

Spirit of Christmas or Spirit of Christ

Message for Christmas Eve 2015
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38

Note: I give credit to Stuart Briscoe for much of this message.

1) Introduction

Have you heard the expression “the spirit of Christmas”? You go carolling down your street, spreading good wishes to your neighbours: you’ve got Christmas spirit. One of your neighbours, however, hollers at you, “Take that noise out of here!” There’s someone who needs some Christmas spirit. Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens’ *Christmas Carol* is someone who needed Christmas spirit, and by the end of the story found plenty of it.

The spirit of Christmas is something we all long for. It shows up in deeds and thoughts of kindness, generosity, peace, goodwill and warm relationships.

One of the most amazing instances of Christmas spirit happened during World War I. Soldiers dug deep trenches in the ground where they would be safe from the gunfire of the enemy, who were in their own trenches. The area in between the trenches was called “No Man’s Land,” because it was too dangerous to go out there. Anyone standing up, or even crawling on the ground, would be an easy target for the enemy. The trenches of the two armies were less than 100 meters apart. They could actually hear one another talking. The trenches were dirty, wet and cold, and they lived like that all through the war.

On Christmas Eve in 1914, soldiers huddled in the bottom of their trenches, trying to stay warm. Some British lookouts suddenly noticed some small lights waving above the German troops. This was odd, because it gave them easy targets to shoot at. A French sniper (the British and French were on the same side) aimed his rifle at one of the Germans. But instead of shooting, he slowly put his rifle down in shock, and in a hoarse whisper he told the guys near him what he had seen through the rifle scope.

The whisper was passed up and down the trenches, and soon everyone was standing up to see for themselves the amazing sight: the German soldiers

had put candles on poles and rifles, anything they could stick up in the air. They had put lights on trees, and were waving their “Christmas trees” in the air. It was a beautiful, breath-taking sight.

Then a voice started singing *Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht* — those are the German words for *Silent Night, Holy Night*. Other Germans joined in, singing in harmony. Soon the British and French soldiers joined the song, in their own languages. It was awesome to hear, all those different nations singing the same song but with different words.

There was more singing, and then something even more amazing happened. Soldiers from both sides climbed out of their trenches into the No Man’s Land. They met in the middle and shook hands. They exchanged cigarettes and chocolates and tinned beef. They pulled out photographs of their loved ones back home — of their wives and girl friends, their children, their parents. Some laughed, but others openly wept and hugged one another. All of this went on even though they couldn’t speak one another’s language!

The Christmas party continued all night until the dawn. Then someone threw out a soccer ball, and on that Christmas Day they had a soccer match right there in No Man’s Land!

News about what was happening got back to headquarters, and the next morning there were new orders forbidding anyone to fraternize with the enemy. It was back to war and kill or be killed.

The Christmas spirit is a wonderful, beautiful thing, but it is limited. The Christmas spirit will produce a truce, but not lasting peace. We need something more.

2) The spirit of Christmas needs to give way to the Spirit of Christ

- The spirit of Christmas is annual; the Spirit of Christ is eternal.
- The spirit of Christmas is sentimental; the Spirit of Christ is supernatural.
- The spirit of Christmas is a human product; the Spirit of Christ a divine Person.

The Spirit of Christ is when Jesus comes and lives in us by the Holy Spirit. It isn’t nice thoughts, but a

living reality. One of the names of Jesus is “Emmanuel” which means “God with us.”

Let me put it to you with the story of a simple, illiterate man who became a follower of Jesus through the work of the Salvation Army. He went regularly to the Salvation Army church. One day he came home rather dejected. His wife said, “What’s the matter?”

He said, “I’ve just noticed that all the people in the Salvation Army wear red sweaters, and I don’t have a red sweater.”

She said, “I’ll knit one.” So she knitted him a red sweater.

The next Sunday after he went to the citadel, he still wasn’t happy. His wife said, “What’s wrong this time?”

He said, “I just noticed all their red sweaters have yellow writing.”

They were both illiterate, but she said, “Don’t worry about it. I’ll embroider some writing on for you.”

She had no idea what the yellow writing on the red sweater of a Salvation Army man said—Any of you know what it is? They have a yellow circle, and in it “BLOOD AND FIRE.” That’s their motto.

(Unbutton the jacket of a Salvation Army person sometime when they’re ringing the bells by their kettle; tell them you’re just checking.)

The man’s wife had no idea what the letters said, and she couldn’t read anyway. So copying a sign from a store window opposite their home, she embroidered the words of that store sign onto his red sweater. When he came back the next Sunday, she said, “Did they like your sweater?”

“They loved my sweater. Some of them said they liked my sweater better than their sweater.”

What neither of them knew was that the sign on the store window she had copied read “THIS BUSINESS UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT.”

That’s what it means to have the Spirit of Christ. That’s what it means to be a follower of Jesus: this business is under new management.

Look at what happened with Mary when she encountered the Spirit of Christ when the angel visited her. Her response was basically, “I am available. I am willing. I am the Lord’s servant. I will be whatever you want me to be.”

If we could have that same attitude in our lives, then the Spirit of Christ would rule in our lives all year round.

Our problem is that we tend to resist the Holy Spirit. Isn’t that odd? The very thing for which we yearn—to love and be loved in spite of our faults, to have hope for the future, to have meaning and purpose in our lives, —is also the thing which we are afraid of when it is offered to us.

But still Jesus comes to us and offers us this new life. He came two thousand years ago. He can come into our lives tonight, if we ask him.