

“WHAT IS CHRISTMAS WITHOUT CHRIST”
Isaiah 7:10-16, Philippians 2:5-11, Matthew 1:18-25
December 14 &15, 2024

“A lady had taken her five-year-old son shopping at a large department store during the Christmas season. She just knew it would be fun for him to see all the decorations and window displays and toys and Santa Claus. As she dragged him by the hand, twice as fast as his little legs could move, he began to fuss and cry, clinging to his mother’s coat.

“Good heavens, what on earth is the matter with you?” she scolded, impatiently. ‘I brought you with me to get in the Christmas Spirit. Santa doesn’t bring toys to little crybabies!’

“His fussing continued, however, as she tried to find some bargains during the last-minute rush on December 23. ‘I’m not going to take you shopping with me ever again, if you don’t stop that whimpering! Oh well, maybe it’s because your shoes are untied and you are tripping over your own laces,’ she said, kneeling down in the aisle to tie his shoes.

“And as she knelt down beside him, she happened to look around. For the first time, she viewed the department store through the eyes of her five-year-old son. From that position there were no baubles, no bangles, beads, presents, gaily decorated display tables, or animated toys. All that could be seen was a maze of corridors too high to see above, full of giant, stovepipe legs and huge posteriors. These mountainous strangers, with feet as big as skateboards, were pushing and shoving and bumping and thumping and rushing and crushing. Rather than fun, the scene looked absolutely terrifying! She elected to take her child home and vowed to herself never to impose her version of a good time on him again.

“On the way out of the store, the mother noticed Santa Claus seated in a pavilion decorated like the North Pole. She knew that letting her little boy meet Santa Claus in person would go a long way toward his remembering the Christmas shopping disaster as a pleasant,

rather than an unpleasant experience.

“Honey, go stand in line with the other children, and then sit up on Santa’s lap,’ she continued. ‘Tell him what you want for Christmas, and smile while you’re talking so we can take your picture for the family album.’

“Even though a Santa Claus was standing outside the store entrance ringing a bell, and although they had seen another Santa at the previous shopping center, the little five-year-old was pushed forward to enjoy a personal chat with the ‘*real* Santa.’

“When the strange-looking man with the beard, glasses, and red suit stuffed with pillows hoisted the little boy onto his lap, he laughed loudly and tickled the little boy in the ribs.

“And what would you like for Christmas, son?” Santa boomed jovially.

“I’d like to get down,’ was the little boy’s response.”¹ So much for the mother’s decision not to impose her view of a good time on him.

But, sadly, this is what many people experience, even at a variety of ages; an imposed concept of what the mid-winter celebration has become. It’s a hustle and bustle, hurry and search for something that is completely void of the real significance of what Christmas is really all about. Our society today is trying to celebrate Christmas as hard as it can go, **yet without Christ Jesus being any part of it.** There are cards and letters and songs and events and parties and parades ALL WITHOUT really telling the true meaning of the celebration. It’s trying to have Christmas without Christ. And when you do that, all that is left is a mass of catastrophes, and failures, and disappointments. Yet we do it every year as if that is really Christmas.

“According to a legend, Satan and his demons were having a Christmas party. As the demonic guests were departing, one grinned and said to Satan, ‘Merry Christmas, your majesty.’

¹ (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers 1989] pg. 82)

At that, Satan replied with a growl, ‘Yes, keep it merry. If they ever get serious about it, we’ll all be in trouble.’

“Well, folks, I invite you to get serious about it! IT IS ABOUT THE BIRTH OF THE BABY JESUS, OUR MESSIAH! It is the coming of God to be here with us. It is the intervention of God’s presence among mankind.”² It is the Lord our God reaching out to us through His own Son in order that we might not be cast away from Him at the close of the age, condemned because of our sinful rebellion of His laws and commandments. It is God, Himself, providing a Savior for us to believe in, and obey, and follow, so that we might be His children, worthy of being with Him in heaven when our time here on earth is completed.

That marvelous birth of our Savior, Jesus, was foretold long before it ever happened. We heard the account of Isaiah 7 tell us about a virgin conceiving, and then giving birth and calling Him Immanuel (Is. 7:14). Immanuel means “God with us!” God, our Lord God Almighty, the Creator of the Universe, the Giver of life to each one of us, was now going to become one of us so that we could come to know God, and love Him, and devote our life in service to Him, so that we might find freedom from our sins and have eternal life with Him!

In order for this to happen, however, the child could not be just another human baby, born in the way every human is born. He had to be a unique, special baby, conceived as one of us, yet without sin. God’s presence with us would be so special that it would transform each of the lives of those who believed in Him and received Him as their Savior and Lord.

Then we heard the Apostle Paul’s description of Jesus, “*who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And*

² (Ibid, pg. 82)

being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8)!

Jesus is God, the Son, who was obedient to His Father, to be born like one of us, to save humanity from their condemnation to death because of their sin. Listen to how the news was received by the one chosen to become His earthly father. This is Matthew 1:18-25. Listen carefully to the real reason for the season. (READ Matthew 1:18-25)

God saw our helpless obsession with sin and disobedience to His commands. God saw that there was nothing we could do on our own to save ourselves from the death that comes from disobedience to His commands. God looked down at the world and decided that He loved this world too much to destroy us and start all over again.

So God did the miraculous - He confined Himself into one single cell, implanted that one cell into the womb of a young unmarried woman whom He favored to be the earthly mother of this precious child. And this young woman, Mary, engaged to the righteous man Joseph, became pregnant with the Son of God. And God invited Joseph to take Mary home as his wife (1:20) so that he could become her protector and encourager and provider.

You see, without Joseph’s help, Mary could possibly have been killed for being unfaithful to her marriage commitment to Joseph. She would have been seen as a prostitute, having had an affair with another man which led her to become pregnant. There was no other way to become pregnant than by having relations with a man. If Joseph wasn’t the father of the child, then the only other way for Mary to become pregnant was to have been unfaithful to him.

So this was a difficult task that the angel was inviting Joseph to do. It was vital that he accept Mary as his wife and claim her child as his own so that both she and the child within her would not be put to death. As miraculous as her conception was, the people around Mary would

not have understood that the child was God's own Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit so that He would be holy, come to save his people from their sins (1:21). Though Joseph was told that it was to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy to King Ahab, no one else would have accepted it that Mary was still a virgin. The angel of the Lord called Joseph to step up to make sure that God's plan of Salvation for the whole world could become a reality. Even though the rest of the people of Nazareth would not understand it, Joseph was called to humble himself before the Lord to become Mary's husband, bringing protection to both Mary and the child. And in so doing, the child could become the Savior, the long awaited Messiah for the world.

So "when Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave Him the name Jesus" (Matthew 1:24-25).

Can you imagine what the repercussions against Joseph would have been! In the eyes of the people of Nazareth, by taking Mary home as his wife, he was "admitting" that he had rushed the engagement period and had consummated their marriage before the wedding ceremony. By doing what the angel had told him, Joseph was being righteous in the eyes of God, but not in the eyes of the people. He would have been chastised and ridiculed and condemned by the people for being unrighteous, not righteous, because he did not (in their eyes and their understanding) follow the laws of Moses according to taking a wife. No matter what kind of persuasion Joseph could have tried in convincing the others of what was truly happening, they would not have comprehended what was really happening.

As a result, Joseph may have been prevented from attending the weekly worship services because of his perceived sin. He may have lost work because the people would not have trusted him anymore. Though Mary's family may have come to accept what had happened to their little

girl, they may never have really believed Mary's account of what the angel had told her. And if Joseph were to have told anyone about his dream of Gabriel's visit to him, the people would certainly have thought that both of these two were absolutely nuts.

So it certainly would have been a blessing for Caesar Augustus' census to come along calling for everyone to return to their home city to be counted (Luke 2:1). God provided a way for Mary and Joseph to escape the condemnation of the community of Nazareth. Because of their being of the house of David, they both would have been able to leave their harsh environments and gained a little peace from the persecution and judgement from the people by going to Bethlehem. God was inviting them to be faithful in His plan, and He was making a way for all those plans to become fulfilled.

Joseph and Mary were both faithful servants to the Lord. They accepted huge crosses to bear in order that the fulfillment of the Lord's prophecies would be accomplished (Matt. 1:21). They trusted what the angel of the Lord had said to them, and they did as they were told, even if it made life difficult for them in the process. They were bringing the Son of God into the world, and He would become the Savior for the world, providing forgiveness of sins to all who would accept Him and obey Him and follow Him.

That's what this season is about, faithfulness in God's call to obey His commands, even if they seem to us to be extraordinary and unreasonable. But how will the world know about the love and sacrifice that Mary and Joseph gave to fulfill the provision of God's Messiah to the world unless we tell them? How will they come to know the truth about this season called Christmas unless we present the real message to them?

Christmas without Christ is just another big worldly party. Christmas without Christ really has no meaning. It is Christ Jesus that makes the season. So I am glad that the women of

this church had their Christmas gathering that focused on Jesus' birth. The Scriptures read and the songs sung helped those attending to draw close to the true meaning of the season. But most of us didn't attend the event! There were a variety of excuses made that kept people away. But those who gathered heard the Good News of Jesus' birth account, and were able to once more put Jesus back into the Christmas season.

So how do we take this Great Good New out into the community? It's too cold for people to gather in the parks any more. So how do we relay the true message about Christmas if we can't meet with people?

Well, how about starting with your family or your own home? How do you tell the message about Jesus' birth in the decorations around your home? Do you have nativity scenes in your front yard? Or are they filled with snowmen, reindeer, elves, penguins and Grinches, or other worldly replacements? Do we focus on the other replacements for the true meaning of Christmas? Or do we allow the marvelous work of the Lord our God fill us with joy? Do we become merry with parties and other events, or do we get serious to let our neighbors know the true reason for the season? Will we keep Christ Jesus in Christmas, or will we forget Him?

Let me close today with a probing revision to a popular replacement of the season. This is "*'Twas the Night before Jesus Came.*" Please listen carefully.

"'Twas the night before Jesus came and all through the house, not a creature was praying, not one in the house. Their Bibles were lain on the shelf without care in hopes that Jesus would not come in there. The children were dressed to crawl into bed, not once ever kneeling or bowing a head; and Mom in her rocker with baby on her lap was watching the Late Show while I took a nap.

"When out of the East there rose such a clatter, I sprang to my feet to see what was the

matter. Away to the window I flew like a flash, tore open the shutters and threw up the sash!
When what to my wondering eyes should appear but angels proclaiming that Jesus was here.
With a light like the sun sending forth a bright ray I knew in a moment that this must be THE
DAY!

“The light of His face made me cover my head - it was Jesus! Returning just like He had
said. And though I possessed worldly wisdom and wealth, I cried when I saw Him in spite of
myself. In the Book of Life which He held in His hand was written the name of every saved
man. He spoke not a word as He searched for my name; when He said, ‘It’s not here,’ my head
hung in shame. The people whose names had been written with love He gathered to take to His
Father above. With those who were ready He rose without sound while all of the rest were left
standing around. I fell to my knees, but it was too late; I had waited too long and thus sealed my
fate. I stood and I cried as they rose out of sight. Oh, if only I had been ready tonight.

“In the words of this poem the meaning is clear; the coming of Jesus is soon drawing
near. There’s only one life and when comes the last call - We’ll find that the Bible was true after
all.”³ Let’s pray

Father, give us the eyes and the heart to see and understand what You did for us through
Jesus Christ. Jesus is the reason for this season! Grant us the courage to present the true reason
for Christmas so that all those around us might fully understand the importance of Jesus being
our Savior. May we use the season to bring eternal life and joy into the lives of others as we lead
them into faith in Jesus, born of a virgin through the Holy Spirit, crucified and buried to take
away our sins, resurrected and ascended, so that we might be with You as we claim Him as
Savior. Help us to live boldly as a witness to Jesus. This we pray in Jesus’ Name. AMEN.

³ (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, [Nashville; Thomas Nelson, 1998] pg. 86)