

Christian or Christ Like?

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Why would you say Christmas was important, yourself? If somebody asked you this morning, why is Christmas important, how would you answer? Now obviously we get a day off work and that's important and you get presents and you have office parties but most of us realize that those are incidental by-products of Christmas, however important they may have become to us. They are not really the important thing about Christmas and most of us know that and we're well-trained and coached and brain-washed and so we would answer safely, "Oh, the important thing about Christmas is it's "Christ mass", it's the mass of Christ, it's the feast of Christ. It's the time when we remember Jesus' birthday," and I think that's how we'd answer.

But do you see that to most people on the earth, that's begging the question. It's really begging the further question, "Well, what's the big deal about Jesus' birthday? Why is it so important?" That's what I just ask us to look at together. Why is Jesus' birthday important? A good place to begin is the Nobel prizes. You know they are those financial rewards and international recognitions that are given by Sweden to outstanding human beings who make great contributions to human knowledge. If you have been following the award of the prizes this year at all, you'll probably agree that this has been the year of the origin of life prizes.

There has been tremendous emphasis on how life originated in recent research and that's been recognized by the Nobel Committee this year. Some prizes were given to two astronomers who measured the energy that comes from outer space and have been able by measuring that energy, virtually to prove that the universe did not evolve gradually over billions and billions of years from the collision of two atoms, but that it has originated suddenly from a catastrophic release of energy in something like a big bang and so a Nobel prize was awarded to them for that tremendous clarification about the theories of the origin of the universe.

Three other prizes were given to men who have identified enzymes that may be used to program the genes that govern hereditary diseases and hereditary traits and may therefore enable us to know how we've become what we've become. One interesting fact that you might have noticed about leading scientists today is a new humility as they have pushed beyond the frontiers of our present knowledge. They have begun to be able to identify more precisely what they don't know. And they have been willing more and more to humbly admit that there are things that they can't know.

One science writer in the New York Times about two weeks ago said, "The big bang theory argues for belief in creation of the world in an instant rather than its evolution over a long period of time," but the problem is that if it all started with an explosion, then we can no longer find anything out about what exploded and so scientists are realizing that if we posit a big bang theory, that's as far as we can go. We can never go behind the big bang because the big bang destroyed all that caused it and so scientists are realizing we can go up to there but by our own definition, we can't go beyond it because all that was there has exploded and we can't tell what was there before the explosion.

This same science writer you put it like this, he said, "We are now faced with the ironic picture of scientists for years struggling to reach the summit of the highest intellectual mountain of the world. At last they are able to pull themselves over the top of the last peak and there in front of their very eyes sit the theologians who were there all the time saying, 'In the beginning God

created the heaven and the earth.'"

It's interesting that that isn't, some pastor or some theologian trying to push his own party line but it is a science writer saying that. In other words, scientists are beginning to say, "Could be." Now, that's what Christmas is about. It's about our knowledge of where we came from and where we're going to.

See, after Adam and his successors refused the communications that God had made to us about his plan for mankind, thousands and thousands of our forbearers have looked up into the sky hour after hour and have wondered, "Is there somebody behind that sky?" And many of them in primitive times would look at the thunder clouds and say, "Yes, there is and he's angry. He's angry. I can hear his voice and his anger." And on another calm, sunny day they would look up and say, "Look at the sky, look at the cloudless sky and the blue sky, the Creator obviously is pleased with us today." And they would look at the mountains and think now, "Boy, he must be a great and a mighty person to put that mountain there," and others would look at themselves and their own fingers and their own faces and they'd say, "Well, he must be something like us if he was able to make people like us."

But in spite of all that loved ones, there was constant vagueness and uncertainty. Various people illustrated and organized those thoughts into statements and beliefs and that was how the original nature religions came about like Hinduism and Zoroastrianism and various other human beings among us wondered how we should behave and we devised little ethical systems and those became Buddhism and Confucianism. Yet despite all these attempts at describing how we came about and why we came about and where we're going, there was always great vagueness and uncertainty.

Men were just doing their best. A shaft of sunlight came into the picture during the 2000 years of the revelations that the Jewish people received because they seemed to receive revelations of a Creator who had a consistent character that remained the same year after year after year and generation after generation. Moreover, it seemed that their information about him came not just from men's opinions or men's ideas or imaginations, but it seemed that the information that they got came from events and miracles that were written into their own history.

Indeed that we can see enshrined in their own civil organization and their own religious rituals today. And yet even their revelation was able to be manipulated by a man like Mohammad and interpreted in his own way and that's always been the problem. In our attempts to discover our own roots and to find out why we were here and who put us here and where we're going, we've always had to come up against this problem.

We have had the scientists say, "Yeah, but Mohammad, Buddha, these guys are just ordinary people like us. They are ordinary human beings. They have no more access to the reality behind the universe than we have. So why should we believe that what they say about our roots and about where we came from is true, any truer than what we think ourselves?" That's what Christmas is about.

Christmas is our Creator coming to our earth and saying, "This is the way it is. This is how it happened," because that's what Jesus is. He is not just a prophet like Mohammad. He is not just a philosopher like Confucius. He is not just a religious leader like Buddha. Jesus, when he was asked by the high priest at the very point of death and under pain of death, "Are you the Son of God?" he said, "I am and you'll see me at the end of this world sitting at the right hand of the Creator and having power to settle all the whole universe." That's what Christmas is, loved ones.

It's God himself coming to us and saying, "I can scatter all the myths of doubt that you people have

had over the years, about why you are here and what you are doing. I'll tell you myself in my own words through my Son here." Loved ones there's no question when you look at Jesus, we've said it often before but you do see immediately that he is just different from every other man that ever lived.

He is absolutely unlike Mohammad and unlike Buddha and many of the other religious leaders in that his life was absolutely perfect and absolutely sinless. He is unlike all the lunatics that have ever claimed to be the Son of God or claim to be uniquely related to God because their lives are filled with imbalance and extremes. His life is filled with balance. In fact, we look at Jesus' life and we regard it as one of the most perfect integrated lives that was ever lived. And he had the kind of power over disease and over nature that we would expect from the son of the person who made the nature and who made the bodies to have.

Of course you know that what sets him absolutely apart from every other so called authority about where we came from is the way he himself came to earth and the way he left it. Mary and Joseph weren't married. They weren't married. That's what that verse means in Matthew, they were betrothed, kind of engaged. So they never had intercourse but he was conceived in Mary's womb because the Holy Spirit put the sperm created by God into her womb and he was born by that miracle.

If you ever wonder if it was anything worse than that, all you have to look at is history. Is there any evidence of anything other than that? There isn't. Not even among those greatest critics of Jesus and of his followers and the incredible way that he left the earth; you remember he explained to all his followers that he was going to be executed but that he would come back and he did that. He came back for more than a month and confirmed that he had power over life and over death so that he could destroy either one when he chose.

That's what Christmas is about. It's God coming into our world in a body like ours in his own Son 1900 years ago and explaining to us personally, "Look, my Son made the world. He made it. It was all made by him. There's nothing here that wasn't made by him and both of us made all of you because we want you to live with us in love forever and we both want you to become like us and enjoy the same joy that we two have together." And so Christmas has scattered all the vagueness we have.

You know if there's anybody here who wonders, "Oh what is life about?" or "Why am I here?" or "Where are we going?" or "What am I supposed to do with my life?" look at Christmas. Jesus has given us the authoritative explanation. It's our own Creator coming to earth and telling us. That's the importance about Christmas loved ones. Every other religion has its prophet and its outstanding preacher and its outstanding leaders but this Christianity is reality because it has at its center, the Son of our own maker and that's why Christmas is important to us.

It's our own Maker coming here and explaining it personally face-to-face with us. So really it's God incarnate. And incarnate means enfleshed. God in a body like ours explaining all the mysteries to us and really that's the key to everything. That's the key to life. It's the key to the meaning of everything. If you can once get the Creator who originated it all to stand in front of you and explain it to you, that's the answer. You can have no greater answer than that and that's the only certainty that you can finally have, God incarnate.

We do not need to be the dupes of people like Jim Jones [a cult leader], we don't. We don't, none of us. If a Jim Jones was to stand here, we do not need to be the dupes of him, we don't. However eloquent he may be, we are not at his mercy because ever since Jesus came, we have the norm, we have

the standard, we have the authoritative revelation of what our God is really like and we can compare everything that comes across our path and claims to be explaining the will of God to us.

We can compare it all with this Jesus and that's the beauty of God incarnate. Really alive. And you can look at Jesus and you can see does Jesus commit adultery? Does Jesus stash money all round the world? Does Jesus steal from people? No. So whenever any man comes who claims to speak God's word to us, we can compare him with this authoritative Word that we have received through his Son and it's true too that every time you come across a man or a woman that speaks like Jesus or lives like Jesus, you can be sure that again you're facing God incarnate. You are facing Jesus having been born in a person's life and having developed and grown and then burst forth as he did in Mary's own body.

Every time you meet such a person, you see God incarnate and that's what convinces you finally and that's what final personal certainty is, you know. It's an ordinary human life being filled with God's Son. That's what convinces people of truth: God incarnate. You can't argue with Christmas and you can't argue with Christmas when you see it in a person's life. So I would ask you, are you a great talker or are you a great liver?

Do you talk well or do you live well? Are you Christian or are you Christ like? Have you experienced what Mary experienced? Loved ones, that's what China needs to see, God incarnate, but that's what your friends and my friends need to see. They have had enough talk. Talk is cheap. Preaching is easy but living is the proof and I'd just ask you, has God become incarnate in your life? Because the world is dying for that kind of certainty and do you know that God can become incarnate in you, do you know that? Do you know that when Jesus died, you as you are now were destroyed and he is able to renew you completely by coming into your life this very day, do you know that?

In fact, do you know that God has already put you into his Son and you actually have to reject him to keep away from becoming like him? Did you ever realize that? I think a lot of you feel, "Oh, being bad just comes naturally to me," actually it doesn't. You have to actually reject life, just as you keep the rain off with an umbrella and keep the sun off with a sunshade. You actually have to reject the life of Jesus that is struggling to be born in you and you know that.

There's a little thing inside you that says, "You should do this or you shouldn't do that," and you know that thing keeps on going even though you strangle it to death, it's still there. It's still a tiny little voice of conscience and actually to avoid becoming God incarnate, you have to deliberately reject the movement of Jesus' life that you've already sensed at times inside you.

I would ask you, why not this Christmas, begin to take steps to let that Christ life, the life of Jesus' spirit inside you, have his own way in your life? Why not take a step towards it? And I'd point out to you that it's action finally that counts. So you can go to work this coming weekend, you can shake your finger all you're worth and say, "Oh you shouldn't drink so much at the office party," or you can say, "Oh you shouldn't spend all that money in Christmas presents," or "You shouldn't be so happy," or "You shouldn't buy a Christmas tree," but finally all that does is turn people off reality and turn people off God.

What people desperately want to see is God incarnate-- Jesus alive in another person's life. And the only way for that to happen is for you to stop living and to give the right to your life completely to Jesus and let him reproduce that miracle. Have you ever thought there may be about 1300 of us here and there may be another hundred upstairs? Have you ever thought, what would it be like if we had 1300 Jesus' in this room, really? That's what God intends. That's what God intended when he made

you. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we would come to you even though some of us are very uncertain about the whole deal. We would come to you and say that we see many things in ourselves that are not at all like you. We see many things in ourselves that would make heaven hell and Lord we don't understand it all but we do believe that you've done something in Jesus in His death that is able to free us from these things.

So Lord, will you help us to believe that we were crucified with Christ 1900 years ago, that we were completely renewed in a mighty cosmic miracle and that it is possible by simple faith to enter into the reality of that this morning. Lord, we see plainly that talk is cheap and it's not Jesus' words that convince us, it's his life. It's the things that happened in his life that convince us that he is your Son and Lord. We realize that our friends and our colleagues have the same right to be able to see Jesus incarnate, God enfleshed, so that they have the same opportunity to believe you as we have.

Lord, we would give our lives to you for this purpose that you might be incarnate again in each one of us for the sake of our friends and our colleagues at work and for the sake of those millions that do not know you. We give ourselves to you for this purpose in Jesus' name. Amen.