the midst of the starlit silence appeared a glory—and a voice. “And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. “And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. “And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”—Luke 2:8–11.

The shepherds, filled with awe at the shining presence and the wondrous words, did not speak. Moving not, they gazed. And then suddenly, as they looked, the single messenger became a choir, and the night echoed with divinest music.

“And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. “And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. “And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.”—Luke 2:16–18. As there was music long ago when “upon the midnight clear” came “that glorious song of old,” so still at Christmas there is music.

Still thro’ the cloven skies they come,
With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heav’nly music floats
O’er all the weary world.
Above its sad and lonely plains
They bend on hov’ring wing,
And ever o’er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.
—Edmund H. Sears

Let us listen to the Christmas music, vocal and instrumental, and remember that the Christian life is music in harmony with the will of God. Let us never forget that the centuries become, as it were, a mighty choir lifting their increasing hallelujahs to Christ’s name. Higher and even higher rises their sublime refrain.

[Let us rejoice] with all the Christmas joy, the Christmas greetings, the Christmas merrymaking...because the true Light shineth.

Taken from the full sermon by R. G. Lee, *The Meaning of Christmas*



CHRISTMAS LIGHT: LIFE AND LIGHT, TO ALL HE BRINGS

One of the special things I truly enjoy about the Christmas season is that of the beautiful lights. Houses are decorated and trees are trimmed. I have many great memories of driving around and looking at Christmas lights. In fact, this is a Christmas tradition for my family. Why do we place lights for Christmas? What is the significance of Christmas light?

This Christmas season brings for the two-thousandth and sixteenth time the celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. He brought with Him into this world of darkness, light and life to all who will believe. Truly He lights every man which cometh into the world with the Gospel, but only those who will respond to the light to receive Christ as their Saviour will truly experience the light of Christmas. John 1:4-9, 12 *In him was life; and the life was the **light** of men. And the **light** shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the **Light**, that all men through him might believe. He was not that **Light**, but was sent to bear witness of that **Light**. That was the true **Light**, which **lighteth** every man that cometh into the world...But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*

The Christmas story is enveloped in light. Isaiah the prophet spoke of the great darkness which dwelt upon the lands of Israel, and of the coming of the one who would pierce the darkness with His light. *To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. And they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness. Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali...The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hat the light shined. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.* (Isaiah 8:20, 22; 9:1, 2, 6)

Even Balaam, the money loving prophet, was used to speak of the great Christmas Star, "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel." (Numbers 24:17) The bright star which pierced the inky blackness of the sky and caused the wise men to follow its path to the place where Jesus lay speaks of the light of Christ. More than the light of the star that great night was the Light of the Saviour.

Bright light blanketed the frosty hillside around one of the many thousands of towns of Judah, Bethlehem, as the angels appeared to humble shepherds with the message of a Saviour born for them. Christ's birth shines the glory of God into this world. The prophecy of John the Baptist's father, Zechariah speaks of Christmas light. *Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.* (Luke 1:78-79) The dayspring speaks of the very dawning of the sun or stars. Just as the sunlight crosses over the horizon at dawn, so is the birth of Christ. The Spirit-filled confirmation of Simeon speaks to the light of Christ which would be a light to lighten the Gentiles as well as be the glory of God's chosen people Israel. Christ Himself revealed Who He was in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Christmas, was the birth of the Light!

Jesus implores mankind to believe and receive Him and His light in John 12, "Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness." How imperative it is that mankind respond to the Christmas Light, while they are under the conviction of the light. If they fail to respond to the light, it may pass and they will be left in darkness. One must believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation and be made a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light, delivered from the power of darkness.

The world in Herod's day was equally dark as today. The condition of man's hearts still is that of darkness. Darkness is that which man naturally loves because his deeds are evil. Light has come into the world to reprove the darkness and to provide spiritual illumination to those who will receive it. The light of Christ has forever pierced the darkness of this world. No one can deny nor hide the light which He brought into the world, as God with Us! He has given us the light of life found within the words of Scripture. *We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts....* (II Peter 1:19)

Christmas Light: As we enjoy looking at the beauty of the lights twinkling on the Christmas tree...Will we take heed to the Light this Christmas season? Will we receive Christ's offer of eternal light and life? Will we receive the Christmas Light? Will we as Believers let our Christmas Light shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in Heaven? Will we live as *blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world?* Christ did not come to give us light so that we might hide it under a bushel for ourselves. No, we are to place it in a prominent place, as a city on a hill, or on a candlestick so it gives light to all that are in the house. Let us let our light be bright this Christmas season so that the Light of Christ will impact all who come under its radiant beams.

Pastor David J. Smith



LET THERE BE LIGHT

There was a time in history when all there was, was “black.”
Yes, “darkness” is the word that best describes this “lumination lack.”

No sun to rule the time of day, nor moon, nor stars for night;
Just blackness, blackness, blackness more, this vision genders fright:
You see, the world was empty, blank, for that’s what God had made,
Up to that point the Earth had not been formed by the Great Carver’s blade.

It is of great importance that, in God’s creative way,
Before much else, He made the light – divided night from day.
“Darkness” is a universal metaphor for anything that’s bad
– there’s “darkness,” “blackness,” “night,” – all used for anything
that’s sad.
It’s used of ignorance, of crime, of treachery, of sin;
of dirt, of death, of depths, and vales, of brutish cultures, dim.

Just think of alleys, tunnels, tombs, and caves – or the “Dark Continent!”
Think bitter attitudes, evil deeds, and you’ll know what is meant.

So “darkness” has been figurative of any wilderness
since Earth’s beginning time when light was never less.

Then, to this void and formless Earth, a prospect shone, so bright:
The darkness heard a Voice, and hid – God said “LET THERE BE LIGHT!”

And then God made the sun and moon, “He made the stars also,”
He “saw that it was good,” and did by this His goodness show.

For while the darkness bespeaks woe, the light does not agree,
Instead it shows the power of God, displayed for all to see.

Instead of woe, light shouts aloud, “let men their songs employ,”
Before mankind, the “morning stars,” the “sons of God” sang “Joy!”

Yes, light personifies the right: all that is good and just,
and guidance, understanding, hope – when in the Lord we trust.

It’s truth, and wisdom, and God’s revelation,
It’s morning, it’s sight, and it’s His salvation!

It’s wisdom, purity, and power, it’s life from Heavn’ above,
It’s strength, and warmth, and happiness – it’s Jesus’ wondrous love!

These two are opposites, you see, quite different is each,
and light is better, far and away, for so the Scriptures teach.

There are so many reasons why light’s superior,
But let us take a look at just a few particulars:

A pillar of fire led the way for Israel’s long trip home.
When Moses met God on the Mount, his mortal visage “shone.”

Jesus’ face and clothes shined “as the sun” (recorded in Matthew),
And the Angel with a “lightning face” sat at the Empty Tomb!

In Acts, a shining light from Heav’n stopped Saul’s envoy from its aim,
When light woke Peter in the jail, the Lord freed him from chains!

And though these lights, miraculous, are held in high esteem,
There’s one event that can’t be matched, or be recast in dreams.

It was the advent of a Light on Earth that ne’er before had been,
But He (yes, He) had been *before* the World, no origin – no end.

Now the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, it happened on this wise:
In a lowly stable, He was born: the God who made the skies.

Humble Mary held that Light; looked in His perfect eyes,
And comforted and shushed her little baby’s cries.

In a field in that same county, some shepherds did abide
And in the darkness guarding sheep, they spent the eventide.

Great light shone round about them – the glory of the Lord,
And fear might overtake them – but for the Angel’s word!

Two lights the Shepherds saw that night, which made the coldness warm:
One light brought on by Heav’nly hosts; one God in human form!

Another light was seen that night by Wise Men from the east,
“We Three Kings,” may not be right, but there were two at least!

They knew that someday He would come: A King born of the Jews,
And when the star began to shine, the kings put on their shoes.

They saw “His Star” shine in the east, and so they came to bow
before the King of all the Earth, and, by gifts, worship show.

“His star” they saw in the night sky, and so they traveled far,
And met the Son of God in flesh: the Bright and Morning Star.

It is long after all these lights, and darkness reigns in souls:
“Driven to darkness, dimness of anguish, beholding troubles.”

The sun still rises; moon still shines, but all men’s hearts are dark,
“Not one is there that seeks the Lord; man’s foolishness is stark.

No peace in heart, no fear of God; their end is destruction
There isn’t one that doeth good, No, none; there is not one.”

All this is true man today, of them, of me, of you:
for every man is born in sin and lost in darkness, too.

What is the answer to this dark and dismal state?
How can one from darkness of the heart to Heav’nly light translate?

Ah, the answer lies in God’s own Word, that “Lamp unto my feet,”
“The entrance of His Words gives light,” and shows an unknown Street.

“The Way” is through the plan of God, not “North,” or “West,” or “South.”
“The Door” is Jesus Christ, the LORD, and that’s the “Gospel Truth.”

For Jesus came to Earth to die for their sins, mine, and yours, was buried,
but He rose again, His victory assured. *Continued on p. 6* 4

GOD WITH US

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF HIS BIRTH?

(Select the best answer from the RIGHT and place the letter in the blank on the LEFT)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| _____ Incarnation | A. Response of wisemen to the star |
| _____ Magi | B. God with us |
| _____ Isaiah 7:14 | C. God's love for us as sinners |
| _____ Repentance | D. Prophesied the place of His birth |
| _____ Caesar Augustus | E. The Greatest Gift |
| _____ Immaculate Conception | F. Filled with the Spirit before birth |
| _____ Magnificent | G. "Anointed One" |
| _____ Zacharias | H. Deity of Christ |
| _____ Romans 5:8 | I. Taxation of Palestine |
| _____ Messiah | J. Song of Mary |
| _____ Hanukkah | K. "Surely, I Come Quickly" |
| _____ Gabriel | L. Christ is sinless |
| _____ Genesis 3:15 | M. Luke 2:8 |
| _____ Private divorce | N. One taking a holy vow to God |
| _____ Cousin | O. City of David |
| _____ John the Baptist | P. Wisemen |
| _____ Deut. 22:20-30 | Q. Sinlessness of Mary |
| _____ "in the fullness of time" | R. Isaiah 9:6 |
| _____ Perpetual Virginity | S. To be bought with a price |
| _____ Mary's lineage | T. Jesus |
| _____ Micah 5:2 | U. Enfleshment of Christ |
| _____ Impeccable | V. Eight day Jewish holiday |
| _____ Shepherds near Bethlehem | W. A speechless father |
| _____ Eternal life | X. His birth will be from the Tribe of Judah |
| _____ Emmanuel | Y. Prophecy about a virgin |
| _____ Joseph's lineage | Z. Guaranteed the royal right of Jesus to be King |
| _____ Genesis 49:10 | AA. "Proto – evangelium" first mention redeemer |
| _____ Clear statement of man's sinfulness | BB. Catholic Heresy |
| _____ Wonderful, Counsellor | CC. Announces the birth of John |
| _____ Exceeding great joy | DD. Romans 3:23 |
| _____ Nazarene | EE. "Metanoia" |
| _____ Voice of the Virgin Mary | FF. Elizabeth's relationship to Mary |
| _____ Jesus is God | GG. Galatians 4:4 |
| _____ Redemption | HH. One of Joseph's options facing pregnant Mary |
| _____ Means 'Saviour' | II. Caused a baby to leap in the womb |
| _____ Revelation 22:20 | JJ. Law requiring divorce for adultery |
| _____ Nazarite | KK. Jesus lived here until the death of Herod |
| _____ Bethlehem | LL. Indicates an inhabitant of Nazareth |
| | MM. Guaranteed legal right of Jesus to be King |

THE BEST ROLLED SUGAR COOKIES

*From All Recipes.com

Recipe By: Jill Saunders

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups butter, softened
- 2 cups white sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 5 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt

Directions

In a large bowl, cream together butter and sugar until smooth. Beat in eggs and vanilla. Stir in the flour, baking powder, and salt. Cover, and chill dough for at least one hour (or overnight).

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C). Roll out dough on floured surface 1/4 to 1/2 inch thick. Cut into shapes with any cookie cutter. Place cookies 1 inch apart on ungreased cookie sheets.

Bake 6 to 8 minutes in preheated oven. Cool completely.

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Julia Makin-4 | Rich and Sharon Hockenberry-19 |
| Nancy Gotwals-4 | Bob and Carolyn Meredith-20 |
| Evie Mergen-7 | Ken Everitt-21 |
| Matt Mergen-7 | Ron Mann-21 |
| Emily Smith-8 | Bonnie Smith-24 |
| Dick and Pat Keller-12 | Dave Zazulak-26 |
| Asher Oman-15 | Angela Wargo-28 |
| Barb Bartholomew-15 | Jonathan Stoddard-28 |
| Pastor and Heidi Smith-19 | Bill Schumaker-29 |

LET THERE BE LIGHT CONTINUED...

"For when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son,

Made of a woman, under law, to redeem and make more 'sons,'"

"Turn from the darkness, to the Light, and have your sins forgiv'n,

Move from the pow'r of Satan unto God, and have a life worth living."

Jesus said "I am a light, that to the world appeared,"

"and souls that do believe on Me, from darkness will be spared."

A new and glorious day will dawn and "the Day Star will arise,"

And all God's people will be taken up into the skies.

"OH, WHOSOEVER WILL, PLEASE COME AND TAKE FREELY,

I AM THE BRIGHT AND MORNING STAR, SURELY I COME QUICKLY"

Pastor Jonathan Stockton

COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

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Join us for our Christmas Services:
Christmas Eve 7:00 p.m.
Christmas Day 10:00 a.m.