

## **“WHAT DOES CHRISTMAS MEAN TO THE WORLD?” John 1:1-14**

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I'm convinced that most people out there in the wilderness of society miss the point of Christmas. Some are so far off point they're in another galaxy.

Two women were out Christmas shopping. They noticed a nativity scene in the middle of all the merchandise. One of them sniffed in disgust, *'Well, what do you think of that? Even the church is trying to horn in on Christmas!'*

I'm not going to waste your time lambasting society for the way it has warped Christmas.

Except to say that millions observe Christmas without giving a thought to the fact that Christmas is about God Almighty coming in flesh to be the Savior of mankind.

- I think all of us like the festive lights that festoon houses and trees at Christmas time. It's appropriate and attractive.

Christmas is a celebration of the entrance of light into the spiritual darkness of our world. Jesus Christ is that light.

- Our Scripture text today introduces Jesus Christ as the light that came into the world. It's John 1:1-14.

<sup>1</sup> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

<sup>2</sup> *He was with God in the beginning.*

<sup>3</sup> *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

<sup>4</sup> *In him was life, and that life was the light of men.*

<sup>5</sup> *The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*

<sup>6</sup> *There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John.*

<sup>7</sup> *He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe.*

<sup>8</sup> *He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.*

<sup>9</sup> *The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.*

<sup>10</sup> *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.*

<sup>11</sup> *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.*

<sup>12</sup> *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--*

<sup>13</sup> *children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

<sup>14</sup> *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

The Apostle John gives us some insights into what Christmas really means to the world.

### **I. CHRISTMAS IS AN EXPLANATION OF CREATION. John 1:1-5**

The Apostle John makes it clear that when Christ came into the world, he was in fact God the Creator.

<sup>1</sup> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

<sup>2</sup> *He was with God in the beginning.*

The *Word* here is God the Son, Jesus Christ. He is and always has been fully God.

Everything that exists has come into being since the beginning when there was just God the Word and God the Father.

The Psalmist wrote: *"By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made."* (Psalm 33:6)

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC the Greek Philosopher Heraclitus used this term *logos* ("word") to describe the design and order he saw in the universe. Later the Stoics developed this concept of *logos* as a force or principle that caused and permeated and governed all things.

John explained that what they called *logos* is God.

<sup>3</sup> *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

"All things" in this verse means the entire universe. In the Book of Hebrews we read that *'By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.'* (Hebrews 11:3)

There are about 500 billion stars in our celestial neighborhood, the Milky Way galaxy. And there are 200 billion galaxies beyond ours, some of them holding more than a trillion stars. Our finite minds aren't able to compute that number of anything!

It was reported just last week that by using optical/infrared telescopes at the Keck Observatory in Hawaii astronomers now realize that the total number of stars in the universe is three times bigger than previously thought.

This gargantuan universe had a Cause. The ancients knew that. John explained that the Cause was God the *logos*.

Jesus Christ who entered our world as a baby is God the Creator.

This what the Apostle Paul said about Jesus Christ: *'For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.'* (Colossians 1:16-17)

God the Son whose birth we celebrate at Christmas created them all.

That is so extreme! It's immense beyond comprehension.

- But evil came into the world and ravaged God's creation in this world. The curse of sin destroyed the spiritual link between God and his highest creation. Mankind became alienated from God, separated because of sin.

People know that something essential has broken down. Life is a string of futile attempts to put the broken pieces of their lives together again. The world has become accustomed to living like that. It's normal.

- Christmas is our Christian celebration of the revelation that God the Creator, the *Word* entered our world the way every human creature enters—as a baby.

He came to remove the curse on his creation and to give people a new beginning with him.

Only God the *Word*, the Creator, can make you a new creation. He is the Creator of life.

<sup>4</sup> *In him was life, and that life was the light of men.*

Christmas is our celebration of spiritual light and a new beginning for people who live in this world of spiritual darkness.

So the Apostle Paul explained, *'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.'* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

<sup>5</sup> *The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*

- At the beginning of the Bible we read, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep. . . And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw that the light was good, . . ."* (Genesis 1:1-4)

But just a few pages later—in Genesis 3 we read the tragic account of a different kind of darkness descending on creation and enveloping people in its blackness.

It's the darkness of evil.

What does darkness do? Among other things, darkness blinds you to what is really there. In darkness you are more prone to believe lies, and not to see the truth. You imagine things you can't see.

If you take a flight from the Upper Midwest to the Southwest---to Los Angeles or Orange County California, your flight path may take you directly over the Grand Canyon. On a clear day you can look down on breathtaking sights. But fly back at night--same flight path---and the darkness robs you of the exquisite view. It's there, but you don't see it.

Spiritual darkness blinds people to something amazing that's there for them.

At Christmas we celebrate the fact that Christ the light came into our world of chaotic spiritual darkness.

The prophet Isaiah wrote and Matthew quoted him in his Gospel, *'The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.'* (Isaiah 9:2; Matthew 4:16)

Christ's birth was the dawn of spiritual light upon spiritual darkness.

Jesus said *'I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.'* (John 12:46)

- Here in v.5 John writes that the darkness has not "*understood*" the light.

The word "*understood*" can also mean "*overcome*" (ESV).

No spiritual darkness is powerful enough to suffocate the light and life that Christ brings to people.

The light of Christ has penetrated to people in the deepest darkness of sin and despair.

I'm sure many of you have vivid memories of Christ the light penetrating the darkness in which you were trapped.

Charles Wesley wrote in a magnificent song about this, *Long my imprisoned spirit lay fast-bound in sin and nature's night; thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray; I woke, the dungeon flamed with light. My chains fell off; my heart was free; I rose, went forth, and followed thee (And Can it Be).*

- Christmas is an explanation of creation, because Christ who created the universe is the only one who can fix it.

He came personally to take care of the problem of evil that had ravaged his noblest creation—humankind.

If this isn't part of our Christmas, then we don't know Christmas at all.

## II. CHRISTMAS IS A PROCLAMATION OF SALVATION. John 1:6-11

Salvation is the word for what God did to rescue people from the horrible curse of sin.

The apostle Paul wrote: '*God our Savior, . . . wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*' (1 Timothy 2:3-4)

Not only did God do everything necessary to save us. He also provided the light, so that spiritual darkness would not blind us to the wonderful truth.

- John the Baptist had a huge role in pointing people to Jesus as the Savior, *Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!* (John 1:29)

<sup>6</sup> *There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John.*

<sup>7</sup> *He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe.*

<sup>8</sup> *He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.*

<sup>9</sup> *The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.*

This light that Christ gives reveals the truth about God and his mercy.

Nobody is saved in ignorance. There are certain essential truths about God and Christ you must grasp.

Christmas is supposed to be enlightening! It's full of God's truth.

But the Bible says many people still prefer the darkness. John explained, *This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.* (John 3:19)

<sup>10</sup> *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.*

Without Jesus Christ in it Christmas is just a word that misrepresents the truth and leaves people in the dark. It's not really Christmas.

Eric the Red, the Norwegian navigator, was raised in exile in Iceland. He led an expedition westward in 982 A.D. and discovered land where he established a Viking colony. The land was mostly glaciers and barren rock, with only a few patches of tundra. It was an inhospitable place. So what did Eric name it? He named it *Greenland* because he said colonists would be more likely to come if it had an attractive name. Can you imagine the shock of the first colonists arriving on Greenland? I can hear them: *Uff da!* (That's a term of disgruntlement. It's a polite Norwegian substitute for cussing. I'm told that in the *Peanuts* cartoons in Norway Charlie Brown says *Uff da!* instead of *Good grief!*) *Uff da! You've got to be kidding* They had been deceived!

When a helpless, ordinary baby came into the world and was named *Jesus/Yeshua* and given the majestic title *Immanuel—God with us*, God was not kidding. He was appropriately named.

<sup>11</sup> *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.*

But the world God created didn't know him or receive him when he came to it. That has to be among the most shocking things in the history of the universe!

When there is a real danger that someone may abuse or injure a particular person, a judge may issue a restraining order. It's a legal directive to one party to keep a specified distance from the other party.

People blinded by spiritual darkness tried to get a restraining order against God.—They didn't want to welcome him.

God created mankind alone with an inner attraction to him—like a magnetic attraction.

But sin entered the world and altered our spiritual polarity.

Instead of being drawn to God, people pushed God away.

- That's exactly what happened in the garden at the beginning when the first couple sinned. Instead of coming to God, they ran and hid from God.

So the influence of God on the lives of people is unsettling. God wants to draw people to himself, but sin drives them away from God. We see it all the time.

- It takes a mighty work of God to overcome that resistance in people. That's why he came among us, *Immanuel, God with us*—to change the spiritual polarity within us.

Christmas is a powerful declaration of this salvation by God.

## III. CHRISTMAS IS A CELEBRATION OF REGENERATION. John 1:12-14

Regeneration is the creation of new life. It's new birth.

For those who put their faith in Jesus Christ, Christmas is a celebration of new life as the children of God.

<sup>12</sup> *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--*

<sup>13</sup> *children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

The apostle Paul told the Galatian Christians, '*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*' (Galatians 3:26)

- By receiving Jesus Christ, by believing in him, people have the *right* to become Children of God. Somewhere in my files I have three diplomas that read something like this, *By Authority of the Board of Regents* (and then it states the College or Graduate School) *John Desmond Crocker had been admitted to the degree of* (states the particular degree). Then there is this statement: *and is entitled to all the rights and honors appertaining thereto.*

One of these days I may write them and ask about when I might expect to experience the honors appertaining to those degrees.

Those who receive Jesus Christ and believe in him are entitled to all the rights and privileges appertaining to being children of God. It's official—settled.

- Exactly how do we become Children of God?

We become Children of God by a *spiritual birth--born of god* (v.13)

Jesus said to Nicodemus, '*I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. . . .Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again".*' (John 3:3, 6, 7)

This spiritual birth into the family of God is so different from the way people become part of a human family, as we see in verse 13.

Being born as a human child involves natural descent occasioned by a human decision and physical intimacy. But becoming a child of God is entirely an act of God.

Only God produces or '*begets*' children of God.

- How big a part did you have in bringing about your birth?

How much of a say did you have in choosing the family you were born into? How many times did we all wish we had a vote on the matter?

Becoming a child of God is God's doing.

What we have to do is receive Christ and place our trust in him as God. Then we have the rights and privileges of the children of God.

I remember a dear old Salvation Army Officer, Col. Lyall Rader, who used to say: '*God is my Father, the Lord Jesus Christ is my Elder Brother, and the devil is no relative at all.*'

Every person who believes that Jesus is God who came into this world as Savior and receives Jesus Christ, has the rights and privileges of heavenly royalty.

<sup>14</sup>*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

- As God the Son, the Creator was born into this world to save us, so by faith in Jesus Christ we are born anew into family of God.

This is the celebration of Christmas in its highest form.

Do you remember when you lay helpless in the rubble of a broken life?

Then you were enlightened by the life-giving light who came into the world. The gospel of Christ reached you. Just as you were, in your helplessness you received Christ, you believed in him (1:12)

You became a new spiritual creation.

- Some of you may realize that this is what your soul has been searching for.

I invite you to receive Christ; to place your trust in him as your Savior---and become a new creation. Begin to live the new life that he came to give.

- Have you kept Jesus at a distance? I hope you've seen today that by doing that you cut yourself off from the only one who can forgive your sins and give you new life?

Will you open your life to him? Will you receive Jesus and become a child of God?

My Christian sister/brother, does Jesus Christ still have the central place of honor in your life? I invite you to renew your welcome to him.