

CHRISTMAS 1978

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'THE CHRISTIAN FAITH'

When St. Paul was encouraging Christians to be generous in their gifts to the needs of other Christians, he reminded them of the generosity of God, and particularly the generosity of Jesus towards them, saying that 'though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich' 2 Corinthians 8:9. Jesus was very generous, giving Himself for us. As creator and lord of glory He could have remained selfcentred, enjoying it all. But God is love, which means that He is intensely interested in others and their needs and He supplies those needs at His own expense. The chief need of us and also of the whole human race is, of course, a new spirit within ourselves. We have only got to reflect on the quarrels between the nations or the quarrels in our own homes, or between our relatives, to see this. God will give us this new spirit if we genuinely ask Him. God's Spirit brings reconciliation. We must turn our face to God and ask Him for forgiveness, acknowledging the sort of people that we are, people who shut Him out of our lives in every important area. We need God's forgiveness, and it was for this that Jesus became man, 'though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor,' that through our turning back to Him we might receive forgiveness so that we might share His eternal riches or, as St. Paul put it, 'that we through His poverty might become rich'. Rich now in our spirits and rich in eternity in heaven with Him. We need not fear the future and its judgement, but rather look forward with joy to deeper experience of His presence.

I read this week about Geoffrey Bull. He was a missionary in Tibet. He described one of his

experiences when staying in a Tibetan lodging. He wrote 'After a meal, and when it was already dark, it was necessary for me to go downstairs to give more hay to the horses ... Below it was absolutely pitch black. My boots squelched in the manure and straw on the floor and the fetid smell of the animals was nauseating. I felt my way amongst the mules and horses, expecting to be kicked any moment. What a place, I thought. Then as I continued to grope my way in the darkness towards the grey, it suddenly flashed into my mind. "What's today?" I thought for a moment In travelling, the days had become a little muddled in my mind. Then it came to me "It's Christmas Eve". I stood suddenly still in that oriental manger. To think that my Saviour was born in a place like this. To think that He came all the way from Heaven to some wretched eastern stable, and what is more, to think that He came for me. How men beautify the cross and the crib, as if to hide the fact that at birth we resigned him to the stench of beasts and at death exposed him to the shame of rogues. God forgive us'

Christmas time reminds us of what Jesus has done for us, that though He was rich yet for our sakes He became poor. But the squalor of the Bethlehem stable was very minor compared to His sufferings on the cross with its shame and its pain and especially the agony in His soul as He bore our sins and their penalty, to the extent of separation from God Himself. But in it all He exercised perfect love towards God and man, and perfect faith, things that we should do but don't. Through His achievement we may share His reward if we turn our faces back to God and make Him lord and boss of our lives. God will accept us as His sons and

daughters and give us His Spirit, which will bring peace in our hearts and peace in our homes. The presence of Jesus is peace and happiness.

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

is broadcast every Sunday at
7.15 p.m. over Radio 2CH

Copies of these weekly broadcasts may be obtained (\$5 per year posted) by writing to The Christian Faith, c/- 2CH, York Street, Sydney N.S.W. 2000

24/12/78

52/78