

**WHAT
DOES
THIS
MEAN
TO
YOU?**



An Address by the Reverend
LANCE R. SHILTON, B.A., B.D.
Rector of Holy Trinity Church, Adelaide
Trinity Sermon, No. 9

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WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO YOU?

The birth of a child is a very wonderful thing. Those of you who know something of my personal history will realise that I ought to know what I am talking about. While I was waiting at the hospital for the birth of my second daughter, I picked up a magazine, and I commenced reading an article - which, I suppose, was the best thing to do under the circumstances. I started to read an article called, 'The Bible is True'. But I was interrupted by one of the doctors who happened to stroll into the room, and looking at me and seeing my clerical collar, he said, "Who's beginning to die?" I said, "You mean, 'Who's beginning to live!'" He said, "It's a strange thing but I always associate parsons with death." I said, "Well, that's strange, I always associate parsons with life!" So we got talking, and I said to him, "You must have been present when many babies have been born. Tell me, do you ever lose the wonder of it all?" He said, "No, I don't - and I never shall."

I wonder how you view the birth of Jesus?

First we see that THE ANGELS VIEWED THE BIRTH OF JESUS TRIUMPHANTLY.

At the announcement of the birth of Jesus a multitude of the heavenly host praised God, saying:

'Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill towards men.'

They knew that there was God's answer to man's sin. God's wonderful plan of salvation was begun, and it was being worked out before their very eyes.

It was an angel who announced the birth of Jesus to Mary. It was an angel who appeared to Joseph, warning the Holy Family to flee to Egypt.

Heaven, you see, participated in this birth. This was no ordinary birth, but the birth of the Son of God. John puts it this way, 'And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His

glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' The birth of Jesus was a triumph of God's grace reaching down to man's need. Think of it! that God, Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, should leave His heavenly throne of glory and share this human existence with us. This is something beyond all thought or imagination. The angels of the realms of glory viewed this triumphantly.

Secondly, MARY AND JOSEPH VIEWED THE BIRTH OF JESUS JOYFULLY.

Every parent knows what a joy it is when a baby is born; when the mother first takes this child into her arms. Only she could describe the utter joy which comes into her whole being when she realises that she is handling that which is of herself, which she has laboured to bring into the world. Yes, that must have been part of the joy of Mary on that occasion, but her joy went even more deeply, because she knew the significance of His birth! Here, in her arms, was the promised Messiah. Here was God incarnate Who had come to deliver His people! Here was the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah which she knew so well: 'Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is GOD WITH US.'

Thirdly, THE SHEPHERDS VIEWED THE BIRTH OF JESUS SIMPLY.

It's rather wonderful to think that the news of the Saviour's birth was first conveyed to simple shepherds in the field while they were keeping watch over their sheep by night. While they were faithful in their humble tasks these simple people had the most wonderful thing happen to them. They were the first on earth to know the glorious news, apart from the parents.

With these people there was no sophistication. We read that 'as the glory of the Lord shone around about them, they were all afraid.' They didn't know

what to make of this, but in simple faith they followed, and they heard the words, 'Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ, the Lord,' and they were able to recognise the Christ Child in this baby. They could see the significance of the Sign which was before them, and so they acted immediately. The records tell us that they said one to another, 'Let us now go to Bethlehem.' These simple people were ready to act on the impulse of the moment, and act rightly. So they came "with haste", the records tell us. But more than that, these simple people told everybody about it, as you might expect, and everybody wondered at the news of it all. Many of us may share in the simplicity of these shepherds. We wonder if perhaps we have not quite enough sophistication to know what it is to be a Christian. We are not important enough to have some special revelation from God in our hearts and in our souls. What happened on that first Christmas time would give the lie to all this. Christ was made known to these simple shepherds, and they viewed the birth of Jesus simply. If only we had more of the simple faith of the shepherds!

Fourthly, SIMEON VIEWED THE BIRTH OF JESUS PROPHETICALLY.

I wonder can you recall the moving scene. The parents of Jesus bring the eight days old child into the temple to present Him to the Lord. There they meet an old man, a saint of God, his name is Simeon; he has been looking forward to this moment for a long time. The Holy Spirit has told him that before he dies he will see the Lord's Christ.

As he takes the Child in his arms, he recalls the words of the prophet uttered seven hundred years previously, because he knows these words by heart, and as he looks into the face of this Child, he is reminded of these words: 'Unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.'; and as this old man

looks into the face of the Promise of God, he recognises his Saviour and the Saviour of the people of Israel, and the Saviour of the Gentiles, the Saviour of the whole world! There are folk here who perhaps are twenty, or thirty, or even forty years older than I am. So much preaching these days is brought before young people. We talk about the Christian message as being the message for the young people, but here, for those who are older, is the message for you. I wonder if you can look into the face of Jesus and say with this old Simeon the words of the Nunc Dimittis: 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen Thy salvation which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people. A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel!'

You are an older person, in the eventide of life; can you look at this Christ Child and see prophetically there the summing up of all that you have been longing for over the years? Look, then, into the face of Christ and you will share the experience with Simeon.

Fifthly, THE WISE MEN VIEWED THE BIRTH OF JESUS INTELLECTUALLY.

These wise men allowed their intellect to be guided by God. 'Where is He that is born King of the Jews?', they said. 'We have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him.'

These intellectuals found the Christ and they rejoiced with exceeding great joy because they followed the leading of God and so they were able to bring their gifts before Him.

God can make any man 'wise unto salvation'. We may feel that we are intellectuals in this age. Let us be sure that our intellect, under the guidance of God, will bring us into the very presence of Christ. Many perhaps have doubts and intellectual difficulties. Many of these intellectual difficulties, I believe, are moral difficulties; but there are some

who have honest doubts and honest intellectual problems. C.S. Lewis was such a man, who was an agnostic for years, but when he came to study the Scriptures and allowed the Spirit of God to work in his being, he reached the end of his agnosticism and realised that the next most logical thing to do was to take a step in faith which brought him into certainty concerning Christ. You can read his books, bubbling with his enthusiastic faith as he tries to tell the world that his intellect brought him in touch with Christ.

You may look at the life of Professor C.E.M. Joad and find a man who is antagonistic in all his philosophy to the Christian message; but eventually there came the time when he realised that all his anti-Christian philosophy was getting him nowhere, and he could only absorb the truth of God and know the truth of the universe as he allowed his philosophy to bring him into the very presence of Christ, and so he died a Christian.

And the reason why some intellectuals never find Christ is that they are not wise unto salvation but they are worldly wise; they are seeking a worldly position.

Suppose that the Wise Men, for instance, had come from the West rather than from the East. This is the sort of thing that might have happened. Suppose that they shared some of the main dominant ideas of our western civilisation; the first wise man, being a top ruler in the western world, is a big industrialist - ever alert to the opportunity of bigger and better sales. He says to himself he will be travelling through some large untapped markets. 'I can follow the star and at the same time open up new outlets for the Kaspar Manufacturing Company, and triple my exports!' And so he diligently calls on all the tradesmen on the way. He amasses a great list of orders ... but it took time ... and it delayed him so that the star faded and he never got to Bethlehem at all!

The second of these Wise Men from the West was seeking worldly power, and so in a true western feeling for military power and defence, he says to himself, 'We'll be travelling through foreign nations; the gifts we bear need armed protection. I must recruit a strong force or else we will never get to Jerusalem.' But the recruiting problems took time, and his soldiers were always getting into brawls with soldiers of other nations that they passed; and Rome refused to let such a menacing force pass through Italy and they didn't get any further than Gaul where they went into winter quarters.

The third wise man from the West was different from the other two; but he was seeking worldly popularity. He, too, was a true man of western culture and aims. He had been called many harsh things by his rivals. He had a high position - no less than Chairman of Melchoir, Melchoir, Melchoir & Melchoir, Advertising and Public Relations Consultants, and he said to himself, 'This finding of a new king will be a tremendously big thing! It has great publicity possibilities, and must be handled in a big way.' So, he engaged all his activities in getting press releases in every town where he stopped and entertained local journalists, and for the sake of complete coverage he made a detour into Egypt, which took three months; but he was too late in getting to the place where the King was born and too late to present his gifts. It would be so easy for us, today, from our western background, in the community in which we live and the kind of civilisation which we have developed, to be so preoccupied with our own interests that we fail to come into the presence of the King of Kings. Then our intellect will lead us away from Christ instead of into His presence.

Sixthly, HEROD VIEWED THE BIRTH OF CHRIST POLITICALLY.

The Scriptures tell us that Herod was 'troubled' when he heard that Jesus was born.

Herod was a man whom Rome had appointed to rule over the Jews. Herod had attained to his office by intrigue and treachery, and he lived in constant fear lest someone should wrest his power from him. Herod was ambitious, crafty, cruel, one who would stop at nothing - not even wholesale murder. It would be difficult to paint a picture of Herod which would be too ugly. Always he was threatened by real or imaginary enemies. So low had Herod sunk that he slew his own mother, murdered his wife and children, fearing that they should rob him of his throne. He slew his own brother and a third son that one of his ten wives bore him. Just before he died, this butcher ordered that all the nobles whom he had made leaders in the nation should be put to death so that there might be a show of real sadness and sorrow at his funeral.

The Emperor Augustus made this statement: 'It were better to be one of Herod's swine than one of his children!'

Herod, however, in all his trickery, pretended to be interested in the search of the Wise Men for Him Who was born King of the Jews. He gathered together the Chief Priests and the Scribes and enquired of them where Christ should be born. They found that Micah had prophesied His birth at Bethlehem. Herod encouraged the Wise Men to 'seek diligently' and when they found Jesus they were to bring him word, so that he, too, might worship Him.

Herod viewed the birth of Jesus politically, and so ordered the death of all children of two and under. There have been many Herods in history. The atrocities of Herod were repeated amongst the early Christians when they stood firmly for the truth which they knew, and we can read in some of the early documents of the way in which these Christians stood firm against the Roman Empire. We can go to the Middle Ages, and we find that politics entered into religion again, and there we see that the truth of God was being swamped by all kinds of things as Popes and Emperors contrived to seek their political rewards.

We know that things are different today, and we thank God for all that the Reformation has meant in the Protestant world and in the Roman world. As we come a little nearer home we find that the Herod of modern history was Hitler who endeavoured to deal with all who truly claimed the name 'Christian'. Amongst the Mau Mau in Kenya was found the same attitude against those who claimed the perilous status of Christian. The leaders of Communism have said that Christianity is the opiate of the people, and they will do all they can, subtly or in other ways, to rid the world of Christianity. We realise that now, as always, if we are going to stand for our Christian faith, then we have to be prepared to suffer for it, because there are those like Herod who view the birth of Christ politically.

Seventhly, THE INN-KEEPER VIEWED THE BIRTH OF CHRIST INDIFFERENTLY.

Do you remember? The night that the Saviour was born, the parents came to the inn but there was no room. It was a matter of indifference to this inn-keeper that Jesus should be born. He may not have known much about it. He probably did the best he could under the circumstances; but to him it was a matter of indifference. And some, today, are like that inn-keeper. They are indifferent ... simply because they have never heard. And there are millions of people in the world today who have never really heard of the birth of Jesus and its significance in their life for the forgiveness of their sins. Some may have attended church on occasions, but they have never really heard how they might invite the Christ Child in; how they might view the birth of the Saviour in the way that God would have them view it.

Let us make sure, as Jesus seeks entrance, that we are not indifferent to His claim. There are those who have heard and who are indifferent to it; who know the way of salvation and have deliberately rejected it because they see that if Christ were to enter into their lives, then it would interfere with their comfort. They want to go on exactly as they are.

There are those who are indifferent because they fear that Christ might interfere with their conduct. There are things in their lives which they know to be wrong. Their conscience makes them feel guilty. They come to a church when they feel guilty. When they talk about religion they feel they might be hypocrites. They do not like others to see them reading the Bible because they might think they are religious. These people have been putting off Christ, keeping Him out of their lives because they are afraid that He might 'interfere' with their conduct. There is no more cruel way of treating love than to be indifferent to it. You can ask any young man or woman about that.

Now, because of all the events which took place before their very eyes, -

the Angels viewed the birth of Jesus TRIUMPHANTLY,
the Parents viewed it JOYFULLY,
the Shepherds viewed it SIMPLY,
Simeon viewed it PROPHETICALLY,
the Wise Men viewed it INTELLECTUALLY,
Herod viewed it POLITICALLY,
the Inn-keeper viewed it INDIFFERENTLY.

HOW DO YOU VIEW THE BIRTH OF JESUS TODAY? Because of all which we have said, you can view it historically-and, thank God, you can, because we have the greatest claims for Christianity that anyone could have. We have more documents to support this Book, the Bible, than we have to support any other contemporary history. There are more documents available for us to read today which confirm the Word of God than there are for the fact that Julius Caesar went to Britain in 55 B.C. We have contemporary historians who witness to the birth of Jesus Christ, to His life and to His death - like the Jewish historian Josephus. The Resurrection is claimed to be the best attested fact in history. We have the proof of the history of the Church throughout the ages. We have the proof of the experience of individual men and women who have put this to the test in their own lives.

It is so easy for us to call upon the tradition of the Church and to look back into history and think that it will, in itself, be satisfying to our own souls.

When we look at Jesus Christ today, we are not viewing someone who is dead in history. We are viewing a Man who is alive today! We are not looking at a statue of sacred memory but a living Person who has made history and can make history in your life right now.

How do you view the birth of Jesus today? Because of all the festivities you may view it sentimentally. We sing our carols, such as 'Hark! the herald angels sing,' but for many it could be summed up in this parody:

Hark! the tinselled fairies sing,
Santa Claus will come to bring
Lighted trees with presents piled,
Rocket ships for every child;
Gleeful, all the space kids rise,
Join the sputniks in the skies,
With the missile men exclaim,
"Christmas sure is getting tame!"

It's a sentimental thing. It's superficial. They've never really seen the depth of it all, and their Christianity is something on which they call when they are in trouble. God is someone 'up there' whom we may conveniently call on as we would the ambulance or the fire brigade when we need them. I remember hearing about a missionary in the jungle of Africa who was greatly afraid when he saw a lion approaching, and so he immediately got down upon his knees and he prayed for deliverance. He prayed for some time hardly daring to look up, and to his great surprise, when he looked up, he saw beside him that the lion was kneeling, praying, too. And he then began to thank God for the deliverance which had come his way; but the lion said, 'Eh, wait a minute! I'm just saying grace!'

There are many people who just call upon God when they want Him, but they don't realise that there is a lion lurking around them whom they should get rid of and who is ready to eat them up. That lion is the lion of sin. Sin is a reality, and this is the very thing that takes superficiality away from Christianity. Christianity deals with this problem of sin. Christianity is the only religion which can offer forgiveness free for all. It is the only faith which can bring a person peace with God.

We all know that we have broken the Ten Commandments. Even if we think they are old-fashioned when we start applying them to our own lives, we find that we have missed out. We know that it is not only the wrong things which we have done which condemn us before God but the right things which we have not done; also the thoughts in our minds and our imaginations. Christ said, 'Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, mind, soul and strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'. Anyone who has not done that completely, at all times, and in all circumstances, is a sinner and stands condemned before God. The Bible rightly says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no, not one. That means that you and I stand condemned before God. Surely this takes the sentimentality out of our Christianity? This makes us face realities - because we see the reality of sin in our own lives. We've tried to deal with it by occasional church attendances, but that hasn't worked. It pepped us up for a while, but it hasn't got us very far. We have tried to deal with it by new resolutions but we find that the more we try the harder it gets. We may succeed for a little while, but we fail again and again, and the habits which harm continually grip us and the more we try to break them the more they enclose themselves around us. We can't help ourselves. We are in a hopeless position. Surely we can see this! We know this from human experience. We don't need the Bible to tell us. You don't need me to tell you. You don't need other people to tell you. It is perfectly true in your own experience.

How, then, do you view the birth of Jesus Christ? Because of all your need, you must view it personally, for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life. God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world, through Him, might be saved. Jesus was born, not that He might delight us with a Manger scene, but so that He might die. This was the plan of God's Salvation for you and for me - that He might die. The shadow of the Cross fell across the cradle on that first Christmas Day. There upon the Cross, as the Prophet Isaiah had made clear, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; by His stripes we were healed. Do you view the birth of Jesus Christ like that?

Do you see Jesus on the Cross, dying for you to take away your sins that you might be free? Do you see Jesus Christ right now, before you, in His risen power, saying unto you, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden. I will give you rest. He that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.' Will you come to Him? Will you put your trust in Him? Will you allow Him to take away your sin? It's true He died for the sins of the whole world, but unless you ask Him to take away your sins by believing on Him, putting your trust in Him, then your sin remains with you. As simple as all this seems, as humble as you feel at this moment, as weak as you are in your sin, just look in faith to the Christ of Calvary Who died to take away your sin.

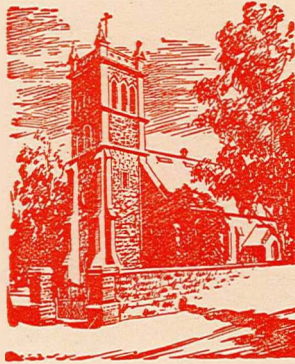
I wonder, will you come just as you are? There may be all kinds of problems, If you come to Christ, these problems will be solved. There may be all kinds of sin which has kept you down. You come to Christ! He will break the power of cancelled sin. There may be all kinds of prejudices to keep you away from Christ. You come - with an open mind! You allow the Spirit of God to speak to your heart. Jesus Christ was born to provide your salvation. You enter into that salvation when you are born again, by allowing the Spirit of God to reveal Christ in all His love to you.

A great artist wanted to paint a picture of a typical newsboy. - He went down the street and saw a boy, his hair all over his face, his knees dirty, his socks around his shoes, his bootlaces undone, and perspiration on his brow. He said, 'I want to paint your picture. Come to my studio tomorrow.' The boy was very proud of this and on the next day arrived at the appointed time. The artist could hardly recognise him for his hair was combed, his face was clean, his knees were washed, his socks were pulled up, his shoe laces were tied. The artist said, 'My son, I hardly recognised you! I wanted you to come just as you were. I didn't want you to improve yourself first.'

Will you come to Jesus just as you are? Don't worry about the improvement. He'll do that. He wants you just as you are. Will you come to Him and allow Him to give you the best gift that you could ever have - the gift of eternal life, the gift of the forgiveness of sin, the gift of the certainty of salvation, the gift of the assurance of heaven? - that can be yours as a gift! Will you come and take it from the Saviour now?

"Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy Blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O LAMB OF GOD, I COME."

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FRONT COVER:

The cover of this booklet uses the Greek letter "X" (Chi). In Greek, the original language of the Scriptures, "X" is the first letter in the name "Christ" and the second letter is "p" (Rho). This symbol has been recognised by Christians from early times as an expression of our allegiance to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.