

Have you ever wondered whether or not Christmas Day is celebrated in Heaven? ---And, if so, what is it like?--- And what do the heavenly beings think of our earthly celebration of the Savior's Birthday?

This morning let us give our imagination free flight and look and listen in on the celestial city on Christmas Day. As we cross the boundaries of time and space we realize that there is no calendar, as we know it, in heaven. However, lest someone therefore conclude that there is no such thing as Christmas day there, let us remind ourselves that it could just as well mean that in a true spiritual sense EVERY day is a Christmas celebration of honor to the Savior who came at Bethlehem to save his people from their sins. And it is perfectly logical to think that they give attention to the way we on earth observe Christ's Nativity.

As we look in on one of the main intersections of the streets of gold, just outside an especially beautiful mansion, we see one who has been called "the forgotten man of the Christmas story" talking to a small group of redeemed believers whom we recognize --- ~~though we know not how~~ --- to have been shepherds during their sojourn on earth. They are like old friends reminiscing about the time gone by. We hear one of the shepherds call the other man "Joseph, son of Jacob."

Joseph says, "Yes, my father Jacob and my grandfather Matthan loved to tell me of the exploits of King David and the prophecies of the future glory of our family. One favorite passage was the prophecy of Jeremiah: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the Earth."

"At first I was sorry when we moved from Bethlehem to Nazareth, but I was glad for it when I fell in love with a beautiful young woman there whose name was Mary. When she confessed that she loved me too, I was the happiest and proudest man in the world. We became engaged according to the Hebrew custom, which required the fidelity of husband and wife although our actual marriage wouldn't take place until some time later.

"Then something happened which shocked me and almost worried me to death. Mary was going to become a mother! I just couldn't believe she had been unfaithful to me, and I still loved her with all my heart. I didn't want to harm her by accusing her publicly, but I felt I must do SOMETHING, so I decided to divorce her privately and quietly.

"While I was thinking about this, the angel of the Lord appeared to me, saying,

"Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins."

"Then I realized that Mary had been chosen of God to bear the Messiah! She was the virgin of whom Isaiah had spoken, which would be miraculously with child without a human father, and would bring forth a son called Emanuel, which, is, being interpreted, God with us."

As Joseph continues to describe the wonderful events of the Nativity, a great crowd gathers around them to listen with awe to the story that never grows old. He tells of the journey to Bethlehem, of the crowded inn, and how the omnipotent Son of God became a helpless infant in a stable with the animals.

The throng grows larger and larger, and someone says, "Tell us, Reuben, what happened when you were keeping watch over your flocks by night."

Then he tells his story:

"We were sitting around the fire in the fields of Boaz near Bethlehem on a cold and clear winter night, and talking about the yoke of the Romans and the Messianic doctrine of the Jerusalem Rabbis.

"Suddenly we noticed the sky was lighted with a mysterious and supernatural glory, and we heard the first Christmas carol: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

"We then ran to Bethlehem and found Mary, Joseph, and the Holy Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. ~~After we worshipped Him we spread the good news throughout Bethlehem and the surrounding region.~~"

At this point the monologue of the Shepherd is interrupted by an anthem of praise which seems as if it would shatter the jasper walls of the celestial city. The shepherds from Bethlehem recognize at once the same angelic choir which had heralded the Savior's birth so long ago. They are now singing the New Song of Revelation "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory and blessing."

They are then joined by all the rest of the angels of heaven, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, they continue to sing,
 "Alleluia: For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.
 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him.
 Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power,
 be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb forever and ever."

The thrill and excitement of such music almost melts the hearts of the Judean shepherds, and, for the first time since they arrived in heaven, it seems almost as if their eyes would swim in pools of limpid tears. They quickly regain their composure, however, and join in the crescendo of praise. In this they are not alone, for spontaneously begin to sing the great multitudes of the redeemed, which no man can number, --- some out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, clothed with white robes, and with palms in their hands, saying
 "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

Then they turn together toward the central Figure of the glorious Son of God.

"His head and his hairs are white like wool,
 as white as snow; and his eyes are as a flame of fire;
 and his feet like unto fine brass;
 and his voice as the sound of many waters;
 and his countenance as the sun shining in his strength.
 The angels and seraphims reverently fold their
 wings so as to cover their face and feet,
 and cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy."

The apostle Paul removes from his scarred brow the crown of righteousness which the Lord had given him, and with trembling hands he places it before his Master's nail-pierced feet. Following this shining example, the rest of the redeemed saints do likewise with their crowns which their Savior had given them because they also loved His appearing. In response to such sincere devotion the Lord Jesus lifts his hand in blessing and says, "The journey from heaven's glory to Bethlehem's manger was long, but I was glad to make it for your sake. The travail of my soul at Calvary was great, but, seeing the results, I am satisfied. I would have done it for any ONE of you, but for such a myriad it was infinitely worthwhile."

While all this inspiring scene is going on, Michael the Archangel moves closer to Jesus. His brow is furrowed, as if something is bothering him. Noticing this concern, the Savior asks him if he has something on his mind. Then Michael answers:

"Yes, my Lord. While we rejoice here at the remembrance of thy great incarnation, there are constantly new arrivals at the Gate from among thy children on earth. Some have come through the fires of persecution, and some are delivered from beds of pain and disease. They rejoice as one in thy marvelous saving grace, but, Master, they bring distressing reports of the appalling spiritual ignorance of the human family on earth."

"They tell us that there are millions of people who celebrate Christmas, yet do not really understand Who Thou art, and why Thou didst go as a Babe in Bethlehem and take upon Thyself the form of a man. ~~It seems impossible and unbelievable to us that many of these darkened minds could be at the same time professing members of many religious denominations on earth.~~

Then from one of the Gates of Pearl comes forward a newly-translated and glorified saint, who rushes to the throne of the Lamb, bows low and says,

"Dear Lord, it is so good to see Thee face to face, and tell Thee of my love for Thee. A few years after my heart first trusted in Thee, my physical eyes grew dim and midnight darkness shut out the sunlight. My great consolation was that I continued to see Thy glorious face with the eyes of my soul.

~~"But what Thy servant Michael has reported about the spiritual ignorance on earth today is sadly true.~~

"Years before I heard Thy call to come home to Thee, to my blindness was added a dread disease which made me a helpless invalid. To this heavy burden the ravages of war, sickness, and accident, took away my few loved ones and left me completely alone in a home for the aged and destitute.

"Some people in the church where I ^{became a Xtn} ~~was saved~~ in my youth have since forsaken the teachings of the Faith which had been handed down by our fathers. The ministers' sermons

deny Thy Virgin Birth, Thy Diety, and the inspiration and trustworthiness of the Holy Scriptures.

"Seldom did anyone come to our humble rest home to cheer us, and when they did, it was not in the Name of Christ."

Here she pauses, and as her ^{sight} ~~eyes~~ drops toward the golden pavement, it seems for a moment as if her frame would shake with a tremendous sob. But she looks back up at the face of her Redeemer, and immediately a heavenly radiance beams from her countenance.

Then from behind the Throne comes a booming voice which is at the same time mellow and tender:

"Lord, I confess that many times as I walked with Thee in Galilee and Judea, I misunderstood Thy will and purposes. I was ambitious for a prominent position in a political, secular, and earthly kingdom. I was weak and presumptuous.

"With deep remorse...I remember...that cold night... when I...denied...Thee...thrice. Yet...after the Resurrection and the Spirit's enduement at Pentecost... I saw and proclaimed thy gospel of saving grace.

"When I think that the strangers and pilgrims on earth enjoy all the light they have today, I am bitterly disappointed at the materialism, commercialism, and debauchery attending Thy birthday now on earth. They give presents to one another, but they will not present their heart and life and gifts to Thee. Merchants appear to be more concerned with ringing their cash registers than with singing the carol of redemption.

"Thy servants neglect our Father's business to work and shop overtime in crowded stores. Christmas parties are often drunken revelries more befitting the pagan orgies of the heathen.

"O Master, how thy heart must bleed and thy Spirit grieve at this ~~deplorable~~ condition!"

Then one known instantly by everyone as Barnabas says "Lord, there is something else that causes us tremendous surprise at Christmas time. It is this. Why have thy children been so slow to tell the glad tidings of thy birth and salvation all around the world When these shepherds heard the gospel from the angels they published it and made it known abroad.

~~We~~ Christians in Jerusalem and Antioch spread the message all over the known world in our generation. Some in the years following continued the missionary pattern started by Paul, Silas, John Mark, Philip, ^{Peter} and but most believers afterwards forgot that every generation is equi-distant from God. And now, so long after the Great Reformation and recent years of spiritual awakening, there are more people than ever in world history who have never heard the good news of thy redeeming grace. We are astounded that they have been so slow to tell the story abroad into the uttermost part of the earth."

"Yes, children," Jesus answers, "all that you have said, and more, is true, and it is indeed a ^{deplorable} lamentable situation.

"But, let us think, rather, of the true remnant now celebrating Christmas in the proper spirit of the season. See, yonder is a congregation gathered in my house to hear my Word. Some are now opening their heart's door to turn from their sin and receive me as their personal Savior. ~~(When the gospel invitation is given, they will hasten to make a public profession of their faith in me.)~~

"Other wayward children are deciding to forsake their disobedient ways and return to the Father's open arms of mercy. Some who have used their time, talents, and possessions for self and earthly concerns, now will surrender their all for God and from henceforth will live with eternity's values in view.

^{Some} ~~Others~~ who have had only lip service in carrying out the Great Commission will now give missions and soul winning priority over everything else as far as their personal influence ~~(and their church)~~ is concerned.

Some young person now answers my call to go where I am calling him to go and says:

"To the regions beyond I must go, I must go,
Where the story has never been told,
To the millions that never have heard of His love,
I must tell the sweet story of old."

"They, one and all, agree that their celebration of Christmas Day on earth shall be as nearly as possible in the same spirit as our Christmas Day in Heaven!"

And everyone said, "Amen"!

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"Yes, children," Jesus answered, "all that you have said, and more, is true, and it is indeed a lamentable situation."

"But, let me think, rather, of the true lamentable situation. We are now celebrating Christmas in the proper spirit of the season. See, yonder is a congregation gathered in my house to hear my Word. Some are now opening their hearts' door to turn from their sin and receive us as their personal Savior. (When the gospel invitation is given, they will hasten to make a public profession of their faith in me.)"

"Other wayward children are deciding to forsake their dissipated ways and return to the Father's open arms of mercy. Some who have used their time, talents, and possessions for self and earthly concerns, now will surrender their all for God and from henceforth will live with eternal values in view."

"Those who have had only lip service in carrying out the Great Commission will now give missions and soul-winning priority over everything else as far as their personal influence (ambition) is concerned. Some young person now answers my call to go where I am calling him to go and says: 'To the regions beyond I must go, I must go, there the story has never been told. To the millions that never have heard of His love, I must tell the sweet story of God.'"

"Now, and all, agree that their celebration of Christmas Day on earth shall be as nearly as possible in the same spirit as our Christmas Day in Heaven!"

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