

COME, THOU
LONG-EXPECTED
JESUS

Experiencing the Peace and Promise of Christmas

EDITED BY
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PREFACE



My husband tells the story of a Christmas when his family had to wait to open their Christmas gifts while he went into his bedroom to wrap the gifts he had bought. “What’s the matter, David?” his grandmother asked as he emerged from his room with his stack of hastily wrapped presents. “Did Christmas sneak up on you this year?”

I have found in my own life that I’ve too often allowed Christmas to “sneak up on me.” I’ve allowed the busyness of purchasing presents and planning travel and participating in Christmas pageants and parties to crowd out a quiet anticipation of the wonder of incarnation. Too many Christmas mornings I’ve realized that while my presents were wrapped, my heart was completely unprepared to truly take in the Gift.

A while back a friend recommended a particular anthology of readings for Advent. So early in December when I saw a large display of the books in a bookstore, I purchased a copy and began to read.

While some of the readings were interesting and inspiring, some left me cold, and others left me confused. But when I came to one particular reading, I just set the book aside. In a piece discussing differences in the accounts of the birth of Jesus, the writer suggested that Scripture doesn’t have to be historical to be inspired.

Preface

I began to think about how much I would enjoy a similar book with short readings on Advent themes from a number of different writers I trust and respect; that reflected a high view of Scripture; and that put the incarnation in the context of God's unfolding plan of redemption. And not finding such a book available, I embarked on what has been a sacred adventure of putting such a collection together.

What a profound blessing it has been to read through written works and listen to sermons of some of the best theologians and Bible teachers of all time, searching for treasures of insight on the familiar Christmas story. I've edited excerpts from writings and sermons into meditations that I pray will illumine your mind, awaken your longing, and prepare your heart for a fresh experience of the coming of Jesus this season.

Nancy Guthrie

The Gift of Gifts

O God, take me in spirit to the watchful shepherds,
and enlarge my mind;
Let me hear good tidings of great joy, and hearing,
believe, rejoice, praise, adore,
my conscience bathed in an ocean of repose, my
eyes uplifted to a reconciled Father;
place me with ox, ass, camel, goat, to look with
them upon my Redeemer's face, and in him
account myself delivered from sin;
let me with Simeon clasp the new-born child to my
heart,
embrace him with undying faith,
exulting that he is mine and I am his.
In him thou has given me so much that heaven can
give no more.¹

CONTEMPLATING CHRISTMAS

George Whitefield



“But Mary treasured up all these things,
pondering them in her heart.”

Luke 2:19



It was love, mere love; it was free love that brought the Lord Jesus Christ into our world. What, shall we not remember the birth of our Jesus? Shall we yearly celebrate the birth of our temporal king, and shall that of the King of kings be quite forgotten? Shall that only, which ought to be had chiefly in remembrance, be quite forgotten? God forbid! No, my dear brethren, let us celebrate and keep this festival of our church with joy in our hearts: let the birth of a Redeemer, which redeemed us from sin, from wrath, from death, from hell, be always remembered; may this Savior's love never be forgotten! But may we sing forth all his love and glory as long as life shall last here, and through an endless eternity in the world above! May we chant forth the wonders

of redeeming love and the riches of free grace, amidst angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, without intermission, forever and ever! And as, my brethren, the time for keeping this festival is approaching, let us consider our duty in the true observation thereof, of the right way for the glory of God, and the good of immortal souls, to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ; an event which ought to be had in eternal remembrance.

What can we do to employ our time to a more noble purpose than reading of what our dear Redeemer has done and suffered; to read that the King of kings and the Lord of lords came from his throne and took upon him the form of the meanest of his servants; and what great things he underwent. This, this is a history worth reading, this is worth employing our time about: and surely, when we read of the sufferings of our Savior, it should excite us

Let us consider our duty in the true observation thereof, of the right way for the glory of God, and the good of immortal souls, to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

to prayer, that we might have an interest in the Lord Jesus Christ; that the blood which he spilt upon mount Calvary, and his death and crucifixion, might make an atonement for our sins, that we might be made holy; that we might be enabled to put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man, even the Lord Jesus Christ; that we may throw away the heavy yoke of sin, and put on the yoke of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Indeed, my brethren, these things call for prayer, and for earnest prayer too; and O do be earnest with God, that you may have an interest in this Redeemer, and that you may put on his righteousness, so that you may not come before him in your filthy rags, nor be found not having on the wedding garment. O do not, I beseech you, trust unto yourselves for justification; you cannot, indeed, you cannot be justified by the works of the law. I entreat that your

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time may be thus spent; and if you are in company, let your time be spent in that conversation which profiteth: let it not be about your dressing, your plays, your profits, or your worldly concerns, but let it be the wonders of redeeming love. O tell, tell to each other what great things the Lord has done for your souls; declare unto one another how you were delivered from the hands of your common enemy, Satan, and how the Lord has brought your feet from the clay and has set them upon the rock of ages, the Lord Jesus Christ; there, my brethren, is no slipping. Other conversation, by often repeating, you become fully acquainted with, but of Christ there is always something new to raise your thoughts; you can never want when the love of the Lord Jesus Christ is the subject. So let Jesus be the subject, my brethren, of all your conversation.

*Did Jesus come
into the world
to save us from
death, and shall
we spend no part
of our time in
conversing about
our dear Jesus?*

Let your time be spent on him: O this, this is an employ, which if you belong to Jesus, will last you to all eternity.

Let me beseech you to have a regard, a particular regard to your behavior, at this time; for indeed the eyes of all are upon you, and they would rejoice much to find any reason to complain of you. They can say things against us without a cause; and how would they rejoice if there was wherewith they might blame us? Then they would triumph and rejoice indeed; and all your little slips, my dear brethren, are, and would be charged upon me. O at this time, when the eyes of so many are upon you, be upon your guard; and if you use the good things of this life with moderation, you do then celebrate this festival in the manner which the institution calls for.

And instead of running into excess, let that money, which you might expend to pamper your own bodies, be given to feed the poor; now, my brethren, is the season in which they commonly

require relief; and sure you cannot act more agreeable, either to the season, to the time, or for the glory of God, than in relieving his poor distressed servants. Consider, Christ was always willing to relieve the distressed; it is his command also; and can you better commemorate the birth of your King, your Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, than in obeying one of his commands?

Inquire strictly into your end and design in spending your time; see, my brethren, whether it proceeds from a true love to your Redeemer, or whether there is not some worldly pleasure or advantage at the bottom: if there is, our end is not right; but if it proceed entirely from love to him that died and gave himself for us, our actions will be a proof thereof; then our time will be spent, not in the polite pleasures of life, but according to the doctrine and commands of the blessed Jesus; then our conversation will be in heaven; and O that this might be found to be the end of each of you who now hear me; then we should truly observe this festival and have a true regard to the occasion thereof, that of Christ's coming to redeem the souls of those which were lost.

Let me now conclude, my dear brethren, with a few words of exhortation, beseeching you to think of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Did Jesus come into the world to save us from death, and shall we spend no part of our time in conversing about our dear Jesus; shall we pay no regard to the birth of him who came to redeem us from the worst of slavery, from that of sin, and the devil; and shall this Jesus not only be born on our account, but likewise die in our stead, and yet shall we be unmindful of him? Shall we spend our time in those things which are offensive to him? Shall we not rather do all we can to promote his glory and act according to his command?

O my dear brethren, be found in the ways of God; let us not disturb our dear Redeemer by any irregular proceedings; and let me beseech you to strive to love, fear, honor and obey him, more

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than ever you have done yet; let not the devil engross your time, and that dear Savior who came into the world on your accounts have so little. O be not so ungrateful to him who has been so kind to you! What could the Lord Jesus Christ have done for you more than he has? Then do not abuse his mercy, but let your time be spent in thinking and talking of the love of Jesus, who was incarnate for us, who was born of a woman, and made under the law, to redeem us from the wrath to come.

Adapted from "The Observation of the Birth of Christ, the Duty of all Christians; or the True Way of Keeping Christmas," sermon (16) by George Whitefield, in *Selected Sermons of George Whitefield*.

TABERNACLED AMONG US

Joseph “Skip” Ryan



“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:14



When a person makes his home among people, he moves in with them. He identifies with them. The incarnation is the moving in of the eternal Word so that he utterly identifies with us in every way. He took the whole nature of a human being, fully and totally identifying with all that it means for us to be human, including that which psychologists tell us is the most traumatic event of human life—birth.

A well-loved Christmas carol contains the line, "He abhors not the virgin's womb."² This should cause a bit of wonder and awe. The eternal God of all the universe did not abhor a virgin's womb.

Thousands of years before Jesus, God purposed that there be a tabernacle in order that there would be One who would fulfill the meaning of that tabernacle, who would be the true Tabernacle for us.

How messy!

I assisted with the delivery of two of our children. A few minutes before Christopher, our first child, was born, Barbara's obstetrician asked, "Do you want to do this?"

I said, "Sure."

He said, "Wash up." And I did. I delivered Christopher, and two years later I delivered Carey. I thought I might drop her, she was so slippery. Birth is messy! What a wonder that the eternal Word of God did not shun being born.

It had to happen this way. Only in the complete identification with our flesh could Christ be the second Adam, the perfect man that Adam was not. Adam sinned and died as a man; only as a man could Jesus do what Adam failed to do and be the mediator between God and man. Why? Because only flesh can die.

The same truth is amplified in the next phrase of John 1:14, "the Word dwelt among us," literally, "tabernacled among us," which means, "he pitched a tent among us." The Old Testament tabernacle is where God moved in and lived with his people. This tabernacle had no meaning apart from Jesus Christ. Its whole purpose in the wilderness was to point people forward to the true Tabernacle who was to come, the Son of God. "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Col. 2:9).

Think about Jesus as the Tabernacle.

The tabernacle was for use in the wilderness: "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness" (Matt. 4:1)

Tabernacled among Us

The tabernacle was outwardly humble and unattractive: “He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him” (Isa. 53:2).

The tabernacle was where God met with men: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me” (John 14:6).

The tabernacle was the center of Israel’s camp, a gathering place for God’s people: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself” (John 12:32).

The tabernacle was where sacrifices for the sins of God’s people were made: “But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:12).

The tabernacle was a place of worship: “My Lord and My God” (John 20:28).

We do not understand the teaching of the Old Testament in all of its fullness unless we read it through Jesus Christ—his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection. The tabernacle has absolutely no meaning apart from Jesus.

Thousands of years before Jesus, God purposed that there be a tabernacle in order that there would be One who would fulfill the meaning of that tabernacle, who would be the true Tabernacle for us. Just as the tabernacle in the wilderness contained and displayed God’s glory (Ex. 40:34–35), even more do we behold “the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6)

Moses sought to look upon the glory of God, and he was warned by God himself not to look (Ex. 33:18–20); but we have the privilege of looking upon the face of the Word of God, upon Jesus, by faith through his Word. Later, one day, by sight we will see the face of Jesus, who will be the full revelation of God and manifestation of his glory.

Glory means *weight* in the literal Hebrew. Many Christians today are into what we could call “Christian lite,” like a “lite” beer. “Give me a little Jesus, just enough to make me happy.” God thunders into our lives in his flesh and says that we behold in him the glory of God, full of grace and truth.

Grace? What is grace? Is it a sprinkling of fairy dust, a warm, happy feeling? No. Grace is a power that lifts you out of the domain of darkness and transfers you to the domain of light. Grace is God’s magnificent power erupting in your heart and soul by his own intervention so that you move from death to life, from darkness to light, from hell to heaven. Grace is power that is embodied in a person.

What is truth? Twenty-five times in the Gospel of John we read about truth. Does truth mean “factual truth”? Yes, it does. “Objective truth”? Yes. But it means more than that; it also means truth that is embodied, infleshed. It means truth that is in the character of an individual. We find in Jesus Christ the One whose glory is displayed by the grace and the truth that he powerfully delivers to people.

Glory in the Gospel of John is used to describe the death of Christ. That is amazing. In John 12:23–24, for example, we read, “And Jesus answered them, saying, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.’” John Donne, in *The Book of Uncommon Prayers*, says, “The whole of Christ’s life was a continual passion; others die martyrs, but Christ was born a martyr. He found a Golgotha, where he was crucified, even in Bethlehem, where he was born; for to his tenderness then the straws were almost as sharp as the thorns after, and the manger as uneasy at first as the cross at last. His birth and his death were but one continual act, and his Christmas Day and his Good Friday are but the evening and the morning of one

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and the same day. From the crèche to the cross is an inseparable line. Christmas only points forward to Good Friday and Easter. It can have no meaning apart from that, where the Son of God displayed his glory by his death.”³

Grace is a person; Truth is a person—Jesus, come to you in the flesh.

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