

About Christmas Day

Christmas Day was first celebrated as the birthday of Christ about the year 180, although its institution is attributed to Telephorus in 138 A.D.

But it is certain that Christmas carols, tress, feasts and presents, like the mistletoe, are many centuries old, inaugurated by the early church to combat and purify the heathen customs of the great Yule-feast, reaching from December 25 to January 6. The Puritan Parliament in England abolished Christmas altogether, proclaiming ivy, holy, and mistletoe to be seditious badges, but after the Restoration, the Christmas festivities were renewed.

The exchange of presents is typical of the gifts offered by the three Eastern kings to the infant Christ.

In the early days, there were some curious superstitions regarding the days of the week Christmas should happen on. If it fell on a Sunday, there would be a good winter, with plenty for all; the summer following would be fair and dry; all lands were to have peace; and any boy born on that day would be a great lord. But, if Christmas happened on a Saturday, the winter would be very hard, with violent storms and tempests, which would kill many people; fruit and corn should fall; many old folks would die; the succeeding summer would be cold and wet, and children born on that day would not live six months.

Of the intermediate days, not much is said.

At the Christmas dinner of long ago, the first dish brought to the table was the head of a wild boar, with a lemon in its mouth, and rosemary, with other sweet herbs, in its ears and nostrils.

Following the boar's head, came the peacock. This royal bird was carefully skinned without disturbing the plumage, and, after having been cooked, was sewed up in the skin again, and placed on a huge platter in a state of position. Its gilded beak holding a piece of cotton, which had been saturated with spirits and set on fire, as it was carried in. "Geese, capons, pheasants, drenched with amber-grease, and pies of carps' tongues," helped to furnish the table, but the most important national dish, which was never omitted, was the turnney.

The old formula for its preparation is in these words:

"Take clean wheat and bray it in a mortar, so as to get off all the hulls, seethe till it burst, let it cool, then add fresh broth, sweet milk, almonds or sweet milk of kine, and the yolks of eggs; boll it a little and mess it forth with fat venison or mutton." Plum porridge was another of the chief dishes, and, with the bag pudding, was served first of all. It was made of "mutton broth, thickened with brown bread, and when half boiled, raisins, currants, prunes, cloves, mace and ginger were added, boiled well and served hot."

Mince pies were baked in coffin-shaped crust, to represent the cratch or manger in which the infant Saviour lay.

In Cromwell's time, the Puritans were not allowed to eat mince pie, the following quotation showing how they regarded it:—

The chiefest food they found most good in Was mesty bacon and bag-pudding! Plum broth was a popish; and mince pie— Oh, that was flat idolatry!

Then, once again, after the Restoration, the world succumbed to the idolatry—"fat," but sweet withal—of mince pie and mistletoe.—Ed.

What Christmas Should Mean to the World To-Day

Christmas Topic for week of Dec. 24th.

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LESSON: Luke 2: 8-29.

We are greatly indebted to Luke for this second chapter of his Gospel. He tells us, and he only, of the circumstances at Bethlehem, of the angels and shepherds, of Simeon and Anna, and of the interesting event at Jerusalem, when Jesus was a boy twelve years of age.

The cradle of the babe Jesus was a manger. Crowded out of the "inn," they sought shelter in the stable of the same. Great interest centres about this manger, and great issues proceed from it.

1. To the world to-day, Christmas means Joy. The angel said to the shepherds, "I bring you good tidings of great joy," and the choir of angels sang, "On earth peace, good-will toward men." Joy is happiness, ecstasy, rapture. It is the experience of the prisoner when he is told that the time of his release has come; or the sick one, when he is assured that the crisis is passed and recovery is certain.

"Joy to the world, the Lord is come;

Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing."

The joy of His light "lighteneth every man that cometh into the world." His character shines through the conduct of everyone who truly imitates Him. In Jesus the sinner sees his own deformity, and a sense of his wretchedness seizes him. The light shineth, but his darkness comprehends it not. He struggles, sometimes desparately, sometimes despondently; the light becomes painful, he would put out his eyes if he could. Conscience is stern and inexorable, but Jesus is not, and says "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." O the joy of living in that light!

2. It means Peace to the world. That is the opposite of strife. He is the "Prince of Peace." He reconciled the world to God and brings sinful man into a state of peace with God. He also makes reconciliation between man and man. The beautiful work of peacemaking has been going on ever since He came. In these days we have national arbitrations for peace, treaties of peace between the great nations, conferences to promote it,—like the Cosmopolitan gatherings at The Hague. About a year ago Mr. Carnegie gave ten millions of dollars for the purpose of aiding the peace movement of the world. That great gift puts optimism into the prophecy that peace shall reign. There will be known in the future as one of the chief peacemakers in the world.

3. It means Worship. The shepherds went at once to Bethlehem and "found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger." The wise men from the far east, "came into the house, saw the young child with Mary, His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him." Matt. 2:11. They did homage to Him, as the Divine One. They did not offer their worship to Mary, but to "Him." They made, as all true worshippers will ever do, an offering, not in words only, but from their treasures. The humble shepherds had anxiously awaited the coming of the Messiah, and now that He has come, they "glorified and praised God." Worship is first of the heart.

"Come and worship,

Worship Christ, the new born King."

4. It means Offerings. The wise men "opened their treasures and presented Him with gold, frankincense and myrrh." They first gave themselves and then their substance. The world's first two brothers brought an offering, as the simplest and most natural thing to do, in coming before their Maker in worship. This is the first form of worship that we have any knowledge of. "Gold"—this likely supplied Joseph with the means to make his flight into Egypt, and sustain the child and His mother. "Frankincense and myrrh," resinous gums of highly fragrant odor and used as incense. The Scriptures were fulfilled in this, for had it not been written, "they shall bring gold and incense." This Prince proposes to carry His gospel to the ends of the earth, and has laid the commission upon us, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Think of it—"Go ye." Make the offering of self and of that which will help to carry out His great plan.

5. It means, therefore, Testimony. The shepherds made known the tidings, and told others the results of their own visit to the manger. Their joy was not confined to their own souls, but what they knew they passed on to others. They glorious facts come in on their own minds were too good for them to keep to themselves. It should be so with us. What we know, we are under responsibility to tell. This is the witness the world needs most to-day,—the personal living testimony of those who have come to Christ themselves and have proclaimed the joy of knowing Him. Christmas calls us all to this personal testimony, and the great facts and privileges of the Season lie at the very foundation of all our Missionary work, and constitute our responsibility for the universal spread of the Gospel of "Great Joy."

6. It means Opposition. "Herod sought the young child's life to destroy it." Matt. 2:16-18. Joseph was ordered to Egypt, so as to be out of Herod's way. Amid these good things, as the echo of the angelic song was dying, this evil thing appeared. How busy Satan is. He was here as in the Garden of Eden, to thwart the plans of the Most High. He goeth about still. Opposition has not ceased. It has been at work ever since. It rose into a mountain, ere Christ left this world and slew Him. It has again and again appeared to be on the point of overthrowing the very tradition of truth. It bitterly opposed the translation of the Scriptures, as well as their diffusion, but without avail, and that victory has been forever won.

What are the great forces of evil in the world to-day? Here are three, indifference, intemperance and materialism. (The thoughtful Lenten worker these facts for his own community.)

Catch the true spirit of Christmas, the joy of usefulness.

Listen as the angels sing. Believe them!

Gather around the manger! Worship Him in praises and offerings! Go forth to tell the "tidings" and hasten the day of world-wide gladness because of the coronation over all the nations of the Prince of Peace, the King of Kings, the universal Sovereign.

The Medcalf Street League, Oshawa, is planning for a Junior League. A good move that hundreds more would be the better for taking.

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