

CONCEPTS OF CHRISTMAS

The mention of Christmas may bring a flood of memories and phrases from songs and snippets of Scripture passages and all these come together to influence our concepts of Christmas. For many who grew up in the middle part of the last century one of the popular secular songs had a line that said

"You better watch out, you better not cry, you better not shout: I'm telling you why! Santa Claus is coming to town."

We've all heard the song, "Christmas is coming, the geese are getting fat, please put a penny in the old man's hat." Today's version might be: "Christmas is coming, the turkeys are in the freezer, please put a dollar in the Salvation Army kettle." Just doesn't have the same ring as the original, does it? Has Christmas changed? Let me ask the question another way: Has our concept of Christmas changed? Certainly our concept changed from the time we were children and our parents fooled us about Santa Claus until we realized that someone had to buy those presents.

As we get more mature, Christmas takes on more of a relationship connotation that brings up the memorable and nostalgic line of a song that declares

"I'll be home for Christmas, you can count on me."

Concepts of Christmas change depending on the presence or absence of loved ones. We can be "joyfully occupied" or "terribly lonely."

Along with this we find that our concept has changed from the time we were primarily receivers of gifts to the time we are primarily givers of gifts.

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, `Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.'" (Luke 2:11-14)

Concepts of Christmas change depending on whether or not we truly know Jesus. Of all the things that can change our concept of Christmas, this one thing has to be the most profound. If we don't know Jesus, then Christmas is just a holiday season, it is yuletide, it is a season to be jolly. However, when we do know Him, Christmas becomes a holy day as opposed to just a holiday. It is the birth of hope and the season to be joyful which goes profoundly beyond just being jolly.

The HOLY CHILD is the HOPE of the world and His indwelling presence is our reason for joy at any time of the year. As a matter of fact, not only does our concept of Christmas change depending on whether or not we know Jesus, our concept of everything will be affected. The impossibility of the Sermon on the Mount becomes a workable way to deal with difficulty. The challenge to pray without ceasing becomes reality as we daily walk with Jesus.

"And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." (Luke 2:6-7)

Our new concept of Christmas causes us to question the use of Xmas which was perfectly acceptable if we know that X stands for the Greek letter "Chi" but is unacceptable we realize that some would use the English X as a way to remove Christ from the observance of the birth of the Savior. It causes us to prefer the rustic stable with the Babe in the manger rather than the glitter of tinsel. It causes us to look for the star of Bethlehem rather than the blinking lights on an evergreen tree.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. . . . John . . . came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might

believe. 8 He . . . was sent to bear witness of that Light. 9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world." (John 1:1-9 selected verses)

As a Christian we should view the world in a completely different light because of this True Light that is available to every person. Natural light can be separated into the various colors of the rainbow and we have all seen evidence of the effects of seeing things in different lights such as red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. We could say that the light that falls on us "colors" the perception that others have of us. We even speak of casting someone in a "bad light" or a "good light." In this time of everything being so political, the various colors take on different meanings such as "red states" or "blue states" to indicate political party affiliations. "Green" has taken on a concept of environmentally friendly while to some while it may still imply "envy" of others.

In a theater environment, various colored lights are used to create drama and interest or to create a certain mood. The question each of us must ask as we go about our daily lives is "what is the nature of the light in which we find ourselves standing?" Do we reflect a red light, blue light, green light or violet light because of those things in which we are deeply involved or things which we may strongly advocate.

A more important and even more basic question beyond the "color" of the light we reflect is "what is the nature and color of the light that we emit from our inner most being?" For those who are born again of the Spirit of God, we have the Light that John described within us and we must let it shine and be seen by other (don't hide it under a bushel.) How can this light be described so that it is distinguished from just being a combination of all the other colors that makes up natural light. If we are thinking in such terms, then we will find ourselves attempting to produce the light by human and humanistic means such as embracing diversity, being tolerant of everything, accepting all manner of behaviors so that we have some of every sort of light represented by "who we are." This idea is what the secularists attempt in trying to produce such light apart from God. It is evident that such a counterfeit alternative does not produce a better and more blessed world.

An appropriate description of this True Light that is the "light of mankind" is found in the hymn *Silent Night* where, in verse three, we find the line "Son of God, Love's Pure Light." This is what comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit who dwells within those who have received Him. This is what should be emanating from each and every one of us who worship the Christ and follow Him as Lord of all. We must be careful to not contaminate that Pure Light with other philosophies or by allowing ourselves to be cast in a "bad light" by associations and behaviors that are inappropriate.

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." (Matt 2:1-2)

Our new concept of Christmas is so full of the Holy it disregards the holly. It turns us into wise men and women for we also seek the One born King, not only of the Jews, but King of kings. We seek Him not so much to bring Him great gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh but to participate in His great gift of Himself to us.

When the magnitude of His generosity floods our consciousness, then we realize that nothing we could give – even gold, frankincense and myrrh – could compare with this gift of grace. We can only respond by giving our all – our very selves – as the grateful response to this gracious gift of God Himself.