



The Life of Our Lord: Written for His Children During the Years 1846 to 1849

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In this charming, simple retelling of the life of Jesus Christ, adapted from the Gospel of St. Luke, Dickens hoped to teach his young children about religion and faith. Author: Charles DickensFormat: 128 pages, HardcoverPublisher: Simon Schuster (November 9, 1999) ISBN: 978-0684865379

The Life of Our Lord: Written for His Children During the Years 1846 to 1849 Details

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From Reader Review The Life of Our Lord: Written for His Children During the Years 1846 to 1849 for online ebook

Joseph R. says

Charles Dickens wrote The Life of Our Lord for his family, so that his children would have a simple and straightforward way to learn about the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. He never published it in his life time and bequeathed the manuscript to his son on condition that he not publish it. His son respected his father's wishes but did not lay such a restriction on his own son who published the book in 1933.

The book follows the gospel accounts, retelling the many events and teachings in Jesus's life with simple language. Each parable is followed with a paragraph by Dickens explaining what the parable meant (though not in detail--he doesn't get into the significance of the angry loyal brother in the Prodigal Son). The book is about the length of a gospel, making it easy to read in a short time.

I was a little surprised by two omissions. First, Dickens describes how, after being baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus went into the wilderness to pray and fast. But he skips the temptations by the devil. Second, he misses the whole Eucharistic significance of the Last Supper! After explaining each parable in turn, it is very odd not even to quote Jesus saying over the bread, "This is My body." Maybe he thought the issue was too complicated for his children (the oldest was twelve in 1849) or he just wanted to focus on the gospel message as a model for behavior rather than a core set of beliefs. Saying anything with certainty is hard since the book wasn't published or discussed in his lifetime.

Dickens' summation at the end is typical:

Remember!--It is Christianity TO DO GOOD, always--even to those who do evil to us. It is Christianity to love our neighbours as ourself, and to do to all men as we would have them do to us. It is Christianity to be gentle, merciful, and forgiving, and to keep those qualities quiet in our own hearts, and never make a boast of them, or of our prayers or of our love of God, but always to show that we love Him by humbly trying to do right in everything. If we do this, and remember the life and lessons of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and try to act up to them, we may confidently hope that God will forgive us our sins and mistakes, and enable us to live and die in peace.

Sean says

Originally written for the private edification of his children (the children that he later abandoned when he separated from his wife to live out his days with a mistress), this retelling of the Gospels is a victorian nightmare theologically. Dickens removes Christ's miracles and all messages about sin and repentance, altering the Lord's mission on earth to comforting the downtrodden--making them feel good and helping them to greater prosperity. This little book ends up being less a representation of God's truth and more a kind

of desperate and pragmatic nominalism (though more fearful and less pragmatic than that of someone like Matthew Arnold): in the wake of Darwinist theory's arrival and acceptance, the faith of many learned Englishmen was radically undercut, leading them to disbelieve the supernatural and the sacred. As a result, a chaotic, atheistic void opened up at their feet and many of them believed it was better for society at large to preserve at least the externals of Christianity as a kind of "golden lie" to comfort the weak-minded and maintain a justification for moral action. The Life of Our Lord is Dickens' appropriation of Christ's life and work to that end. That said, do not be misled into sharing this story with children as "gospel truth," but it makes an interesting and valuable case study in the popular atheism/Averroism of the high Victorian era.

Jane Potter says

this is a easy read that's a great introduction to the life of Christ. I read some of it out loud to my husband.

I enjoyed the morals that Dickens shares about what we can learn from the miracles of Christ. I think this is a great book to introduce kids to the life of Christ.

However, I would use this as a starting point and would continue in more reading about Christ in the scriptures and more scholarly texts like Jesus the Christ by James E Talmage. Overall, an enjoyable read, great during the holidays.

Melissa says

Charles Dickens wrote this for children, and I think I loved the sentiment just as much if not more than the content: "My dear children, I am very anxious that you should know something about the History of Jesus Christ. For everybody ought to know about Him. No one ever lived, who was so good, so kind, so gentle, and so sorry for all people who did wrong, or were in anyway ill or miserable, as he was. And as he is now in Heaven, where we hope to go, and all meet each other after we are dead, and there be happy always together."

I loved the way he wrote of the miracles of Christ: "I wish that you would remember that word, because I shall use it again, and I should like you to know that it means something which is very wonderful and which could not be done without God's leave and assistance."

At the end he gives a beautiful reminder of what it means to be a Christian, and how remembering the life and lessons of Christ will help us to act in His name, provide hope, forgiveness and peace.

Kw says

Charles Dickens wanted his children to understand who Jesus was, so he wrote, almost as letters, his take on the life of Christ. It isn't perfect, and theologians might wish to alter it to be more scripturally sound, but I still enjoyed and appreciated his effort. The copy I stumbled on has beautiful lettering, copies of Dickens' own handwriting, and colorful flowers to gussy it up a bit. It also explains that the family didn't want it published early on, but later descendants deemed it worthwhile.

Heidi-Marie says

I can certainly see why Dickens never wanted this work published. It is not awful. But it is definitely a summary of the life of Christ written to be at not only a child's level (thus some childlike summaries and much simplified explanations and assertions), but to his OWN children's level. There are occasional parts where Dickens is trying to teach his children good principles and actions based on the Savior's life.

He NEVER meant this to be read by others. I wouldn't have wanted such a work to go either. One of the most eloquent writers could have written a much more beautiful testimony of his beliefs about the Savior for others to read. But that was not a part of his life that he wanted bashed because it was so sacred to him. And he probably didn't want the subject treated lightly or in a strictly a literary light either. He shared this precious part with his YOUNG children. It is no literary masterpiece in the least, but from it I was able to gain how much Dickens loved the Savior, believed in him, and wanted his children to share in that love and belief.

Michelle says

I loved this book. I found it at a library book sale about thirty years ago, when I was still in college. I kept it for many years. Then, I donated it so someone else could discover Charles Dickens and/or Jesus Christ.

Alicia says

Shaun and I read this out loud together to help us celebrate Christmas. It was beautifully simple and wonderfully focused. I think it will become an annual Christmastime tradition for us.

Reread 2012

Reread 2013

Reread 2014

Reread 2015

Reread 2016 - Luke really loved this book as we read it this year. He asked for it at bedtime and even brought it to me during the day. It is a great way to feel the Christmas spirit.

Elizabeth says

Beautiful retelling of the life of Christ. Just beautiful. This will be a yearly-- maybe even monthly read for me.

Danny says

Very interesting to read this expression of belief given the context of Dickens upbringing, education and life in Anglican, Victorian England. Dickens, from what I can ascertain never professed religious belief himself. He was a harsh critic of the social injustice of his day, often inflicted by professed religionists. He did, however often voice tender faith thru some of the most worthy characters in his masterpieces. It is revealing that he wanted the world to see that he desired his children to feel a reality of deity in the Life of Jesus.

Erika B. (SOS BOOKS) says

This book is simply a letter of a father's belief written to his children! Favorite part

"That there might be some good men to go about with Him, teaching people, Jesus Christ chose twelve poor men to be His companions. These twelve are called Apostles or Disciples, and He chose them from among poor men, in order that the poor might know--always after that, in all years to come--that Heaven was made for them as well as for the rich, and the God makes no difference between those who wear good clothes and those who go barefoot and in rags. The most miserable, the most ugly, deformed, wretched creatures that live, will be bright Angels in Heaven if they are good here on earth. Never forget this, when you are grown up. Never be proud or unkind, my dears, to any poor man, woman, or child. If they are bad, think that they would have been better if they had had kind friends, and good homes, and had been better taught. So, always try to make them better by kind persuading words, and always try to teach them and relieve them if you can. And when people speak ill of the poor and miserable, think how Jesus Christ went among them, and taught them, and thought them worthy of His care. And always pity them yourselves, and think as well of them as you can."

-pg.34

Alyisia says

The tone of this book is just like a father speaking to his children, tucking them in with a bedtime story. It is a touching and personal retelling of the story of the Savior's life, with Dickens' testimony interwoven. We like to read this with the kids at Christmas time.

Amy says

I was very disappointed with this book for many reasons. First, it does not feel like a Dickens book. I know, he wrote it for a young audience, but his voice was missing. The only place I could really find it was when he told his children he would take them to a zoo to see a camel if they wished. I loved the complexity of the plot and characters in his novels, all of that was missing, and this book is nothing more than a glossed, overly simplified chronology of Christ's life. Perhaps most disturbing was he removed Christ's divinity and mission from the book, and in that regard he completely missed the heart of the Christian faith and the message of the four gospels.

Garrett Cash says

As others have pointed out, this was never meant to be published nor considered a literary work. Nevertheless it is fascinating for showing the almost completely overlooked Christian faith of Dickens. Also of interest is Dickens simplifying the ideas of Jesus for his children, which show Dickens's thorough understanding of the teaching of Christ. *The Life of Our Lord* is a "gospel harmony," a telling of the gospels story by putting together all of the details in the four gospels. According to the author of God and Charles Dickens: Rediscovering the Christian Voice of a Classic Author all families in Victorian England had at least two books on their shelves, a Bible and a gospel harmony. If you're going to read one, it might as well be by one of (if not THE) greatest English authors of all time. Just remember it was meant for Dickens's children, and is beyond criticism.

Lyn says

I've heard that critics hated this book, and I'm not at all surprised. This book should not be stacked up against Dickens' other works of art. It was clearly never meant to be a great literary masterpiece, and you can't expect many critics to get that. This is simply a father explaining the life of Christ to his children, in his own words, using his own interpretations.

That is precisely why I loved it so much. The scriptures can be daunting to wade through, but this book puts the New Testament in much simpler terms. I felt like a child he'd gathered in his arms and placed on his knee to talk to. I wish this would have been around when I was a kid to bridge that gap between Sally, Dick, & Jane and the gospel cannon. I absolutely intend to give this to my kids (when they're about 8 or so) to help them begin to foster a love for scripture stories.
