

## Why Did Jesus Come?

Luke 2:8-15, 25-35

December 20, 2009

Consider Again Christmas

When Pope Julius I authorized December 25 to be celebrated as the birthday of Jesus in A.D. 353, who would have ever thought that it would become what it is today.

When Professor Charles Follen lit candles on the first Christmas tree in America in 1832, who would have ever thought that the decorations would become as elaborate as they are today.

It is a long time since 1832, longer still from 353, longer still from that dark night brightened by a special star in which Jesus the king was born. Yet, as we approach December 25 again, it gives us yet another opportunity to pause, and in the midst of all the excitement and elaborate decorations and expensive commercialization which surround Christmas today, to consider again the event of Christmas and the person whose birth we celebrate.

Brian L. Harbour, James W. Cox, The Minister's Manual: 1994, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993, p. 254.

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### The Announcement to the Shepherds. Luke 2:8-15

What have you heard and Seen this Christmas?

Oh, you say, had I been there at Bethlehem that night I would have seen. I would have understood. I would have known it was the Christ child. Would you? There is one way of knowing:

Ask yourself what you have seen and heard this Christmas Season.

- When you watched the 6:00 news did you see chaos and strife, or did you see sheep without a shepherd.
- When you went out to do your shopping did you see only hordes of people in the stores, or did you notice the worried expressions on some of their faces--worried because they are facing this Christmas without employment or enough money and they don't know how they are going to make ends meet.

What did you hear this Christmas?

- Did you hear only the blast of music and carols, or did you hear the silent sighs of the lonely and the bereaved who may be dreading Christmas because it accentuates their loneliness.
- And in the midst of the sounds of honking horns and people arguing over parking places, did you hear faint sounds of laughter coming from Asbury Church missions projects because you furnished food and toys for families and children.

You see, so often what you see and what you hear is not dependent upon the event but upon you. If you did in fact hear the cry from the lonely, the laughter of poor children, if you saw the sheep without a shepherd, then, and only then, might you have noticed the events that took place in Bethlehem that night. If you lacked that spiritual seeing and hearing then you probably would have been with the 99% who were present but who saw or heard nothing out of the ordinary.

In the end perhaps one of our carols words it best: No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin. Where meek souls shall receive him still, the dear Christ enters in. Amen.

Brett Blair, Sermon Illustrations, 1999.

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Praise God for Christmas.

Praise Him for the incarnation,  
for the word made flesh.

I will not sing of shepherds  
watching flocks on frosty nights,  
or angel choristers.

I will not sing of a stable bare in Bethlehem,  
or lowing oxen,  
wise men trailing star with gold,  
frankincense, and myrrh.

Tonight I will sing praise to the Father  
who stood on heaven's threshold  
and said farewell to his Son  
as he stepped across the stars  
to Bethlehem and Jerusalem.  
And I will sing praise to the infinite, eternal Son,  
who became most finite, a baby  
who would one day be executed for my crime.  
Praise him in the heavens,  
Praise him in the stable,  
Praise him in my heart.

Joseph Bayly.

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### **The Revelation To Simeon. Luke 2:25-35**

On November 18, 1995, the Israeli master violinist Itzhak Perlman played before the eager audience of New York's Lincoln Center. But within seconds of beginning, it was clear that the maestro was in trouble. Just as he finished the first stanza, a string on Perlman's violin snapped. To everyone's surprise, Itzhak Perlman paused for a moment, closed his eyes, and then signaled the conductor to begin again. The orchestra recommenced, and he joined them where he'd left off.

He played with passion and purity, modulating, changing, retuning and recomposing the piece on the spot to render what was lost by the broken string. When he finished, the audience exploded to its feet. They knew the feat they had just seen. Perlman raised his bow to quiet the audience and then said, not boastfully, but in a quiet, reverent tone: 'You know, sometimes it is the artist's task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left.'" (From the sermon "Long Past Prime" by Daniel Meyer

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### **Simeon and The Savior**

**By Jennifer Kennedy Dean**

*Guest Writer*

Luke 2:27-32

When the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform for Him what was customary under the law, Simeon took Him up in his arms, praised God, and said: Now, Master, You can dismiss Your slave in peace, according to Your word. For my eyes have seen Your salvation. You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples— a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to Your people Israel.

By the time Your promises are fulfilled, You have first created the expectation and fanned the flames of hope in those whose hearts are attuned to You. You have opened the eyes of faith in the one who looks to You. Take Simeon, for example—old Simeon, well along in years, righteous and devout. You had made him a promise that he would not die until his eyes had seen Your salvation.

On that day when Mary and Joseph brought their little baby to the temple courts, they were there to offer the customary sacrifices at the customary time in the customary way—an ordinary scene. Nothing outstanding or unusual was happening; nothing occurred to call Simeon's attention to the family from Nazareth.

Simeon was not alone at the temple. Others were there—many others, probably. They looked at the family from Nazareth, too, did they not? Yet only Simeon looked at the family and saw Your salvation. Only Simeon recognized in the flesh what his heart had been seeing in the Spirit for years.

At Simeon's age, it is likely that his eyesight had faded. He probably could not see as clearly as many of those at the temple that day. Yet, when he looked at what everyone else was looking at, he saw Your salvation. There You were, cloaked in the ordinary. Those focused on rites and ceremonies, those evaluating position and prestige—they missed You. Though You were right in their midst, they were blind to Your presence. But Simeon, whose spiritual sight was sharp, saw You clearly.

Simeon, when he saw You, proclaimed himself at peace. The sight of You, even in Your infancy, brought peace to Simeon's old heart.

Lord Jesus, in this Christmas season where we sing songs about peace but fill our days with chaos, let me see You in the ordinary. Let me recognize You in the comings and goings. Let me look beyond the glitter of the holiday and see the glory of Your presence. And I, too, will be at peace.

Simeon took You up in his arms. What a moment that must have been for dear Simeon. With You balanced in the crook of his arm, pressed against his aged breast, Simeon looked into the face of his Savior.

How overcome he must have been. Surely tears flooded his eyes and tumbled down his craggy cheeks. He had to have felt that divine and eternal moment with his whole being. Simeon held his Salvation in his embrace and felt the Master's touch.

Peace, confidence, certainty; a sense of being settled and stable and safe; clarity about who is in charge; awareness of Your power—all of this is part of the peace I feel when I experience Your touch.

This Christmas season, when I fall into the well-worn patterns of my flesh—trying to measure up, trying to make everybody happy, trying to attend perfectly to every detail, trying to fulfill other people's expectations—capture my heart with Your touch. Bring peace to my thoughts with Your presence. “When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Your consolations delight my soul” (Psalm 94:19 NASB). No matter what frenetic activity and insistent demands swirl around me, I want to be able to say, “My eyes have seen Your Salvation” (Luke 2:30). Let me be transfixed by Your face.