

From The Pulpit

by Rev. Donald M. Clark

THE CHARACTERS OF CHRISTMAS
(The Shepherds and Wise Men, Who Worshipped Him)

WHENEVER I SEE A CHRISTMAS scene portraying the manger scene, with the shepherds and the Magi gathered around the manger, I am reminded that we read our Bibles superficially, for the Scriptures tell us very plainly that the Wise Men did NOT visit Christ at the stable! It was after Joseph and Mary returned from Jerusalem, to a house in Bethlehem, forty days after the birth of Jesus, that the Magi found the Christ Child. So we should understand at the very outset that we have, here, two distinct events.

The first event has its background on the hills surrounding Bethlehem. Here were shepherds, watching their flocks of sheep. It was night, and suddenly, they were enveloped by a great light. Then they saw an angel, who told them of the birth of the Child, the Messiah. They were told to go and worship the Child.

One wonders why these shepherds were so selected. Was it because they were simple men, unconfused by the modern thinking of the city Jews? One thing we know: they were men who had such a religious background that the few, simple words of the angel were immediately grasped. THE MESSIAH, long looked for among the reverent of the Jews, had, at long last, come to earth!

Our religious background is more important than many of us suppose. The child who is taught to kneel at his bedside and offer a few simple prayers; the boys and girls who are accustomed to bowing their heads before each



REV. D. M. CLARK

meal; the children who know that the Bible is something to read and not to give a room an air of sanctity . . . all these are being prepared with a faith and a knowledge which will enable them to know God intimately in the years ahead.

MANY AMERICANS HAVE berated the government in recent months because of the lack of preparedness which seems characteristic of our State Department. And our Christian citizens need to be reminded that if they fail to give to their children that spiritual preparedness which they need and will need increasingly in the years to come, they are criminally negligent. Certainly, these simple shepherds had been raised in homes where the Law was read. On the Sabbath, I imagine they managed, somehow, to get to the synagogue. They were the kind of men to whom God could speak!

We are told that when the great light appeared, and the angel spoke, "they were sore afraid." Well, that was natural. I am glad they were afraid! We need more God-fearing men in the world today! I hear the name of God taken in vain; the name of His Son is used repeatedly as an oath; surely such persons cannot fear God very much--but, though they know it not, they have real reason to be afraid. "God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." I never hear the name of Christ used as an oath without experiencing an inward repulsion. Use His name, yes, but use it in prayer, not in casual conversation.

What did the shepherds do when their heavenly visitor departed? "The shepherds said one to another, 'Let us now go into Bethlehem, and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.'" And they came with haste and found . . . the Babe lying in a manger." Directly they heard, they acted. Here, there was no procrastination. They did not say, "It is dark--let us wait till tomorrow morning."

And did that end the matter, as far as they were concerned? By no means! "And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning the Child. This was GOOD NEWS! It would not keep! You know,

Violence Not A Cultural Heritage

IN A RECENT LECTURE at Brandeis University in Massachusetts, Dr. Manfred S. Guttmacher, widely-known psychiatrist, attributed the high homicide rate among Negroes to segregation.

Guttmacher, chief medical officer for the Baltimore, Md., court system, stated in his address "Certainly there is no racial group in our population that has borne through the decades the tragic amount of frustration that Negroes have to bear. It seems highly probable that this is the chief factor in creating their proportionately high record of violence".

He stressed the murder rate was not a cultural heritage from Africa, perpetuating itself here, as argued by anti-Negro elements.

"Another study has found that African homicide rates are not only lower than those for the American Negro but also lower than those for the American population in general.

He noted that though the homicide rate is higher among Negroes than whites, the victims of the Negroes' killings mostly are Negroes.

of course, that the word "gospel" means "Good News." It is so good that IT WON'T KEEP!

BUT THERE WAS ANOTHER group which came to worship Jesus, at the home in Bethlehem where the little family dwelled after Jesus had been taken to Jerusalem to make the offering in the Temple required by Law. These were the Magi, whose home was in Persia, far to the north. The Magi were a priestly craft and were quite numerous. It seems apparent that these "Wise Men" who came the long distance to see, and to worship Jesus, were looking beyond the faith of their priesthood; for the Magi were worshippers of the elements; fire, air, earth, water. They worshipped in fire temples, where the fire was kept burning night and day. Their method of disposing of their dead was unusual, since the dead could not be burned, buried, cast into water or left to decay in the air without defiling one of the elements they worshipped. Therefore, they solved the problem by allowing their dead to be devoured by carrion-loving birds and beasts. They placed their dead in "towers of silence" for this purpose. The Magi wore white robes with tall felt headdress.

As we have said, it is apparent that the group that made the arduous journey to Bethlehem must have looked beyond the faith of their group, for the Magi had never worshipped God as the Jews thought of God. We do not know how they became aware of the birth of the Child. Our first knowledge of them is from their announcement to Herod that they had come to worship Jesus. The only clue we are given is that they had seen the star in the east. Since the Magi were interested in the stars, it may be that the unusual phenomena had aroused their curiosity. But their words, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews" implies a deeper revelation than that. Be that as it may, these men, who were far from being Jews or believing as Jews believed, came to worship Jesus.

And they brought with them gifts. Gold, and frankincense and myrrh. Gold for the material; frankincense for the spiritual; myrrh for the service symbolized by anointing.

Truly these were wise men! They selected their gifts with care! These were gifts with a meaning.

AS WE APPROACH the Christmas season, we shall not forget the Christ Child. And we may learn a real lesson if we will emulate our giving to Him by the example of the Magi.

First there was gold. Probably these Wise Men were wealthy. Not many of us are rich in money--but we can give what we can afford, and the gift will be richly blessed. Maybe, in addition to a special gift to our church, we can find some family or some individual who is in need at Christmas.

Then there was frankincense, symbol of prayer and devotion. Let us renew our allegiance to Christ at this Christmastide. Let us tell Him we love Him, and show Him that we love Him!

And, finally, there was myrrh. The oil of anointing. The symbol of service. How He will appreciate our pledge to serve Him through the service of others!

This worship of the Magi was a threefold worship. Worshipping means a good deal more than going to church and participating in each part of the service. It means prayer, yes . . . but it means giving, and it means serving, also.

"ELIJAH" Presented As Christmas Concert

UNDERWRITTEN BY THE SOUTHWEST Gas Corporation as a community cultural project, the Musical Arts Workshop of Las Vegas will present Mendelssohn's "Elijah" for its third annual Christmas concert, Sunday, December 19 at the Flamingo Hotel.

Admittedly, its most ambitious project to date, the special Christmas presentation of "Elijah" will be conducted by Edward Brahm, and will feature 80 choral singers and a 40-musicalian orchestra.

Written in 1846, Mendelssohn's world-famous "Elijah" is based on the life of the great Hebrew prophet of the 9th Century, B.C. Vocal soloists include Anthony Thomas as Elijah, Maxine Deacon, Phillis Deoy, Richard Dennis, Marjorie Dickinson, and Jean McCune, all of Las Vegas.

Reserved seats are \$2 and general admission is \$1. Tickets may be purchased at Southern Nevada Music Co., Southwest Gas Corporation, or any First Western Savings and Loan office.

Talent Search To Begin In January

SPONSORED BY THE LAS VEGAS Recreation Department, a city-wide "Search for Talent" contest will be held during January, 1966.

The contest will be divided up into four divisions, with ages 9-12 termed as the pre-teen group; ages 13-15 will be classified as Jr-teens; and the 16-19 age group will comprise the senior teen division. Individuals of age 20 or over will compete in the adult division.

Trophies to the winner of each age division will be awarded, and the event, held for the first time by the Las Vegas Recreation Department, is hoped to become an annual one. Although previously announced that the contest would be presented as a benefit affair for the Easter Seal Foundation, because of city policy, the talent show will not be a benefit.

A low entry fee of 50¢ for teens and \$1 for adults will be charged for all applicants to cover cost of the four trophies. City officials will judge the preliminary auditions which will be held January 17-18. Finals will be conducted Sunday afternoon, January 23 at 2 p.m. when it is hoped that a top show business personality will serve as head judge.

To obtain application forms, contact Nick Sylvester, Recreation Supervisor, or Jim Jensen, Dula Center Director at 385-1221, ext. 374, or ext. 360, respectively.

RELIGIOUS ARTICLES OF ALL FAITHS

Help Your Fellow Man Put Christ Into Christmas THIS YEAR

GIVE A RELIGIOUS GIFT

Large Selection of Bibles of All Faiths
Protestant * Catholic * Jewish
(Also Masonic)
Nativity Scenes * All Sizes
Statuary Pictures & Plaques
Medals * Crosses * Rosaries
Missals * Prayer Books

Berta Specialties, Inc.

431 Fremont Phone 382-4930