

THE GOD OF CHRISTMAS

Dr. George O. Wood

Are we alone on this twirling, orbiting, brownish, blue and green marble in the universe? Science fiction is telling us through movies and literature that people have been trying to get in. *Starman* and *ET*. The National Aeronautics and Science Administration have been on a scientific level trying to get a message out from earth to the universe. In 1972 NASA sent a Pioneer 10 space probe to travel a billion miles over a 2½-year period to Jupiter. When it got done with its mission it was to keep going infinitely into the universe at the speed of seven miles per second. It is thought that in 80,000 years traveling at that speed it would reach the nearest star. The chances of it ever coming close enough to a planet with conditions like that of earth that would make possible life is exceedingly remote.

Yet on the prospect that such a chance might exist NASA asked Cornell University astronomers Sagen and Drake to find a way to reach those extraterrestrial aliens out there. So they came up with a six-inch by nine-inch plaque. It was on aluminum and it was coated with an erosion resistant gold the plaque simply had a scale drawing of the Pioneer 10 spacecraft and in proportion to that space craft was etched the figures of a male and a female. They were hoping that perhaps a million years from now in some distant planet in a far away galaxy someone might see this and get a message which by a star outburst pattern on the plaque would tell them if they were astronomically trained to detect when the spacecraft originated and where in the universe it came from.

Five years later in late 1977 NASA sent another space probe into the heavens. The Voyager. This time it carried more than a plaque. It carried information about earth life, pictures and sounds and music. The pictures were coded into a disk, 115 photographs in all showing planet earth. Anatomical drawings of animal species. Pictures of human families, the natural environment of earth. Islands and seashores, deserts and valleys. The Snake River and the Grand Tetons. There are pictures of wild animals and a beautiful multi exposure of Kathy Rigby somersaulting on a bar showing the elegance and coordination of the human frame. There are pictures of people picking grapes and harvesting cotton. Of going to sea in fishing boats. There are pictures of a supermarket and a superhighway. Of traffic jams and a space shot. A flight of geese across a crowded sunset. And last of all a violin.

The 115 photographs are following by a greeting spoken in 55 languages and a message from then President Carter. In addition to the greetings there are the sounds of earth – of whales and rain and mud clots and footsteps and heartbeats, blacksmiths, rockets and pulsars. Finally there is a music section to the disk, which gives a varied concert featuring 27 different musical selections from all the planet. Selections from Bach and Beethoven, Asian classical music and primitive music and folk music. One writer who was reviewing what was sent out to represent earth's music said he felt that he would vote for Bach, all of Bach, nothing but Bach. Streaming out into space over and over again. We would be bragging of course he says but we can tell the harder truths later.

There is other music, isn't there?

As a footnote it should be added that the last minute before the record of Voyager was to be engraved, NASA officials sent an urgent call to Cornell University and said they had forgotten

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one thing to put on the plaque to outer space and to the extraterrestrial. An important thing that had to be communicated. The important thing that needed to be engraved at the last minute was the names of all the congressmen who served on the Senate and House of Representative space committee. Man was trying to get a message into space.

Men could send a message. There's probably nobody there to get it unless it's angel life that God has created. But how would God communicate to us? God has something better than a message. He has a person. When you look at man's feeble efforts to communicate to outer space it makes you stand back all the more in awe and wonder at the God who is communicating to us at Christmas. That's why I've called this message "The God of Christmas" because the way God gave us Christmas is telling us everything about God. Everything about the Spirit and mind of the eternal creator who gave us the universe and our own individual lives.

What Christmas is telling us is that God got more than a message to us about who he is. He gave us a baby. God just didn't send us a book. He didn't just send us a plaque. He didn't simply send a set of rules. The eternal God became Mary's little child and the only way to communicate life is to give life and to be life. God became flesh.

The omnipotence or the all powerfulness of God involves the fact that God is able to do whatever he wills to do. And he has willed to communicate with us. To not leave us alone as an abandoned out of contact space ship in the universe. God didn't simply give us a message. He gave us his Son. He gave us a baby.

The God of Christmas is also the one who does not hesitate to have faith in people, faith in men and women. So many people live their life thinking God is down on them. But Christmas is saying God is up on people.

God is very up on Mary and Joseph to trust them with his eternal son. I wouldn't have trusted them. Not because they weren't of good character. It's just if I were going to send my only son into the world and I were God I would choose a very privileged family. And I would send him at least to be born in a hospital and have an incubator on hand. I wouldn't trust no room in Bethlehem and a manger and an animal stall.

And I'm not sure that I would trust Mary and Joseph to bring him up just like I would want. But God trusted these humble peasant people to bring this baby up.

Later God shows his trust again when Jesus lets his disciples be entrusted with the message of what he had done for all the earth. God didn't trust in telepathy or fancy electronic wizardry to communicate his message. He trusted people to share the story from one to the other through the ages.

God has trust and faith in us. Christmas is telling us about a God who trusts us. About a God who has faith in us before we ever are asked to have faith in him.

One of the most precious gifts we can give to people is the gift "I trust you." And God in giving us Jesus has said, I trust you to make the right decision about him.

The God of Christmas is also telling us about the Christmas event is that he is one who reaches out to love and to be loved. Christmas is all about the love of God and the heart of the gospel

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really summarizes Christmas and all that is involved with Jesus. When John tells us in that most famous of all Bible verses, “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Someone in looking at that little verse broke down every part and had every part representing something that was the greatest.

God – the greatest lover.
So loved – the greatest degree.
The world – the greatest number.
That he gave – the greatest act.
His only begotten Son – the greatest gift.
That whosoever – the greatest invitation.
Believeth – the greatest simplicity
In him – the greatest person.
Should not perish – the greatest deliverance.
But – the greatest difference
Have – the greatest certainty
Eternal life – the greatest possession.

God loves us and reaches out to us at Christmas. Then Christmas is telling us about the God who completes whatever he has begun. Christmas is the Lord Jesus’ beginning on planet earth. But it is valued because the child grew up and fulfilled the mission for which he had been sent.

This is the only child ever born who had as his mission the saving of people from sins. And the granting of eternal life. I said several weeks ago on a Sunday morning, Jesus is the only one who is in the business of giving life. People are in the insurance business, the auto business, the medical business. Jesus is the only one in the life business. He is the only giver of life.

He was sent on a mission to give us life. We wouldn’t be remembering the baby at Bethlehem unless the baby grew up. Unless the baby had significance and destiny. Thinking of the importance of a child’s coming into the world I think back to an historical time, the year 1809. In that year five babies were born whose lives were to greatly influence the 19th century and the planet earth.

The names of the babies were Little William, born in Liverpool, England. Alfred, born in Summersby, Lincolnshire, England, Baby Oliver born in Boston, Little Felix born in Hamburg Germany. And baby Abraham born in Hodgenville, Kentucky.

Who could have known that these five little babies, born in the same year, 1809, would grow up to be William Gladstone, the great reforming prime minister of Britain who abolished child labor and who set slaves free. Alfred Tennyson, the great writer. Oliver Wendell Holmes, the supreme courts justice. Felix Mendleson, who gave us the gift of his music. And Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth president. In fact on a plaque marking Abraham Lincoln’s birthplace near Hodgenville, Kentucky is recorded this scrap of conversation that reflects the attitude of the village in the day he was born. The plaque says this: two villagers talking to one another “Any news down at the village?” “Squire McClain’s going to Washington. He’s going to see President Madison sworn in and old Spellman has told me this Bonaparte fella has captured most of Spain. What’s new out here, neighbor?” “Nothing. Nothing at all except a new baby born to the Tom Lincolns. Nothing ever happens out here.”

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And there were people who probably said at Bethlehem, Nothing ever happens here. Just a baby born to poor peasant folk. But everything happens when he comes into the world.

Some events may not create much of a splash, such as the birth of a baby. But those events that have lasting importance will eventually get the notice they deserve. Bethlehem has gotten press because of the baby that was born.

People in 1809 were thinking not of babies but of battles and big things. God was going to change the course of the nineteenth century by giving the world babies. People in Bethlehem were thinking of resistance and political turmoil and the big things of the day. But God was going to change the course of human and personal history by giving us a baby. Jesus' destiny was set from the beginning. He is the only one who can forgive our sins and give us life. We would not be celebrating his entry into life had he not completed the mission for which he had been sent. That's an encouragement to us. Because it tells us that when God begins a work on earth or in our life individually he will pursue it until he completes it.

A true Christmas in our life is one in which we stand back and say to God, We receive the gift you have sent. And we take Christmas to understand who you really are. We wipe away all the idle imaginations of our mind, both the idle ones that speak of loitering. And idols that speak of the mental images we have of God that are false. The idea that he's the policeman in the sky, the cop on the beat, the remote one who is inaccessible and the indulgent Santa Claus. We wipe all those idols aside and ponder the real meaning of the God of Christmas who comes to us in human form. God sending himself, giving us his love, wanting to draw us into his world. Knowing that the only way we can one day bear his image is that his Son would come and bear our image. As Paul puts it, Just as we have born the image of the man of earth so also shall we bear the image of the man from heaven.

Christmas is all about receiving God's gift and treasuring it in our life and knowing God.

Thank you, Father, thank you for Christmas. Amen.