

## **RED DROPS ON WHITE SNOW**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

My message this evening has a very unusual title. It came to me as I was praying about this service. Red Drops on White Snow.

Probably every one of us has seen or has received a Christmas card that had some snowy, wintry, rural scene on it. Aren't you glad to be living in southern California where the temperature tomorrow will be 88 degrees? Many of us of course has spent Christmases where there has been snow. We've not only dreamt of a white Christmas but we've experienced it.

I visualize a scene of coming through the woods and there's a clearing and then there is a cabin. It's nighttime and there is snow all on the ground and there is deep snow on the sloped roof of the cabin. There are the beautiful, real snow capped evergreen trees. There is a porch that seems to invite you into the cabin. It all seems like such a peaceful and beautiful Christmas scene. Just like we imagine Christmas to be if we had our idyllic Christmas. It would be something maybe like that.

But as I look closely on the snow, as in my mind's eye I begin walking up to the cabin, I notice that there is a stark reality about the scene that at first flush I had not picked up. For a moment when I had first seen it everything looked peaceful, serene, beautiful, quiet. But now my eyes picked up on the ground – the drops of red on the snow – which witnessed to me that that night some living thing had passed that way and had been hurt, had been in danger, had perhaps been mortally wounded. The peace of that pastoral winter Christmas setting had suddenly been shattered by the awesomeness that blood was on the snow.

I think probably that tells me more about the real meaning of Christmas than anything I have ever encountered. The angels bring the word to the shepherds "Unto you is born this day in the city of David..." Everything up to that moment is pastoral. It's beautiful and we envision the bells of Bethlehem. Everything is quiet and peaceful. But the angel narrative says "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior..." and there it is – red drops on white snow.

For his very name – Jesus – means he has come to save his people from their sins. The way Jesus saves us from our sins is to not give us a lecture on how to do better but to begin the trail to Calvary from Bethlehem. There was a cross to his coming that was more than leaving the palaces of eternity and coming in a humble measure at Bethlehem. There was a cost beyond that that would require this baby to grow up and to go up and to go to Calvary and give his life as a substitute for ours. There is, the Bible says, now salvation at all without the shedding of blood. God has accepted the death of Jesus, the innocent one as a substitute for our own sins.

The message of Christ at Christmas is not "Do better." It's not "Work harder in the New Year." It's "Rely upon me totally. It's not through your effort. It's through the gift I am bringing you. My life given for you." Bethlehem. That's where the Savior was born.

If you look through the pages of the Old Testament you will find that Bethlehem in the Old Testament had a rich and significant history and it is in that history that we also grasp the existential moment to understand how Jesus' coming prophetically testifies to how that city fits into his dreams and wishes for all humanity. The history of Bethlehem is tied up also with this

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red drops on white snow for when we first encounter the word “Bethlehem” in scripture it is a burial ground where a patriarch named Jacob lays in the dust of death his beautiful and loved wife Rachel.

God knew we were all in the city of death and needed someone to help us out. He heard Jacob’s weeping and he’s heard every weeping when we have been in sorrow. Perhaps you’re in death this evening. Maybe a real death within your family. Maybe a psychological death. Maybe a down time. Maybe this has been the worst year you’ve ever experienced in your life. And it seems like life is being beaten out of you. Christ is born this day in the city of David. Christ is born in the city of death. To bring us hope and to bring us God.

The next main time that Bethlehem is introduced to us in the Old Testament is that it is a city where a happy wedding takes place. The ancestors of David named Boaz and Ruth meet at the threshing floor just up above the shepherd’s fields at Bethlehem. Last summer I was at one of those threshing floors which 3000 years later are really unchanged. There they met.

How like Jesus to be born where marriages are happening. Where families are happening. There’s no greater stress in our culture and our society today than the stress that’s upon family. Our Christmases bear witness to it. For Christmas time is sort of a Richter-scale reading of where we are in our family relationships. If you’re finding within your marriage and within your family there is severe trial and trouble and heartache I encourage you to let Jesus be born in your attitudes, in your habits, in your thought life. I encourage the Christ of Bethlehem to be born in you with his forgiving heart and with his great Spirit of reconciliation that does not judge whether or not he’s going to love by the level of good feelings and response he’s getting from the one loved. But he’s determined to love regardless of the response.

Bethlehem was also the city of occupation. It’s last major reference in the Old Testament came at a time when the city was held by Philistines and David wanted water from his hometown at Bethlehem at the well there. Bethlehem was in occupation.

There are many believers all over the world this evening living under military occupation. Then there is all of us who are captives that Jesus came to save. He came to preach good news to those who were captive. You may be captive to alcohol. You may be captive to drugs. You may be captive to the me-first philosophy of this day. You may be a captive of pride, of your own strong will. You may be a captive of anger and depression. Christ is born in the city of captivity as well.

He’s born in the city of death. He’s born in the city of marriage. He’s born in the city of captivity. His birth is the start of the trial that will lead to his death for he seeks to bring us out of the city of death. He seeks to bring us into fullness in family. He seeks to bring us out of the occupying powers of the evil one who is real and who is in this world.

Christ has come. Here in Bethlehem Jesus is born, a Savior.

It’s so difficult to adequately portray in a few moments how much God loves us. What Bethlehem really means from God’s point of view is he’s willing for his only begotten Son to come and to begin and experience that will result in his laying down his life for us. That was occasioned by the tremendous love that God has for us that made him willing to put red drops on white snow.

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I got a little taste of the love of father-God this past week. I got my son's permission to tell this. After service Sunday night George Paul came to me and asked permission to go somewhere where there was a little party. He told me where. Sometimes after a service when people tell me something I don't always remember it unless I write it down. George told me where he was going. We went our own way and we got home about ten. Usually George comes in the door about 10:30 or so. At 10:30 he wasn't there. I usually when I get home, fall asleep. It doesn't take me long. But when the children aren't home and I don't know where they're at then I become concerned. Eleven o'clock came. The news came on. I thought surely by 11:30. One of the rare times Jewel fell asleep and I alone was left to be the sentinel. I knew something was wrong at 11:30. By 12:00 I had visions in my mind of tragedy. At 12:15 I had called the first police department inquiring if there were serious accidents in that town. I had also prior to that called Wayne Tesh and woke him up and asked him if he knew where George was. I'd gotten our youth minister up and asked if he knew where George was. I had simply forgotten where he was and I wasn't going to start through the church directory calling people. My mind alternated between, George knows that I know where he's at so that's why he's not worried. But on the other hand he doesn't know that I don't know where he's at and I am worried!

Between 12:15 and 12:45 I had called six police departments. I covered the major area around us in South Orange County and I was so glad that evening in none of those towns there had been a serious auto accident. So now it was only a matter of waiting. I can't tell you how many times between 11:30 and 1:00 I was at the window looking out. Concern for my son. Just concern that he was ok. Knowing that he thought I knew where he was but since I didn't I was concerned.

When he came in I wanted to love him and I wanted to lecture him. I thought as I stood there by the window how father-God looks out on humanity. Jesus once told a story about it where all humanity is depicted as a son who has gone into a far country. This time deliberately, and deliberately wanting to lose contact with his father. And how the father paced back and forth day after day waiting for his son to return.

One thing Jesus doesn't say in that story that's so critical is that father-God didn't simply stand there and wait for us to come back. He sent his Son to get us. And to tell us in our own far country how much he loves us and cares for us and wants us in his family.

Christmas is so much more than the singing of carols, so much more than the mythology of Santa Clause, so much more than family festivity. Christmas is that great moment, which marks the coming of God's Son on a mission to save us. The salvation that he brings us is salvation like a gift, to be simply received. But when it is received and taken into our life it changes everything we are and ever hope to be.

I obviously do not know where you are spiritually at this time in your life. My prayer for you though is simply that if you have not come to realize the real meaning of Christmas of red drops on white snow, Christ the Savior is born, that is Christmas Eve while you are here in this sanctuary you will open your heart to God in prayer and say to Jesus Christ come into my life. Come into the place of death, come into the place of family, come into the place of occupation and bring your liberty and bring your salvation with you.

Thank you, Lord, that you came looking for us. That you sent your only Son because you loved us so much. When we're deeply loved by someone we respond not casually, not with

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just a hastily written thank you note. But we respond in kind w`ith our whole life, with every fiber of your strength and being to reach out and love you back. We have friend here this evening who in their own life have for whatever reason resisted a relationship with you and kept you at arm's length in their own life. May you gently remove the barriers, which we create and come to us so that not only in Bethlehem will the Savior be born. But in our own hearts and lives as well. In Jesus' name. Amen.