



Grand Lodge Bulletin

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A Christmas Message



The most dramatic moment in the Freemason's life is at his initiation, when in the darkness, the Word is proclaimed "God said 'Let there be Light'" and in a flash he is restored to the light to see the kindly countenance of the Worshipful Master and his companions and all the fellowship of the Lodge.

There is mystery in Light—in Genesis light exists before the creation of the sun. This mystic Light, without which there can be no life, has a place in all the religions of mankind. Some, like our Nordic ancestors worshipped the actual sun; others worshipped the Principle of Light, of which the sun was a symbol. These included the Zoroastrians forbears of the modern Parsi. The Hebrew built his temple with due regard to east and west, the sunrising and sunset, when his sacrifices were offered. The Buddhist enshrines the word in the title of the Lord Gautama and calls his the Buddha, the enlightened one. The Christian, taught by his Master speaks much of light and reverently calls Him "The Light of the World".

At this season of the year, modern society in the West, borrowing from Christianity but mixed with ancient Nordic ideas, puts lights on evergreen trees and gaily decorates not only houses, but commercial buildings; witness the

glorious Christmas trees in stores, banks, offices, and the very notable display at the Calgary Brewery, a visit to which (Don't mistake my meaning!) is a "must" for all Calgarians and their children or grandchildren.

What does it all mean? Meaning it must have, for modern man is neither superstitious nor unintelligent. Surely it means that in the Lord Jesus light has shone into the world, a light to illumine, reveal, convict and convince man.

It illumines the idea of God and proclaims Him as good, and loving and concerned with man and his estate. It reveals the true nature of man as a child of God, delivered by his soul from any mechanical working of the laws of evolution. He is man, not merely a creature. It convicts every one of us of insensate desires and evil selfishness, the root sin of sins. It convinces him because the Light shone in a truly human life and demonstrates that any man can live that life through the power of the grace of God.

Fellow Freemasons! The Light shines—not has shone. It shines today! Walk in the Light, and know the length and breadth and depth and height of the infinite love of God our Father, and have a truly Merry Christmas!

—Ven. Cecil Swanson



CHRISTMAS AND MASONRY

By R. W. Bro. the Rt. Rev. Bishop Herbert,
K.C.V.O.; D. D.

Provincial Grand Master for Norfolk

The fact that Christmas falls in the winter season has a significance to Masonry. Christmas presents a challenge—how are things going in the Lodge? Are the ceremonies what they should be? Is the spirit of fellowship growing amongst the members? Is the Lodge playing its part in the wider world of Masonic influence? Christmas, so to speak, looks back, while New Year looks forward. Christmas may be considered by some to be a mere calendar date, but calendar dates may be of real use, as reminders of duties, as commemorating successes or as valued encouragements. Big things are not to be despised because sometimes they have small consequences.

And yet I think no Mason should be content with the conception of Christmas as merely a mid-winter holiday date. That this idea is common is as true as it is deplorable, and perhaps there is no more glaring instance of the increasing secularisation of life. To millions of people, even in this so-called Christian country, Christmas means nothing more than eating and drinking, Christmas trees and presents and special rounds of pleasures. Never a thought is given to its origin and meaning. No one asks why it is called Christmas and the world is therefore so much the poorer. Not even the man who has no personal religion can deny that it is precisely the growing weakness of spiritual values, the insistence on transitory pleasures and the attitude of 'I couldn't care less' that is responsible for some of the ugliness of modern life, with its selfishness, its lack of moral standards, its degradation of human character. Here we touch on a tragic truth. A Latin aphorism, showing how old a place this truth has in human society, says *Corruptio optimi pessima* which may be translated "The worst things in life come from the corruption of the best". Amongst the best is certainly human character. How splendidly is this manifest in time of war, and especially again and again in the stresses of personal life. Have we not all, thank God, known people who by the splendour of their character have restored our belief in man, and perhaps even in ourselves? But if it can rise to such heights it can also fall to the depths. Lucifer, the son of the morning, can become the fallen angel, Satan. And as for you and me, don't we know to our bitter shame how narrow is the margin of safety, how little is needed to bring the worst of our nature to the surface and make our better self forgotten?

Therefore I can imagine no better reform than the restoration of Christmas to its rightful place among men, and I want to consider what reference this has to our Masonic life. At once we are confronted with the question: What is the relation-

ship between religion and Masonry, and, well-worn though it may be, I must say a few words about it.

First, Masonry is not and has never claimed to be a religion. No Mason would make any mistake about this, but it is true that many Masons view their Masonry as a substitute for religion as though Lodge attendance and Lodge loyalty were as important as membership of and worshipping in a religious communion. Of course the opposite is often the case. A man sees his personal religion and his share in the life of some church as side by side with his Masonry, each interacting on one another to the enrichment and deepening of both. What I intend to say a little later on has its bearing on this, but I am immediately concerned with the former class. If they are wrong in building Masonry into a religion in their own minds, what in fact is the religious significance? Historically the connection is clear. All the old medieval guilds of craftsmen, and peculiarly all masons and builders, so largely employed on cathedrals and churches, saw their work and skill against the background of vocation. To them religious practice went side by side with professional skill—working and praying were just two aspects of the same life. The two could not be divorced and they just would not have understood the modern conception that there need be no connection between work and religion, indeed that they have nothing to do with one another. This past tradition we have carried into modern Masonry. It is not a religion, but it is most firmly based on religion. No man can be a Mason who does not affirm his belief in God and who is not prepared to take solemn obligations on the Bible or on the Sacred Volume used in his own particular religious body. All ceremonies are shot through with the ideas of the majesty and authority of God, the sacredness of human personality, the awful responsibility of every man to make the best use of his life. And, like the craftsmen of old, it points to his work, his job in life, his place in society as the sphere in which these Masonic ideals, themselves the outcome of religion, are to be fulfilled. Whatever a man's job may be, butcher, baker, candle-stick maker, he ought to be a better one because he is a Mason, and it is almost as true to say that he can't be a good Mason unless he is a good butcher or baker. And thus his Masonry, and the stresses and necessities of his business life, ought to drive him into closer relationship with some religious body, in order that through a fellowship of believers and through his own religious practice and experience he may more truly realize his own ideals and be of service to his generation.

Have we drifted a long way from the subject of Christmas and Masonry? I hope not, for I have had it in mind throughout what I have written.

Christmas is, of course, exclusively a Christian festival: it can mean nothing religiously to a Hindu, a Mohammedan or to others of certain faiths; but to a Christian it is everything; it is

the symbol, the reminder in time of the very centre and heart of his religion, so that without the truth for which it stands, his whole religion would crumble. Put as simply as possible, it means the coming of the Son of God into human life, coming as a human child into a human family, both to show how lovely is human life when lived as it is meant to be lived, and to offer up that perfect life to God in order to redeem mankind. It is this truth and this hope that inspires every Christian, and without which he just can't conceive living at all.

But we are not all Christians, at least in this committed sense. What then, can Christmas mean to ordinary, not very religious Masons? At last we have reached the heart of our question, but I don't think we could have reached it at all without some such previous considerations. Well, Christmas recalls us, first of all, to those basic truths of life, revealed by religion, which every Mason has made his own. What are these? First, that God is—that He is the Master of the Universe, the righteous and the holy One whom man (you and I) can know and can obey. Secondly that this obedience means conformity with the Volume of the Sacred Law, that is to say, the Book of God, about the rules of life which every Mason accepts.

Christmas reminds us that the business of living as we ought to live can't be and was never meant to be worked out in isolation. Just as the Christ came into this world as a baby, that is a member of the human family, so we have homes and family obligations in which our Masonry must prove itself. The idea of Masonic fellowship is of course common; indeed universal, but it can easily be a pretty poor thing, an excusal of personal faults by blaming them on others and a social indulgence that prevents us from doing our duty. It ought, of course, to be that kind of friendship that is one of the best things that life provides, and therefore a strengthening and deepening of character in a mutual way. It is the modern interpretation of the medieval guild idea, a brotherhood based on craftsmanship, personal usefulness and corporate responsibility.

But there is also a bigger truth enshrined in the Christmas story. One of the tragedies of modern life is the supposed contradiction between the secular and the spiritual, between religion and life in the world, and equally between religion and science. Our forefathers knew better. They saw religion as all-embracing, as the main power by which men live, as the source of character that gives value to activity, and they knew this because the heart of their religion was the truth that God had come down into human life to share it and to raise it to a standard that belongs not to earth but to heaven. This may sound old-fashioned, out of line with modern life with its pressure of worldly considerations and its political and social insistence on material expediency. But are we really satisfied that twentieth century materialism, with all its success in raising the

standards of comfort and increasing possessions, is also increasing the sum of human happiness and making the world a better place? Is it not precisely this belief that we can have a better world through what we have and not through what we are that produces the world conflicts of our time and the ghastly fears of atomic annihilation? The sense of insecurity that is today the cause of so much crime springs inevitably from a situation in which spiritual truth is forgotten and materialism reigns supreme.

Doubtless there is not much, though perhaps more than we realize, that we can do individually to alter the situation, but my conviction is that Masonry has a real part to play. Its fundamental beliefs and assumptions such as I have outlined above, are as it seems to me, precisely what our troubled world needs, but they can only be effective through the lives of our Lodges and our members. I have myself often seen the character of a district changed by its Masonic Lodge. Or perhaps it would be truer to say that I have seen the district changed by the influence and leadership of a man or men who owed these qualities to their Masonic experience. What then might be the effect on the life of our country if all of the several hundred thousand Masons of today were giving a similar example of dedicated life?

Just a very humble place, not clean, not sweet smelling, half cave, half stable, in a small market town in a far-off town nearly 2,000 years ago, where a peasant girl gives birth to her first-born child. How small and unimportant it all seems. Yet that moment changed the whole course of human history, and its influence down the ages has widened and deepened until today millions of people everywhere see it as containing the one hope of the world. No one, as I think, ought to appreciate this more than Freemasons, and it is with this belief, this hope, this good wish that I couple for myself, and I hope for others, Christmas and Masonry.

Courtesy—The Masonic Record.

I heard the bells on Christmas day—their old familiar carols play, and wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on earth, good-will to men. And in despair I bowed my head, there is no peace on earth, I said, for hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good-will to men. Then pealed the bells more loud and deep God is not dead, nor does He sleep. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, good-will to men.

—Longfellow.

As a tree is fertilized by its own broken branches and fallen leaves, and grows out of its own decay, so men and nations are bettered and improved by trial, and refined out of broken hopes and blighted expectations.

Let not the mistakes of yesterday nor the fear of tomorrow spoil today.

—Knox.

HIGHER EDUCATION BURSARIES PRESENTED

PHOTO BY WELLS STUDIOS—EDMONTON

Bursary Winners Attend Presentation Ceremony

Back Row: Kathryn Kozak; Neil Angerman; Allan Bragg; Richard Brownlee; Allan McQuarrie; Patrick Kelly; Wm. Barton; Robt. Borgstrom; Archibald Stewart; Robt. Benesch; Myer Rabinovitz.

Seated: Carol Tovee; L. O. Sanders; Dr. S. H. Hardin; W. L. McPhee (Grand Master); R. D. Wishart; R. S. Sheppard; Anne Careless.

Edmonton was the scene of a pleasing ceremony on Oct. 29th when M. W. Bro. W. Lloyd McPhee, accompanied by several members of the Higher Education Bursary Committee and R. D. Wishart, Supt. of Student Awards met the fine group of young people shown above and presented them with cheques representing one half of the Bursary designated for them; the remainder of the money will be paid at the beginning of the second term of the University.

Garth Olson of Ponoka does not appear in the picture as he was engaged in a class. Judy Beningfield was presented with her cheque in Lethbridge on Oct. 19th while Robt. King, Anne Richardson and Janneke Lievaart received their awards in Calgary on Nov. 1st.

The presentation of the bursary awards is the culmination of a good deal of effort on the part of the Bursary Committee. This Committee consists of the Grand Master, the Deputy Grand Master, the Grand Secretary and six members elected by Grand Lodge for a term of three years, two of whom are elected annually to secure the desired continuity.

It is the duty of this Committee, to select, prior to August 31st in each year, the students to receive the bursaries for the ensuing year. The number of recipients authorized was eight for 1959-60, twelve for 1960-61 and a number, not exceeding sixteen, in any year thereafter. The awards are not based entirely on scholastic standing, but also take into consideration such factors as financial need, industry, integrity, initiative

and other characteristics of the applicant which may assist the Committee in making its selections.

Applicants may be either sex and awards are tenable not only at the University of Alberta, but at any school of acceptable qualifications.

Bursaries are granted for one year, but any student requiring financial assistance in subsequent years may re-apply and such application would be considered on its merits.

The amount of each Bursary has been established at \$500.00 for the school year concerned but the Committee has authority to increase this amount to a maximum of \$700.00 where this is deemed essential. One half of the amount is paid in September and the remainder in January of the next year.

Application forms for the Bursaries may be obtained from the Grand Secretary and must be returned to him, fully completed, not later than April 30th in each year. The Bursaries are open to all young people and are not confined to the children of members of the Masonic Order.

The decision of the Committee in regard to any award must necessarily be considered final.

The Committee is now working in close harmony with the Awards Committee of the University of Alberta in order to insure that there is no duplication of major awards throughout the Province and that students selected are in every way worthy of the investment we are making in their future.

R. W. Bro. J. A. Pink (23)

Member Higher Education Bursary Committee.