

## The Drama of Christmas

Some events recorded in the Bible astound us over by their sheer size. In Genesis, God commanded light and darkness to separate and created massive continents “ex-nihilo” or “out of nothing.” In the book of Exodus, Moses leads fleeing Hebrew slaves out of Egypt. Chased by thundering Egyptian Chariots, the fleeing slaves came to the edge of the sea where the sea separated and they safely passed to the other side. Then suddenly, these same waters rushed back upon the Egyptian chariots and soldiers not only killing them, but also permitting God to teach Pharaoh one last object lesson of His power. This is impressive drama.

In contrast, consider the drama which unfolded in Bethlehem and its surrounding hills on the first Christmas. Bethlehem, while it was David’s hometown, was hardly a strategic center of cultural, economic, and military activity. It was a small town of about 1,000 inhabitants. Joseph and Mary were among the poorest of the poor. Mary became pregnant before they were officially married which in those days was a really big deal. A young girl could be stoned for such infidelity. When asked about her pregnancy, Mary explained that God did it. Joseph considered divorcing her, but an angel convinced him otherwise. We know both Mary and Joseph as God’s faithful, obedient servants. But at the time, they were misunderstood and ridiculed by all who knew them. Their eighty mile donkey ride from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register for a census or new taxation program by the Romans was probably a relief more than a burden as they left behind the accusing eyes and wagging tongues of family and friends.

The shepherds were a story all their own. They suffered from a bad reputation for their tall tales. These are interesting folks whom God chose as the first worshippers and heralds of His Son. The religious hierarchy lumped shepherds in the category of the godless, forbidding them to even enter the courtyard of the temple. Yet, the night sky filled with the resplendent light of God’s glory illumined their sight. The sounds of the Heavenly Host filled their ears. The original Christmas sound and light show was presented to a bunch of nobodies and social downcasts, not the social or religious elite of the day.

As you read the stories again this Christmas, revel in just how common and ordinary are the people and description of the first Christmas. For example, Luke does not try to dazzle us with a detailed description of the drama of Incarnation Night. How bright was the resplendent light? What did the Heavenly Host look like? What was the expression on Jesus’ face? Luke answers none of these dramatic concerns.

We do not get the answers to such questions. In fact, the accounts move the focus from the historical and dramatic event to the responses of the ordinary folks who witnessed it. *“Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart”* (Luke 2:19). *“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen...”* (2:20). *“All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them”* (2:18). The light of Christ shined most brightly that night on the hearts and faces of those present as a reflection of God’s salvation.

Every Christmas, there are dramatic reenactments of the Christmas story. The venues range from church basements to professional theatres. The actors range from boys in the neighborhood wearing borrowed bathrobes and worn out sneakers to celebrities and theatric lighting. Maybe you have watched one of these professional “re-tellings” of the first Christmas. Joseph is tall and dignified. Mary is portrayed with a gentle smile and gorgeous flowing hair. The manger holds a “live-looking” baby. Above the professional manger set are flashing lights, fluttering angels, and Handel’s Hallelujah chorus fills the stage. The show is impressive; people’s eyes and ears are filled with drama.

This picture is too typical of the way many of us celebrate Christmas. We see again. We hear again. We buy, buy, and buy again. But who do we hear and what do we see? Do we marvel in the light and glory of God? Are we amazed at His amazing grace? Do we ponder anything, much less praise God and tell others what we have heard and know? Are we humbled by this remarkable historical entrance into the world to save sinners like you and me?

The story is told about a Christmas pageant in the basement of a small church. It was not great drama. An awkward, slightly handicapped boy was chosen as the Innkeeper. His only lines were, "There is no room in the Inn." He practiced these lines so he would be prepared for his part in the drama. The problem was that when Joseph and Mary came to the Inn for help; he got caught up in the drama. He started with his practiced line, "There is no room..." but that nervous young boy became confused and instead muttered..., "Wait a minute. Don't go. You can have my room."

That's why when it is all heard and seen, it may be the common Christmas pageants in church basements which best capture the Christmas drama. They often portray what can happen to common, unremarkable people trying to make their way in a dark, confusing world when suddenly the light of Christ shines on and in them.

This Christmas, may the light of Christ shine in our hearts, you and me, as we ponder the common, yet profound birth of our Savior. *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us"* (2 Cor. 4:6-7).

Great Peace in the Lord,

Eddie