1. The first and last meaning of Christmas is that it commemorates the nativity of our Lord - the incarnation of the God-head in the person and form of a Child -- the unprecedented and unrepeated inclusion of the divine in the human -- the beginning of the great drama of redemption which ended on a Cross.

2. But Christmas also has a great number of secondary implications for our life and thought, especially in our wayward and forgetful time -- it has a way of pointing up some of our problems -- of making us more deeply aware of some of the sharp contrasts and glaring inconsistencies which separate our world from God's world -- it provides a high and holy place from which we can, at least momentarily, set things in their proper order.

3. One of these is the ancient and now almost forgotten distinction between pleasure and happiness -- this Christmas again - a great many people will celebrate on the level of pleasure -- eat, drink, exchange presents, hear music, see beautiful things--one of the marks of pleasure, since it is normally associated with the senses, is that it is quite easy to get - one can acquire it without
much effort - nor is it wrong in itself - it becomes wrong only when the world does what it has done these many years - makes the tragic mistake of identifying it with happiness - or makes it an end in itself-- then something else strange happens - the pleasure which we sought turns on us - becomes dust and ashes in our hands and myrrh on our lips -- pleasure gives way to a terrifying emptiness of heart and soul -- a profound sense of disappointment and loss.

4. Now when that happens - as it has happened in our time - men and women often decide to seek - new pleasure, new stimuli for the jaded senses, new excitements -- throw themselves into every new pleasure in the pathetic hope that the multiplication of pleasures will finally bring happiness - now, that never happens - pleasure never makes happiness, no matter how much you multiply it, it just cannot be done, though we are always trying to do it - the wrong arithmetic - the addition and multiplication of pleasure must finally end in subtraction - in a deep and lasting sense of loss - in a loneliness filled with ghosts - the reduction of life to the husks of memory and regret.
5. Another thing about pleasure - the anticipation of it is always greater than its realization -- remember the Christmas of your childhood - the days before Christmas - the anticipation of new toys, the sight of the lighted tree, perhaps more candy and cookies - and then when Christmas finally came and we had played with the toys - and tasted the candy and blown out the last candle on the tree, did we not feel, as we retired, that somehow or other it had not quite come up to expectation - it did not, for no mere pleasure ever does - even certain kinds of so-called happiness never do -- men seek power - and when they get it - still unhappy -- wealth -- never quite works out - they always want more and the wanting makes them unhappy - and so sex and drink - always a let-down.

6. But true happiness is a far different matter - it is a thing of the soul - a matter, not of tasting and seeing, but of knowing and thinking and believing -- it goes far beyond whatever momentary pleasures life may bring - to the still heights and depths of a new serenity of mind and soul - the peace of God - which the world cannot give and cannot take away.
7. And I am very sure that all of us will need a little of that happiness this Christmas time - a little of the warming peace which comes from being at home at the Manger - isn't that our great need - I know there are some who don't look like it -- run around - grasp at pleasure - activity - keep going - but - get them aside - need peace - quiet of heart and mind - fitful fever - sooner or later - the despairing words of Macbeth to his physician -

"Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow
Raze out the written troubles of the brain
And with some oblivious antidote
Cleanse the suffed bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?"

No answer! Macbeth wearily: "Come put mine armor on, give me my staff" - better to die than to live like that - find forgetfulness in war or in a life of lust - eat, drink - it's all the same - if we can't have happiness, let's have pleasure or death.
8. Well, the Child has changed all that - tore up the roots of our trouble and sorrow - sin gave us the power to make life a stairway to a Manger -- the deep, true, permanent happiness which comes from knowing Him and following Him no matter where He leads -- this really it -- for this is a matter of your soul - and that's when real happiness begins and ends -

9. And so this Christmas - a few of us who have wandered far - who have lost Him in what we have done to Him and to one another - lost Him in our pride, our hate, our fear, our littleness of soul, our sin, so often hidden - we may return again to the Manger - proudly take our places beside the little children of the world - be really happy - pray "Ah dearest Jesus, holy Child."