

From The Pulpit

by Rev. Donald M. Clark

THE CHARACTERS OF CHRISTMAS
(The Light of the World. Luke 1:79)

TO THE FATHER OF THE CHILD who became John the Baptist, we owe the words of our text. In the words of the context, Zacharias proclaims the coming of the Messiah, the horn of salvation and the light to those that sit in darkness. After He had commenced His ministry, Jesus referred to Himself as "the Light of the World."

The world into which Christ was born was indeed a dark one. The Romans were the rulers of the known world but Rome was not interested in the moral and the spiritual. Intellectually, the Greeks ruled the world, but they were interested in philosophy rather than the spiritual. And the religion of the Jews had deteriorated into a ritualistic shell, where adherence to the letter of the Law was all-important. The old mythological religion of the Greeks was dead, as was also that of Rome. The educated classes were interested in the arena more than the temple, and the closest approach to a god was the Roman emperor. Vice and immorality were rampant. So, for the devout Jew (of whom there were too few) the only hope seemed to be in the coming of the promised Messiah. Then, maybe, the crushing of the Roman heel would cease!



REV. D. M. CLARK

AND NOW, LIGHT, AT LAST, has dawned, and the promised Messiah has been born of a descendant of David, as had been prophesied by the prophets of old. And a new hope sprang up in the hearts of the few who believed.

Some thirty-three years later, the Messiah was nailed to a cross on Golgotha! Those Jews who had expected their Messiah to set up a kingdom in Jerusalem and rule on earth were bitterly disappointed. Was this another false alarm? It seemed so. But to the faithful few came the vision that the Messiah had truly come; that His Kingdom was far greater than any Jew could have visualized in the old days. His Kingdom was a rule of love in the hearts of men, everywhere; whatever their race or color.

More than nineteen centuries have passed since the Star shone over Bethlehem. As we look back over the centuries, what does that light reveal?

1. IT WAS A SEARCHING LIGHT: When Christ died, He turned His mission over to a mere handful of men. Yet, by the beginning of the fourth century, Christianity had found its way to Asia Minor, Syria, Cyprus, Alexandria, Egypt, Rome and a large portion of Central Italy, Greece, Phoenicia, Arabia, Persia, and even to India. Little by little the Light was searching its way over the world! If Christianity had carried the light as faithfully in the centuries that followed, we would not find ourselves in so much trouble today.

AS YOU AND I OBSERVE Christmas, Sunday, in the quietness of this holy place, there are millions who do not know the meaning of Christmas. Indeed, we would not have to go to Africa or to China to find these millions! For to many, Christmas is symbolized by Santa Claus rather than by the Christ Child, and the Christmas tree is more symbolic of Christmas than the Star which, through the ages, has searched the hearts of men. What have WE done to take Christmas to the hearts of those who have never heard of the Christ Child?

2. IT IS A REVEALING LIGHT: The star which the shepherds saw and which guided the Magi to the Christ Child was unseen by many. During the blackouts of the last war, many who lived in the cities of the world saw the stars for almost the first time! And that is a characteristic of the Star of Hope: it reveals itself only to those who will look up, their eyes undazzled by other lights. But if we WILL look up, the light of the Star will shine into our hearts, and

we shall be amazed at all it reveals. We shall see dark, dusty corners that need to be cleaned out; we shall find untidy closets that need rearrangement; we shall be ashamed at all the light reveals.

3. IT IS A HEALING LIGHT: In Mammoth Cave, in Kentucky, there is a subterranean lake. The guide will show you fish swimming in the lake, and will call your attention to the fact that EVERY FISH IS BLIND. They have never seen the light; they live in darkness; they are totally blind. Jesus likened those who live in spiritual darkness to the blind. But one of His specialties was the healing of the blind. How many there must have been who cried: "Once I was blind, but now I see!"

CHRISTIAN HISTORY IS FILLED with the names of those who were healed of their blindness. From Saul to Kagawa--from Paul's converts to the thousands who have been influenced by the life and the writings of the great Japanese Christian, men have discovered that the light can remove the scales from their eyes. It is truly a healing light.

4. IT IS A GUIDING LIGHT: "To guide our feet into the way of peace," cried Zacharias. Yes, that is the purpose of the light; to search us out, to reveal our sins, to heal us and to guide us. I suppose that of all the words in our dictionary, the word "Peace" is the most precious and the most sought after. The Way of Peace seems to many to be utterly unattainable. (I am thinking, not of peace between nations, desirable as that may be, but of peace of heart.) How can we find peace in an uncertain world? How can we feel peace of heart when our sons are giving their lives in Viet Nam? Yet, peace is within the reach of every one of us!

Joshua Liebman opens his best-seller, "Peace of Mind," with the statement that, in his youth, he had made a list of earthly desirables: health, love, riches, beauty, talent, power, fame, etc. He showed his list to an older friend who told him that he had left out one ingredient, without which, every one of the items he had listed would be worthless and undesirable: PEACE OF HEART. The tremendous sale of Dr. Liebman's book is evidence, in itself, that millions are craving peace of mind.

In his book, "The Higher Happiness," Dr. Ralph W. Sockman writes: "There is a peace of mind which we can understand the world may give to man. A family is gathered for the evening meal in a comfortable home. The hush of eventide has quieted the day's activities. Bodies which have been healthily exercised are now relaxed. No danger lurks to disturb the thoughts. No financial worries threaten the morrow. In such a delicious sense of physical well-being and mental contentment, we can understand the father or mother looking around the family circle and saying, "Now, this is what I call peace."

BUT WHEN JESUS SAYS, "My peace I give unto you," He is speaking out of a totally different setting. He is met in an upper room with the comrades who have weathered with Him the attacks of adversity and ridicule. The air of the city is electric with the gathering storm which is to break around Him in all its fury on the morrow. He knows the pain which is being prepared for Him. His sensitive imagination can feel in advance the excruciating torture of the cross. Treason has entered the ranks of His most trusted friends, and one is already on the way to plot His arrest. Out of such a situation come the words, "My peace I give unto you." For whatever peace Jesus felt at that moment was beyond the power of the world to give or take away.

"Such peace may come only to a person who is at one with God, his will so surrendered to God that there is no conflict of purpose, his heart so attuned that there is no disharmony of desire."

That is the peace into which the Star of Bethlehem will guide us. A minister once told me: "I am a pre-Millennialist, and therefore I do not believe in peace on earth." What rubbish! I believe in peace on earth, because I have it in my heart! Have you?

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SCHEDULE OF CHRISTMAS SERVICES

Friday, December 24 * Christmas Eve.
(Dispensation for partaking of meat granted)

Confessions: From 4 till 5 p.m.
From 7:30 till 8:30 p.m.

Blessing of the Crib at Midnite, followed by
Midnite Mass. . .

Second Christmas Mass will be at 11 a.m.

Last Christmas Mass will be at 5 p.m. fol-
lowed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacra-
ment.

A Happy and Holy Christmas to all.

Jewish Holiday Of Hanukkah Begins Saturday

Candles will be lit in gift-giving, Jewish fam-
illions of Jewish homes at sundown Sat-
urday to mark the be-
ginning of Hanukkah,
"the festival of Lights."

Hanukkah commemor-
orates a Jewish victory
in history's first war
for religious liberty. It
was won in 165 B.C.,
when Jews led by Judas
Maccabeus overthrew
a Syrian tyrant named
Antiochus who had des-
ecrated the temple in
Jerusalem by introduc-
ing pagan practices.

Hanukkah is regard-
ed in Israel as a rela-
tively minor holiday,
but it has assumed con-
siderable importance
for America's 5.5 mil-
lion Jews because it
comes at the same time
of year as Christmas.

By making Hanukkah
a season of festivity and

gift-giving, Jewish fam-
ilies keep their children
from feeling left out.

Some Jewish homes
have adopted such
Christmas practices as
trimming trees, on the
pretext that these are
really folk customs with
no particular Christian
reference.

The festival lasts for
eight days. Tradition
decrees that each Jew-
ish home display a
Hanukkah Menorah, or
candelabrum, with eight
candles.

One candle is lit the
first night, two the sec-
ond night, and so on un-
til all eight are burning
on the last night of the
holiday. This progres-
sion symbolizes Juda-
ism's belief in the slow,
steady victory of spiri-
tual enlightenment over
darkness.

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