

A WONDROUS MYSTERY

DAILY ADVENT DEVOTIONS



EDITED BY GEOFFREY CHANG

CHARLES H. SPURGEON

“In *A Wondrous Mystery*, Geoff Chang has collected Spurgeon’s Christmas sermons to help us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. I can think of no better way to respond to the busyness of Christmas than to slow down and meditate on the glories of the incarnation.”

**Juan R. Sanchez**, Senior Pastor, High Pointe Baptist Church, Austin, TX; coauthor of *Reaching Your Child’s Heart*

“Spurgeon’s captivation with Christ bubbles over as he dwells upon the incarnation. Combining deep thought and deep delight, his studies of the Son of God taking our nature settle our faith and stir our love. These sweet extracts, judiciously chosen and helpfully introduced, reveal and stimulate reverence and joy rooted in the wonder of Immanuel—God with us.”

**Jeremy Walker**, Pastor, Maidenbower Baptist Church, Crawley, UK; speaker; author; *From the Heart of Spurgeon* podcast host

“No preacher of God’s Word speaks to me more powerfully than Charles Spurgeon. His are the words of an old friend, though sadly many of my other friends don’t yet know him. Many thanks to Geoff Chang for giving us Spurgeon’s rich insights into Christ’s incarnation.”

**Randy Alcorn**, Author of *Heaven, We Shall See God*, and *Grieving with Hope*

“While some mines quickly exhaust their stores of precious metals, others keep giving forever. And so too do

the works of Charles Spurgeon. This book is a collection of treasures that will bless you this Christmas or any Christmas.”

**Tim Challies**, Pastor; speaker; author of *Seasons of Sorrow*

“*A Wondrous Mystery* contains pure gold from Spurgeon’s treasury of teaching on the incarnation. Far from being an opponent of Christmas celebrations, Spurgeon joined them. Though opposing religious superstition, he championed the Christmas holiday. This volume by Geoff Chang will delight you, deepen your theology of Christmas, and be a helpful tool for family worship.”

**Ray Rhodes Jr.**, Author of *Susie: The Life and Legacy of Susannah Spurgeon* and *Yours, till Heaven: The Untold Love Story of Charles and Susie Spurgeon*

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Daily Advent Devotions

CHARLES H. SPURGEON

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To my parents





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## Introduction

Thanks to English Puritanism in the seventeenth century, Christmas was largely forgotten in the English-speaking world for two centuries. Now, we shouldn't think of the Puritans as killjoys (as our culture so often portrays them). Their opposition to Christmas was primarily spiritual. The Puritans were staunch Protestants, and they opposed anything that might draw the people back to Roman Catholicism. And Christmas was a big part of the Roman Catholic system. The name Christmas, or Christ-mass, came from the December 25th observance of the Catholic mass, which the Puritans took to be unbiblical. It was just one more holy day in an extensive liturgical calendar, which involved the veneration of saints and other extra-biblical practices. Over the centuries, Christmas celebrations had taken on pagan customs and traditions that had little to do with Christianity. Far from being a family-friendly holiday, Christmas was often marked by debauchery and drunkenness. As a result, during the years when the Puritans were in power, they worked with Parliament to pass laws forbidding shops from closing on Christmas and threatening fines for those caught celebrating. In America, restrictions were not as strong, but Christmas still was not the national

event that it is today. Children still went to school on Christmas. Stores remained open. Congress continued to meet. Think of it like Ash Wednesday or Pentecost Sunday for Protestants today; some might observe it, but life and work carried on as normal.

But in the nineteenth century, Christmas took on a new cultural popularity in the English-speaking world, thanks to two main factors. The first was the publication of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* in 1843. Modern readers may view the classic as a portrayal of Christmas in Dickens's day, which is partly true. But the book was as much an effort to revive Christmas and bring it back into cultural prominence. *A Christmas Carol* became so popular that Dickens went on multiple tours to give sold-out dramatic readings of the book in packed venues throughout America and England. After 1843, Dickens would continue to publish yearly Christmas stories, though none of them matched *A Christmas Carol* in popularity. Interestingly, however, these stories rarely, if ever, mentioned the birth of Christ.

The other factor in reviving Christmas in the nineteenth century was the influence of Prince Albert and Queen Victoria. Prince Albert brought over to England several of his native German Christmas traditions (Christmas had never died out under Lutheranism), and those celebrations were widely publicized. There was one illustration that was especially famous, published in the *Illustrated London News* in December 1848, which pictured Albert and Victoria, their children, and the governess gathered around a Christmas tree with

lights and presents. In many ways, this was a portrayal of the Victorian ideal. The royal family not only introduced new traditions to the English (Christmas trees, gifts, candles, etc.), but, more importantly, they made Christmas a family celebration. Rather than Christmas being associated with revelry and drunkenness, it was now centered around the family and the home. The popularity of the holiday continued to expand in this era, fueling the renewed celebration of Christmas as a time for family traditions, holiday meals, and gift-giving.<sup>1</sup>

Amid this intersection of Victorian culture, English Puritanism, and Christmas lived Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892). Shortly after his conversion, this country boy began to preach at the age of 16, was called to pastor in London at 19, and within 7 years, he was pastoring the largest church in evangelicalism, the Metropolitan Tabernacle. He preached as often as 13 times a week, and millions of his published sermons were sold around the world throughout his 38-year preaching ministry. Through his church, he founded the Pastors' College, two orphanages, and dozens of evangelistic and benevolent institutions, and the impact of his ministry continues to be felt today. Many would consider him the greatest preacher of his generation.

And as a Victorian who read Dickens and admired the royal family, it's no surprise that Spurgeon loved Christmas! Preaching in London in 1855, he declared, "I wish there were ten or a dozen Christmas-days in the

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1. For a cultural history of Christmas and the revival of Christmas in the nineteenth century, see Bruce David Forbes, *Christmas: A Candid History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

year; for there is work enough in the world, and a little more rest would not hurt laboring people. Christmas-day is really a boon to us, particularly as it enables us to assemble round the family hearth and meet our friends once more.”<sup>2</sup> He welcomed the holiday season as an opportunity for rest and being reunited with friends and family, especially for his working-class congregation. On Christmas day, he would not only spend time with his family, but he would visit his orphanages and distribute gifts to the children.

At the same time, Spurgeon was an heir of the Puritans. During a time when Roman Catholic theology was experiencing a resurgence in England, Spurgeon championed the evangelical doctrines of the Protestant Reformation. Even as he promoted Christmas, he was careful to ward off any superstition surrounding the holiday.

We have no superstitious regard for times and seasons. Certainly we do not believe in the present ecclesiastical arrangement called Christmas.

First, because we do not believe in the mass at all, but abhor it, whether it be sung in Latin or in English; and secondly, because we find no Scriptural warrant whatever for observing any day as the birthday of the Savior; and consequently, its

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2. C. H. Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit: Containing Sermons Preached and Revised by the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, Minister of the Chapel*. 6 vols. (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1855-1860.), 2:25. Henceforth, *NPSP*. This work will also cite C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Sermons Preached and Revised by C. H. Spurgeon*, vols. 7–63 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1861–1917). Henceforth, *MTP*.

observance is a superstition, because not of divine authority. Superstition has fixed most positively the day of our Savior's birth, although there is no possibility of discovering when it occurred. . . . Probably the fact is that the "holy" days were arranged to fit in with the heathen festivals. We venture to assert, that if there be any day in the year, of which we may be pretty sure that it was not the day on which the Savior was born, it is the twenty-fifth of December.

Spurgeon taught his people not to treat Christmas in any way as "sacred." We see this especially in the gatherings of his church on Christmas Sundays. Unlike other churches, he treated those gatherings just like any other Sunday: no special decorations, no new liturgy. One local newspaper gave this report on Christmas Sunday at the Tabernacle in 1870:

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle on Sunday there were no outward signs of Christmas. The Tabernacle wore its usual appearance, only that owing probably to the inclemency of the weather it was not as crowded as it ordinarily is, and indeed was not quite full, and the fog was so thick that the gas was lit, Mr. Spurgeon was hardly discernible, except by those who were near the platform. But his voice rang out clear and distinct as ever.<sup>3</sup>

For the sermons he preached on Christmas Sundays, Spurgeon didn't mind preaching on Christmas texts,

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3. "Christmas Day at the Metropolitan Tabernacle," *South London Press*, December 31, 1870, 10, The British Newspaper Archive.



like Isaiah 9:6,<sup>4</sup> Micah 5:2,<sup>5</sup> or Luke 2:7.<sup>6</sup> As he once said, “Although we do not fall exactly in the track of other people, I see no harm in thinking of the incarnation and birth of the Lord Jesus.”<sup>7</sup> Even so, he didn’t always preach on a Christmas theme. Some years, he simply carried on with his normal preaching habit, which was to preach on a Scripture text given to him by the Spirit in prayer. And so, on any given Christmas, his congregation might hear him preach on the infallibility of Scripture from Matthew 4:4<sup>8</sup> or on repentance from Jeremiah 18:11.<sup>9</sup> Also, Spurgeon did not limit his preaching on the birth of Christ only to December. Rather, throughout the year, he regularly taught about the incarnation and preached from Nativity texts. On those Sundays, the congregation enjoyed hearing a Scripture reading about the birth of Christ and singing Christmas carols in the middle of the year.<sup>10</sup> The incarnation was a wonder to be marveled at all year round.

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4. “A Christmas Question,” preached on Dec. 25, 1859, *NPSP*, vol. 6, sermon 291.

5. “The Incarnation and Birth of Christ,” preached on Dec. 23, 1855, *NPSP*, vol. 2, sermon 57.

6. “No Room for Christ in the Inn,” preached on Dec. 21, 1862, *MTP*, vol. 8, sermon 485.

7. “The Incarnation and Birth of Christ,” preached on Dec. 23, 1855, *NPSP* 2:25.

8. “Infallibility – Where to Find It and How to Use It,” preached on Dec. 20, 1874, *MTP*, vol. 20, sermon 1208.

9. “Return! Return!”, preached on Dec. 21, 1884, *MTP*, vol. 43, sermon 2547.

10. For example, see “The True Tabernacle, and Its Glory of Grace and Peace,” preached on September 27, 1885, *MTP*, vol. 31, sermon 1862. One of the hymns sung in this service was Hymn 256 from the church’s hymnal, “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing.”

Even as Christmas grew into a cultural phenomenon, Spurgeon lived during a time when the doctrine of the incarnation was being challenged. With the growth of German higher criticism, the authority and trustworthiness of Scripture were increasingly being challenged. The translation of David Strauss's *The Life of Jesus* into English in 1846 led many to adopt a rationalistic understanding of the Gospels, stripping them of all supernatural elements. For them, the incarnation was no longer the miraculous joining of the eternal Son of God with our humanity. Rather, it was simply mythical language that pointed to the high view the disciples had of their rabbi. As evangelicals encountered this teaching, many responded by shifting their emphasis from salvation to ethics. After all, morality was something both conservatives and progressives could agree on. For some, this meant shifting their teaching away from Jesus's death and resurrection to the incarnation. This allowed them to focus more on God's immanence (as opposed to his transcendence) and Jesus's love and moral teaching, and downplay any mention of sin, judgment, or salvation.

Spurgeon would have none of this. Throughout his ministry, and especially during Christmas, he took every opportunity to proclaim the gospel: that the Son of God became a man in order that he might be the perfect sacrifice for the salvation of sinners. The incarnation is not a myth. It is a theological wonder on which our hope depends. The miracle of the virgin birth, the appearance of the angels, God's orchestrating of history, and every other supernatural element of the Nativity pointed to the fact that something wonderful

had taken place: “The Infinite has become an infant; he, upon whose shoulders the universe hangs, hangs at his mother’s breast; he who created all things, and bears up the pillars of creation, has now become so weak, that he must be carried by a woman!”<sup>11</sup> And yet, this incarnation did not happen so that Christ could be for us merely a moral example. Rather, he came first and foremost to be our Savior. The wonder of Christmas is that the God against whom we have sinned would ever send us such a gracious gift. And yet, this is what he did in the little town of Bethlehem many years ago:

Though it is eighteen hundred years ago and more, the Christmas bells seem to ring on. The joy of his coming is still in our hearts. He lived here his two or three and thirty years, but he was sent, the text tells us, for a reason which caused him to die. He was sent for sin. . . . He was sent that he might be the substitute for sinners. God’s great plan was this, that inasmuch as his justice could not overlook sin, and sin must be punished, Jesus Christ should come and take the sin of his people upon himself, and upon the accursed tree, the cross of ignominious note, should suffer what was due on our behalf, and that then through his sufferings the infinite love of God should stream forth without any contravention of his infinite justice. This is what God did. He sent his Son to Bethlehem; he sent his Son to Calvary.<sup>12</sup>

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11. *NPS* 3:351.

12. *MTP* 16:291-292.

How can Christians properly celebrate Christmas? Certainly, Christmas trees, gift-giving, family reunions, and many other customs can all be joyful traditions of the season. But Spurgeon would say that the primary way to celebrate Christmas is by faith in the incarnate, crucified, and risen Savior. That's why this devotional exists: amid a busy holiday season, it is meant to be a daily help to us, reminding us why we celebrate.

The readings in this volume are taken from Spurgeon's sermons and are designed to help you grow a deeper understanding of the theology of Christmas and a greater love for the Savior. They have been lightly edited for a modern audience. I've also added verse references to help you refer back to the Scriptures. They're not organized according to any liturgical calendar (which I think Spurgeon would have appreciated!). You can certainly read them during the Advent season (which begins four Sundays before Christmas), but these readings would be edifying anytime throughout the year. More importantly, however you read this devotional, treasure these truths and ponder them in your heart. Only as we embrace the Savior by faith can we come to know the true joy of Christmas.

Geoffrey Chang  
Kansas City, MO  
October 26, 2023

## Day 1

# Christ, the Conqueror of Satan

"I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel."  
Genesis 3:15

**T**his is the first gospel sermon that was ever delivered upon the surface of this earth. It was a memorable discourse indeed, with Jehovah himself for the preacher, and the whole human race and the prince of darkness for the audience. It must be worthy of our heartiest attention.

Is it not remarkable that this great gospel promise should have been delivered so soon after the transgression? As yet no sentence had been pronounced upon either of the two human offenders, but the promise was given under the form of a sentence pronounced upon the serpent. Not yet had the woman been condemned to painful travail, or the man to exhausting labor, or even the soil to the curse of thorn and thistle. Truly "mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). Before the Lord had said "You are dust, and to dust you shall return," he was pleased to say that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head (Genesis 3:19). Let us rejoice, then, in the swift mercy of God, which in the early watches of the night of sin came with comfortable words unto us.

The seed of the woman by promise is to champion the cause, and oppose the dragon. That seed is the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophet Micah says,

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth. (Micah 5:2–3)

To none other than the babe which was born in Bethlehem of the blessed Virgin can the words of prophecy refer. She it was who did conceive and bear a son, and it is concerning her son that we sing,

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

On the memorable night at Bethlehem, when angels sang in heaven, the seed of the woman appeared, and as soon as ever he saw the light the old serpent, the devil, entered into the heart of Herod if possible to slay him, but the Father preserved him, and suffered none to lay hands on him. As soon as he publicly came forward upon the stage of action, thirty years after, Satan met him foot to foot. You know the story of the temptation in the wilderness, and how there the woman's seed fought with him who was a liar from the beginning.

The devil assailed him thrice with all the artillery of flattery, malice, craft, and falsehood, but the peerless champion stood unwounded, and chased his foeman from the field. Then our Lord set up his kingdom, and called one and another unto him, and carried the war into the enemy's country. In various places he cast out devils. He spoke to the wicked and unclean spirit and said, "I command you, come out of him" (Mark 9:25), and the demon was expelled. Legions of devils flew before him: they sought to hide themselves in swine to escape from the terror of his presence. "Have you come here to torment us before the time?" (Matthew 8:29) was their cry when the wonder-working Christ dislodged them from the bodies which they tormented. Yea, and he made his own disciples mighty against the evil one, for in his name they cast out devils, till Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). Then there came a second personal conflict, for I take it that Gethsemane's sorrows were to a great degree caused by a personal assault of Satan, for our Master said, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). He said also, "The ruler of this world is coming" (John 14:30). What a struggle it was. Though Satan had nothing in Christ, yet did he seek if possible to lead him away from completing his great sacrifice, and there did our Master sweat as it were great drops of blood, falling to the ground, in the agony which it cost him to contend with the fiend (Luke 22:44). Then it was that our Champion began the last fight of all and won it to the bruising of the serpent's head. Nor did he end till he had spoiled principalities and powers and made a show of them openly.

Now is the hour of darkness past,  
Christ has assumed his reigning power;  
Behold the great accuser cast  
Down from his seat to reign no more.

The conflict our glorious Lord continues in his seed. We preach Christ crucified, and every sermon shakes the gates of hell. We bring sinners to Jesus by the Spirit's power, and every convert is a stone torn down from the wall of Satan's mighty castle. Yea, and the day shall come when everywhere the evil one shall be overcome, and the words of John in the Revelation shall be fulfilled. "And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God'" (Revelation 12:9–10). Thus did the Lord God in the words of our text promise a champion who should be the seed of the woman, between whom and Satan there should be war for ever and ever: that champion has come, the son has been born, and though the dragon is filled with wrath against the woman, and makes war with the remnant of her seed which keep the testimony of Jesus Christ, yet the battle is the Lord's, and the victory falls to him whose name is Faithful and True, who in righteousness judges and makes war.