

The most stunning event in history ... that's what I called Christmas last week. Why? ... because God entered into world history, in the flesh, in real time.

I believe there is a yearning in the human heart to know that we are here, not as accidents or after thoughts – that we are here on purpose, for goodness' sake. If this Creator is all loving (as they say) we really want Him to know where we live, to know our names. If He really cares, then we want to know that He has “walked this lonesome valley” the same way we do. We want to know that we are not alone in the universe! And I contend that until we know these things our lives remain unsettled.

That is why Christmas is so stunning and so important. Christmas celebrations too often obscure the astounding truth that the Creator of the universe has cared enough to become one of us in the babe born in Bethlehem. I mean, many times in history babies have become kings, but this is the only time a king has become a baby!

The amazing occurrence really began nine months earlier when an angel of the Lord visited Mary with the news that she'd been chosen by God to give birth to the Messiah. The Bible (Luke 1) tells how Mary went to visit her relative Elizabeth, who was herself pregnant with John the Baptist. When Elizabeth saw Mary, she greeted her with these famous words, *Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!* Luke 1:42. When Mary heard those confirming words, she broke out into song; the words we read in Luke 1:46-55. The song has traditionally been called “the Magnificat,” from the first word of the Latin version: “magnify.” For 2,000 years it has been sung by Christians all over the world as part of Christian worship. I guess we could call it the world's first Christmas carol.

The Magnificat is astounding in itself, for it reveals God's intentions for humanity ... intentions that are, in a sense, revolutionary, for they upend the human ways of leadership, relationships, and governance. I encourage you to read those verses again, yourself, and reflect on what is happening in our world today.

God-With-Us, Christ Jesus, fully human and fully divine, brought us salvation from our sins – just as His name, Jesus, implies. And here's the revolutionary result: genuinely forgiven people make better people, and better people make a better world. Whenever Christ has entered in a people and society, the seeds of moral, social, and economic improvement are sown. God in the flesh engenders real time, in the flesh, positive changes in our lives.

Whenever the gospel has entered a society and made an impact on a significant group of people, it has always had the effect of lifting those people up economically. That happened in England with the Wesleyan movement. At Wesley's headquarters in London, called the Foundry - because that's what it had been, a factory making cannons – job skills and stewardship practices were taught along with Bible and Christian doctrine.

How does it happen? Just look at the stories right in our own backyard. The Mission at Kern tells of Tyler, Catherine, Alison who abused alcohol and drugs for years, abandoned or abused their families and friends. They lived on public assistance and handouts for years. But when they came to Christ, they got saved from those

addictions and got a new purpose in life. That new purpose gave them a new desire. And out of that new desire, they got their lives together, got a job, found a home and became productive citizens. Their story is repeated around the globe, with those who are down and out and who find new life in Christ.

So it is that the gospel makes better people and better people make a better world. The gospel not only works an inner transformation; it also works an outward transformation that literally changes the way people think and talk and act. And in the process, it produces the qualities that tend toward economic progress.

But please, do not mistake the Magnificat as a call to human progress lifted from the Bible to implement as a political program, shorn of the rest of the Gospel vision. We cannot forget that the Savior began His call with “Repent! And believe in the Gospel.” He is the embodiment of the Holy God of Israel and the prophets. Any program or cause is a lesser god; a counterfeit god. A gospel without a call to repentance for us sinners, is a gospel that is emptied of the heart of the real thing. It produces only a vacuous variety of faith – that makes no demands for change within each of us, whether rich and powerful or poor and powerless.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only hope for humanity — for the soul *and* for the body, for the church *and* for the world, for the individual *and* for society. When the gospel makes headway in society, there you will find more peace, more tranquility and (ultimately) more prosperity.

### **Don't Read This In Public**

Besides being the very first Christmas carol, the Magnificat is one of the most profound documents ever written. Dr. E. Stanley Jones, the great Methodist scholar, author and evangelist, said that the Magnificat was “the most revolutionary document in the history of the world.” That’s quite a statement to make, isn’t it? But consider this. Years before Dr. Jones made that statement, William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury, instructed his missionaries to India never to read the Magnificat in public when unbelievers were present. Why? Because in a country like India with all its poverty, and rigid caste system, this portion of Scripture, if taken out of context, would cause nothing but trouble. (Ex. Introduction of the gospel to Tonga).

Here’s the reason: Mary’s song teaches us that God doesn’t suffer gladly the proud. He doesn’t run with the rulers of the world. He doesn’t come to the people who think they’ve got it made. God is at home with the humble, the tired, the weak, the hurting, the handicapped, the deaf, the blind, the lame, the feeble, and the lowly of this world. God comes to those who revere His name.

Bible scholar William Barclay says: “There is loveliness in the Magnificat, but in that loveliness there is dynamite. Christianity begets a revolution in each man and revolution in the world.” It’s lovely dynamite.

### **God Remembers**

Each of the two stanzas of Mary’s song conclude with a reference to God’s mercy, maybe like the refrain of the song: *His mercy extends to those who fear Him* (vs. 50). *He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful* (vs. 54). That’s a wonderful way to put it. God remembered to be merciful – and so He sent His only Son.

**Aren't you glad that God remembered to send his Son? Where would we be if Jesus had not come?**

**What God began in Bethlehem is far greater than the English Revolution, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Russian Revolution. What God started in Bethlehem was a spiritual and moral and economic revolution whose effects are still being felt today. Nothing in all history can match what God did when He sent His Son to the earth.**

**Do you know what Christmas really is? Christmas is God's war against the principalities and powers of the world. When you set up a manger scene on a table at home, you're setting up a powerful symbol. Every time we sing a Christmas carol, we're singing a revolutionary anthem. Every time you send out a Christmas card—if it makes any reference to Jesus at all—you are sending out revolutionary literature.**

**And the tragic irony of it all is that the secularists who want to ban references to Christmas and to Jesus from public schools and the public square understand the meaning of Christmas better than we do. Outside these doors at Christmastime the battle is raging. Jesus started a war against Satan and his kingdom, a war that goes on all around us day and night, a war in which men and women are the spoils of battle. Whose side are you on? When you celebrate Christmas, you are turning the secular values of the world upside down—just like Mary talked about in the Magnificat. Even before her the Psalms gave the same message: *The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet,'* Psalm 110:1. The enemies of God are made Jesus' footstool.**

**Name all the great human leaders you can think of... Which of them would you mention in the same breath with Jesus? Would you consider them a living presence or enter eternity with their names on your lips? Jesus Christ is the one who addresses us and is addressed by us and in whose name we pray.**

**Since He came, the world has never been the same. His revolution continues. God remembers.**

**Jesus Christ, our Captain in this spiritual battle, enlivens our flesh and blood in His cause. He calls to those who will rally to His cause, take up his banner, and bring others to Him. Friends, the future belongs to Him!**

**Today and every day His call is the same: "Come to me and find rest and then power as we change the world together."**

**Christ our Lord left us a tangible, flesh and blood, sign to remind us of His sacrificial leadership and His continued presence in our flesh and blood lives. His life-changing, life-giving power flows through us.**

**Let us come to His table this morning, take Him into ourselves, and begin this new year saying:**

***My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, Luke 1:47.***