

Christmas: A Time of Distraction or Devotion?

Luke 2: 1-7

We will celebrate Christmas this week. The Christmas season has become the busiest time of the year. We have been preparing for it for months and it seems as if the whole month of December needs to be reserved for gatherings and fellowship. I enjoy those special times with family and friends, but I often wonder if Christmas hasn't become too busy. If we aren't careful we will schedule ourselves into a frenzy. We will become so busy that we fail to consider and fully appreciate what it is that we are celebrating.

A large majority of Americans, as well as people around the world, celebrate Christmas, but what is the main focus of the season? I believe that the modern world has hijacked our sacred holiday and made it a commercial nightmare. Rather than a time for thankfulness and rejoicing, it has become a time of jealousy, resentment, and greed. There is little consideration for the birth of our Lord. Most are only concerned with whether that coveted gift has been wrapped and placed under the tree.

We have read the account of the day that our blessed Lord was born. This is the real focus of Christmas. That is what Christmas is all about. If we fail to see Jesus, then we have missed it all. On that faithful day there were no Christmas trees or parties. There were no extravagant gatherings, just Mary, Joseph, and Jesus there in a cattle stall in Bethlehem. In fact the city was all a bustle with activity, but it wasn't concerning the birth of Christ. Most on that day were distracted, but a few were devoted. Let's look at the [assumptions](#) in this passage concerning the birth of our Lord and consider the question, [Christmas: A Time of Distraction or Devotion?](#)

I. A Day of Distractions – Bethlehem was filled with visitors at the time that Jesus was born, but most of them were so distracted that they didn't even notice that the Son of God had come to earth. Each of us are familiar with the real reason of Christmas, but we too can become so distracted that we miss the beauty of it and fail to worship the Lord during this time. Let's consider what had caused this widespread distraction. It involved:

A. The Burdens of the People (1-2) – [And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. \[2\] \(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.\)](#) Rome took a census every fourteen years for both military and tax purposes, and each Jewish male had to return to the city of his fathers to record his name, occupation, property, and family. This was not a voluntary process; it was required that all make the trip to the city of their heritage. We do not know if the people were expected to pay any taxes at this time or simply file for them, but it was a burden on the people.

- Travel in that day was most difficult. It would have created a great strain on the average family for the man of the house to be gone long enough to make the trip, not to mention the financial burdens that it brought. As the city filled with visitors from other towns, no doubt they were unsure of exactly where they needed to go or where they would stay for the night. The people of Bethlehem were not looking for the Messiah to come; they were too burdened with the cares of life.

- I think that we would have to admit that burdens in our lives often cause us distractions, especially during the Christmas season. We have become so consumed with purchasing the latest gifts that many find themselves stressed over their current financial situation. Our economy is the worst I've ever known. We are in the midst of war and moral decay. People's lives are in turmoil and few will be able to focus on the true meaning of Christmas. How sad it is that most will not recognize the One who is able to offer peace for troubled hearts.

B. The Busyness of the People (3) – [And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.](#) All that found themselves under Roman rule were forced to make this journey. As they moved toward the city of their fathers, they were not concerned with the things of God. They were not worried about worshipping the Lord or looking for the birth of Christ. Their lives were consumed with one thing and that was filing for the census. They were so busy that they failed to make time for the most important event that had taken place to date.

- It is good for us to remain busy and be productive as long as it doesn't keep us from spending time with the Lord. Christmas is the busiest time of year. We all have more places to go than we can possibly get to. The main focus for most during this time of year is making sure that the gift list has been completed, getting all of the decorations in place for the guests to arrive, and being in fourteen places at the same time!

- We have allowed ourselves to become so busy that we have very little time, if any, to reflect on what we are actually celebrating. It has been asked, what if someone planned a birthday party for you, but they were so busy getting everything in order that they forgot to invite you and didn't even notice that you weren't there? Sadly that is the case for most at Christmas. We are celebrating the birth of Jesus, but we are so busy that we don't even take time for Him or notice that we have missed it!

C. The Blindness of the People (7b) – [There was no room for them in the inn.](#) Joseph had made the trip to Bethlehem with Mary his wife. She was soon to be delivered. This was a place where Joseph would have had relatives. There must've been those who had heard of the miraculous conception. There must've been someone who was familiar with their situation, and yet no one

cared. No one bothered to think that the Christ child was about to be born. They were spiritually blind. Their hearts were not focused on the coming of the King.

- Christmas is celebrated by many who are spiritually blind. They have no concept of what it is all about. Many think it is just a time for Santa Claus and eggnog. We need to be reminded of what we are celebrating. May we never be guilty of failing to see or recognize our Lord at Christmas or any other time. I pray that God will open our eyes to the truth and majesty of this special time of year. What have you told your children? What does Christmas really mean to you and your family?

I. A Day of Distractions

II. A Day of Devotion – In the midst of such distraction we also find a picture of sacrificial devotion. Most failed to see the eternal significance of that day, but not all. These understood that something miraculous was happening even though the world was unaware. First we see:

A. A Submissive Couple (4-5) – [And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; \(because he was of the house and lineage of David:\) \[5\] To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.](#) Consider all that Mary and Joseph have experienced in the past few months of their lives. About ten months prior to this they had no idea what God had in store for them. They were likely making plans for their wedding and planning their new lives together. Now we find them making a difficult journey with all of their plans changed. They are now making preparations for the Baby that will soon arrive.

- Rather than arguing with the Lord or refusing His will for their lives, they willingly submitted to the Lord's request. They chose to follow the Lord and live for Him instead of their own desires. Those around them may not have understood or believed, but Mary and Joseph were committed unto the Lord. They experienced the same burdens and busyness, but they never lost sight of what God had called them to do.

- As we consider Christmas, we ought to have a renewed desire to serve the Lord and live for Him. We are all busy, but if we keep our focus on the Lord we can make it a time of devotion rather than distraction. For many Christmas is all about what they want; and if they don't get it, they are unhappy. It isn't about us or what we hope to receive; it is all about Jesus and His coming. Rather than seeking the latest gift why not seek ways to give of yourself unto the Lord? Why not surrender your life unto the Lord in return for all that He has done?

B. A Redemptive Son (6-7) – And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. [7] And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. The moment that God's people had anticipated for generations had come. The Messiah was born in Bethlehem just as God had promised. Although the world and even those who should have been looking for His birth had missed it, God had remained faithful.

- There is no greater picture of devotion than the birth of our Lord. We must remember that Jesus did not have His beginning here at Bethlehem. He is the eternal God who has no beginning and no end. He was not a son who chose to become a savior; He is the Savior who chose to become a Son! He willingly came to earth in the form of a man so that He might provide for the redemption of fallen humanity. The Lord chose to come unto a people who were not looking for Him and really had no concern if He came at all.
- Jesus came for you and me. He came to bear our sin on the cross so that we might have the opportunity to be saved. Even in His birth there is evidence of what He had come to accomplish.
- His holiness is contrasted with His humility. Mary brought forth her **firstborn son**, the only begotten of the Father. The King of glory had graced the earth with His presence in the form of a humble Babe. The king had come, but even at His birth there was **no room for Him**. This was to be the case in much of His life as He walked among men. He would be misunderstood, despised, rejected, and refused as the Lord He is.
- Also as we look at the humble birth we see His life contrasted with His death. He was laid in a **manger** in the city of Bethlehem. A manger was simply a feeding trough for the animals. Bethlehem was known by many as the city of bread. The Bread of Life had come to provide what men needed so that they might obtain eternal life. The source and hope of our salvation had come.
- Just as His life was in view, so was His death. Mary wrapped Him in **swaddling clothes**. This was not the garment of royalty. It was quite literally the clothing of death. Strips of cloth were used to wrap the bodies of those who had died. Even in His birth we are reminded of the cross and the tomb that He would face and conquer for us. Have you ever known such love and devotion as that which Jesus offered for us?

C. A Receptive Few (15-18) – And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. [16] And they came with haste, and found

Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. [17] And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. [18] And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. The elite of Bethlehem were totally unaware and unconcerned about His birth, but there were those who would believe. We find that there were lowly shepherds, literally outcasts considered unclean by society, who were given the great news that the Messiah had come. Those who were rejected were given the glorious opportunity to accept and worship the Lord.

- These were not too burdened, too busy, or too blind to receive the Lord and make room for Him. They came with haste and worshipped the Lord, believing that He was the Christ.
- There is a great truth for us here. We are aware that the majority of the world will not make room for the Lord. Most never even give Him any thought, unless they fear they are about to die. That is exactly what the Bible reveals. [Mat.7:14](#) – **Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.**
- I am glad to be among the receptive few. There will be millions who will not even consider our Lord this Christmas, but that is no reason for me to leave Him out. I have received the gift of His glorious salvation and the promise of eternal life. I want to make this a season of devotion and love for my Lord rather than allowing it to simply be a season of distraction. I pray that we will all make the time to celebrate Christmas and worship the Lord whom it reveals!

I wonder where this wonderful season finds you. Are you so distracted and consumed by the burdens and busyness that you have failed to see the Lord? Have you trusted Christ as your personal Savior or are you among those who are spiritually blind and have no concept of the reality of Christmas? If so, you can come as the lowly shepherds did. Jesus stands ready to save you today.

This could be the best Christmas of the rest of your life. You could receive the greatest gift that was ever given, a gift that will last for eternity. Christian are you committed to making this a time of devotion and worship rather than distraction? Why not come this morning and bow before Him in thanksgiving and praise?