

To Walk with Christ

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 at this Christmas service of our church. This church is not a Christian church, but we cherish the same reverence and adoration for Lord Jesus Christ as any other Christian church will do. So we observe this Christmas service with great sincerity and great love and reverence. We try to see Christ, not as a social figure, not as a political figure, but the Divine, full manifestation of the Divine in his body and mind, what we call the incarnation, divine incarnation. We do accept Jesus Christ as a divine incarnation, son of God, son of Man. All these things that are written in the Bible about Christ, we fully agree with them, but we do not cherish that fanaticism of many Christian churches, because our cardinal doctrine of Vedanta is to see the truth in all religions.

All religions are nothing but expressions of God and you cannot leave God to only one expression. You cannot give a ruling to God: "You are God, You must send in this world only one religion. You can send millions of millions and millions of human beings but as for religion is concerned, only one religion." God won't tolerate that. And with God we also do not tolerate that, what is called dogmatism. Besides this dogmatism, our reverence and for Christ has no flaw.

As you see along with other prophets here, we have decorated the picture of Lord Jesus Christ and in the morning we had a simple worship and now we shall have the usual service beginning with a reading of the story, birth story of Lord Jesus Christ from St. Matthew. *Swami Ganeshananda will read that short story, that story which never gets old. Then there will be two carols, two carols will be sung by our congregation: Joy to the World [and] O Come All Ye Faithful. And then there will be a lecture, short lecture, "To Walk with Christ." Then there will be the offering and followed by again singing of two carols, "Angels we have Heard on High" and then "Silent Night." After that there will be some announcements, announcements and then benediction and some candies will be served at the door. So I request Swami Ganeshananda to read the birth story of Lord Jesus Christ. [Not included in tape, which begins again at the lecture.]*

To walk with Christ.... That is the subject of this evening's, this morning's service... to walk with Christ. We know from the Bible that after his twelfth year, Christ has... had disappeared in unknown countries. He was preparing himself for his great mission and when he came back he barely lived for three years – a little over three years, but he had left his message, which was to be fulfilled through centuries in all countries. And we read in the Bible when he came, he began to seek his followers. He went to the fishermen who were busy fishing and mending their nets. He went to one of them and said, "Follow me." And

that man could not say “no.” He did not know really who is calling him and why he is calling him. And he forgot about his own responsibility. His family life, all depended upon the fishing. But he forgot everything and followed with him; he walked with him. And the same thing happened with several other fisherman devotees. He collected them together. And they began to walk together and let us also in our imagination walk with Christ.

He would there... he went from village to village, and people did not know why but they could not resist his call. He began to follow him, along with hundreds. And he began to preach the doctrine of love. So long they are accustomed to rigid customs, rigid rituals, centered around the temple, Jewish temple, where there was everything-- except religion! [Audience laughs.] And Christ came to bring the true religion to the community. So he began to address the crowds. And he told them that they are not... if they are to follow him they have to listen to his advice, and his advice is not very difficult. So through the Sermon on the Mount, when he was addressing the multitudes we find the noble and pure message of Lord Jesus Christ.

When we read these messages, these simple messages, we have to believe that there is a God. And, that God, is not a superfluity in our life. That God is essential in our life. That is our Father, is our Truest Friend, is our Highest Treasure. So we have to... and he said that I am the Light of God. He declared that... that God’s special manifestation is in him, through him. And then he said, “Ye are the light of the world.” That means, if you walk with me, you have to share my life, my life of loving God and suffering for God and serving God’s children. So if you believe me, you have gathered around me, don’t think it is for fun. You have to sometimes face great ordeals, even death. But you must not be afraid, because you are following me, and God has sent me as His son, as His messenger in order to bring real religion to people -- religion, which is the strength of our life, the joy of our life. That religion has to be made pure, practiced in a pure way.

So we read the Bible, Christ’s words in the Sermon on the Mount. Every word is full of inspiration, but his contemporaries, those people who followed him did not quite understand him at that time. They thought, because they were suffering much from the oppression of the alien rulers, the Romans, and they thought, “This is our new king.” So in their devotion there was that misunderstanding. They thought that we had been suffering for several years, and now this man will free us from the foreign domination. We shall be free. That was the belief of many people. But there were some who knew the spirit of Lord Jesus Christ’s words and they tried to follow his principles. They tried to walk with him.

He went to the Sea of Galilee. He walked through many villages around that place and taught this love of God – not a God of judgment, the God Who is always with a stern rod, is ready to hit you, if you move one inch [chuckles] from the rigid rules of the temple. A God of love. If you call on God, He responds. That is why in one of his teachings we find, “And thou shalt love the Lord, thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy soul,” because, to walk with Christ means to bring a living God in our heart. You cannot have the

company of God just for one hour or two hours, or on certain days for one hour. No! God has to be a companion of your life. Whatever you do, you have to offer your doings to God. Whatever you enjoy, you have to enjoy through God, because this whole world is God's world. And all the actions that you are doing is the... the power is coming from God.

That is why he taught his followers a simple prayer which is called, "The Lord's Prayer." And there we find, "Thy will be done." All power, all glory is God's. This you have to remember. That is walking with me. Walking with me will never stop. You will see horrible things during my life time the three or four years, about three and a half years are left of that life. But what suffering I have to face, you will see. And why this suffering? It is for you all. Because I am the light of the world and you are also the light of the world. You are... you carry with you the potentiality of God. You are also divine. And you have also [to] face... you shall have to face these ordeals, which I am facing. People will taunt on you. People will be cruel to you. But you have to bear all this with faith, knowing that you are walking with Christ. Even when this body goes, Christ said, even when... and this body will go. The days are coming when this body will be, will be destroyed most cruelly. And that is for the sake of man, because out of compassion, God has sent me to purify man through his son -- through his son who was a personification of holiness, personification of purity and courage.

So, that is what walking with God and those things we read, the short story of what happened. Events happened. The crowds were drawn to him and they wanted to see some miracles. And some miracles he showed, because people of little understanding cannot believe sublime things all at once. But if you can show them some miracles, then they will say, "Yes, there is truth in his words. These impossible things have happened." That is why Christ had to show them some miracles. But we should not, if we study the life of Lord Jesus Christ, we see [him] showing miracles -- reviving a dead person, or clearing the illness of some sick person was not the glory of Lord Jesus Christ's life. Lord Jesus Christ life's glory is his purity, his holiness, his love of God, his compassion, and his service to man.

Unsparingly, he served everyone who needed [it]. And that, that is the true walking with Christ. And that walking has not stopped. After the crucifixion of Christ, centuries have passed, but there have been people through centuries in many countries who have walked with God, who have remembered the teachings of Christ, who have tried to love God with all their heart, all their mind and all their soul, and to serve fellow brothers, fellow human beings. These, these essential teachings of Lord Jesus Christ have been practiced and that is why this charity is living. If Christianity was all a social gathering on the... on the occasion of Christmas, another gathering on the occasion of Easter, if Christianity was all [only] this, then Christianity would have long [ago] died. It is because within the fold of Christianity there are many, many people of faith, of love. They are trying to walk with Christ.

Walking with Christ is a symbolical expression, to mean that the principles he preached, the life he showed, his love, his sacrifice, his courage, his wisdom -- all these things we want to contemplate everyday, not merely on Sunday, not

merely on Christmas Day. But we should, we should not give up the presents -- Christmas presents! We should not forget. We should not say, "Oh, if you want to follow Christ, this way, it is too austere. We shall lose Santa Claus..." No! [Audience laughs.] Santa Claus will come with new packages, gifts, spiritual gifts, which are also from Christ: the gift of purity, the gift of love, the gift of faith, the gift of courage, the gift of endurance. All these are great toys -- great toys which will make our life happy if we can have those toys.

So, it is important for us to stress these wonderful teachings of Christ which are so similar to other great teachings of other religions, because all religions speak of the same God, in different names. So when Christ said, "What shall ye gain if you get the whole world and lose your own soul? What can a man give in exchange for his soul?" Soul. The truth about the soul! We are body conscious. We live in a body, a living body, but we do not know that within this body, the real person, real man is a soul. Swami Vivekananda in his short lecture about Lord Jesus Christ, "Christ the Messenger," he said, "Lord Jesus Christ, when he used to refer to himself as son of God, 'God has sent me,' do you think he was speaking of the physical Christ?" No. Christ, Swami Vivekananda says, Christ was always conscious of his divinity, that God is all the time sitting in his heart, even on his... Even when they had cruelly put him on the cross, Christ never forgot God. And that is a lesson for us to emulate, in the difficulties, and the crises of life, we have to know that we are walking with Christ. Christ, the spiritual Christ, the eternal Christ, is with us and we should remember. We should remember our relation with Christ.

We call Christ, "Lord" and Christ sometimes scolded the followers. Simply saying, "Lord, Lord, Lord" won't take you anywhere. Simply saying "Lord, Lord" won't do. You have to do what the Lord wants you to do. The Lord wants you to love God. The Lord wants you to love your fellow men. The Lord wants you to be free. The Lord wants you to be soul-conscious, to know that this life is not our only life. This is a play; this is a game and we have to pass through many such lives and we are to reach, just as the river's destination is the ocean, so every human being's destination is God. So every day we have to walk with God. We have to spend some time in some simple prayers and worship and song, to the leader of our life, the master of [our] life, which for a devotee of Christ, is Lord Jesus Christ, and we should remember some of his simple teachings, which we can follow.

We cannot follow some of his teachings, which were really meant for people of renunciation. When Christ said, "Have thou no home... the birds of the air they have no home, they... God supplies them." If you have faith in God, then God will supply the necessities of your life. Such an attitude is not possible for the average Christian. Such an attitude is possible for people like his close followers, who we called the apostles. The apostles showed as much as possible in their life the spirit of renunciation, the spirit of self-surrender, the spirit of love. They're like Christ, after Christ disappeared from this world, these early Christians and these followers of Christ, they also walked from place to place in the face of great difficulties and dangers because all around were enemies. There were devotees enough, but they were hiding themselves because they

were conscious of the oppression, the tyranny that will come to them if they are discovered as Christians. So that is... it is so interesting to read the accounts of the silent worshippers who used to live in [the] desert or live [in] some villages, where very no one could easily discover them. But they were carrying on in their lives, through their lives, this great message of Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ emphasized the spiritual life. Man's real goal is to see God. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." A similar... similar words of inspiration we find in the Bible, though it is difficult to follow these teachings completely for everyone. Perfection. We speak of perfection. For the Lord Jesus Christ says, "Perfection... God is the real perfect one." So see we have to... he says, man should make his spiritual ideal, perfection. "Be ye therefore perfect." That means, if your heart slowly gradually is freed from the passions and the prejudices and the temptations, hmm, which Christ said, "the treasures of the earth." On this earth, what is [are] treasures to us? The motor car is a treasure. A big house is a treasure. A good family is a treasure. A big fat balance, bank balance is a treasure. These are the values, which have surrounded us. These are our treasures. But Christ says, don't be... lay up yourself the treasures of the earth. These are earthly treasures. They will serve some purpose no doubt. You won't have to give up, but you have to control yourself. We have to know the ideal of life is not to gather these earthly treasures, but the treasures of heaven.

What are the treasures of heaven? The spirit of renunciation, love, purity, self control. These are the treasures of heaven. So you try to gather as much as possible, treasures of heaven though your daily lives... through your daily lives. So we have to walk with Christ every day, every time. Then our human personality will change. It will not be a personality of violence, of greed, of hate, of cruelty. But it will be a personality of sweetness, of compassion, of love. Then we shall be the followers of Christ and we shall be walking with Christ every day: in our family, in our place of work, wherever we go we'll feel that we are walking with Christ. Christ is with us, because Christ was not flesh. Christ was spirit.

That is the purpose of spiritual life, as... as outlined by Lord Jesus Christ. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." This is, as in Vedanta, we have four yogas: communion with God through the attitude of knowledge, through the attitude of love, through the attitude of work – action, so in Lord Jesus Christ's teachings we also find these yogas, karma yoga, bhakti, yoga, jnana yoga. And, that thing is most important to remember, he said, "Seek and ye shall find. Ask and it shall be given you." Seeking, asking, and... "Knock and it shall be opened unto you." A spiritual seeker, spiritual person should practice these three things. Sometimes his mind should ask for God, "Oh God, have grace on me, and I want you. I am surrounded with many things, but nothing satisfies me. I want your love, your sweetness, your purity." That is... and then sometimes our heart should be so eager. The heart should feel that: I cannot live without God anymore. I've lived with many persons and many things all my life, now I want to live with God. That is knocking. So if we can knock, if we show that great earnestness... throughout

history there have been people who have shown us how to live a very earnest spiritual life. They knocked at the door, and the door opened for them. They had a vision of Christ. They had a vision of God.

And so, we too should not think that these are imaginary sayings: that to see God, to have God in the heart [is imaginary]. No! They are true words. It may not be possible for us, for every one of us to follow these words strictly, because we have so much responsibility in life. Where is our time... time for Christ? Christ would say it does not matter. You don't need... Just remember me. I shall be with you. Walk with me. See he has made things simple for us. I do a certain action, certain work, I can forget. I can show my egotism – “how wonderful I have done this work,” or I can be a humble person. It is all by the grace of Lord Jesus Christ. It is all by the grace of God. Two different attitudes. And so, that attitude-- to remember Christ, to walk with Christ -- is not really so difficult. We have to live our life and we have to go through many kinds of activities in order to raise our family, in order to save our families, save ourselves. We have to do many things, but through whatever difficulties and crises come to our life, we should walk with Christ. We should remember his sayings and then we shall feel that Christ is not dead. Christ is living. Christ is living in me, [and] in others. And that remembrance of Christ will make our life really blessed and joyful.

Now let us... what's the next program now? Yes. Offering. Then there will be two more carols.

Our bulletin for January 1990 is out. They have it at the door. Our next service will be on January 7th, Sunday service. The subject will be “The Power of Newness” and I shall be the speaker. Then on... then the Isa Upanishad will be taken up on Wednesday, January 10th. There will be another... there will be this Christmas recess from tomorrow, till the January 7th. During this recess time there will be the Sunday worship as usual, but not the [lecture] part of the worship. It will be early, just as another day's worship is done on early. And if anybody likes to come so early, [he] is welcome to come. And there won't be any evening vespers during this period, but 31st of December, New Years' evening we shall have a function with a program of the New Year. Oh... that was announced in December— 31st. I thought January has come already. It is still in December. So in December bulletin it was announced, that the 31st of December we shall observe the New Years' Eve. The function will begin at 9:30 and we shall show a movie, tv movie in the library, and then we shall come here about 11:30 inside the temple we shall have some meditation and then welcome the new year with meditation and chanting, and singing also is possible. So from 11:30 up to 12:30, but before that, about 9:30 we shall be in the library and we will have some refreshment, maybe some “pop-corn.” We have a new popcorn machine. [He laughs and audience laughs.] And popcorn in hand we shall watch the movie. It is a very interesting movie. And then we shall come here and welcome the new year. And just at 12 o'clock. That will be our program.

Om. Madhu vAtA R^itAyate madhu xaranti sindhavaH.
 mAdhvIrnaH santu auShadhIH..
 madhu naktamutoShaso madhumat.h pArthivam.h rajaH.
 madhu dyauH astu naH pitA..
 madhumAnno vanaspatiH madhumAm.h astu sUryaH.
 mAdhvIrgAvo bhavantu naH..
 Om madhu madhu madhu. ¹

Sweet blow the winds and the very oceans give forth blessedness. May the herbs and plants bring us health and happiness. Sweet unto us be the... the dawns and evenings. May every particle of mother earth be charged with blessing and may the heavens shower us with benediction. Sweet unto us be the noble forest trees. Sweet unto us be the shining sun. Sweet unto us be all living creation. Om. Sweetness, Harmony, Peace.

1. [Transliteration of Rg Veda verse is taken from http://satsangh.tripod.com/pujatexts/satya_baskegar.html] accessed June 26, 2012. The site says: "This page uses Unicode encoding for Devanagari. Please set the fonts and languages setting in your web browser to display the correct Unicode devanagari font such as Mangal.ttf from Microsoft or Raghu8.ttf from the BBC site." [Have not done that, so transliteration may need editing.]