

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

CELEBRATING THE LORD'S BIRTHDAY

by the Rev. N. Bruce Rogers

What do you think about when you think about Christmas?

Do you think about the Christmas tree, with all the exciting presents under it, all carefully wrapped up with colorful paper and pretty ribbons and bows?

Do you think about Christmas cards, and about hanging up your stockings for Santa Claus to fill?

Do you think about going shopping for presents out in the cold, crisp air of winter, and hearing the special music of Christmas that seems to fill the air?

Do you think about all the good things there will be to eat, or visiting relatives and friends, and playing with cousins and others?

Or if you live near a Church congregation, do you perhaps think of the Tableaux, and of seeing all those wonderful scenes, while people sing special hymns and the minister reads the Christmas story from the Word?

It is true that all these things and more are a part of Christmas as we now celebrate it, and they make it an exciting time for us. But do you know that none of these things is why we have Christmas.

We do not have Christmas in order to have Christmas trees and presents.

We do not have Christmas in order to have Christmas cards or so that we can hang up stockings, or so that we can have special music to hear and sights to see.

We do not have Christmas so that we can have good things to eat and parties.

We do not have Christmas so that we can have Tableaux.

We could have these things any time, if we wanted to. All we would have to do is to plan a little and spend some money, and we could have these things any time.

And what is more, do you know that once upon a time, long ago, people did not have many of these things, and still they had Christmas? Even just a hundred years ago, things were much more simple and not nearly so fancy at Christmas time, but people still had Christmas.

So now what do you think? Why do we have Christmas?

We have Christmas for the same reason that we celebrate birthdays. When we celebrate someone's birthday, and we say "happy birthday" to him and give him presents, we are saying that we are glad he or she was born, and we try to show that we are glad. That is why we send birthday cards and give birthday presents and bake special birthday cakes, to show that we are glad someone was born.

It is for the same reason that we have Christmas, because at Christmas time we also celebrate someone's birthday. Only it is the most special birthday ever, because at Christmas time we celebrate the Lord's birthday. We celebrate the Lord's birthday because we are so very glad that He was born into the world, so that we could see Him and so that He could straighten out the world.

Let's talk about those two things. Let's talk about seeing the Lord, and about His straightening out the world.

First, about seeing the Lord: Of course we cannot see the Lord with our eyes, because after He finished His work on this earth He went back to heaven. But because He was born and lived for a while in this world, there are many stories about Him in the Word, and we can still see Him in those stories with the eyes of our mind. This would not be possible if He had not first been born into this world.

So because of the Lord's being born into this world, and because of the stories in the Word about Him, we can still see the Lord in our minds and get to know Him and love Him,

Secondly, about His straightening out the world: When the Lord was born into the world the world had gotten to be not a very nice place. Evil people were taking over and trying to run things their way. Many of these evil people were really wicked, and they were teaching other people to be wicked too. They had even taken over the Lord's church, and instead of showing people the way to heaven, they were pushing people around and making them think that evil was good. If anybody tried to disobey these evil people, they punished them in terrible ways, and everybody became so afraid of them that they could not think straight. You should be glad you were not born then.

Even evil spirits from hell were beginning to be able to get back into this world, by taking over people's minds and controlling them. You may remember how many times the Lord cast out evil spirits from people's minds. So the Lord had Himself born into this world, so that He could cast out those evil spirits, and so that He could teach people the truth.

He showed people how wicked their leaders were, so that at last they rebelled against those leaders. He showed people how to be kind and gentle again, so that they learned to love each other and to live a life that would lead to heaven. This also would not have been possible if the Lord had not first been born into the world. Because the Lord was born into the world, He was able to straighten out the world, where we can now live happily without being controlled by evil people.

So at Christmas we celebrate the Lord's birthday. We celebrate the Lord's birthday because we are glad that He was born.

We are glad because we can now see Him and get to know Him in the stories about Him, and we are glad because when He was born into the world, He straightened out the world and showed us once again how to love each other and to be kind to each other.

And that is also why we celebrate Christmas in the way we do. Because at Christmas we celebrate the Lord's birthday, and because He came into the world to teach us to love each other, we try especially hard at Christmas to show that we love each other.

That is why we give each other presents, to show that we love each other.

That is why we send Christmas cards, and do all those other nice things, to show we love each other.

Think about it this Christmas, and see if your family doesn't do all these things to show love.

The special music—almost all of it was written to make people especially happy.

The good food people make—it is all to make people happy.

The visits to family and friends—it is to show them that we love them and that we care about them.

If we hang up our stockings for Santa Claus, it is because Santa Claus stands for the spirit of kindness, and we are showing that we want the spirit of kindness to come into our homes.

We do all this because the Lord was born into this world to teach us to love each other and to be kind to each other, And so when we celebrate His birthday at Christmas, we try especially hard to do just that, to do what He wants us to do, by showing that we love each other and that we care about each other.

In this way we show how glad we are that the Lord was born. We also show how glad we are by reading from His Word, about the time when the Lord was born, and about what happened then and how it came about.

That is why in our Church congregations we have special Tableaux, to help us go back in our minds to the time of the Lord's birth, so that we can think about the Lord's birth and celebrate it all over again in our minds, just as if we were one of the shepherds or one of the wise men.

This is the very most special way that we celebrate the Lord's birthday at Christmas, when we read from the Word and think about the Lord, and when like the shepherds and the wise men, we too are glad and rejoice at the Lord's coming into the world, and worship Him in our hearts with great joy.