

# The Theology of Christmas

by A.W. Tozer

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*The sermon explores the theology of Christmas, highlighting the wonders of eternal life, life manifested, the nature of God, sin, forgiveness, and cleansing through the blood of Jesus Christ.*

**Duration:** 42:00

**Scripture:** John 1:4-5, John 1:9, John 1:14, 1 John 1:1-2, 1 John 1:5

**Topics:** "Christmas"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of waking up in the night to pray. He shares his personal experience of talking to the Lord before getting out of bed most mornings, but sometimes struggling to do so. The speaker then focuses on the message found in 1 John 1:5, which declares that God is light and there is no darkness in Him. He highlights the trustworthiness of God and encourages the audience to put their faith in Him. The sermon concludes by discussing the theology of Christmas and the need to sing theology rather than just songs.

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## Transcript

Now, I think it can be said without any successful contradiction that the holiday or event which has brought more song to the world than any other is Christmas. You have heard today, you've heard here tonight, you have been hearing over the years, what we might call the melody of the incarnation. But in this chapter, ten short verses, John gives us the theology of Christmas.

And there is great danger that we build song on song song on song, and find at the end that we have been singing about our singing. We must sing theology, or be silent. And this is the theology of the advent.

I want to notice seven things. Now, I'll point them out to you. You may check them in your Bible if you wish, or keep them in your head.

The first is the wonder of that eternal life, that which was from the beginning. I pointed out not too many Sunday nights ago that this does not begin with a personal pronoun at all. It begins with the word that, because he's not talking about person first.

He's talking about life. The life was manifest, and that eternal life which was with the Father was manifested unto us. We stand before this wonder as before a great mountain.

There it is. We can't explain it. We can't lift it.

We can't go under it. We can't move it. There stands the great mountain of facts, that eternal life.

And this life was in God, and this life was God. And this life is the first great wonder of this season, that there is somewhere something we call life. We have a bit of it in our minds, and a bit of it in our bodies, but somewhere there is a great mountain of life from which the jewel of our lives was digged.

Somewhere a great fountain of life from which the tiny trickle of our life flows. That is the wonder, that eternal life. Now, let's pin that down.

Let's mark that. Let's underscore that. And when the Christmas carols are laid aside for another year, and the tinsel's taken down, let's stand and gaze with wondering eyes upon that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifest unto us.

And that's the second wonder, the wonder of life manifested. For that is what Jesus did when he came to the world. He manifested that.

Not who, not a personal pronoun at first, but an impersonal something that is beyond personality. That which is the key to all the world, that out of which all flow, that out of which all has come, that eternal life. And that eternal life now manifests itself as a person, and that life was manifested.

And John said, John could say it, we have seen it, he said, and we bear witness of it, and we show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and which was manifest unto us. And our eyes have seen, and we have looked upon, and our hands have handled all that wonder called the word of life. Now the wonder is that word of life manifests.

Every time you think of the incarnation, you should bow your head for a moment. Every time it comes to your mind, you should utter a prayer. You should utter that inward prayer which the church has learned long, long ago.

The old father named Molinus, who went about in Spain saying that it's all right to pray according to your deeds. He was an old Catholic. He said, that's all right, pray the way the church tells you to.

But then in addition to that, I got a better way to pray. He said, pray in your heart. He finally put him in prison for saying that.

But I recommend it, prison or no prison, that you learn to pray out of your heart, and that you learn to remember that the best prayer is not the formal prayer somebody else has written. It is your prayer out of your heart. If your child came to you and read the little word, Mama, I love you, I think you are very kind, and then folded it back up and put it in her little coat pocket, and then the next day came to you again and said, Mama, you are nice, I love you, that would get tiresome, I think, after a while, wouldn't it? Wouldn't your heart hunger for a spontaneous grin that wasn't in print? Wouldn't it get hungry for a little pat that wasn't in print, that nobody else had thought out? Wouldn't it get hungry for spontaneity? I think so.

And so while we pray prayers, I read an article just recently condemning printed prayers. How can you condemn printed prayers when the psalms, 150 psalms, are there printed prayers? You can't condemn them, but you can only say that they teach you how to pray, and you in the spirit of them can have a spontaneous utterance of prayer. Well, I got off on that when I said, every time you think about the wonder of the incarnation, you ought to send up a little bit of prayer.

You ought to wake in the night and pray. I suppose five out of seven mornings I wake up and begin to talk to the Lord before I'm out of bed. The other two I don't feel well, and I have to remind myself I ought to do it and do it, and maybe if I live a little longer I'll get all seven of them turned over to the Lord, so that there'll be seven times and I won't have to remind myself.

Well, now the third thing is, and this mystery is here, this wonder, it is found in the fifth verse. This, then, is the message which we have heard of him in declaring to you that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. Here is the wonder of the nature of God.

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. Life, this is the wonder of life, and the scriptures mix up, and don't try to keep separated light and life. Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings.

When that was written, theology was written, for life and light are one. This is that eternal light, and it is also the light that lighted every man that cometh into the world. And I suppose that there's something deeper than morals here.

A great German theologian, a generation ago, wrote a book, has written a book, I started to say, wrote a book which has become very famous in learned circles, and in that book he declares that the idea of holiness goes back of personality. That you think of the holiness of God as a strange thing before you think of the person of God. I think he's right, I think I'm quite sure he's right, and he says that the idea of purity is not the first idea of holiness.

The first idea that comes to the mind, or that came to the mind when the word holy was suggested, was not the word of being pure, not the thought of being pure, but the idea of being greater than, higher than, beyond, other than, different from, lonely in its self-sufficiency, uncreated substance of life, that without a pronoun, that without a personal pronoun, that. And then, later on, we attribute purity and holiness to God, so when God says, Be holy for I am holy, he's talking about moral purity, he's talking about spiritual cleanness. But, beyond that, and back of that, and prior to that, is the solemn, indescribable something which cannot be put into words that there exists a nature, a substance in the universe which is life, and life, and it is a thing, and it is that, but it also has personality, and that personality is God.

And the wonder of this chapter here, the third wonder, is the nature of God. God is light, God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. Now, the church history shows us that nobody, and this could be said of nobody, except that eternal life which was manifested and become flesh.

But, apart from him, nobody from Adam on down, including David, and Joseph, and all the rest of the great Old Testament patriarchs and the New Testament saints, of not one of them could it be said in him was life, and no darkness was in him at all. But it can be said of God. Does this mean anything to you that in this hour of espionage, and of ambassadors going about hiding facts this day, of slanted news, and hidden truths, and top-secret conferences in this day when you can scarcely trust anybody? Does it mean anything to you that somewhere, accessible to us now, there is that which never, never, never sinned? That which could not, cannot sin.

That which is light, and in it there is no darkness at all. I listen sometimes to a program called Night Desk. It's just news, only it's fresh news phoned in or talked in on the radio.

And the other night, that is, I think Friday night, they had a story about a gold-plated store in the city, six stories high, I think it was, or five, and that suddenly at 8 30 in the evening, when the customers were all in

there, lights went out. Went out clear from top to bottom, and it took them a long time to get the customers out. And the reporter said to one of the girls, a clerk there, tell us about it.

Well, she excitedly told about it, and he said, uh, was there anything stolen? She broke out laughing, and she said their shopping bags started to get full as soon as the lights went out. She said that they tumble this, and they tumble that, whatever they could get, they tumbled into their shopping bags, and she said they all went out with their shopping bags full. Now, those people aren't low down the dregs of Chicago.

They're citizens of our fair city, an average cross-section. That's the way people are. For that reason, I say you can scarcely trust anybody unless he's converted, and then you wait while.

But you can trust God. If that means anything to you, you can trust God. God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.

God will never betray you, he'll never let you down, he'll never lie to you, he'll never shade a meaning. You can begin within the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth, and end in revelation with even. So come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, amen, and you'll not find one shaded sentence, not one covered paragraph, not one slanted word, not one effort to deceive, nothing in salesmanship.

That's why I can't take this modern idea that we're going to sell the gospel. Go sell the gospel, get the convert's name on the dotted line, away with you, you children of the marketplace. If Jesus were to come, he'd take a rope and drive all such salesmen out of the church and start over.

No, no, there's no salesmanship in the gospel, my brother, none in the bible here. No effort to persuade, no hiding one fact in order to accent another one. Everything in this book is as open as the sky, as pure as the waters that flow down from the melting snow yonder, or the waters that flow from the mountain top, so that there is pure, clean light, no darkness at all.

God, you have God, my friends, you have God. Somebody said, Russians have the Sputnik, and we have the soft vaccine. Very, very, very good.

But we Christians can add one more thing. We have God, and in God there is no darkness at all. Then the fourth wonder here is the terrible mystery of sin.

We say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth isn't in us. If we say that we've not sinned, we make God a liar, and his word is not in us. This awful thing we call sin.

Sin, this terrible thing that's been renamed and reshuffled and is now understood otherwise, but it's still sin. You can call cancer by a beautiful name, but it's still sin. Maud Smith goes to Hollywood, and they rename her Lamour something or other, but she's still Maud Smith, and you can't make her any better by changing her name.

They called, what was her name, Smith, Mary Pickford, but she was still Miss Smith. Well, Mary Pickford and all that crowd, they're what they are, and a pretty name doesn't make them any better. And when you call sin by some other name, it's still what it was before.

Call a cancer something else, and it kills its victim. Call infantile paralysis by the name of poliomyelitis, and you have a big word, but you still have a killer and a crippler. And call sin by some other name, a complex or something, and it's still sin.

And if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. And if we say we have not sinned, we're calling God, who in whom is light, and in whom there is no darkness, we're calling that holy thing, that holy one, that world-filling mountain of eternal life and light and purity, we're calling that a lie. So, this terrible mystery is sin.

It's here. It's all about us. It flows around us like the bilge water, like an overflowing sewer, slimy and smelly and filled with silk, and it leaks in everywhere, soaks through, and you scrub and come back the next day, and it's there again.

Sin is everywhere about us. That awful mystery, the mystery of iniquity, Jesus called it, the one of the apostles, the mystery of iniquity, that's the fourth thing in this theology of Christmas. All these things we have, my friends, don't let's get off on a tangent and be carried away with the sound of pretty bells.

There's theology, or something sound and hard. You can come up to it and pound it, and it doesn't ring hollow. The world will take any kind of a crazy thing and put a wreath in front of it, and a ribbon around it, and turn it into a Christmas gift, but it's all hollow.

Everything the world has is hollow. But you can take this sound doctrine of that eternal life, and the manifestation of that eternal life, and the fact of God in his everlasting, impeccable purity, and the awful fact of sin. These are hard, sound bullets, as hard as cannonballs, and you can't beat them down.

You can't get rid of them if you try, and you needn't fear them. They are there. They're as solid as the rock of ages.

Then there's the fifth one, and that follows normally the fourth, and that is the wonder of sin forgiven when confessed. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. There is the wonder of deliverance from sin.

The church is not yet mature, and so we're sometimes shocked by seeing Christians lose their temper, or we're shocked by seeing a Christian do something that we feel shouldn't have done, and then reflect on his Christian character. Well, that ought not to get us down, brethren. You don't expect of your children, your growing children, the same degree of maturity that you expect of them when they get into their middle twenties, and I think that God does possibly not expect of us quite the degree of perfection that he would expect of us later, so that we may forgive the church and certainly forgive each other, and Jesus said to do that 70 times a day, and Paul said that if thy brother sins against you, forgive him.

Forgiving is God. For Christ's sake, forgive us, so that there's a margin there, but here we have it. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive.

Now, there's forgiveness with God that he may be feared, the psalmist said, and there's forgiveness. Now, that's a wonder. That's a wonder that this holy God, in whom is life and light, and in whom is no darkness, this one who is inoculate and impeccable, in whom no shadow of darkness is found, this one can forgive sins in his own creatures.

Yes, he can do that, and he does do that, and don't ask me to explain how or why. I don't know. I know that he does.

The sixth is the wonder of cleansing from unrighteousness. Now, it isn't enough to be forgiven. There must be cleansing, or the work of God is not complete.

There must be cleansing. Jesus Christ came not to forgive us only, but to cleanse us as well as forgive us. The best illustration I know is that of a man condemned to die.

He had been condemned by society as unfit to live because he took a human life, say, or betrayed his government, say, and was guilty of treason. So, he's sentenced to die, and then some president or governor, or one able to do, pardons him, pardons him, and he goes out into society like these poor boys, brainwashed kids that came home from Korea. I haven't a hard word to say about them.

Mostly, they were ignorant boys who'd been brought up in poverty. They had no education. They'd never been taught what a wonderful country America was.

They didn't know what democracy was. They didn't know the distinction between democracy and totalitarianism, and when they went over there as kids going out of the woods, they couldn't take the pressure of the subtle, damnably diabolical brainwashing techniques of the satanically clever communists. And so, they said, we'll stay, we'll be communists.

Now, they're filtering home one at a time, and apparently the government is going to let them do it, and say a little to them, and forgive them. But, oh, my friends, there's one thing that no president, no judge, no no governor can do. He can't cleanse.

He can't wash them from their brainwash. He can't take out of their heart the knowledge that they once did that terrible thing. Nobody can cleanse anybody else.

Can't reach in and sponge out of their poor minds the fact that once they sinned against that starry, spangled flag. They move around among us, poor fellow that, in a burst of boyish nonsense, killed a Japanese woman over there. He's back home, they say.

Nobody's noticing. We made a great international business out of it, and now he's home, and scarcely anybody knows he's around. They, as good as exonerated him over there, save oriental face, they sentenced him, and then suspended the sentence.

That was to save face. But, they let him go. He's gone.

He's home. He's either been, or will be soon discharged from the army. They can't take that out of his heart.

Still there. He was guilty, even guilty of a foolish burst of boyish carelessness. He's still guilty, and he knows it.

He'll remember it when he sleeps at night. He'll remember it when he stands by a gravesite, every time he stands by one. You can't take out of a man what he's done, even though he's pardoned for doing it.

But, the scripture says, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us. And, wonder of wonders, that cleansing takes out the psychology of having sin. It changes the psychology of having sin.

Heaven will not be filled with a lot of ex-sinners who can't get over it, and who are still walking about looking down, afraid to speak. He not only forgives the act, but he cleanses the mind so that there is not a psychology of sin anymore. If I had been ever guilty of treason against my country, and had sold, say, information to the enemy, and I'd been pardoned by a president, I still could not look at my fellow citizens.

When we gathered together, and people were gathered around, and tried to act natural and relaxed, and couldn't, and they couldn't look at me, and I couldn't look at them, I never could feel right, because I would have the psychology of a traitor. And, I would feel that I wasn't fit to be there, and didn't deserve to be among them. And, when anybody mentioned Washington or Lincoln, I'd suffer inside.

But, the wonder, the sixth wonder here, and mystery is how God can take a sinner who knows he's a sinner, knows he's sinned, and so cleanse him that he loses the sense of having sinned. And, he can be as though he had not. I've often used another man's phrase here that I borrowed somewhere from the Middle Ages, but they used to call it restored moral innocence, and that is what we have here, restored moral innocence.

How is that? Well, it is verse 7, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Never forget it, my friends. The babe in the manger never saved anybody.

Let us not allow ourselves to be fooled by sentimentality love babies, or even of appreciation to the eternal Word made flesh. The babe in the manger cleansed nobody, but the man on the cross did. And, it was the blood of Jesus Christ, one of the great cults, one of the major cults, I'll tell you which one, Christian science, one of the great cults.

Now, if anybody here is in that church, don't come to me and start arguing afterwards. There's no use, I know about it. But, they have said, and one of their great teachers, that is great to them, has said, the blood of Jesus Christ has no more power to deliver from sin now than it had when it flowed in his veins.

Which is to say that the Lamb of Abel had no more power to open heaven and bring the hand of God in benediction upon Abel's head when it was shed than when the Lamb gambled among the other lambs in the meadow. No, no, my brethren, the life is in the blood, and the mystery is how that the blood of Jesus Christ shed on a cross can now come to the heart of a returning sinner and cleanse him so that he's free from sin. Theologians sit down and try to figure how it is.

How do I care how it ends? If someone were to come with a bottle of something, or a ray, or something else, and say, here, I can cure your cancer, and someone who withered away to 90 pounds and was ready to die, take a spoonful of that in five days, be up and back at work, I wouldn't protest that I didn't know how it worked. I would say I saw it work, so I don't know how the blood can cleanse. I only know it cleanses, and I only know that it will populate heaven yet with a company of happy people who forgot they sinned, and yet in their memory they know they have.

They will sing together about the worthy being, the Lamb that was slain to redeem us and wash us from out of all kindreds and tongues and tribulations. They'll remember it, but they won't remember it with a sneaking feeling. They can look on the face of God, the scriptures say.

They shall look on his face, and his name shall be in their forehead. The sinner can't look on God's face because he has the psychology of the traitor. He knows, he knows he can't look on God.

Adam couldn't look and ran and hid among the trees of the garden. Peter couldn't look and ran and cried, Depart from me, O Lord, I'm an unthin man. Isaiah couldn't look and fell and said, I'm undone.

But the ransomed sinner can look, for there's a wonder of cleansing here. The blood of Jesus Christ takes away the sense of sin. And then in the third verse is the seventh, and that is that ye may have fellowship with us.

Truly, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ, and this is the wonder of communion. Communion is more than the Lord's Supper. It's more than a name given to a church.

Communion is union, for it couldn't be commune. There must be union, and there is a union. Union of people from everywhere.

If I were to take a poll tonight in this relatively small congregation of your nationality, I suppose I'd have 15 nationalities right here. And if I were to take a poll of your educational background, I suppose it's scarce to be a half dozen of you that had the same. But yet, in Christ Jesus, we as Christians have a fellowship.

A fellowship that isn't forced, that isn't strained. It doesn't depend on our beating the drum, or wearing badges, or hating anybody. You know, some people have fellowship, a fellowship of hate.

They're joined together by their mutual hatred for something, but you and I are joined together by our mutual love for somebody. And so, there is a fellowship, and you don't have to ask what's your background. The fellowship that's as wide as the world, it's the fellowship of saints.

It's the communion of the redeemed. Truly, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. You know, we stand rather awed in the presence of angels.

If we get among angels, we'll be rather awe-stricken. And we say, we say, what a, how wonderful angels are. And that's right, they are.

And they're so much ahead of us now. They're way ahead of us now. And they really, I suppose there's a reason we should think about them with a good deal of awe.

But you know, there's going to be a time when they're going to stand at attention and look at us, because no angel, no angel was ever redeemed. God did not redeem angels. He took not upon him the nature of angels.

He took upon him the seed of Abraham, the nature of Abraham, that man. And how God, that eternal light, and that light, and that holy one in whom is no darkness, how he can walk arm in arm with men who've walked knee-deep in the slime of sin, whose mouths have been filled with cursing all the day long, whose throats have been an open sepulcher, whose thoughts have only been evil continually, now transformed, and forgiven, and renewed, and reinstated, and cleansed. God conveyed a fellowship with them.

I think the angels are going to stand around in respectful attention and say, we don't understand it. I wonder if that's not what Peter meant when he said of such things angels desire to look into. We may be a mystery to them, they're a mystery to us, but perhaps we'll be a deeper mystery to them.

So, here we have the theology of Christ. You take this with you, and when you take the tree down and run the vacuum over the needles that's spilled on the floor, and you put the decorations away for another year, settle down to just living in the United States, you still have this hard, and solid, and big. You can build on it, and you can live on it.

It'll be bred mountain high to eat. It'll be a rock mountain high to build on. It'll be a fountain of light to light you through all this world, and the world to come.

Thank God for the melody of Christmas, but thank God more for the theology out of which that melody sprang. For all the melody in the world, and all the lovely dreams of beauty would be nothing if they had no

foundation. Here's the foundation.

They rest as solid as the holy throne of God. You and I can believe them, we dare believe them, stand on them, and live on them, and when the time comes, die. Now, I think it can be said without any successful contradiction that the holiday or event which has brought more song to the world than any other is Christmas.

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