

From The Pulpit

by Rev. Donald M. Clark

THE APPRECIATION OF CHRISTMAS

Text: And Mary Arose in Those Days, and Went Into the Hill Country With Haste Into a City of Juda.

The first dictionary meaning of appreciate is "to set a just value on; to esteem to the full worth of." It means also to be sensitive to the beauty of a thing, as when one appreciates a sunset or a white camellia. Again, it is the opposite of depreciate: A thing depreciates when its value decreases; it appreciates when the value increases. Then, too, to appreciate is to be grateful for something.



REV. D. M. CLARK

Thus we might appreciate a loaf of bread, a rose, a painting, a home, a parent, a friend, an education, one's country, even God himself. Today, let us consider the appreciation of Christmas. If, to even a small degree, we can more truly discover the value of Christmas, become more sensitive to its beauty, give Christmas a larger worth and be thankful, surely this will be an hour well spent. The appreciation of Christmas is our theme and purpose.

How shall we do this? Let us meet some of the characters in the Christmas story and ask them in turn concerning the meaning of Christmas, trying to discover what each one might add to our appreciation.

We make a strange beginning. We shall ask an ancient patriarch who lived, in round numbers, two thousand years before the event of Christ's birth. Now four thousand years is a long, long time to look back. And two thousand years is a long time to look forward.

It is Mary herself who brings Abraham into the scene. Recall her song, the "Magnificat," which she sang in the house of Elizabeth. It begins, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." It continues, "He that is mighty hath done unto me great things." It ends, "In remembrance of His mercy; as He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever."

Mary remembered Abraham. Why? Because two thousand years before God had promised that in the seed of Abraham, in someone of his ancestral line, all the families of the earth should be blessed. This thread of promise was woven into the history, poetry, wisdom, literature and prophecy of Israel. In the Old Testament it is a promise made and a promise remembered. A babe leaps in the woman and she cries out, "This is the fulfillment of the promise that God made to Abraham!" This is a miracle. There is nothing like it anywhere else in history.

Abraham, what does Christmas mean? Hear him answer, "It means that God keeps his promises."

Mary, what is the meaning of Christmas? Mary learned on that first Christmas day that there is vicarious suffering in the world. There is suffering that is endured for the sake of another. In those days a woman gave birth to a child in pain. Every day now children are born without their mothers' pain. Perhaps much is gained by this; it may be more is lost. For you see, pain is not always negative, a deteriorating experience; pain may be positive and uplifting. Pain can be used to purchase life, the life of another.

There is vicarious pain in the world. It is strange that God should use pain in his plans. But He does. It is a "transfiguring discovery" that pain can be creative. All the mystery and wonder and glory and victory of the Cross are implicit in Christmas.

Ask the shepherds, what is the meaning of Christmas. We hear the answer, "There is glory and praise in the world."

Because of all the things that the shepherds saw and heard there is not only the shepherds' joy and praise; there is continuation of their joy and praise. In painting. In music. In literature. In pageantry and symbolism. In hearts warmed by love.



DEADLINE for church news and photographs is Friday noon preceding the next Thursday publication date, at the Rev. Mr. Clark's home, 1676 N. 'E' St., telephone 642-1560. All items submitted must be accompanied by the sender's name, address and telephone number.

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The Angels that sang at Bethlehem increase our appreciation of Christmas. Their song: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." There is hope in the world. There is hope for the world's peace and a prevalent goodwill. This, too, is the meaning of Christmas. We must appreciate Christmas by holding hope to our breast.

We have asked others, let us now ask the Child. He grew to manhood and He told us just why He came. "I came to seek and to save that which was lost. I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." Simeon said, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." The meaning of Christmas is salvation, that I may see it, that I may feel it in the heart of me, that I may know it in the soul of me.

For the deep appreciation of Christmas we must make this all very personal.

Abraham's suggestion: There is divine purpose in the world; we have a place in that purpose.

Mary's suggestion: There is vicarious pain in the world; we can bear and share that pain.

The Shepherds' suggestion: There is joy and praise in the world; we must live and work for its fulfillment.

The Child's suggestion: There is salvation from sin and death, "God so loved the world..." we must accept him as Lord and Savior.

If we do these things, we will make a feeble but a true beginning in the appreciation of Christmas.

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