

Christ, the Spiritual Hero

Om. A-sa-to ma sad gam-ma-ya. Ta-ma-so-ma jyo-tir gam-ma-ya. Mri-tyor ma a-mri-tam ga-ma-ya. Avir avir ma e-dhi. Rudra yat te dak-shi-nam mu-kham. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam.

Lead us from the unreal to the Real. Lead us from darkness unto Light. Lead us from death to Immortality. Reveal to us Thy Resplendent Truth and evermore protect us, Oh Lord, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face.

Welcome everyone to this morning's Christmas service. Millions of people all over the world are adoring Christ, the Christ child on the lap of the Madonna and spending the day in the contemplation of Christ, singing the carols and so on. We, in our humble way, even though we are not Christians in the usual sense of the term, we in a humble way will pay our homage and adoration to Lord Jesus Christ.

The title of my sermon later on will be, Christ the Spiritual Hero. Let me first read the program of this morning's functions. [Rustling papers] Where is the program? [Audience laughs.] Are you sure this is the program? Now you have taped all these together.

A reading of the birth story of Jesus from the Bible by Swami Ganeshananda. That we have been doing every year, because those five minutes from the book of Matthew we read, just the birth story. Even in that five minutes if we are truly concentrating on this child on the lap of the Madonna, our mind is transformed to another region. We forget the present surroundings. Our mind goes to thousands of churches, where they are adoring Christ -- thousands of earnest Christians, sincere Christians, they are adoring with the light and incense and songs. Let our heart be one with their hearts, because Christ is one. Christ does not belong only to the Christians. He belongs to all people in every corner of the world where people are following his great heroism. He was not an ordinary hero. He was not a hero in the sense we usually understand. So we read the birth story and after that we sing two carols. After that, the sermon: Christ, the Spiritual Hero. After that there will be [a] collection and when [the] collection is over, we [will] sing two more carols. The carols will be begin by [a] few [of] our choir here and then, these are well-known carols; the whole congregation can join. After that there will be several announcements and final benediction will be given by Swami Prapannananda and the candy will be served at the door. This is our program this morning, so I request Swami Ganeshananda to come and read the birth story.

[Matthew 2:1-5, 6-15, 19-21, 23 (King James Version of the Bible)]¹

This is from St. Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 2.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him?"

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

And they said unto him, "In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet."

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also."

When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him."

When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

Saying, "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life."

And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

[Christmas carols: O Come all Ye Faithful and Joy to the World, are not included in the transcription.]

Christ the Spiritual Hero

The word hero we use in many senses. Alexander was a great hero. He conquered many countries, came up to India and founded for some time at least a Greek kingdom under his general Seleucus². And, there was an inter-communication between the Greek culture and Indian culture. We find that in the architecture and also literature of the time. But it did not last.

Napoleon was another hero. His heroism was to conquer the world. He was by... in himself he was of course a great warrior. He wanted to conquer Russia. That was his mistake. So he could not [do that]. He came back to France and by that time other countries of Europe combined against him. But his name is there: Napoleon the great hero. There are many people even now, who love him. In Paris, there are memorials. The French people love Napoleon. It was not merely that he was a great warrior, but he was a man of determination, courage, character.

In India there was a great king before Christ. His name was Ashoka³. At first he was a warrior in the usual sense of the term. He conquered many neighboring countries. Then he found for himself, this is no heroism so he sought another kind of heroism and he practiced that kind of heroism, a heroism that cares for... cares for man-- that cares to abolish the sufferings of man. Ashoka came, of course, after Lord Buddha, and Buddha's teachings penetrated his heart. So his ambition was now to remove the sufferings of man. So in many places in India you have memorials, stone memorials where in these memorial stones he gives in briefly his policy of his rule and mostly they were from the teachings of Lord Buddha, where there is no room for bloodshed and tyranny and exploitation and cruelty. But there is only the great desire to help mankind, to remove their misery. And he himself did that till the end of his life.

He lived up to the age of eighty. And this kind of heroism of course attracts people. So he was by his side, thousands of followers who are ready to sacrifice, who are ready to die for the sake of the cause. And what was the cause? The cause was to remove the sufferings of man in its entirety. Not the sufferings of man for a period. But one has to dig deep, go deep and find out what is the cause of human suffering. And Buddha found it, by meditation. We know Buddha's story. There are hundreds of books about his life and his adventures were adventures of love and peace. Of course he was a hero in the spiritual sense.

So there are different types of heroes and when we come to life of Jesus Christ, we have to call him a hero in the spiritual sense. Even at the age of twelve, he was fearless. He did not care for his own sufferings if he could point out to people, particularly the church people, their mistakes. So boldly he went. He used to go the church, to the temple in Jerusalem and scold the priests. This is the temple, this is God's place, but [in] this, [in] God's place you have, you have created a business place. Your interest is not God or religion, but your interest is greed. Your interest is false profession, and they were grown-up men but they saw the strength of this young boy of twelve. They could not protest him openly so these priests.... Israel was then under the political domination of Rome. The whole of Israel was a slave country. So they had every hope, because their old books had told that a deliverer will someday come and remove this political misery. We shall regain our former status.

But this child, Jesus, scolded them and said, "Come to your own religion. Practice your own religion, which is not greed, which is not business, but which is character, which is real devotion to God, real love to God. In this way, even at the age of twelve, he showed his mantle [mettle?], the great strength and

boldness of his character. His father was a carpenter and he used to help in the work of his father. If you go to Jerusalem, the people will still show you the place where Jesus used to do his carpentry. Of course, how much truth is there, God knows. [Laughs lightly.] Probably there is no truth. It is for money.

Anyway after that we lose track of this twelve year[-old] boy. He disappeared. Nobody knew where he was. There are many theories about his traveling. He traveled to the East; he traveled to many countries, including India. His objective was to build up his own character – his own army. His own army was himself. He had to be a man of perfect character. There should not be any trace of evil in him. That was his goal. In the language of [the] Bible, we call it heaven. But that is not the heaven in our sense of the term. It was a state of perfection. The human being is born weak and coward and greedy and sensuous animal. This animal man has to be raised to the status of a god. That is perfection.

So he was wandering and doing his sadhana. There have been many books available where some of his traveling and some of his activities during this period of absence is given and people have many theories about the unknown life of [starts to say Lord and then doesn't finish the word] Jesus Christ. But he returned again to his country, to his Jerusalem. And by then people knew the change that had come over him. There was then a teacher of the Jews, John the Baptist. He used to teach in the formal Jewish customs. They have to take their bath and he would repeat some mantras. Like that there are formalities – rituals. So Jesus came to him. Well he is a teacher. Let me go and learn. But when he went to him, John the Baptist fell on his feet. “But I cannot be his teacher. I can fall at his feet and bind his shoelaces. He is a man of God. He has come from heaven. He has come from the Great Father, the Great Lord. And he has come with a mission, the mission of God.” So John the Baptist became a disciple, so to say. And by that time power, emanated from him – not the power that the Jews expected. The Jews expected: a man will come who will help them to remove their bondage from the Romans.

So when Jesus was utilized, utilized [eulogized?] in this way, many people had the hope: this is the messiah. This is the messiah God has sent and it is to him that our country would be... would be free. So there were hundreds of followers and hundreds of enemies also. But there were a few who barely understood him, who could not resist his call. They were people of low status of society – fishermen. They were not people of wealth or position, were humble men. Jesus came to a group of these people who were fishing. There he stood before them and they could not resist his call. He said, “Give up your nets, fishing nets and follow me.” They are surprised. This is our profession; this is the way by which we maintain our family. And he tells us to forsake our profession.

But some were brave. They did not know from where this braveness came. Jesus instilled that courage. Jesus told them. I shall lead you. If you follow me, I shall lead you to the highest good. I will lead you to freedom, real freedom, not freedom from the Romans, but real freedom. So they followed him, some of them – not many—seven or eight or nine or twelve. Later on, we call

them the apostles. Later on they became great personalities. By the contact of Jesus Christ, each of them became a saint. They did not care for life or wealth or family. They followed him from place to place, preaching the gospel of truth, preacher of the real spiritual goal of man. The real spiritual goal of man is perfection! Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." And in another word, another place he says, "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy mind and all thy soul." So these are the strategy of spiritual heroism. He wanted each of them to be a hero. A hero... they wanted to be a hero, by which they could alleviate the distress and sufferings of man. He could only preach three years. By that time, the enemies were strong. He knew that perfectly. He knew that he was sent, by God, for a mission, which in the words of Vivekananda "would last for thousands of years"; [it] would last for thousands of years – his real true mission.

His mission was not just to form a sectarian organization -- but a power of the spirit, a power of God, by which man's heart could be conquered—the evils that are hiding in the heart of man. His fight was against those evils within the heart of man. He said the kingdom of heaven is not far away, but it is here with you, if you can be pure, if you can be pure in heart. If you can cleanse yourself then you will see: heaven is before you. He declared, "I am the light of the world." Light in the sense [of] the spiritual light, which the world needs so much. The world is under the sway of greed and pompousness and fear and all kinds of passions. Animal man! But your life and efforts, he told his disciples should be to raise this animal man to a man of God.

Wealth is not the goal of human endeavor. He said, "What does a man gain if he can gain the whole world but lose his own soul? What can a man give in exchange of his soul?" So his goal was the soul of man, which is not his physical body, his mind as here we come very close to Vedantic teachings. The soul of man is the God in man. God is residing in our heart as our soul. That is why he said, "I am the light of the world, and ye also are the light of the world." Every man has the potentiality to discover his soul nature, by which he can fight the evils inside, the fight that corrects [possibly "corrupts" but if so, needs other words for clarity] the society. So these kinds of teachings, teachings of faith, teachings of purity, teachings of godliness, teachings of compassion -- all these teachings, he was saying through the villages around. And people flocked around him. They could not help it. Such a power emanated from this simple young man.

He was absolutely fearless. He knew that these Sadducees and Pharisees, which were the names of the priests, the Sadducees and Pharisees are after me. He knew that. And that happened. He had his quarters in a house of Jerusalem and there he had a feast. He told his disciples that this is my last feast. And one of them, money is so powerful. Money is much more powerful than God. [Audience laughs.] So one of them who was a faithful devotee, follower of Christ, Judas, his name – but he was bribed by the Sadducees and Pharisees. They said, that you are having a feast and Christ calls it the last supper, and you will by sign point out to us, who is Christ.

So that was the last supper. He took farewell from everyone. Among his admirers and disciples there were women – wonderful women, who did not care for earthly happiness or earthly enjoyment, but they loved him dearly. So eventually they conspired and they came to complain to the governor of the place, (he was a Roman) – that this man is misleading the people. They are destroying our ancient faith. He is destroying our ancient faith. So this man must not be allowed to live. So this Roman governor said, I do not want to go into your disputes. You decide among yourself. You have a court. You decide among yourself what should be his fate. And finally they decided his fate would be: death, cruel death. In those days death was given by what is called a cross. A man would hang, not hang, but this man would be standing against a piece of wood, a cross, and his hands would be on both sides and leg and they will be nailed. And by that – hours of agony—and they would die. That was the rule of the punishment, capital punishment.

So Christ was given [sentence] by this court. This is, this was not a Roman court. The Roman governor did not really like it, but the Jewish priests they had somehow to get rid of him because they are misleading. They are bringing new teachings, which are against the rituals, against the formalities of our books. So Jesus had to carry his own cross, heavy piece of wood, crossed wood, he had to carry himself. And his devotees were by his side, but nobody had the courage to fight against the tormentors. They are silently watchers. And they are crying. And Jesus laughed.

So Jesus has to carry his own cross from place to place; he was so tired he had to rest a little and again he would draw the cross, far to a place called Golgotha. And there, there are other criminals also. There one criminal was already hanging in the cross. And he was also against Christ. And when Christ was raised to that cross, and his feet and his hands are nailed, that is a very sad... There have been very many movies we see this scene and we cry in agony, cry in sympathy. But so he was... his life was of course physical suffering. He bore [it] because he knew that it was all God's will. God has sent me to fulfill His mission through this suffering. So he told his disciples, "I have come not to give you peace, but the sword" meaning that you have to suffer a great deal, after my death in order to preach my gospel far and wide. You will have to suffer, be prepared for suffering. So that was the sad end of how Christ was nailed and he was thirsty and he seemed that he complained to God, the father: "If that be Your will, I will obey you." See, when we read these stories in the Bible, we are moved. Then he died and what happened [after] that, let us reserve that for Easter, [audience laughs] his rising from the grave.

But for Christmas it should be, it should not be any sadness. For Christmas we should look on the Divine Child, on the lap of the mother, innocent child, but that child carried so much power, so much courage, so much compassion, so much love and purity. He never married. He had no time for his own sense enjoyment. Every moment was... of his life was for others. That is true heroism.

So on this day it is our duty. We are Vedantins. In our altar we see Christ and we have decorated him with flowers and all. We are Vedantists. We adore

Christ in the same way as a pious and devoted Christian would adore him. For us, Christ is not different from our own hero, Ramakrishna. Swami Vivekananda who came to this country in nineteen and eighteen ninety-three, he had given a lecture about Christ. He spoke in several places. So we should understand Lord Jesus Christ, his teachings of love and compassion, his teaching of holiness-- how a man can become holy.

1. Gospel of Matthew 2, Bible, King James Version. Early Christian Writings. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/matthew-kjv.html> accessed 4/23/13.

2. Indo-Greeks. [spelling of name checked] Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Greeks> accessed 4/10/13.

3. Ashoka. Wikipedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashoka the Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashoka_the_Great) accessed 4/10/13.