

# Gifts of Advent

Sermons by Dr. Russell F. Metcalfe, Jr.

*Permission to reprint or publish Dr. Metcalfe's material is **granted**  
provided that the reprinting or republishing is not-for-profit.*



# Table of Contents

---

<b>The Gift of Peace</b> .....	<b>5</b>
I. PEACE IN THE FUTURE .....	6
II. A PRESENT PEACE .....	6
III. A SIGN OF THIS PEACE: COMMUNION .....	8
<b>The Gift of Faith</b> .....	<b>11</b>
I. A DARKNESS INTO WHICH GOD'S GRACE SHINES .....	11
II. FAITH, THE VISION THAT SEES THE INVISIBLE, OF THE GOD-LIFE SHARED	13
III. THE VISION MADE POSSIBLE, SPIRITUAL SIGHT (Ephesians 2:8 - 10) .....	14
IV. COME TO BETHLEHEM AND SEE .....	15
<b>The Gift of Love</b> .....	<b>17</b>
I. THE WONDER OF THE OLD CHRISTMAS STORY .....	17
II. CHRISTMAS IS A MESSAGE OF GOD'S LOVE FOR ALL TIME .....	17
III. HOW THE GOODNESS OF GOD REACHES A SINFUL WORLD .....	18
IV. HEAR GOD KNOCKING! KNOCKING! .....	18
<b>The Gift of Grace</b> .....	<b>21</b>
I. CHRISTMAS AND LOVE AND GIVING .....	21
II. THE MOTHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE VIRGIN MARY .....	22
III. THE WONDER OF CHRISTMAS GRACE ... REPEATED IN US! .....	25



## The Gift of Peace

*Gifts of Advent*—1 of 4

- **The Gift of Peace**
- The Gift of Faith
- The Gift of Love
- The Gift of Grace

December 1, 1991

John 16:33

(Children's Sermon:)

The best stories are the old stories! The ones we have heard over and over. And the very best of these old stories are Bible stories. I'm thinking of one I learned when I was very small— younger than most of you...

"Please help me remember.. help me tell the story of Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego."

There was a powerful king. There was a golden statue. There was a command: Do not pray to any God except the King (who thinks he is a god!) There was a "burning, fiery furnace!"

The king did not understand Shadrach, Meshach, and Abdenego. The king thought that God and prayer and things like that were not important. The king thought that he was more important than God! But we know that God and prayer and love and truth are the most important things in the world, don't we! We know that God loves us.

That is what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abdego knew! They were sure God was good. They were sure that if they loved God, and did the right, God would be with them! And He was!)

So— what happened?

And what does that tell us about praying and burning fiery furnaces and kings and the like? Do you think any of this has anything to do with peace?

**(Introduction, Sermon, proper:)**

Our text this first Sunday in Advent is John 16:33

These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

Peace was one of the main themes of the final words of Jesus, the Last Supper discourse. In Advent the hope of genuine peace and faith and love all mingle together in the anticipation of the coming of Messiah.

## **I. PEACE IN THE FUTURE**

Advent is about anticipation. It is keeping alive the hope that Messiah will indeed come. Of course, we know that He has already come. He is coming again. But also in reality we know that there are many areas where there is a lack of peace— in the world, and in our individual situations. Wherever there are human beings, there is a need for peace.

"We do not yet see all thing put under (Messiah's) feet! But we see Jesus!" That is where hope comes in. Hope is believing, having faith in God's integrity, as we look into the unknown. Advent— anticipation. People in darkness, seeing a Light.

The hope of Messiah is alive in Judaism as perhaps never before! It should be alive in all people of faith. Jesus promised a future peace.

## **II. A PRESENT PEACE**

But peace is not just "in the future" for those who follow Jesus. If genuine peace were only in the future it would be worth whatever it costs to live so as to finally receive it. But there is real, genuine, heart-healing peace right here and now! Jesus said, on that night before He was crucified, "Peace I leave with you; MY peace I give to you!"

- A. This present peace is a MYSTERY of our faith. Philippians 4:7 "The peace of God which passes all comprehension— passes all understanding— that is mysterious but real—

shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

YES- I can see the many things that are wrong! God's prophets are crying out against the evil of our day! Father Heery in Sacred Heart pulpit; my son Russell's pastor, Steve Perry in the Duxbury Nazarene pulpit— you don't need to travel to hear Chuck Coleson (although that is not a bad idea)— you just have to be alive to God to be shocked and saddened by the intensity of the evil in our world today— evils that I find difficult to even talk about in a public meeting where tender ears are present!

YES- I do not know what the next step is! I have no lack of advice: write this legislator; block that entrance; get busy— DO something! Now! Don't waste time! It's already too late!

NO! I am NOT overwhelmed! I know that I am in my Savior's care! The FIRST thing I must do is make sure that my roots go down deep into HIM! My PEACE is only in HIM!

- B. Present peace begins with a reconciliation with God. The call of the prophet is "Be reconciled with God!" The world in great part does not even understand that it is alienated from God. Our society today has no concept of sin. On the one hand violence and sex are glorified; on the other hand random killing and rape and incest are epidemic, and social experts cannot make the connection. Our society is out of touch with spiritual reality! We as a civilization are being showered with anti-God propaganda.

But when individuals wake up— or are shocked awake by some sense of need, and the Holy Spirit of God brings conviction for sin, and a strong faith that Jesus can and will forgive sin, there comes a glorious sense of peace with God, and a justification— a forgiveness of guilt that brings real, not false peace.

This is the peace of PARDON.

Present peace continues with a settled-ness regarding who I am, and what I do. I do not claim more for "peace" than the Bible; the way of faith is very

## The Gift of Peace

much a battle. But God's people come not only to know peace with God, but they come to know the peace OF God.

This is a peace of PURPOSE.

The best part of present peace— peace during the storms and battles of life— is that the God of peace is with His people!

This is the peace of God's PRESENCE.

- C. This present peace is an ABIDING PEACE! 1. As we abide in Him! 2. This peace comes to ABIDE in us!
- D. When the disciples finally DID turn their world upside down it was NOT through frantic endeavor. It was not through massive political demonstration. There were cases of civil disobedience, perhaps. But only when clearly the law told them not to speak of the power of the Gospel. And then, frightened, they repaired to the BODY, where they poured out their fears, and they prayed together! Their prayer was for abiding peace:

"Lord, behold now their threatenings! Grant that with boldness (i.e., lack of intimidation; i.e., peace) we may proclaim You as Lord!" (Acts 4)

### III. A SIGN OF THIS PEACE: COMMUNION

Jesus said: "As often as you do this, You proclaim all that I am and all that I have done and all that I am going to do!" (Paraphrase from I Corinthians 11)

#### **Invitation:**

Jesus would invite us to share in His peace today!

Jesus would remind us of our HOPE today!

Our peace is in the future— He is coming again, just as surely as He came in Bethlehem. We are no different from the faithful who sat in darkness, waiting, watching— like Simeon and Anna and all the prophets before them. The wrongs of earth will be made right! Every knee shall bow! Messiah will come!

Jesus would also reinforce our PEACE today! Our peace is here, now, with us, present! What a wonderful GIFT! What a powerful assurance!



What a sinful thing to hide such a GIFT! How we need to seek ways to share it!

Jesus would also challenge us to be instruments of PEACE:

Our peace is not a denial of struggle; not an "answer" to dilemma, nor a forceful action. Our peace is a still small voice saying: "This is the way! Walk ye in it!" Our peace is the quiet nudge to speak to a neighbor with concern about her problems; our peace is a call to be and then to do.



## The Gift of Faith

*Gifts of Advent—2 of 4*

- The Gift of Peace
- **The Gift of Faith**
- The Gift of Love
- The Gift of Grace

December 8, 1991

Ephesians 2:8

### Introduction

Last week the children and I reviewed the Old Testament story of the Three Hebrew Children. It may never be reviewed in quite the same way ever again!

To our modern ears, that story seems far removed from Advent and Christmas. Still, I would like to return to it this morning. How, do you suppose, is there any correlation between Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the coming of our Lord as a Babe in Bethlehem?

Advent is anticipation, Advent is hope. Advent is facing darkness with faith. Advent is living in a world that tries to pressure you to conform, in the confidence that God knows, and that God cares, and that God somehow is coming into that world, into that darkness.

[ Writing to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul reminds them of the darkness in the world, and also of the fact that before God broke into their lives they were very much engulfed in that darkness.]

### I. A DARKNESS INTO WHICH GOD'S GRACE SHINES

- A. THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL DARKNESS has not changed, from the time of Nebuchadnezzar, to St. Paul, until the present:

In Ephesians 2:1-3 Paul calls it "THE FORMER STATE" - the way you used to be.

Here is how Paul describes it. It is spiritual death - it is an existence without the light of revelation. No word from God, heavens of brass, which is the essence of darkness.

It is a life of pressure to conform; lock-step conformity to opinion of 'them' - devilish - poverty - inheriting God's wrath

- B. DARKNESS IS AGGRESSIVE; it threatens to engulf; it squeezes into conformity: That is why in another place Paul warned Romans 12:2) "Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold; but rather, be transformed by the renewing of your mind."
- C. [STORY] The challenge of SPIRITUAL DARKNESS to the faith of the Three Hebrew Children seemed pretty bold and clear-cut. Our challenges somehow seldom appear that way.

They were asked to violate the First, or at least the Second Commandment. If that were to happen today how many people would even know the First or Second Commandment?

They were asked to put something ahead of their Jehovah God, at least for a little while; they were asked to publicly give respect to a pagan idol. Just a little thing? Shadrach, Meshach and Abdenego were willing to die for what they believed!

They were DEFIANT IN THE FACE OF KNOWN TEMPTATION TO EVIL!

What was it that enabled Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to stand firm in the face of certain punishment and death?

What was it that gave them courage to stand against the great majority? Do we ever face pressure to compromise?

I think immediately of

- (High school/ peer pressure/ slick media hype/ but they are not the only ones that feel the pressure: at every age there is the threat: "Get out of line and you will be shunned! Don't be the odd-ball!
- Mothers are criticized for NOT working— or, they may be criticized FOR having a career;
- people feel squeezed into social classes, as though it is a "second class" thing to be a carpenter or a laborer;
- academics have the pressure of the fear of being thought behind the times, academically)

WHAT GAVE THE THREE HEBREW CHILDREN MORAL COURAGE TO SAY, "WE DON'T CARE WHAT YOU THINK: HERE WE STAND! BY GOD'S GRACE WE CAN DO NO OTHER!"???

The answer is: they could SEE what, seemingly, others could not. They had a vision that went beyond the moment.

- D. It is vital, in times of spiritual darkness, to have some means of vision, of finding one's way. This VISION, or SIGHT is what Paul calls "a gift of God." It is a key, an enabling, that God gives to those who are saved, that enables them to grasp the truth.

## **II. FAITH, THE VISION THAT SEES THE INVISIBLE, OF THE GOD-LIFE SHARED**

(Hebrews 11, 'Moses persevered because he saw the invisible')

- A. We know how the story turned out: Someone like unto the Son of God came into the heat and the pressure with the men who would not compromise their faith. It was a miracle that convinced even the pagan king himself!
- B. And it is no less a miracle when God Himself comes into the darkness and pressure where we live, in 1991, where people do not usually physically martyr Christians, but a time in which it probably is as difficult to live a godly life as at any time in human history!
- Paul says to the Ephesians Christians: GOD WALKS IN THE FIRE WITH YOU! He calls it, in verses 4 - 7 "THE PRESENT STATE." He describes it like this:

(You were dead to spiritual things;) NOW you are alive unto God!

Not only that, but (You were condemned, worthy of death;) NOW you are made one with Jesus, and by that identification you are exalted with Christ Jesus to heavenly realms.

I know this sounds too good to be true. But there it is! We are members of God's family! We have the incomparable riches of grace. We have the eternal prospect of all that Adam and Eve lost in the fall from grace, and more!

- C. All this salvation, all this grace, all these promises are because Jesus, Messiah, came to us in our darkness— and bled and died on a cross for the sins of the world. All this miracle is available because God still comes near to those who see the light, and follow that light. We call that ability to see, to believe, to follow FAITH!

### **III. THE VISION MADE POSSIBLE, SPIRITUAL SIGHT (Ephesians 2:8 - 10)**

- A. God's GRACE is available to all. But Paul makes it clear that GRACE IS SOMEHOW CONNECTED WITH FAITH. Grace can never, ever be taken for granted. Grace is connected with FAITH, or the ability to "believe." (Text: For by grace are you saved, THROUGH FAITH, which is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast.) FAITH IS A GIFT OF GOD WHICH MUST BE USED TO RECEIVE GOD'S GRACE!
- B. WHAT IS THIS 'FAITH' THAT IS GOD'S GIFT?
1. FAITH IS A MYSTERY. Like sight itself, most of us know precious little about how it works; but we know how precious it is! The gift of spiritual sight is even more precious.
  2. FAITH IS LIKE A SEED. Jesus spoke of faith as being like a grain of mustard seed.
  3. FAITH IS, IN AND OF ITSELF DYNAMIC AND POWERFUL. It is a power which may be subverted at times to selfish ends. But it is NOT FAITH THAT SAVES! Faith ultimately cannot rise above its object. (Power of positive thinking)

4. FAITH CONNECTS US TO THE LOVE OF CHRIST! Ultimately, faith is God-given ability to SEE spiritual truth (passing mere explanation). Faith is the ability to BELIEVE, to RELY, to see God's INTEGRITY and act upon it to everlasting gain.

#### **IV. COME TO BETHLEHEM AND SEE**

- A. Why didn't everybody find Jesus when He was born in the manger? Why were just "certain shepherds" able to find the Christ Child? How come more Wise Men didn't follow the Star?

How about Simeon and Anna in the Temple?

Could it be that the people then were just like now? That they lived in a darkness that kept them blinded to spiritual reality all around them?

- B. WHY DON'T MORE PEOPLE TODAY LOVE JESUS CHRIST? Can it be that they are spiritually blind? Or have they neglected the gift of spiritual sight?

- C. You have this gift! You can begin to use your gift— with it you may see the Christ! You may find God's life.

But it will take almost as much courage as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had when they would not conform to their evil world. YOU WILL HAVE TO FOLLOW THE LIGHT UNTIL YOU COME TO KNOW THE CHRIST!

#### **Conclusion:**

In our world good is called evil, and evil is called good. The commandments of God have been replaced by our own "human values." We are taught "QUESTION AUTHORITY!" And the credo of our age is "WHAT IS GOOD FOR ME IS RIGHT!"

So we even ask "What good will come to me if I have no gods before Jehovah God? " What will it profit me if I worship products made with human hands, whether they be idols that look like idols, or idols that amuse us, or that pander to our pride?"

Instead of standing under the judgment and authority of God's Word, our society, and all too often even we who claim to be in the church itself, (we) stand in judgment

## The Gift of Faith

on God's Word; (we) pick and choose which of God's commandments we shall keep and which we shall ignore!

GOD WILL HONOR FAITH!

OUR GOD WILL COME, EVEN IF IT HAS TO BE IN THE FIERY FURNACE!

When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego honored their God, and took their stand, they not only were vindicated themselves, THEY MADE A PROFOUND DIFFERENCE IN THEIR WORLD, IN THEIR GENERATION!

Our sick world needs Messiah! And Messiah will come! He will come, NOW, to His children who look to Him with FAITH! And one day He will come so all the world will see Him!

**Prayer:** For the ability to SEE Your face!

*#182 It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*



## The Gift of Love

*Gifts of Advent—3 of 4*

- The Gift of Peace
- The Gift of Faith
- **The Gift of Love**
- The Gift of Grace

*"Come Home for Christmas" Sunday*

December 15, 1991

John 3:16

### **I. THE WONDER OF THE OLD CHRISTMAS STORY**

We've heard it all our lives, and we never get tired of it: Christmas is love. Christmas is giving. "The people who sat in darkness ... saw a great Light" The wonder of God coming in a totally unexpected Way: God in a Baby!

The wonder of this truth really "got to me" this week when I saw little Andrew Mann Nielson (as the Baby Jesus) in the cradle of straw— a real baby— and watched him move and reach for his mother— and once again I realized that God actually wrapped all His LOVE in such a tiny package!

We think of how from that Baby all we hold so very dear about salvation and life and eternal life have come: no wonder Christmas means so much! We say things like: It's too bad that the wonder of Christmas couldn't continue 365 days a year!

### **II. CHRISTMAS IS A MESSAGE OF GOD'S LOVE FOR ALL TIME**

Sometimes we forget the way that God comes near in OUR time: How He draws near NOW! God still comes the totally unexpected, incredible way! We savor the Christmas traditions, and we even believe the incredible, wonderful story that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. But sometimes we forget that the real heart of Christmas IS for all 365 days of the year!

When we are the "people who sit (in any kind of) darkness"— when we have the hard places in life: situations or even people threatening to bring us down to ruin, when we have burdens or sins, too often instead of looking for a Higher Power we seek FIRST our own solutions. After all, isn't that what God gave us intelligence for? We never think that God wants to be asked in on every facet, every detail of our lives! This world is too complicated for something as old-fashioned as "faith" to enter in when there are real problems!

But God is waiting to enter into every part of our lives! It wasn't just in Bethlehem that God came in a surprising, loving way! God has invaded the world with His love and goodness!

### **III. HOW THE GOODNESS OF GOD REACHES A SINFUL WORLD**

Faith tells us that at the heart of our Universe is GOODNESS! There is LIGHT and there is LOVE where God sits on His throne. But that is there, and we are here.

So too often we think our faith is just for the life that comes after death; and we wait for Christ to come and ZAP all the bad guys— the porno people and the greedy money grubbers that swallow up the poor people of the world. After all, what can WE do?

So sometimes— all too often— we have neglected to let God really be at home in our hearts, so that He can do whatever He wants to do in His own way!

He is interested in every one of us!

### **IV. HEAR GOD KNOCKING! KNOCKING!**

But "that was then.. and this is now! Right?" Jesus came then as a Baby, but He has already conquered sin and death and hell, right? He is now at the right hand of the Throne of God. Right?

It is true that Jesus has conquered. And it is also true that one day the Bible tells us that this present, evil world will tremble at His coming. But it is not quite true that He

expects us to passively wait until He comes and ZAPS the bad people of the world. Jesus wants to be active in each of our homes and lives.

What do you suppose that Jesus is doing just now?

Yes— He is praying for us. Yes, He is preparing a place for His people— for you and me if we will trust Him. But there is another picture of the glorified, majestic Savior that sounds a lot like the theme of the Christmas story!

In Revelation, Chapter One, John the beloved has a vision of the glorified Christ that nearly overwhelms him. Remember, John walked and talked with Jesus Christ for more than three years. He knew all about the lowly Nazarene, the One who had been born in Bethlehem. But this vision was a revelation in itself! It literally bowled him over! He fell down at the majesty and glory of the Lord Christ!

But in Revelation, Chapter Three, John gives us another picture of this Savior. And do you know what He is doing? He is standing outside a door, knocking! The Savior of the world, knocking at a door, asking to come in!

"Is there any room in there?" Does that sound familiar?

And do you know what door it is that the Savior is knocking on? IT IS THE CHRISTMAS STORY ALL OVER AGAIN! JESUS IS LOOKING FOR A HOME, A PLACE TO FELLOWSHIP, TO EAT AND SLEEP!

That door is the door of your life! It is the door of that situation that is overwhelming you! It is the door to the areas of your marriage that have gone sour! It is the door to the way you look at relationships!

**Conclusion:**

"Christmas" says to us:

- Light is more powerful than darkness
- Love is stronger than hate
- and Jesus has proved it by his own life.

He has proved it in the lives of everyone who has trusted him.

## The Gift of Love

He has changed the course of human history.

He will complete his conquest, He has promised but in the meantime, He still is seeking to come to you and me in his own loving way.

We need answers for the troubles we all face in life: misunderstandings, losses of all kinds, insults, slights, bruises. But before we need answers, we need God's gift of love!

He sent a baby to save a darkened world. And he comes now, knocking, knocking at our doors, in any and every circumstance of life.

To "Come Home for Christmas" means to find that God is our home, and that we are welcome in His family, in His household.

But it is also to let God come into OUR hearts, and welcome GOD into our family situations, to make GOD at home in us!

*"O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
Descend on us, we pray!  
Cast out our sin, and enter in;  
Be born is us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell.  
Oh, come to us, abide with us,  
Our Lord, Emmanuel."*

-Philips Brooks

## The Gift of Grace

*Gifts of Advent—4 of 4*

- The Gift of Peace
- The Gift of Faith
- The Gift of Love
- **The Gift of Grace**

December 22, 1991

Ephesians 3:17-21

*3:17 ... so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*

*3:19 ... that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God*

### Introduction

Christmas is a lot of different things to every one of us! Christmas is wonderful! Christmas is exhausting! Christmas is expensive! Christmas is expectations! Christmas is love! Christmas can reflect all of the many sides of what we mean when we say the word "love." [... many shades of "love"]

## I. CHRISTMAS AND LOVE AND GIVING

### A. CONDESCENDING LOVE

Sometimes love at Christmas means saying "It's wonderful!" when you open a present. Some of the presents I made or bought for my father and mother when I was small were pretty awful. But somehow they actually seemed to cherish them. What you really mean is "It's wonderful that you thought enough of me to give me a present— but, really, what do we need an ash tray for when nobody smokes in our house?"

B. REFLECTED LOVE

There is a joy in seeing other people who seem to be happy. Sometimes love at Christmas means nearly bursting with joy when the beautiful boys and girls of the Sunday School sing about the Babe in the manger.

C. COMPASSIONATE LOVE

Sometimes love at Christmas means thinking about Mary and Joseph and what it means even in our time to desperately need a place to stay the night.

D. THE "PRESENCE!"

Sometimes the deepest significance of the Season dawns on us once again! Sometimes we have a "holy moment," when it seems that God Himself draws near, and we know that He really does love us tenderly. And what more could we ever ask?

E. GRATEFUL LOVE!

And maybe sometimes, just sometimes, love at Christmas might be saying, "Thank You God! You seem to have done all the giving! What can I get You for Christmas??"

It may be that the best Christmas love is not expressed until "gifts are exchanged" at this highest relationship of all! God's wonderful, undeserved Gift to us may be echoed by the gift of our love and our trust to God!

Is it possible that I have anything God thinks is precious? "HOW CAN I ENTER INTO GOD'S PLAN AND SHARE HIS LOVE?" Nowhere is this more clearly reflected than in the way the most honored and highly favored of all mortals entered into the first Christmas. I refer to the holy, sacred story of Mary, the Mother of Our Lord.

## II. THE MOTHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE VIRGIN MARY

- A. SHE WAS THE FIRST ONE TO KNOW that there was going to be that First Christmas. We call the occasion when Mary found out "THE ANNUNCIATION." God sent an angel,

Gabriel, to visit Mary. The story is found in Luke 1:26 - 38:

Now in the sixth month [of Elizabeth's pregnancy] the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

And coming in, he said to her, "Hail, O woman richly blessed! The Lord is with you!"

But she was greatly troubled at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this might be. And the angel said to her,

"Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.

"He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I know no man?"

And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.

"And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God."

And Mary said, "Behold the bondservant of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

- B. THIS STORY IS "HOLY GROUND" to me. We (should) stand in awe of the way God chose to become one with us; it was a unique- a ONE TIME HAPPENING in the history of our world. I believe it literally, actually, physically and spiritually took place: God became incarnate in the womb of a virgin.

1. GOD COULD HAVE SENT His Son full-grown, a perfect Man formed from nothing; He chose instead to ask a beautiful teenager if she would be the mother of a very special, very human baby Boy.
2. It is deeply significant that GOD CHOSE TO BRING HIS WORD TO EARTH THROUGH A COMBINATION OF SUPERNATURAL AND VERY HUMAN MEANS.

- a. The meeting, the Annunciation was miracle.
- b. But Mary had to make a very human decision. Mary made that decision: she said, "Behold the handmaiden of the Lord!"

The Conception was a miracle; and as the Baby grew within her, the Gift of the Ages was, like all babies, a miracle of creation beyond her understanding or ability.

- C. GOD STILL ENLISTS A COMBINATION OF SUPERNATURAL AND VERY HUMAN MEANS WHENEVER HE REVEALS HIMSELF and His love to this needy world!

God could preach sermons and bind up wounds and speak out against evil by sending fantastic creatures; He chooses to use imperfect, stumbling men and women like you and me.

- D. SOMEHOW MARY'S BEAUTIFUL WILLINGNESS IS VITAL TO GOD'S PLAN.

1. Yes, it WAS to Mary's GREAT benefit; but IT WAS NOT FOR MARY ALONE, or even for Mary, PRIMARILY! The Gift was for the whole world, to the glory of God.
2. Mary reflects this in "THE MAGNIFICAT" [the response she gave to the affirmation or worship of her unborn child she received from her cousin, Elizabeth: Luke 1:46-55:]

And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord. And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.



For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and Holy is His Name. AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.

He has done mighty things with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and He has exalted those who were humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things; And sent the rich away empty-handed.

He has given help to Israel His servant,  
In remembrance of His mercy,  
As He spoke to our fathers,  
To Abraham and his offspring forever."

3. As she praises God, Mary is grateful for what has happened to her, and that is only right; but THE CENTER OF HER PRAISE IS GOD HIMSELF.
- E. This is a lesson we need to learn and re-learn from Mary: It is a blessed and wonderful thing to know God and be blessed by God; but WE ARE BLESSED IN ORDER TO BE GOD'S CHANNEL OF BLESSING; WE ARE BLESSED SO THAT WE CAN MAGNIFY THE NAME OF THE LORD!

### **III. THE WONDER OF CHRISTMAS GRACE ... REPEATED IN US!**

- A. IT IS NOT A NEW THOUGHT that at Christmas we should let the Christ "be born in us today!" In fact, it is a common theme among Christians: Let Jesus in! Make room for Jesus in our hearts! One poet put it this way:  
  
Though Christ a thousand times  
In Bethlehem be born,  
Yet not within your heart-  
Your heart is still forlorn!

IT IS NOT A NEW THOUGHT that Christ within is the Source of Life and Light and all spiritual blessing. We say: "Yes! There is room in our hearts! Be born in us!" We rejoice in the Name "God with us! Emmanuel!"

B. What we dare not forget is that like Mary, WE MUST ACCEPT THE RESPONSIBILITY AS WELL AS THE HONOR OF SHARING THE LIFE of Christ that God has placed within us!

1. It was the Miracle of Miracles when in the Baby Jesus God brought His WORD to this earth! By that Miracle God expresses His love!
2. It is ALSO a great miracle when the Jesus-life is born in us— when we are born again in Him— AND IT IS NOT JUST FOR OUR BLESSING AND BENEFIT, ANY MORE THAN BRINGING JESUS TO BIRTH WAS JUST FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY!
3. I know that is almost sounds sacrilegious to say it, BUT GOD STILL USES A COMBINATION OF SUPERNATURAL AND VERY HUMAN MEANS TO BRING HIS WORD, HIS SON JESUS TO THOSE WHO NEED HIM!

C. SOMEHOW YOUR WILLINGNESS IS VITAL TO GOD'S PLAN. We must come to think of what God wants with us, wants to do through us— and not just how God's grace can enhance our success in life and make us more comfortable.

1. Letting Christ the WORD live in us may make life more complicated at times! THE ANNUNCIATION CERTAINLY MEANT A GREAT DEAL OF MISUNDERSTANDING AND DISCOMFORT FOR MARY! CHRIST WITHIN YOU AND ME WILL MEAN SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND SOME BURDENS FOR US AS WELL!
2. But the Apostle Paul prayed that the Church— the church of HIS time— as well as YOU and ME this very day— might know this miracle. MAY GOD USE YOUR HEART AND LIFE TO LET HIS SON SHINE THROUGH?
3. Let me close this brief message with Paul's prayer from the third chapter of Ephesians (3:17-21). I read from the Amplified Version:

*MAY CHRIST through your faith [ACTUALLY] dwell— settle down, abide, MAKE HIS PERMANENT HOME— IN YOUR HEARTS! May you be rooted deep in love and founded securely on love,*

*That you may have the power and be strong to apprehend and grasp with all saints (God's devoted people, the experience of that love) what is the breadth and length and height and depth of it;*

*[That you may really come] to know— practically, through experience for yourselves— the love of Christ, which far surpasses mere knowledge (without experience); THAT YOU MAY BE FILLED (THROUGH ALL YOUR BEING) UNTO ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD— [that is] may have the richest measure of the divine Presence, AND BECOME A BODY WHOLLY FILLED AND FLOODED WITH GOD HIMSELF!*

*Now to Him Who, by (in consequence of) the [action of His] power that is at work within us, is able to [carry out His purpose and] do superabundantly, far over and above all that we [dare] ask or think— infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, hopes or dreams—*

*To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen— so be it.*

### **Conclusion:**

There is no question about the wonderful Gift God has given to us all at Christmas! We have the gift of grace— of life eternal through the gift of God's Son.

But may there be a gift exchange as well! May we say with all the love we can bring to prayer: Behold the handmaid of the Lord! Behold the bondservant of the Lord! Lord, Here's my heart! Love this world through me! Amen!

*174 O Little Town of Bethlehem*

