

believe today in only the things we can see, smell, touch and explain.

When asked "What is real," our age replies, "That which you can put into a test tube or a bank vault or a split-level house."

Martin Luther's comment on Gabriel's greeting "Hail, Mary, full of grace" was: "What can we make of that? A purse full of gold we can understand, but what can we make of the name 'full of grace'?"

By the same token we certainly do not understand even the drama of life: "All the world is a stage and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances and one man in his time plays many parts."

But when the curtain falls and the actors desert the stage, we realize that life is infinitely more than make-believe. There must be a substance and not just a reflection.

Thus we are driven to inquire "What does it all mean?" Is it just enough to have a few symbols to read about this lovely legend, to listen to the grand music and poetry; or is there some interpretation of this glorious fact of Christmas.

I. Christmas reveals God's creation! In the beginning before the world was or even an ear to hear or a mind to understand, God was speaking to Himself in His mind and there was a word.

A certain (university president) had the unusual habit of tipping his hat every time he met a small boy on the street. When asked why, he replied, "I never know but that I may be speaking to a future president of the United States."

This delightful little story suggests the question for each of us at this Christmas time. When you look into the manger of Bethlehem what do you see? What does Christmas mean to you?

This morning I may ask you what is the meaning of Christmas? Is it merely something that puzzles you? You have never discovered the answer nor do you find inspiration in it? Literature sees it as its greatest subject. But however you may regard the babe of Bethlehem, you cannot ignore Him. In the history of the world, did ere the birth of a babe to a peasant woman create such a commotion as in that hour. (Heaven) announced His birth; (humble people) sought and kneeled that night at the cradle; (Wisemen) left their studies to bring gifts to Him. A (tarrant) dispatched his soldiers to destroy Him. Even his mother and foster father wondered at the mystery which surrounded His birth.

For this little baby was (unlike) any other born of woman. Literally, the eternal ages looked down upon him and here we see the dawn of a revelation foretold of His coming. History has been divided by the hour of His birth; men may look upon Him with

speculation, denial, or faith; but as you stand in quietness in the presence of this stable, the invisible hand of God draws back the swaddling clothes of time to reveal as is stated in Isaiah 40:9 "Behold, you God."

Now the most beautiful and complete account of the birth of Jesus is found in the Gospel of Luke. At the same time he gives some great proof for the birth of Jesus. Luke was a historian; Sir William Ramsey, one of the most critical students of Luke's writing, declares "Luke a historian of the first rank! Even where his writings conflict with the official records of the Roman empire, archaeology has confirmed Luke, knowing that the empire's records were either in error or else incomplete."

Luke was a physician--Colossians 4:14--and therefore a scientist. As a physician he would from the beginning be prejudiced against the idea of the virgin birth. There is every reason to believe that Luke talked with Mary herself and that he traced all of these things accurately; that they were not mere superstitious, imaginative ideas as some people have sought to make them. But Luke describes these things and tells us about the story of those he has talked with who were eye witnesses. There were only two--Joseph and Mary--that he could have talked with; you remember in Luke 1:35 "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the highest shall overshadow thee."

It took a miracle and that's exactly the way Luke describes this.

In John 1:14 "So the Word became human and lived a little while among us and we actually saw His glory--the glory of one who is an only son from his father and he was full of spiritual blessing and truth." Christmas must be something more than just a drama for certainly the Bible tells us a great deal. It may seem sort of spectacular when you read about the long journey from Nazereth to Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea and then the unsuccessful quest to find proper shelter for the expectant mother. Then the lowly birth and humble manger, the heavenly choir and the Judean shepherds, the wisemen following the strange star in order to bring gifts to this strange Babe, and finally an old man and woman--Simeon and Anna--seeing the Promised Deliverer of Israel, and the flight into Egypt to escape the wrath of the jumpy King Herod. Of these things we read from the Scripture at Christmas. They have some drama to them.

But on the other hand, here is a revelation, disclosure, the unveiling, the discovery of something that was previously hidden or unknown to us. Here it means the direct exposure and uncovering of the unseen and often times unknown God to the mind and the heart of the individual.

In our age we need to recapture this sense of wonder. We

As you read this long list of people with all their sorrow and sins, with all their sacrifices and disappointments, with all their defeats and despairs, their remorse and rebuffs--all of them marching to Bethlehem and to Christmas. As they march, I say they give us a revelation of God's powerful Redemption.

IV. Christmas reveals God's grace. Now, by grace I mean not merely unmerited favor but measurably more. I mean this voluntary compensation--an outright gift. Grace is thus characterized by God reaching down to help us in every aspect of our life. Furthermore, it is God doing for us what we are unable to do for ourselves. It is at Christmas that we see a manifestation of the tremendous difference that God through Jesus Christ has made and continues to make in our lives. All of which is a revelation of the nature of the grace of God.

There is (no philosophical system) presently known to man that can put any pure reason as to why God should have sent his son to redeem man.

The nature of God's grace is what makes Christmas such a profound revelation. After the Prodigal Son who had taken his money and wasted it finally sat down and came to himself. Said he, "I am no longer worthy."

Indeed! How (correct) he was in his human reason. But that

Then the word was spoken of a meditating between the creator and the creation bringing the world into being and fashioning it. God spoke it into existence and without him was not anything made that was made. The word is an expression of his works. But there are many kinds of works. This world is God's work whereby he speaks out Himself and every night the curtains are rolled away and we see what daylight has hidden. Every morning the curtains of light are drawn again and we look down on a world of sleeping beauty. We observe here the creation. He was in the world, indwelling it. We see this practical value of truth which we learn that in this nature God has made a revelation, and the Bible reveals that Christ, the eternal word, came into this world and assisted in the creation of it. This world as we see, with Christ in his personality, his body, his soul, is a reality of God with us. This is the word that was revealed universally. He came unto his own to be the light that lighteth every man. Through the centuries, Christ's being in the world this was a time that when not in outward form and sound, but through the life of man, God was to speak. The word was made flesh. From that moment the life of a man was God's expression of mind to us. It is not that Jesus proclaimed but what Jesus did--His life, the one perfect word which heard the Creator's voice. In the Old Testament we read of God's speaking in the temple, being the glory of the pillar and the cloud. In the New Testament we read His glorious revelations through his

Son which was to become the light that lighted all men.

II. Christmas reveals the mercy of God. Mercy is certainly a heavenly trait. Some call it compassion. Any proper definition of the term would naturally include the fact of pity, not just emotional pity for mercy (does not end) with feeling sorrowful. We are not to confuse this with mere sentiment; but here is a feeling of compassion that must be made and translated into being or otherwise it becomes full and ineffective.

Mercy is that essential perfection in God whereby He pities and relieves the misery of his creatures. To be sure, this may be seen in connection with the sinful nature man possesses. God, through His loving kindness, fashioned man in his own image, but man in his weakness did that which was evil. God told man that if he sinned he would surely die; man sinned but because of God's unlimitless mercy, he had compassion on man. Human justice would have demanded that man die, but divine mercy intervened and Christmas is a time when we see this mercy in operation. We get a glimpse of the merciful God at work to save man from himself and at Christmas time God sends his mercy.

The quality of mercy is not strained; it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven. It was God's active mercy that dropped upon the world with the birth of Jesus. God visited man and assured him that He did not intend to forget him.

III. Christmas reveals God's redemption. In Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus, he gives a family tree. You can read this account and of course if you meditate upon it, you can scarcely read it without shedding a tear. He puts a lot of sympathy in it, for behold you will discover numerous broken, twisted, sinful lives that come before your mind through those lines.

There walked the aged Abraham--childless. Suddenly he was torn from his home to roam the earth, facing death, and the extinction of his name.

There was Jacob--you remember that he stole Esau's birth-right; he was at enmity with his brother; he had to leave his native land on account of greed.

Behold Tamar--mother of a sinful, ill-gotten child.

There was Rahab--a scarlet woman and prostitute in that line.

There was David--you can see beside his life the gloomy shadow of Uriah's wife as a constant reminder that his character had been blighted at that point and beauty brought low to his kingdom.

to the town and see the circus. The boy rode on horseback and arrived at the cities outskirts and hitched his horse, joined the crowd, and moved toward the downtown section. People lined the sidewalks and enjoyed the festive mood. The boy took his place among them. Presently down the middle of the main street came uniformed policemen, behind them a brass band followed by a group of elephants and other circus animals. Then came the clowns and acrobats and the remaining circus performers. All were stepping to the music of the drums. As the procession ended, the crowd began to hustle away; the boy found his horse and made his way home. Upon his arrival home he handed his father the coin he had been given and his father demanded: "What, didn't you see the circus?" The belated son replied, "Yes, I saw the circus, but I didn't have to pay! It was free! It wasn't even at the fair grounds; it came right down the main street." I'm afraid that there are many of us who like that boy mistake the parade for the main attraction. We too, get lost in the trivial and the trite when we could be enjoying the full, free, three-ring circus.

*God opened a Transiethmos at Bethlehem
lifting Heaven to Earth -
Parsons came Atlantic & Pacific*

We look upon the mob hounding Him to His death; His little brow will someday wear a crown of thornes. His back, now nestled comfortably in the cradle will feel the cutting blows of the cruel lash; His swaddling clothes tenderly placed will give way to mockery of a King's robe. Chubby hands and feet

is only half of the story. Worthy--no! But he found even in his rank of unworthiness he was taken into his father's love and embraced, forgiven, and restored to all the rights and privileges of sonship. This is what God's grace means and what Christmas reveals to us.

God's grace has revealed in the coming of Jesus his tap-roots of Christian virtues.

Paul could never forget the years when he had lead the persecution of the early church. His letters were often referen-ces with instances of lamentations as he recalled those early days. Even amid the tears and the joy that filled his heart, he had assurance that God and Jesus Christ had forgiven him, with that assurance, Paul could lift his sufferings at the hand of his enemies without bitterness toward them. In the very center of his heart was the overwhelming sense of God's grace in Christ.

Paul could never forget Stephen dying or his dying prayer of forgiveness for those who were stoning him.

At Calvary it was God's grace that lead Jesus to pray, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

So it is that at Christmas we have a dynamic revelation of Christian grace which reached down, out and beyond, pure and

sweet, the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but
now am found; was blind but now I see."

V. Christmas reveals God's love There is something else here that I see: "God so loved the world" that he gave. No matter what else we might say about Christmas, it is God's love--that is the one illuminating truth.

A well-known American philosopher sent forth the challenging idea that God is limited. According to this theory there are some things that God and his divine nature cannot do. This one thing I am confident of--God's love knows no bounds; there are absolutely no restrictions, dead-ends, or limits.

There is nothing man can do, has done, or ever will do that could separate himself from the incomparable love of God.

In the human course of events we may understand circumstances causing our children to cease loving us or the affections of a husband and a wife, but not so with the love of God. It was at Christmas that this indescribable love as the word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus Christ clothed with the emblem of eternal meaning came to the midst of human conflict.

This was a great manifestation of God's love, of his spirit through his son, and in Jesus the people of his day saw. We now in spirit realize the warm, tender interest God has in each

that he loved us and sent his son as the salvation for our sins! That's what makes love so amazing, so divine, and demands my life and my soul and my all.

It is not just another event in history; it is history's most decisive event. It is history's most glorious moment; there is a positive disclosure; a definite effort on the part of God to break through and to meet man's needs.

No longer do we need to speculate about God in the dark mysteries of our own imagination. God has been here; God himself has visited us. He who out of love created us for blessing has come to earth. He has loved us through all time and in the fullness of time became one with us in Jesus Christ. Christmas in its most blessed expression is the revelation of God's love.

To be sure the scientific, materialistic, skeptical age such as ours is most difficult for men to understand angels or to hear the heavenly chorus when there are so many man-made space satellites buzzing through the air. But there is the operation of the Holy Spirit as in the Book of Hebrews God resorted to many and various ways to reveal His purposes to man.

Yes, there is something of the spectacular here, but we must not allow the drama to throw us off the trail to see that this was God's revelation.

will be lacerated by the cutting spikes. The heart that now
beats in peaceful slumber will be pierced by a soldier's spear.
He who first lay in the manger will be hanged on a cross.

Thanks be to God that Luke did not end there, for this baby shall be great and called the son of the Highest and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of his father David and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of His kingdom there shall be no end. Luke 1:32-33 (From the cradle to the cross; from the cross to the ^{road from the empty} tomb and the throne. This is the message of Christmas.) This is the revelation with its full meaning. This is what we need to do--come and bow at this manger and behold our God.

Christmas is not merely a spectacle; Christmas is a revelation. At Christmas God laid bare his character, his purpose for mankind. At Christmas we see this vividly portrayed in the quality of his mercy, in the nature of his grace, in the wonderful incomparable love. No! Christmas is not merely spectacle. Christmas, which commemorates the (birth of Jesus) Christ--the (anniversary) of God's visit in the flesh--can never be fully comprehended in such transit terms.

The most wonderful and blessed event is the disclosure and unveiling of the almighty God commands as John says it: "The Word became flesh."

Dec. 23, 1964 New Year Club
Dec. 20, 1964 A.M. Christmas message.