

The Worship of Christ

By

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“We have come to worship Him.” — The wise men, Matthew 2:2.

There is no Christ Child. This is no catch phrase; I am dead serious. To worship Christ as a child, as “the Christmas Child,” the “Christ Child” or “the Babe of Bethlehem” is to fail to worship the Christ that **IS**.

Christ’s life on earth was profoundly human. Mary, a pregnant teen-ager without a husband, was the target of gossip and ridicule. The stable was cold, dark and dirty. From birth to death, Jesus was real flesh and blood, facing all the painful realities of life as a human being.

But, in order to avoid reality, we take the events and tidy them up. Mary, the weary bedraggled teen-ager, is now the dignified and celebrated Madonna. The stinking stable is sterilized, pine-scented and made into a beautiful setting. The whole scene is turned into a melodrama, a kind of-sideshow, a once-a-year attraction to conjure up sentimental thoughts for pagan observance.

Consider the way it was. Christ did not enter the world as an angel, nor as a supernatural being, nor as the mere extension of God’s spirit. “The word became flesh.” (John 1:14). At a certain point in history — (“in the fullness of time”) — Christ came into the world as a human being. He entered the world as man for the specific purpose of giving His life to meet the penalty for sin. He said that He would give His flesh for the life of the world (John 6:51). His mortal life of some 33 years was a one-time event. It will never happen again. “But now once at the end of the ages has He been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26).

There was reality to Jesus as a baby. He was an actual person. As babies grow, so did Jesus, and He can no more return to infancy than can you or I. He entered the stream of humanity for the purpose of dying as a man for man’s sin and, that accomplished He arose from the dead and took His rightful place of authority in Heaven. As a baby in the manger Jesus was God in the flesh, but He had no power in saving us from sin and its penalty (death) until He himself had tasted death, not as a child, but as the man, Christ Jesus, fully committing himself to the judgment of God in death.

Perhaps many people like to keep Christ in the manger in order not to have to face the fact of sin for which He died. Subconsciously there is an ever present reluctance on the part of most people to confront the real living Christ. In much modern religion the object of worship has been transferred from Christ to the church itself. Sermon after sermon is preached to set forth what the church is doing or should do or what you can and should

do for the church. Vast efforts are made to gain support for “the church”. The gospel has become only the means of initiation into the church. Members are drilled in the importance of “loyalty” to the church and urged to serve the church and to center their activities in the church. Worship is church-centered rather than God-centered. Attendance at the morning church service is the measure of Christian success. Churches compete for attendance and members are dubbed “faithful” for helping attain attendance records.

Under such emphasis, worship becomes passive. It is all done FOR the people through the program of the church; the performance of the choir, the carefully planned execution of the service by the preacher and assistants, by the stained glass atmosphere and the overall “religious” smell of the whole thing. One may go through the whole routine without applying his mind to the adoration of Christ, and yet go home feeling that he has been to church worship. Sadly we must concede that too often this is exactly what it is - church worship - the worship of the church and not the worship of Jesus Christ.

True worship — worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24) — does not mean a mysterious exercise of emotion, but rather an intelligent adoration with a knowledge of the truth about the one we worship. An example is offered by the wise men. Although Jesus was still a baby when they came to worship Him, the gifts which they brought indicated that they were expressing their adoration for His true purpose and position in the world: gold represented the richest gift as they understood Jesus to be the richest gift ever made to man; frankincense was a purifier and represented purity. While we generally associate babies with innocence, there was special significance to the purity of Jesus, for it was necessary that He remain totally pure throughout His life in order to be sinless man dying for man’s sin. Myrrh was a burial spice, certainly an uncommon gift at a baby shower.

But the wise men knew the truth about Jesus that He was born into the world for the purpose of dying. Thus they came to worship Him by recognizing His true position, His worth and His purpose - that Christ is Savior, that He is King and that He is God. Even lying in His crib only a few weeks old, men who worshipped in spirit and in truth did not worship Him merely as the “Christ Child.” They worshipped Him as God.

Why do we keep Him in the crib? Why do we revert back to Him each year as a baby? It is almost as if the world cannot tolerate a God who is more than one year old, so it keeps putting Him back in the manger. Children grow up to know Jesus as the baby adored by ancient shepherds and animals, and as the recipient of mysterious gifts. Their earliest recollection of Christ associated Him with the fantasies of childhood such as Santa Claus, Rudolph and the reindeer, and all the rest of traditional make-believe.

We celebrate the birthdays of great men not by displaying their baby pictures, but by portraying them at the height of their maturity and by calling to remembrance their greatest accomplishments. Why keep Jesus in the Cradle? Is it because man does not want to face the reality of Christ? Is it because we do not want to face the fact of sin and the necessity of repentance? It is much easier to face Christ as a child than as the Judge and Executioner. The historical meaning of “advent” referred to Christ’s second coming, the day when He will come back to this world, not as an infant, but as Lord of Lords, to

judge those who would not have Him as Lord of their lives. Then men must bow not before a cradle but before a throne. Unbelievers will not face Him in a peaceful stable, but in a terrible Judgment.

The worship of Christ must be worship of Christ as He is. He is not the baby in the manger. He is not even the Christ on the cross. But He is the one who has already accomplished the sacrifice for sin, has been raised from the dead and today lives as Lord of heaven and earth. "But He, when He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; henceforth expecting until His enemies be made the footstool of His feet" (Heb. 10:12, 13). It is this reality of an event that is history which constitutes the gospel. Now, to realize this and to put one's faith in it is nothing less than the Christian faith, that which separates a Christian from the world, for this is the point of separation, that a Christian takes God seriously.

But how can one be considered serious in worshipping Christ as a child when He is not a child? Or how can one be considered serious when he talks about Christ' coming every year, or that the meaning of Christianity is revealed in good will, tolerance of everything and everybody, as if a hearty "ho-ho-ho" covers our transgressions and makes us right with God? The reason for Christ's coming was just the opposite: God is not tolerant toward sin and sinful man, and sent Christ into the world that sin might receive its just punishment in Him (Rom. 8:3).

Therefore, worship, to be in spirit and in truth, must be worship of Christ in the historic setting encompassing not only His entrance into the world through a virgin and His death as a man for sin, but the fact that He, resurrected from the dead and made immortal, is the living King under whose feet all things must be subjected. That includes you and me. Then here is where we get the meaning of Christ: we are subject to Him. So far from being a baby in a cradle, helpless and dependent upon His peers, Christ is the one on the throne, and we come to Him, helpless and dependent upon Him. Christ no longer lies in a cow shed. He ascended on high, glorified, immortal and now is seated in the place of God's power.

It is the reality of Christ that the world evades. His sovereign power is unmentionable in the cabals of the socialists. In their plots to take over and make over all society, they dare not recognize that a power exists higher than the State, and that individuals are subject to Christ rather than to the representative from H.E.W. Most educators shun the King like the plague. Permissive-ism, experimental-ism and the new ethics cannot co-exist with the Sovereign One.

To face truth means we face ourselves as sinners, condemned except for the intervention of Christ. It means to face judgment to come as well as the commands of God to be obeyed in our daily living; so, to worship Christ is to come before Him aware of all these facts, understanding the magnitude of His mission to the world and submitting ourselves to Him as our only Lord and King. Such worship must not be dependent upon the atmosphere created by the professional clergy, nor dependent upon the architecture or the programming of the church; it is not the enjoyment of a "season" or the spirit of it the

community - is bowing down before Christ as God, as the Lord of Lords, and as the Lord of our lives. It is facing Him now, rather than fearing Him in the Day of Judgment. It is focusing our minds and our activities on this one thing, the eternal purpose of God as revealed by Christ Jesus. It is joining with other citizens of the kingdom — members of the church — not to serve and worship the church, but to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and to give our complete attention and allegiance to our creator “who is blessed forever” (Rom. 1:25). “*We have come to worship Him.*”

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