

Recovering The Meaning of Christmas

“To perceive Christmas through its wrappings becomes more difficult with every year.”~E. B. White

Christmas is indeed a very special time of the year. There have been more songs written, more movies produced, and more dollars spent on Christmas than on any other event. There is a festive spirit in the air. People seem to be much more generous, open, and even spiritual during December.

Somewhere beneath all the festivities and activities of the Christmas season is its higher, deeper, better, eternal meaning. After the Grinch, in Dr. Seuss’s wonderful Christmas book, had stolen all the Christmas trees, presents, and food, he heard the people singing and celebrating still with all their hearts. Here are his thoughts, as he watched.

“And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling, how could it be so? It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes or bags. And he puzzled and puzzled 'till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more.”

Christmas, indeed, means a little bit more. It means much, much, more. It is about God’s magnificent plan for all of us, and his eternal and all powerful love for the world. The images of Jesus and the manger, with all the people and animals gathered round in adoration, is a summons to us all toward heaven, toward those things and thoughts that really matter.

The love that God has for us, and the love we must have for others, is behind, beneath, and above the secular Christmas moments. A tiny baby, born to be our Savior, that’s what Christmas is all about. Everything else, from Santa to Handel’s Messiah, from the Christmas tree to Christmas presents, from family travels and gatherings to Christmas pageants, comes from that divine action announced by the angels over Bethlehem.

Think about the box we have put ourselves in at Christmas. All the pressures, all the presents to buy, all the things which have to be done. What if we could look at those

boxes, like the presents around the tree and all the rest, as symbols of what God has done?

Richard Paul Evans, in that tiny little book *The Christmas Box*, suggests this. “The human life cycle,” he says, “no less than evolves around the box; from the open-topped box called a bassinet, to the pine box we call a coffin, the box is our past and, just as assuredly, our future. It should not surprise us then that the lowly box plays such a significant role in the first Christmas story. For Christmas began in a humble, hay-filled box of splintered wood. The Magi, wise men who had traveled far to see the infant king, laid treasure-filled boxes at the feet of that holy child. And in the end, when He had ransomed our sins with His blood, the Lord of Christmas was laid down in a box of stone. How fitting that each Christmas season brightly wrapped boxes skirt the pine boughs of Christmas trees around the world.”

Sometimes we must see in the midst of life the things which can remind us where we need to be. Look for them in all the events which unfold for us.

“Years ago in New York's Hayden Planetarium a special Christmas holiday show was enhanced by an added feature. A giant lollipop tree was projected onto the planetarium dome, surrounded by toys and the song Jingle bells, then Santa, and then the star of Bethlehem broke through into a sky that produced exactly the Palestine sky on the night of the nativity. Here was the lost meaning of Christmas..... For adults it is a tragic loss to substitute "Jingle Bells" for "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," and a lollipop tree for the manger of Bethlehem. The instinct is right to fade out these things in the light of the Christmas star. It is about God's incarnation that the angels sing-- God with us.”~Robert E. Luccock

Perhaps, dear reader, there will be a moment, an event, which helps us recover the meaning of Christmas before it is too late. As we look at our families, as we see the world which has such need of a Savior, God wants to show us Jesus.

The manger should be first above all. Our first place is in Church, not just at Christmas, but all year long. Then, and only then, can we find the focus and the joy that God has in mind for us. Then, and only then, can we give our family the most important gift.

Recovering the meaning of Christmas. The quest we should all be making, and one day, will find.