



# **THE NEW SHOFAR**

**Joy to all the world the Lord has come  
CHRISTMAS IS GOD'S GIFT TO THE WORLD**

## ***Discipleship begins with Jesus of Nazareth the Christ of God***

Christians are men and women who follow the Way of Jesus Christ. In accepting his invitation to discipleship, we commit ourselves to follow his Way, to do his Truth and to live his way of Life. It is not the prerogative of a few, for all are invited and it is not meant to be a lifestyle for the elite but for all, saints and sinners alike. It is however a difficult, constantly challenging and endlessly changing journey and few are able to live it in its fullness.

Why do so many of us continue to maintain our struggle to be disciples of Christ? Because in him we have caught sight of something of the mystery that is our engagement with God. Because the final truth about God and ourselves is found in this man from Nazareth and so we take up the Gospel invitation to *come and see* and follow the path wherever it may lead us.

### ***Why bother with discipleship?***

We set out to grow as disciples because we believe that somehow and somewhere in our present lives we can experience something of God's future for us. There is a great deal more to life that we can discern for ourselves. There is more than we can construct for ourselves and that *something more* can only be found in God, with Jesus being the only Way to God.

Herein lies a problem as we come to yet another Christmas celebration. It reminds us how the path of discipleship will always be moving beyond what we have already achieved. Each of these achievements are but the opening up of new beginnings, the opening up of new directions, most of which will lead us into the "unknown" and put strains on our hope and our faith.

This is why the Father sent his only Son. As St Paul wrote...*I am no longer trying for perfection by my own efforts, the perfection that comes from the Law, but I want only the perfection that comes through faith in Christ, is from God and is based on faith.*

### ***It's not Christmas again is it?***

One of the great threats for us as we take up our Godward journey, to our vocations as disciples, is the danger of familiarity. All too often there is a gulf between the discipleship with which we claim to be working and the daily grind that is bringing Christ alive in the words and deeds of our daily living and this gap is potentially of great danger to not only disciples but to our faith communities as well. It leads us to begin to justify things as they are and ourselves as we are. We can have the words of faith (creeds and prayers) but our lives do not reflect the pattern of his death.

This is one of the reasons Christmas is of such importance to us. It encourages us to challenge the validity of our image of Christ and assess how real it is in the light of what actually happens in our daily lives. In a blunter form, we are seeking to explore just how much of our image of Christ

**Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -  
[anathoth.hough@gmail.com](mailto:anathoth.hough@gmail.com) - [www.houghgod.com](http://www.houghgod.com)**

has been re-created in our own image and likeness so that it now carries far more resemblance to us than it does to Christ. Having the Son of God born in a manger challenges us to contemplate whether we are comfortable and at home with our spiritual living and our modes of discipleship because over the years we have limited or removed entirely the pain and cost that is an unavoidable part of any genuine discipleship. Is it that our Christianity now fit us like a second skin? This is what happens when we try and avoid the strangeness, the otherness and the scandal of having God becoming a man and living among us. He can become a domestic idol, a household god.

### ***Our God in a manger?***

Every Christian household should have a family crib and that crib setting should be a focus for our meditation and prayer throughout the Christmas season. Why? Because there in the manger, human expectations and religious hopes have all been set on their heads. Here is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lord, *the Word through whom all things came to be* and he is wrapped in swaddling clothes, sleeping in a manger around the back of an inn in which there is no room for him to shelter. What this child will end up doing his future ministry will much of the same thing. At one stage he will answer his critics in a terrifying challenge: *do you think I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division...!* Throughout his wanderings the *Son of Man will have nowhere to lay his head*, will have nowhere to call “home”. Those who seek to follow him along *the Way* will have to leave everything they have behind and move into the future in hope and trust. Jesus claimed to have come to *cast fire to the earth* and referred to the followers of Judaism as being *an unbelieving and perverse generation*. All in all there are fourteen of these tough rebukes to be found in the Gospels, with Jesus hammering this “evil”, “adulterous”, “peevish” and “unfaithful” *generation*. This is the generation of God’s people he failed to win over to his Father’s saving works, the people for whom he wept. This is why they accused Jesus of being *in league with Beelzebub*. They preferred this to the possibility that he was indeed the Christ his words and his deeds proclaimed him to be and that God was with him and in Him.

### ***Fully man and poor like us***

Our crib reminds us of the importance the “poor” would have in the mission of Jesus, those who *labour and were heavy laden*. They were the people who had been written off by Judaism, by the social norms that governed the way people lived. They ended up being classified as being *sinner*s because they could not fulfil the myriad laws and customs the religious leaders claimed God used for assessing his children. Rejected by the “good people” and disowned by God, they lived their lives in despair, without hope and very much aware of their status as outsiders. These are the people God gathered around the crib of his Son.

Jesus proclaimed a God who embraced these *poor ones* and who showered down upon them divine care and compassion. Those rejected by others (and by the system) are cherished by God. In the New Testament these *poor ones* are those who lacked what was necessary to make life human. The Greek word has the sense of being *bent over, heavily burdened* and is applied to those who are victims a man’s inhumanity to others. It includes the widows and orphans, those unable to care for themselves, the refugees, the sick and the dying and drew into itself the shamed and humiliated, the marginalized and the social pariahs. Many were broken and depressed, simple in mind, on the edge of despair; the lonely, the lost, those who were “different” and those who had become victims of their own weaknesses and failings. All found a place around that crib in Bethlehem, worshipping a man-child who had been sent to turn the world on its head.

**Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -**

**[anathoth.hough@gmail.com](mailto:anathoth.hough@gmail.com) - [www.houghgod.com](http://www.houghgod.com)**