

***“The King in the Manger” (Part 2)***

December 19, 2010

Texts: Luke 2:7; Matthew 2:1-2, 9-10

**In 1965, CBS asked cartoonist Charles Shultz to produce a Christmas special, featuring his Peanuts characters.**

Schultz was a “secular humanist” (not a Xn), but he insisted that the program be about Charlie Brown’s search for the true meaning of Christmas, and that it include a direct quotation from The Bible.

The animated film was completed just 1 week before it was scheduled to be aired.

If CBS officials could have, they’d have cancelled the show when they discovered that one of the characters—Linus—says the true meaning of Christmas is found in Jesus’ birth, & reads the account of it in Lk 2:8-14.

CBS would have cancelled the show for that reason, but they didn’t have enough time left to replace it with something else.

**In the US today, X has been all but removed from Christmas.**

For the vast majority of Americans, Christmas has become a commercial event with no religious significance.

Santa is just a salesman in a red suit, who began by promoting eastern department stores and selling Coca Cola, but will now sell anything.

On TV Jesus has been crowded out of Christmas by the likes of:

Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, Frosty the Snowman, The Grinch Who Stole Christmas, *The Dog Who Saved Christmas*, The Nutcracker Suite, Charles Dickens' *The Christmas Carol*, & the complete list of usurpers goes on/on.

Christmas in our society has become a secular holiday having to do with family, good feelings, and comfortable winter traditions.

But public mention of the word “Christ”, from which “Christmas” is derived, is virtually forbidden.

The use of His name is so objectionable to many, that what was once referred to as “Christmas Vacation” is now called “Winter Vacation” (a celebration of the weather!).

Calling it “Christmas Vacation” seems to threaten the “separation of church/state”=> a legal principle invented by Thomas Jefferson (not found in the Constitution) that, in practice, has unofficially come to mean government suppression of the Xn religion.

City officials everywhere, threatened by the ACLU, routinely outlaw Nativity scenes, because of this principle.

Even “Christmas trees” are called “Xmas Trees”—“Christ” being the only word in the English language considered so dangerously inflammatory/divisive that it must be replaced with an “X.”

**This hostility toward Christ at Christmas started out as mere indifference, when Joseph/Mary were given no room in the inn, despite Mary's full-term pregnancy.**

As we saw last Sunday, God had sovereignly planned for X's birth in a stable to introduce His Son to mankind as the Savior of the humble, the poor, and the sinful.

But for man's part, selfish/heartless indifference was the cause of Mary's being left in the stable to have her Baby.

**In this world there have always been two kinds of people=>**

\* The unbelieving majority, which has no room for Jesus at all, just as there was no room for Him in the inn.

Behind their indifference toward X, there's often a covert hostility.

\* The believing minority, who seek Him and worship Him, just as the Magi did that first Christmas.

From the very beginning, Jesus X has always been a very provocative figure.

By His very nature, He provokes people either to love Him (as the Magi did);

Or to hate Him (as the unbelieving world does).

That's the way it has always been—even when He was a Baby, before He could say/do anything.

**This morning let's consider these 2 groups more carefully=>**

\* **The Unbelieving Majority**

There has never been room for Jesus among unbelievers.

This becomes evident as you examine the places where their influence is felt most.

So let's examine 4 of those places=>

***1<sup>st</sup>, Jesus finds no room in the inn of public discourse today.***

The “inn” we read about Luke 2, wasn't a 1<sup>st</sup> century hotel, but a village guest house, or the upstairs level of a private home, a semi-public place.

The same word, *kataluma*, is used of the Upper Room where Jesus/His-disciples celebrated the Last Supper. An inn was any place of temporary (even hourly) occupancy.

“Inns” were places where public discourse occurred, as people in transit shared their thoughts/views in passing—just as they might today in a coffee-shop/barber-shop/park-bench.

The point is, that Jesus' claim to be Messiah, the Son of God, was seldom given serious consideration in public/private conversations at such places during His own time, & it still isn't today.

Talking publicly about the things of X may get you the cold shoulder treatment.

As one lady told me, “We're guaranteed freedom from religion in this country, so leave me alone!”

There is free toleration of everything but Jesus.

You can make any foolish/fanciful/outlandish statement in public, and someone will usually give you a serious hearing, esp. here in Sedona.

They'll sit entranced as you describe your aura, the flow of spiritual energy in a room, the power of crystals to heal gout, or aliens who planted life-seeds in the ocean that have evolved into the human race.

There's room for swearing, dirty-jokes, slander, politics, or anything else you might want to discuss;

But, mention Jesus, & you'll be shunned as a religious fanatic/fool, whose words cause people to roll their eyes.

Say something like, "Jesus came to earth to save you from your sin," & you'll find there's still no room for Him (nor you) even when there's room for anything/everything else.

If we Xns hold our tongues and remain silent about X, we leave sinners to perish in hell, but the world will say=>

"Ah, now your behavior has become acceptable to us."

We'll know in our own conscience that we're denying our Lord/Savior, so that's not even an option for us.

Thus we are to speak up for Him, joining Him outside the camp of public discourse/opinion, bearing His reproach (Heb 13:13).

***2<sup>nd</sup>, there is no room for Jesus in the halls of government.***

King Herod certainly had no room for Christ in his palace.

When the Magi went to Jerusalem, and asked where the King of the Jews was to be born, word of it got back to Herod, & all of Jerusalem became troubled.

They knew what he was capable of, when he felt his position/power were threatened.

And they were right=> He killed all the baby boys in Bethlehem, trying to eliminate any possible rivals.

There's an inherent antagonism between X and the rulers of this world in general, because their perspectives are so opposite from His.

\* X came in simplicity/humility, proclaiming a Kingdom in which the last will be first, and the first will be last. They seek grandeur/pomp/self-aggrandizement (i.e., to be first themselves).

\* X came in humility of mind, regarding others as more important than Himself; They are ambitious politicians, who rule 1<sup>st</sup> /foremost to get reelected & secure their own positions.

\* X is the Prince of Peace who will use His power to establish a Kingdom of righteousness on earth. They use their power to promote such unrighteous and godless ideals as gay-rights/abortion and the government's domination of people's lives.

The representatives of men, in Congress, will always exclude and override God's Representative (Jesus X), & His divine will. There was no room for Him in the inn, & there will never be room for Him in the halls of government power. As Psa 2:3 says, rulers will always take counsel together against God and against His Anointed, intent on tearing apart their fetters & ruling as they themselves see fit, whether God likes it or not.

***3<sup>rd</sup>, there's no room for Jesus in most schools.***

There should be, because Jesus was a great Teacher/Philosopher. Even at the age of 12, He amazed the rabbis in the Temple with the depth/breadth of His understanding.

But students of Plato/Aristotle, a/w/a those in the Stoic/Epicurean schools either ignored Him, or tried to reinterpret His words in view of Greek philosophy.

There is still very little room for X, in colleges/universities today.

Their humanistic teaching has caused far more students to doubt that He is who He claimed than to believe Him.

The 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup>-century Protestant rationalists of many European universities pictured Jesus as an intelligent and well-meaning human, but nothing more, certainly not God's only-begotten Son, or the Incarnation of God in human flesh.

That view has come to dominate liberal churches;

***4<sup>th</sup>, there's little room for the real Jesus in many churches.***

Due to the influence of academia, much of the contemporary church has all but excluded the X of the Bible.

That shouldn't surprise us, since it was the religious establishment of Jesus' own day that put Him to death, shouting, "*Not this man, but Barabbas*" (Jn 18:40).

And it was the Roman Church that ordered the Inquisition, tried to kill Martin Luther, and burned English Protestants to death at Smithfield during Bloody Mary's reign (England's Catholic queen).

Today, there is even little room for Jesus in much of the Evangelical Church as well.

It says that Jesus taught about love, but little else that's really relevant.

There's absolutely no place for the Jesus who taught ideas like those we find in Lk 13:5=>

*"I tell you... unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."*

Or like those we find in Mt 16:24-25, where Jesus said=>

*"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. / For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it"*

Today if one Xn says to another, "Let's talk about the perfect deity/manhood of Jesus; Or about His righteous life and finished work on the cross; Or about His immanent return."

The answer might be, “Why? We’re not in church! What are you trying to prove?”

The unbelieving world—including worldly “Xns”—has never had room for X.

\* **The Believing Minority** (the other/*smaller* half of the world)

**The reason there’s no room for Jesus in serious public discourse, the halls of government, most schools & many churches, is that there’s no room for Him in non-believers’ hearts.**

But now we come to a group of men whose hearts were wide open to Jesus, even when He was still a Baby.

[**Matt 2:1-2, 9-10**]—“*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, / ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His **star** in the east, and have come to **worship** Him’.... / [Verse 9] And having heard the king [Herod], they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. / And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly w/ great joy.*”

**As we consider the actions of the wise men, we discover what made them wise—four aspects of true wisdom=>**

\* *1<sup>st</sup>, the wise men were wise, because they knew what they were looking for.*

They didn’t content themselves with just looking at a star.

They weren’t star-gazers, or astronomers who merely wanted to learn about stars in general.

They said=> *“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star.”*

In their view, the star was merely a means to find the King, so they could worship Him.

Having spotted the star, they immediately set out from the East to find the King, to whom they knew the star would lead them.

There have been times when I’ve preached on some wonderful/profound passage of Scripture containing precious/eternal truths.

Afterward, someone whose soul could have been saved by a proper response to that passage has said, “I liked the story you told at the beginning of your sermon.”

He saw the star, but completely missed the Savior/King to whom the star was supposed to point.

His soul may perish as he toys w/ intellectual bobbles/candy-sticks.

I have no desire to be well known as a preacher, but I fervently desire to learn how to preach in such a way that people leave here saying, “He talked about a Savior and about salvation, and I must have what he was talking about! “I’m going to seek Jesus until I find Him for myself.”

\* Some of you have been listening to—possibly toying with—the gospel for far too long without acting on it.

It's time to stop star-gazing, & to earnestly seek Jesus, as the Magi did.

\* Others are living half-hearted Xn lives, walking as far from the Lord as you think you dare.

The wise men took decisive action to get closer to the Christ-child, & it's time for you to do the same.

\* Still others have long worshiped Him, and I hope that the result of our time together this morning will be that you worship Him w/ even deeper reverence/love.

\* *2<sup>nd</sup>, the wise men persevered.*

One characteristic of a spiritually wise person is that he commits himself to the right goals, & pursues them tenaciously.

The Magi certainly did, continuing their westward journey for hundreds of miles across rivers and deserts, despite the danger of robbers/hostile-tribes.

When they got to Jerusalem, and asked where the King of the Jews had been born, no one seemed to know/care.

The chief-priests/scribes told Herod of Micah's prophecy that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, but they themselves weren't interested enough to travel the few miles to Bethlehem, & find out if He had come.

It's very strange that the leaders of Judaism showed so little interest in their own Messiah.

The wise men could have packed up and left, assuming the whole journey from the East had been a colossal mistake.

Instead, they persevered on, determined to leave no stone unturned until they had found the infant King.

If you are a wise person, and really believe that whether you will spend eternity in either heaven or hell, depends on whether/not you form a personal/saving relationship with Jesus X, nothing on earth will deter you from finding Him. Your attitude will be, “Even if no one else goes with me, I am going to find Jesus.”

That’s what Jesus Himself meant when He said=>

*“The gospel of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it” (Lk 16:16).*

I.e., the Kingdom of God presses ahead relentlessly, and the relentless won’t let anything stop them from pressing their way into it.

The Good News is, if you’re that determined to find Jesus, He is even more determined to be found by you.

**\* 3<sup>rd</sup>, *the wise men understood the value of what they sought.***

This is made clear by the fact that they left all their other pursuits in order to discover the location marked by the star.

Who would take care of their responsibilities back home?

Who would take care of their families?

Those things, though important, weren’t as important as following a star to the King, who is the desire of all nations.

They had seen His star in the East, and had traveled in the direction from which it had appeared to them.

But then it had disappeared, and they didn't see it again until after their meeting with Herod.

Now it was back up there in the night-sky, leading them right to the place where Christ had been born.

Mt 2:10=> *“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.”*

They rejoiced because they knew the value of what they were about to find, directly below that star.

If men knew the true value of the gospel, they'd rejoice over it.

They'd feel far more joy over finding the Lord than they do when their home-team wins the game, their candidate wins the election, or they get a big Christmas bonus at work.

Without Jesus, there is only darkness, hopelessness, and vexation of spirit.

Finding Him is finding light/life for one's eternal soul.

The Magi weren't satisfied with finding the house where the Christ-child was laying.

They didn't stand outside, contemplating the house, saying, “We've found the place, and now we can go home.”

The importance of the house/star had become secondary, because they were about to discover what they'd really come to see=>

the One who was born King of the Jews.

They lifted the latch, went inside, and witnessed the miracle of the Incarnation of God as a tiny human being.

\*\* 2 Cor 4:6=> *“God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”*

That’s the light the Magi really wanted to see, and when they saw it, they rejoiced/worshiped.

If you too understand the true value of that light which can shine in your heart, and thus pursue it relentlessly until you find it to the saving of your soul, you too are a very wise person, who has come to understand/believe that=>

\* Jesus was born that you might be born again.

\* He lived so that you might find the light of life.

\* He died so you might die to sin, & escape its deadly tyranny.

\* He rose to live again in order to make intercession for sinners, that we might be reconciled to God thru Him.

So come and find these remarkably valuable treasures in Jesus, by seeking Him and seeking from Him the forgiveness of your sins.

Q: Would you be willing to take the whole day off tomorrow, if necessary, in order to seek Him as your own personal Savior/Redeemer?

If you had to take a whole week to do so, but at the end of this week you could enjoy a confidence by Christmas day that you had found Jesus and saved your soul for all eternity, would it not have been time well spent?

Q: If your house were uninsured against fire, you'd take that time off to get it insured;

But your soul isn't insured against hell unless you've entrusted it to Jesus X.

What a tragedy it would be for you to start out to seek Jesus, the King who gives the treasure of life, then to let yourself become distracted/discouraged/dissuaded from doing so before you actually found Him.

*\* 4<sup>th</sup>, the wise men were wise because, when they saw Jesus, they worshiped Him.*

Mt 2:11 says that, having entered the house and seen this Child who was to be the King of the Jews, “[the Magi] *fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold & frankincense & myrrh.*”

They hadn't come simply to satisfy their curiosity.

They'd come to see/worship God's King.

Looking at Jesus, they saw the infinite in the Infant, & the majesty/radiance of God's own glory, in the Baby's face.

Do you see that?

If so, you see in Him more than the unbelieving do, and it's only because God has given you the spiritual eyes to see it.

Look at Jesus in that manger, humble/poor/sinless, having come to earth as perfect man, & yet perfect God, so that He can save men/women—you!

I wish you would join with the Magi, & join with the shepherds, worshiping Him for the great sacrifice He made on your behalf.

They all demonstrated great wisdom in doing so; Now it's your turn to follow their example if you haven't done so.

We too must worship Him, if we are to be saved.

If you've never truly done so in the past, adore Him now. You must, because He is "God over all, blessed forever, amen."

Again, the wise-men demonstrated their wisdom, in that when they worshiped Jesus, they didn't do so empty-handed. Their worship wasn't merely lip-service, just saying, "Jesus, I love You."

Nor was their worship simply a self-centered attempt to stir up pleasant emotions, or feel good about themselves. They worshiped Him out of the sober understanding that He was an eternal treasure, sent into the world, by God.

Ask yourself, “What would the Lord have me give Him, so that my worship isn’t a cheap/discount imitation of the worship offered by the Magi?

“How can I best express to Him my adoration?”

They offered the best they had—gold/frankincense/myrrh.

But in reality, the Magi were offering themselves to the King, knowing that He judges our hearts and our worship by the genuineness of our love for Him.

Is there a sincere love for Jesus X in your heart, compelling you give Him your best=> your heart/life?

If so, bow your heart before Him in adoration.

If not, admit to yourself that you’ve actually been part of the unbelieving majority that has no room for Him at all.

Ask His forgiveness, and give yourself to Him.