

MONDAY MANNA

21 December 2015

AN OLD HOLIDAY THAT IS ALWAYS NEW

By Robert J. Tamasy

This is the week we again turn thoughts to “Christmas,” whatever that happens to mean for each of us. For many around the world, it means the commemoration of the birthday of Jesus Christ, even though the actual date of His birth is hidden in historical obscurity. For today’s business and professional world, however, Christmas means the difference between profit and loss (especially if you are in retail); the evaluation of bonuses for employees; the culmination of another fiscal year; and even determining whether “Merry Christmas” is an appropriate greeting for customers in our politically correct culture.

In reality, even though the holiday has taken on a secular life with traditions of its own, to extract Jesus Christ from Christmas is to render the day meaningless. Perhaps marketplace geniuses would have devised another special occasion to promote consumerism, but Christmas is an empty shell without the reflections on the Christ child, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, sheep and angels; Christmas carols both familiar and new; Christmas recipes and decorations, reflecting a wondrous annual celebration.

With the thousands of books written, millions of sermons delivered, and countless TV programs and movies based on Christmas, it seems, as King Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 1:9, “there is nothing new under the sun” when it comes to discussing this unique event we call Christmas. Yet, despite being a story that is many centuries old, it also is forever new.

It is much more than a warmhearted story about a young family gathered in a crude Middle Eastern stable. The magnitude of this event is captured in the gospel of John: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Earlier the passage explains who “the Word” is: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Jesus Christ, the one whose birthday we celebrate, was – and is – the Word who came to earth to dwell with mankind, not only to teach and model how to live, but also to die so that through Him we might experience true life: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10), or as another translation phrases it, “have it abundantly.”

Today we hear endless debates about “truth”: “What is truth?” “What is your truth?” During His time on earth, Jesus boldly declared that truth – eternal truth – is non-negotiable, not a matter of preference or multiple choice. He said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

Two passages from another part of the Bible explain how understanding of the ultimate Christmas gift came about. Romans 3:23 states, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” declaring mankind has a problem. The Scriptures call it “sin,” brokenness that separates us from God. But in Jesus Christ, God has provided the solution: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

So I hope, as we delight in exchanging gifts, indulge in hearty holiday meals, and enjoy times with family and friends, we will not neglect to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas – and its impact for us all.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. If someone were to ask you, "What is the meaning of Christmas, in your opinion?" how would you respond?
2. What are your thoughts about the commercialisation of Christmas? Is it appropriate; has it gone overboard; or should the spiritual celebration and the marketplace observances necessarily be kept separate? Explain your answer.
3. Describe your most vivid Christmas memory. How has it influenced your feelings and attitude toward celebrating Christmas?
4. The Bible passages cited are not ones that are traditionally associated with the Christmas story. What do they say to you?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

- Matthew 1:18-25;
- Luke 2:1-20;
- Romans 5:8;
- Ephesians 2:8-9;
- Titus 3:5