

The Reason for the Season

Christmas Message

Luke 2; Matthew 2

Introduction

Today, we will look at Luke chapter 2 and Matthew chapter 2, to refocus our attention on the reason for this season of Christmas. It is easy to get caught up in all of the mad hurry and rush before we ultimately celebrate the day on December 25th.

It has occurred to me that not only are there people who missed Christmas the first time, but there are people who are still missing it today. They are the same class of people. In the same way, those who experienced the first Christmas are the same class of people who are experiencing it today. They follow the biblical pattern.

So let us, in topical fashion, take a look at the people who missed the first Christmas and the people who are still missing it today. We will then, look at what it takes for a person to really experience, enjoy, and celebrate what this season represents.

Those Who Miss Christmas

Let us look at three types of people who miss Christmas. Take note of these because you might find yourself in a mad rush this season, falling into one of these categories.

1. The first type of person who missed the first Christmas, and who still miss it today, we could call, the preoccupied person.

Look at Luke 2:1-4, which begins with a familiar verse.

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.

This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.

Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David,

Note the words of verse 4. We often skip over them without thinking. Recognize the fact that, had the lineage continued to descend through this line and had there been a king in that day, the legal heir to the throne would have been Joseph. Of course, the throne had been set aside, so he was a simple carpenter instead of a king.

Continue to Luke 2:5-7.

in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.

While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now I know you are probably thinking that we are going to pick on the poor innkeeper again. Not necessarily, although I believe he represents a class of people who totally missed it because they never recognized what was happening.

Occurring on this day was that which had been prophesied centuries before. It came and knocked on his door, but he had no time and no room.

Now, bless his heart, it was a busy time. All of the people were going back to their homes to be registered in the first census of this day. His inn was probably packed and jammed, perhaps even with people sleeping on the floor. He was probably gracious enough to find room in the hut out back; in the manger where the baby would be wrapped and laid. So we are not going to be too hard on him.

However, he represents a class of people who still today, if Jesus Christ knocked on their door, would say, "There is no room and no time in this busy season for You."

Now let us be honest with ourselves. Suppose for a moment, that Jesus Christ, on the twenty-fifth of December, knocked on your door or my door and said, "I want to spend a day with you."

I think we would respond with, “Well, let me check my calendar. Let’s see – it’s lunch here, and supper there, and unwrapping packages and all of that, and . . .”

I know we can go to the extreme, but for a moment, stop and think. I love this season. I love unwrapping the packages and giving them. I love the tree and the lights and the singing. This is one of my favorite times of the year. But I want to create in our minds the question, “Are we going to rush through Christmas without any time for Jesus Christ? Where is He this season in your calendar and in mine? On December 25th, how does He fit in?”

Perhaps you and I would find ourselves classified with this poor innkeeper – too preoccupied, too busy, no time, and no room. The innkeeper is one person who missed the first Christmas. This person still misses it today.

You may be familiar with the story of the couple in Boston who were giving a Christening party for their little boy. They invited all of their friends, neighbors, and relatives to come to their palatial home and celebrate. The maids met the guests at the door and hurriedly took their coats to the upstairs master bedroom and put them on the bed. Everyone was celebrating, and finally, someone said, “Let’s take a look at your little boy. Where is your son?”

The couple went upstairs, but could not find their son. After much searching, they discovered that he had been smothered beneath the heavy pile of coats on the master bed. They had been so busy celebrating that they missed the purpose of their celebrating. We still do this today.

2. The second kind of person who missed the first Christmas, and who still miss it today, we will call, the rebellious person.

There are the busy people who miss Christmas and there are also rebellious people. Look at Matthew 2:1-2.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,

“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”

Herod’s blood probably turned to ice at this statement. Continue to Matthew 2:3.

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Herodotus, Josephus, and other historians tell us the kind of man Herod was. He had taken upon himself the title, “King of the Jews”. He had created this title because he was, by appointment, given Palestine to rule. To make sure that the Jews followed him, he married Miriamne, a Jewess, hoping that this alliance would create some type of loyalty between the Gentile, Herod, and the Jewish nation.

Herod did a lot of things for the Jews. In fact, history records that one time, when inflation was up and there were many problems, he decided to return some tax money to all of the inhabitants of Palestine as a gift. He also built tremendous buildings, roads and bridges. He developed the athletic programs of the city and the educational system was fostered under his care.

However, Herod was jealous of the title, “King of the Jews”. He was so jealous, in fact, that one day, he killed the brother of his wife, the high priest, fearing that he would assume the title in his place. He also ordered the execution of Miriamne, his own wife. He put three of his own children to death, as well. In fact, five days before he died, he killed his third son because he did not want him to reign – no one would hold the title “King of the Jews” when he was gone.

Josephus tells us that when Herod knew his death was imminent, he ordered the capture and imprisonment of many, perhaps more than seventy, of the leading citizens of Palestine. He commanded that the day he died, they were to be executed to ensure that there would be mourning in Jerusalem.

Herod was a power hungry, jealous man. We can imagine what went through his mind when this group of magi, with all of their splendor, arrived from the east, and said, “Where is the King of the Jews who has just been born?”

In Herod’s mind, no one would be king but him. He missed the first Christmas.

People still miss Christmas today, who have the same thought, “No one else will be king but me. No one will occupy the throne but me. No one will call the shots in my life, except me.”

As a result, they miss the King of Christmas, Jesus Christ.

3. There is another class of people that missed Christmas then and miss it today. Not only the rebellious and the preoccupied, but let me tantalize your thoughts with this one – the religious missed Christmas.

Look at Matthew 2:4-6. After Herod heard the announcement of Jesus' birth, he gathered the religious leaders of the people.

Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

"And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel."

What shocked me, as I studied this passage again, was the fact that Herod heard the magi, who had seen perhaps even the Shekinah glory appear, as they talked about a star or the glory of God. They had perhaps, spent more than two years traveling. They came and announced, "The King of the Jews has been born."

Herod then called all of the religious crowd in, and said, "Now, tell me where He's going to be born."

They quoted, "Oh, we know exactly where – Bethlehem of Judea, for the prophets have said, ..."

Yet, not one of them tagged along with the magi to see if Christ had been born.

Can you imagine knowing, by announcement, that Christ had come and knowing where He was born, yet never going to see Him? I think the reason was that these men were so wrapped up. If you had asked them, "Aren't you going to take time to see the Christ?" they would probably have scoffed and said, "We have our synagogue; we have our activities; we have all of the pomp; we have a religious system."

These religious leaders were *so* religious that they had no reason to take time out for Jesus Christ. He had been replaced by their system.

The same thing happens today. People say, "I have my baptism . . . I have my church . . . I have my activity . . . I have my deeds. Why do I need to see Jesus Christ?"

Today, in America, do you know who I think the largest class of people who miss the reason for the

Christmas celebration will be? The religious crowd who will stand around the piano or around the tree and sing, "Silent Night".

Those Who Celebrate Christmas

Now, before we depress ourselves any further and look at the fourth and the fifth type of person who missed Christmas, which I am sure there are, let us talk about those who celebrated it then and those who will celebrate it now.

1. The first class of people that celebrate Christmas are those who glorify Christ.

Look at Luke 2:8-19. I love this part.

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.

And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;

"for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

"This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger."

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us."

So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger.

When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child.

And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.

But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

Note the next verse, Luke 2:20.

The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

Now the religious crowd would completely miss Christmas. They would never take the time to observe, not even out of curiosity. They had the scriptures memorized, but they could care less about the Christ about which the scriptures prophesied.

However, this group of shepherds were men who were outcasts. They were the uneducated. In fact, they were considered ceremonially unclean. They could never enter the synagogue because they took care of the beasts that would be sacrificed. Shepherds were on the lowest rung of the societal ladder.

The reason I like this is because although these shepherds are dirty, uneducated outcasts, who does God come to and give the announcement? The religious crowd? The educated? Those in the synagogue? No. God gives the announcement of Jesus' birth to this group of shepherds.

The word "glorify," could be traced back to the word "doxa," which began with the meaning, "to have an opinion". Then, over the centuries, the meaning of "doxa" began to develop into, "to have a good opinion or to have a right opinion". By the time of the apostle Paul, "doxa" meant "to glorify God"; that is, to have the highest, best opinion of Him that is possible.

When these shepherds heard the announcement and then saw the babe, they glorified God. In other words, in their minds – their uneducated, simple minds that were so open to the news – they had an elevated thought, an elevated position, a high opinion of God.

The person then and the individual today, who knows how to celebrate Christmas is the individual who has an elevated, high opinion of the glory of God and they honor Him in that manner.

2. The second class of people who celebrate Christmas are those who take time to worship Christ.

Look at Matthew 2:7.

Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared.

Now we know from scripture and from history, that it took the magi perhaps, around two years to arrive. So Jesus would have been around two years of age. We know, from Herod's decree, that all of the baby boys were killed from the age of two and under (Matthew 2:16). It took these men two years perhaps, to reach Palestine from Persia.

Continue to Matthew 2:8-11. Note in verse 11, the magi found Jesus, no longer in a stable, but in a house.

And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him."

After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

You may remember, perhaps from a previous study, the significance of each of these gifts. Gold, of course, referred to His deity, which was primary, and that was the first gift.

Now we know the magi were the resident authority in Persia. In fact, you may remember that Daniel was part of the magi – he was a wise man. These men were known in Babylon and Persia in the east as king-makers. They were not kings, they were king-makers. Any heir to the throne would sit under their instruction. The magi would instruct the future king in the sciences and mathematics and architecture and all of the skills of that day. Then, upon their approval of that future king, they would coronate him.

Get the picture out of your mind, as well, that three showed up. There could have been as many as fifty or one hundred arriving in splendor – enough to trouble the entire city of Jerusalem. They were very wealthy, so perhaps following along with them, in their caravan of camels and donkeys, were servants. They had gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and

perhaps, soldiers to protect these gifts as they traveled.

This entourage arrives in Palestine asking for the Boy. Imagine the scene when they find Him. They arrive at the house and knock on the door, with all of them filling up the street. Neighbors poke their heads out, wondering what is happening now. Finally, perhaps Mary answers the door and is greeted by this vast array of wealth and authority. They ask for the Boy. By now, Mary is probably totally confused. She has been pondering all this in her heart. However, she gets the little two-year-old Jesus and brings Him to the door, perhaps the threshold. Immediately, these men, maybe one hundred of them, fall down and begin worshipping.

Do you know what these men are doing? They are the king-makers. They are going through the coronation process. They are declaring, "He's the King."

However, it is interesting, as well, that Jesus had not sat under the instruction of these men; He was not trained by them. Apart from their instruction, apart from their approval, they said, "This Boy is heir to the throne."

Now "worship" means, "to acknowledge His worth". It is a sister word of "doxa" or "glory".

These men are in the street, worshipping or ascribing worth to this little Boy.

I would love to know what Jesus was doing. I have never known a two year old to stand still. Mine would have been checking out the camels and all of the people.

Imagine this scene as these men acknowledged Jesus' deity. They celebrated it then and to celebrate it today, we must glorify Him and worship Him.

3. The third class of people who celebrate Christmas are those who love Christ.

We will not take the time to study the scripture, but these are the people who love Christ. People who celebrate Christmas are those who glorify Him, worship Him, and love Him.

There are two unknown figures in this entire account. We discover them when we read Luke 2:21-38. They are Simeon and Anna.

Simeon and Anna had been praying and fasting and waiting for the coming Child. God, by way of revelation, had let them know that Jesus would come during their lifetime. When He finally came, God

made sure these two people found out. When they heard the news, they were filled with joy and began telling everyone of their love for this Boy.

I could not help but think, from this, that there is another class of individual that knows how to celebrate Christmas. It is the individual who has in his, or her, heart, a love for Jesus Christ.

Do you love Jesus Christ? It is that love, it is that glorifying, it is that worship that provides the foundation to appreciate, to celebrate His coming.

Conclusion

We think of gifts during this season and we give them, yet the apostle Paul, in II Corinthians 9:15, tells us that Jesus Christ is the "indefinable gift". The most frustrating thing to every pastor who stands and preaches during this season – and it has been incredibly frustrating to me – is to go back to this story and try to describe it, to try to unify our hearts with all that happened. This is frustrating because when He came, Paul said, "You can't describe it. He is an indefinable gift."

Perhaps you remember the time when Richard Burton gave Elizabeth Taylor the largest, most expensive diamond anyone, other than a king, had ever given. I hope she appreciated it. At the time, every newspaper in the country reported its weight, its value, its size, its color. They could, with ease, describe it. There is no gift known to man that we can give to each other that is indefinable.

However, Jesus Christ, the gift of the Father to humanity, is indefinable. This indefinable gift, Jesus Christ, left His glory to give us glory. He took on an earthly body and an earthly mother, so that we could have a glorified body and a heavenly Father. He occupied a stable, so that we, one day, could occupy heaven. He was hunted down by Herod to deliver us from the hunter of men's souls, Satan. He became poor, so we could be rich. He was born to die, so that we could be born again and never die.

We cannot describe this gift. All we can do is glorify, and worship, and love Him. Let us make this Christmas that kind of experience.