

Longing for the Savior

Bernard of Clairvaux, the great twelfth century abbot, once wrote about Christmas in his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*:

During my frequent ponderings on the burning desire with which the patriarchs longed for the incarnation of Christ, I am stung with sorrow and shame... Very soon now there will be great rejoicing as we celebrate the feast of Christ's birth. BUT HOW I WISH IT WERE INSPIRED BY HIS BIRTH! All the more, therefore, do I pray that the intense longing of those men and women of old, their heartfelt longing, may be enkindled in me.

Confronted with an increasingly secular and commercial celebration – a Christ-less Christmas, if you will – it would be easy to sigh along with Bernard of Clairvaux: “But how I wish it were inspired by his birth.” We have even turned this sigh into a common seasonal lament, and at times seasonal protest: Put Christ back into Christmas!

But, the key to putting Christ back into Christmas is to enkindle or re-ignite or fan our heartfelt longing for Jesus, our hunger for the Christ to be born within us. This hunger is God's gift to every human being. This longing paves the way for the second part of the incarnation mystery – Christ alive in our souls, our hearts, our inner beings.

The gift of Christmas can only be fully realized and joyfully received if we seek it.

- Simeon pleaded to stay alive long enough to see the Messiah.
- Mary opened herself completely to conceive Jesus.
- The shepherd said, “Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us.”
- The Magi followed a star in search of the new king.

They each wanted the Savior. They each wanted to see and welcome Jesus. They each had a heartfelt longing for Christ in their lives and in the world.

Max Lucado, in his wonderful little book, *One Incredible Moment*, urges us to “Step away from puny pursuits of possessions and positions, and seek your king. Don't be satisfied with angels. Don't be content with stars in the sky. Seek Jesus out as the shepherds did. Long for Jesus as Simeon did. Worship Jesus as the Wise Men did. Risk whatever it takes to see Christ.” (page 102).

Every vital, healthy, fruitful congregation I have been privileged to witness in the Dakotas-Minnesota Area displays an intense longing for the incarnation of Christ. They enkindle this Christmas longing within their members and communities. It is this spirit of longing for and seeking Christ that undergirds our mission of making and equipping

disciples of Jesus. It is this spirit of longing for and seeking Jesus that calls us to kingdom life – the radical and transformative reality which was inaugurated by Jesus’ birth.

Hebrews 11:6 reminds us that “God cares to respond to those who seek God.” Other translations read, “God rewards those who diligently seek God.”

This is the good news for us this Christmas. Be diligent in your search for Jesus. Be passionate in your quest for Jesus. Be ravenous in your hunger for Jesus. Be relentless in your journey to Bethlehem. Enkindle your longing for the birth of Christ in your life.

And, so I pray for each of us this Christmas:

Gracious and Holy God,
the Giver of all good gifts;
we seek but one reward – one gift –
in this Christmas season.
Grant us hearts
that will not rest
until we rest in You.
Grant us hearts
that long only for You.
Grant us hearts
that seek only Your presence.
Grant us hearts
that will settle for nothing less than Jesus.

May God bless you, your loved ones and your congregation with a joyous Christmas and abundant hope for the New Year!



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