

Building a House for God

One of the very worthwhile traditional Christmas observances is the retelling of the short novel, *A Christmas Carol*, published in 1843 by Charles Dickens. The protagonist, Ebenezer Scrooge, is, frankly, a despicable old man, but after encountering four ghosts during a lengthy, nightmarish night, he wakes up on Christmas morning, a changed, reformed man, worthy of being the hero of the story. // But what if Scrooge had become a Christian before that fateful Christmas Eve?

[VIDEO: “If Scrooge Were a Christian”]

You see here what a difference Christ Jesus makes in a person’s life! But just how does that become effective in anyone’s life? Well, all that we know are good and righteous behaviors and virtues result from Holy Spirit working in our lives. He is responsible for bringing forth both the gifts and the fruit of Holy Spirit. If we let Him—everything that Paul admonished Titus to impress upon his church members, and more. Parenthetically, they apply just as equally to all of us. But, again, how does Holy Spirit bring forth all this from us? Turns out, He has to not only live within us, but also be given control of our thoughts, wills and deeds.

Looking at the bigger picture of life and existence, we can see that God intends to not only live *with* us, but *within* us. And

this “prime directive” has been in place since the creation of Adam. But alas, after only a few years in the Garden of Eden, this indwelling fellowship with God was broken when Adam rebelled against God’s one prohibition, instigated by the devil in the guise of the serpent who first beguiled Eve. With that infraction, the prime directive has remained unfulfilled. Ever since, the ultimate objective is to regain, reinstitute, and reinitiate, that lost fellowship with our Father Creator God. Because He misses us. He loves us so very, very much. But beyond His love, we can not even survive without Him. Try as we might, we will all succumb to death, and fall short of ever regaining the blissful life with Him that was intended for us from the beginning of time.

So, God set in motion His prearranged, simple but surprising, humble but stunning, rescue mission. Because of Adam’s dalliance with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, humanity’s thinking has been warped, darkened, and clouded by the devil’s deceptions. To restore us to our right minds requires an extensive reeducation of all things, not least of which is our identity. And beginning with the understanding that God created us, and that without Him, we will suffer and inevitably die horribly, eternally, humanity has slowly been taught that God must live with us, not as next-door neighbors, but actually within our own houses, indeed within our very selves. And so, God “hitched a ride” with the Hebrews, whom He had chosen to be the prime instruments to carry out His plan to rescue humanity. He condescend-

ed to “tabernacle”, that is, “live” with the Israelites in a portable tent that is called a tabernacle. And for hundreds of years, God’s glory presence could be both seen and felt from within that tent of fabrics, wood, bronze, silver and gold.

According to God’s plan, the Israelites were established in the Holy Land, and King David, the “man after God’s Own heart”, desired to build a building to “house” God’s presence in the capital city, Jerusalem. But God told him through the prophet Nathan, after Nathan properly prayed, that David’s son, Solomon, would have the honor of building the Temple, though God neither needed or desired a “house” to live in, as if anything on earth could in any way contain the Creator of the Universe. But, because David had the desire to bring God close to the people, God would turn around and bless David with an everlasting kingship and kingdom. Of course, we know this from retrospect is referring to David’s greater and greatest Son, Jesus the Christ. Because, just as no brick and mortar could dream of containing God’s presence, something far different would have to be imagined.

God’s infinite plan, conceived before even time began, entailed the inconceivable, that God Himself would become a human. And so Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary, causing her to conceive a perfect, sinless Child, untainted with the hereditary sin nature passed down from Adam. Thus the Child within Mary was the Son of God, and the Son of Man through Mary’s womb. Never in history had such a fantastic thing happened, nor would it

ever again. But remember that the whole plan of God would have failed had Mary said no. Instead, as Luke 1:38 faithfully records, she responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true”. Because of her humility and obedience, we’re now gathered here together today to praise her firstborn: Jesus the Lord Christ, the ultimate indwelling of God living not only with us, but in us. As Lord Jesus breathed Holy Spirit upon His disciples, so we each are to receive Holy Spirit within us and thereby receive life everlasting, and be His servant. We call this upcoming night of Christmas Eve, a holy night. The holy night. It is holy because of Who is born this night. The very God.

A favorite Christmas carol of many, that we sing together each Christmastide is called, so appropriately, “O Holy Night”. Rachel Kick wrote of its origins. “In 1847, a French priest commissioned this beloved song for his parish. Lyricist Placide Cappeau finished his poem, and pleased with his work, he asked Adolphe Charles Adams to compose the music. The song was sung for Christmas Eve mass. ¶ Initially, *Cantique de Noel* (the song’s French name) was widely loved. Later, leaders learned Cappeau was a socialist and Adams a Jew—and the song was banned from services. But the French people loved it so much, they continued to sing it. ¶ Ten years later, John Sullivan Dwight introduced it in America. An abolitionist, he was moved by the third [stanza]. (*Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother*). Although banned in France, *Cantique de Noel* became popular

with Americans. ¶ On Christmas Eve in 1871, [24 years later] in the midst of fierce fighting between France and Germany during the Franco-Prussian War, an unnamed French soldier jumped out of the trenches, walked onto the battlefield, and started singing the song's first line in French. After singing all three [stanzas], a German soldier emerged and started singing a sacred German hymn. Fighting stopped for the next 24 hours in honor of Christmas Day. Temporary peace was initiated by *O Holy Night*. ¶ Fast forward to 1906. Reginald Fessenden figured out that by combining two frequencies, radio could do more than transmit Morse code. It would be possible to speak! For the first time in history, a human voice was heard on the airwaves; Fessenden read the Christmas story from the book of Luke, then picked up his violin and performed *O Holy Night*".

Now that you know some of the illustrious history of this very anointed hymn, let's lift up our voices and sing it.

["O Holy Night" music video]

This magnificent Christmas hymn of praise to God in Christ was written by someone with a faulty philosophical understanding of human existence, and the music composed by a Jew, who, supposedly by not believing in Christ, was therefore disqualified to compose the music. Well, God does not see things that way. God is God and we're not, and He uses the things of this world to accomplish His perfect purposes and wondrous will. And He blesses both those who receive and those who produce what He

calls into being. Roman Catholics as a whole can't bring themselves to believe that Mary could have been an ordinary woman because she was chosen to bear the Son of God, Christ Jesus. Yet, she had to be. Otherwise, Christ Jesus could not refer to Himself as a Son of Man, that is, Son of Mankind. Mary had to be one of us, and He had to be born from one of us. It was a solution to the rescue mission so perfect, so brilliant, that no one, not the devil, not least of all we humans, could conceive it. Yet, "O Holy Night", regardless of its "tainted" origins, has nevertheless been powerfully used by God for 176 years, and counting.

Now consider how a few changes in words can completely change circumstances, the world, "Scrooge", most importantly individual people all made in God's very image. As of 2007, the third most performed and recorded contemporary Christmas song has a St. Louis connection. Sung by Judy Garland in the 1944 MGM musical film *Meet Me in St. Louis*, "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas", nearly didn't survive. Its lyrics were rewritten three times, each time by their author, Hugh Martin. Garland refused to sing the original words, as they were too depressing. When Frank Sinatra later recorded it, he insisted that a few phrases be changed to make it still more upbeat. The third rewrite came about after Martin himself had become saved, a complete believer in Christ. Read the beautiful "revision" printed on the insert. And remember them every time you hear this song.

["Have Yourself a Blessed Little Christmas" slide]

