

Finding Christ at Christmas

I. Introduction

- A. Today is Christmas day, the day we celebrate Christ coming into the world as Emmanuel, God with us. We read in Matthew's account of Jesus' birth that after Jesus was born, the wise men who were seeking Him went to Herod asking, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?"
- B. If you had known that God had taken on human form and made a personal appearance in the world, where do you think you would have begun looking for Him? Where would you have started looking for the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-glorious God of creation?
 1. Would you have looked first in some world-class city?
 2. Maybe in a palace.
 3. Most of us probably would have looked amongst the movers and shakers of society, the prominent and powerful people.
- C. But how many of us would've thought of inquiring of some despised shepherds or pagan philosophers (which is what the magi were) as to where God might be found? How many of us would you have thought of looking in a barn? And even if we did, would our attention have been drawn to a baby? How many of us would have expected his parents to be a simple carpenter and his young wife? To each of these questions, I think all of us would have to say, "No way!" After all, this is God we're talking about.

II. We can't find God on our own

- A. The point is, if it had been up to any of us on our own to find God on that first Christmas day, we certainly wouldn't have looked for Him in a smelly barn on the outskirts of a small town, bundled up in strips of cloth and lying in a feed trough surrounded by simple parents, dumb animals and despised shepherds.
- B. If it had been up to any of us on our own to find God on that first Christmas day, we would have come up empty. In fact, everything we thought we knew about God would've only served to lead us off in the wrong direction. Our understanding of God would've been so inadequate that we wouldn't have had a chance to find Him on our own. As it turned out, God was so much grander and wiser and more mysterious than we ever imagined Him to be.
- C. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).
- D. The weakness and humility with which God came to be with us was inconceivable. No one would've ever guessed it.

- E. In his best-selling book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Philip Yancey contrasts the humility that characterized Jesus' birth with the prestigious image often associated with world rulers today. One Christmas Yancey was in a beautiful London auditorium, listening to Handel's *Messiah*. He writes:
- ...looking toward the auditorium's royal box where the queen and her family sat, I caught glimpses of the...way rulers stride through the world: with bodyguards, and a trumpet fanfare and a flourish of bright clothes and flashing jewelry.
- Queen Elizabeth II had recently visited the United States, and reporters delighted in spelling out the logistics involved: her four thousand pounds of luggage included two outfits for every occasion, a mourning outfit in case someone died, forty pints of plasma, and white kid-leather toilet seat covers. She brought along her own hairdresser, two valets, and a host of other attendants. A brief visit of royalty to a foreign country can easily cost twenty million dollars.
- In meek contrast, God's visit to earth took place in an animal shelter with no attendants present and nowhere to lay the newborn king but a feed trough. Indeed, the event that divided history, and even our calendars, into two parts may have had more animal than human witnesses. A mule could have stepped on him.¹
- F. Think of the displays of God's power and presence in the Old Testament: God came in burning bushes, fire by night, cloud by day, thunder and lightning. It would've only been natural to expect that when God came to live among His creation, He would have introduced Himself with demonstrations of power and might.
- G. What do we find at that first Christmas instead? We find helpless Jesus, vulnerable Jesus, hungry Jesus, sleeping Jesus, baby Jesus, "God with us." Without Christmas, we couldn't even begin to comprehend these words being used to describe Almighty God.
- H. But even more amazing to think about is the reason Christ "made himself nothing" (cf. Philippians 2:7). It was because of His great love for us. The Creator of the universe loved us enough that He was willing to humiliate Himself for our sake.
1. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17).
- I. Christ's incarnation, His coming to earth, displayed love better than any definition using words ever can.
- J. So where does that leave us? How can we find a God who doesn't think like we do? Where do we even begin to seek Him whose ways are not our ways? The fact

is that we can't find God by ourselves. We need help. And where does the help come from? It comes from God. The One we seek is the One who seeks us and leads us to Himself.

III. God leads us to Himself

- A. "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign..." (Isaiah 7:14). What is the purpose of a sign? A sign points you in a direction; it helps to lead you to your destination.
1. So to the shepherds, the angels spoke God's message, "This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12). Why did God give them a sign? Because they never would have thought of looking for a baby in a barn if He hadn't. God was leading them to Himself.
 2. And how about the wise men? It wasn't their wisdom alone that led them to the "king of the Jews." They began to seek Him only after God revealed to them His star in the east. God, through His creation, was leading them to Himself. And although it didn't directly bring them to the baby, it got them going in the right direction.
 3. Do you think the star that led the Magi could've been seen by others at that time? While we can't be sure, it's likely that the star would have been visible in the sky to others if they had been looking for it.
 4. There's a theological term called "general revelation." General revelation refers to God's revelation of Himself to all people through His creation.
 5. Paul has general revelation in mind when he said in Romans 1:20, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."
 6. In Psalms we read, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world" (Psalm 19:1-4)
 7. So through the star, through general revelation, the Lord got the Magi going in the right direction. But that wasn't enough. General revelation, by itself, can't bring anyone into a relationship with Christ.
 8. So when they got to Jerusalem they inquired of King Herod where the Christ might be found. Herod called the chief priests and teachers of the law together and asked them where the Christ was to be born. They consulted their Bibles and said, "In Bethlehem in Judea, for this is what the prophet has written" (Matthew 2:5).

9. Now in addition to general revelation, the Magi received from the chief priests and teachers of the law what's called special revelation—God's communication of Himself in a direct way through His spoken and written Word.
10. Isn't it tragic that the religious leaders held the special revelation that contained the location of where to find Christ, yet they themselves never went to seek Him? It was only as the Magi acted by faith on God's special revelation that they went and actually found the Christ child and trusted in Him. That's how we all come to Christ.

IV. Conclusion

A. So what does Christmas teach us about finding God?

1. First, it teaches us that if it was up to us to find God, we could never do it. God's ways **are** higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts. If we ever thought we could find God on our own, we would only discover how little we actually knew about Him and His ways.
2. Second, it teaches us that for those who earnestly seek Him, God tells us where to find Him. He leads us to Himself. He shows us the way.
3. Third, it teaches us that it isn't enough to have a knowledge **about** God. The religious leaders who gave directions to the Magi had more "head knowledge" about God than you or I will ever have; yet they never found Christ. The Magi found Christ because they weren't content with just knowledge; they wanted a relationship. The only way to have a relationship with God is by coming to and receiving the Christ of the Bethlehem manger. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 10:4).
4. Lastly, it teaches us of God's great love for us. He, "who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:6-8). It was because of His great love for us that Jesus became like us so that we, in turn, might become like Him.

B. "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 29:13-14).

¹ Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Zondervan, 1995)