

## **Christmas in the Rear View Mirror**

### **Luke 2:20; Matthew 2:12**

Luke 2:20 (NKJV) 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

Matthew 2:12 (NKJV) 12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

Have you ever noticed that as you pass something in your car that in the rear view mirror the item quickly diminishes from sight. As a matter of fact, the passenger side mirror is even worse. So bad is it that most of them have printed on them this phrase, “objects are closer than they appear.” It is because the mirror is convex to allow us to see more than we would with a regular mirror.

And as we look in the mirror at the Christmas season, there are two things we need to know. First Christmas is closer than it appears. And that it will quickly recede from view in proportion to how fast we are traveling.

But many are glad that it is over, Christmas that is. I remember back when I used to work at Kmart, let me tell you I was glad when it was over. But then there was the week of returns and continuous price checks.

When I was a kid I never thought about it too much. We had our new toys to keep us occupied and we didn't have to do any of the preparation or the clean-up. So we transitioned pretty well.

But today there is a sort of sadness when I see the days after Christmas. As early as the retailers put up the Christmas decorations they will now take them down. It is time to move on to the next marketing ploy.

And even in many homes that are nominally Christian the same thing will happen. Now they will try to figure out how to pay for the excesses of the holiday and the doldrums of sunless January will be upon us.

But today I would encourage your hearts to continue in Jesus Christ and to grow in Him this coming year. So please notice these things.

- I. As things get farther and farther away they seem smaller and smaller.
  - A. From the moon the earth is just a round blue ball, but for those observing it there is nothing more significant.
    1. But on the return flight the earth grows in size until it is all that we can see.
    2. Without it they could not survive, their lives would end.
    3. Jesus does not shrink into insignificance in the 11 months between Decembers.
  - B. I am sure that the shepherds went back to their work, they had little other choices.
    1. But do you suppose they went back unchanged.

2. I doubt that, for once God enters your life He remains a major part of it.
- C. And we are told that the Magi returned to their own country.
1. But do you suppose they were ever quite the same as they had been.
  2. I think not.
  3. Everyone that is saved is saved by grace through faith.
  4. They had believed all that God had revealed to them.
  5. Like Abraham their faith was accounted to them for righteousness.
  6. When they came to see the child they were wise men, but when they returned they had some of the wisdom of God.
- II. Jesus is to have more than a temporary affect on people's lives.
- A. If for the shepherds this was only a temporary event in their lives then it did them no good.
- B. That is why Jesus employs terms like born again to describe the change that takes place.
1. The change that Jesus makes in a person's life is so dramatic that it is referred to as being born again.
  2. Risen from the dead.
  3. It is a life change event.
  4. Many Christmas worshipers have never come down that road.
  5. They have embraced the season and the wrappings and the lights and the music of Christmas, but never the Savior who is Christ the Lord.
- III. With Christmas the business world begins today to work on next year's Christmas.
- A. Soon Christmas shopping will start in July.
- B. They are stuck in a cycle that always takes them back to the beginning.
1. But they cannot get beyond it.
  2. It is because Christmas for them is not the beginning but the end of a season.
  3. It is not to door into a life of faith and obedience but the place where you hit the reset button and start the process over and over again.
  4. Many people never get past the babe in the manger.
  5. They do not see the suffering servant that we read of in our responsive reading today.

6. It is like those encyclopedias that we used to buy at the super market.
  - a. You got the first one for only \$1.50.
  - b. And then you were supposed to add a new volume each week until you owned the whole set.
  - c. I don't know how many encyclopedias I had just the first volume of. That is why I don't know anything past the A's.
7. Many so called Christians has a whole set of the first volumes of Christmas but they have never been interested enough to get the rest of the set.
8. But next year they will add that Christmas volume to the 30 or 40 ones they already have.

IV. We are meant to move higher, further, closer, more faith, more dedication.

- A. 2 Peter 3:17-18 (NKJV) 17 You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.
- B. Ps 92:12 — The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
  1. Years ago we had a willow tree in our yard that had grown beyond our intentions.
  2. Eventually it was diseased and died.
  3. So we bought one at the store about three years ago.
  4. It is the slowest growing tree that I have.
  5. I have oak trees that are going to catch it if it doesn't hurry.
  6. Christians are meant to grow like the might cedar tree, tall and strong, not like my wimpy willow tree.
- C. Eph 4:15 — but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--
  1. In that passage you see that all that God has done for us is so that we might grow in Christ.
  2. His desire for us is to be more spiritually mature.
  3. He wants us to be like His son. Romans 8:29 (NKJV) 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be **conformed to the image of His Son**, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.
- D. Col 1:10 — that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being

fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

1. The purpose of our growth is not for ourselves but for the work of God.
2. **walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him**
3. **being fruitful in every good work**
4. **increasing in the knowledge of God**

E. 2Th 1:3 — We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,

1. That we might grow in faith.
2. And the love of everyone of us all abounds toward each other.