

## **THE REAL MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS**

**Luke 2:1-20**

**Messiah Christmas Eve Worship**

**December 24, 2015**

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The legend is told of a wealthy prince who one day, while doing some business in the poor section of town saw a young woman; she was very beautiful. As soon as the prince laid his eyes on her he fell in love with her. However he had a terrible problem. How could he a wealthy and prominent prince win the love of this poor peasant woman?

He did of course have several alternatives. Being a prince all he had to do was say the word and this woman would be brought to the palace; she would simply be made to marry him. Yet he didn't want to do that because that kind of marriage wouldn't guarantee that she would ever love him; she would have no freedom to choose for herself.

The prince then had another alternative. He would go to that section of town; to the place where she lived; he would find her and tell her, *"I love you! Will you marry me?"*

He wasn't however very sure about that idea because he knew that even though she might marry him, that many women would marry a prince for other reasons besides love; they would marry mostly to gain wealth and prestige and he didn't want that kind of relationship.

Therefore what the prince finally decided to do was to lay aside his princely robes; to do away with his wealth and position. He moved into the poor neighborhood where this woman lived; took a job as a carpenter; worked very hard at this task each day.

Then each evening he spent his time moving among the people in the neighborhood trying to get to know them; to understand them; to love them.

It was in this process of living, working and becoming part of this neighborhood that the prince finally met this young woman. The result was that he was able to win her love in an honest and real way. He now knew that she loved him for the person he was, not for his title. The way he did this of course was to go where she was; to live among her people; to become like her.

On this Christmas Eve this little story/legend of this prince helps us to better understand the real message and meaning of Christmas. We too celebrate the message that God has come to where we are; that he has become one of us; that he did not stay in his heavenly palace but came to earth as a human being to live among us.

Just like the prince, God could have used his power to force us into loving him. Either that or he could have made us all like robots and puppets who would do exactly as he wishes. Yet God did not force his love on us; he did not want us loving him for the wrong reasons. Rather God came as a baby in a manger; he came as the child of lowly and humble parents.

As we gaze at the manger this evening we see God become flesh. We see a baby who knew the pain of hunger; who had to cry for human love. We see a youngster who had to struggle to grow up in wisdom, stature and understanding.

We see a child who had to study and work hard; a person who had to face all the temptations that we will ever face. Jesus Christ came as a human to say, *"I understand. I can identify with you. I know, I've walked the same streets."*

He came to live among us, to be one of us, so that he might win our love in an honest way. He came as a baby so we might have the freedom to follow him; might love him for the loving and caring friend that he is; might respond in faith to his love not because we feel we have to, but because we want to.

Father Damien was a well-known missionary who served many years ago (1840-1889) on the island of Molakai in a leper colony. All the people on that island except for him were infected with leprosy; that dread disease that eats away at one's body and skin.

The work for Father Damien was not going too well; it was very discouraging. The people were not responding to his ministry and it was mainly because he could not understand what they were actually going through. He was healthy they were sick; what they had he did not have.

One day Father Damien was feeling very discouraged about what was going on while he was cooking in his kitchen. He accidentally spilled some boiling hot cooking oil on his feet; to his surprise he didn't feel anything. He immediately remembered that one of the signs of leprosy is that there is an immunity to pain.

He looked at his feet and sure enough that dreaded/awful disease of leprosy had infected him too. Yet instead of feeling angry about it he felt a sense of joy. He ran and rang the bell in the church to signal that everyone should gather. When the church was full he went up into the pulpit and addressed all the people with these words, *"Fellow lepers! Fellow lepers!"*

In a sense this is what God has done through Jesus' birth at Christmas. He has come down to this world and to each one of us he says, *"Fellow children, I understand; I can help you; I've been where you have been. What is it that you face...Suffering? I understand; I had to face that, too."*

*"Loneliness?...I understand. The crowds left me; the disciples deserted me; my family thought I was crazy; my good friend Peter denied me. The cross was lonely...I understand. Temptations to immorality and impurity?...I know that too because I had it. I had to learn to control these wonderful gifts that God had given me."*

*"I was tempted to misuse power, ambition, sex and love...I also know that temptation. Discrimination?...I know that, too. I was born poor; born to an oppressed people. I was caught*

*illegally, tried illegally, crucified illegally. I know what it is to be discriminated against...I've been there. Death? Are you worried about death? I know that too; I've also been there."*

Do we truly understand this real message of Christmas? Whatever we face God in Jesus has also faced it. He has been to the bottom of the valley and only he knows how to help us get through it. He wants to help us; he wants to win our love and our faith. He is able and willing to help us in whatever we face if we will only let him.

The wonderful message of Christmas is that God did not wait for us to go seeking him for help. Rather he came seeking us in his Son Jesus Christ. In all the other religions of the world it is the other way around.

They believe that people have to somehow seek God through certain good works; through crystals or channeling; through transcendental mediation; through other practices they believe make them worthy enough to come into the presence of God.

Yet that is not the true message of Christmas and it is not the true message of Christianity. God rather came seeking us by sending his only Son our Savior to die on the cross for our sins; by taking all our sins on himself and by putting them to death. Jesus did all this so that you and I, so that all who believe might be brought back into a right relationship with him.

My dear friends, it is my sincere prayer this Christmas Eve that you will know and understand the real meaning of Christmas. Jesus comes to you today as a little baby in a manger; he comes as a human being; he comes as one of us.

He comes and says, *"I love you! I understand you. Whatever your needs might be I can help you."* As he does this let us respond by putting our faith, love and trust in him. Let us offer him this night the gift of our hearts and lives.

*"O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray. Cast out our sins and enter in, be born in us today."*

A blessed and Christ-filled Christmas to each one of you this joyous Christmas Eve!