

September 3rd

Historic heroes are often discovered to have great faults. Was Emperor Constantine really a Christian or just a Roman who saw the rise of Christians and decided to play to their cause? JFK, champion of the space program and a seemingly great man, was also an unbelievable philanderer who risked American security to an affair with an East German spy. During the 1960 campaign, campaign contributions were used just about every night to hire prostitutes for him. On November 22, 1963, Kennedy was assassinated and everyone remembers that day. But that same day Clive Staples Lewis died. Known as Jack by his friends, he was born near Belfast, 1898, and raised an Anglican. But when he was ten, his mother died of cancer and he wanted nothing to do with a God so cruel to take his mother. As a teenager he proclaimed his atheism and no one was smart enough to argue with him. (But if you are mad at God, doesn't that mean you secretly believe in Him?) Jack attended Oxford and spent 30 years of his career at Magdalen College. A highly respected literary scholar, he was finally hired as Department Chair of Medieval and Renaissance English at Cambridge. Such studies are highly acclaimed in the culture of Britain, like being the top historian of American History in this country. It was a great career, but God wasn't done with Jack. Lewis was a complex man. He vowed to another soldier and close friend in WWI to take care of his family if that soldier died. When he died, Lewis provided for his family after the war.

In 1926, he had a conversation with another fellow of the university that was a cynic, J. R.R. Tolkien. He was surprised to learn that his friend believed in the Trinity. That quirk challenged him to think his own atheism through. On a bus trip in 1929, he jostled along thinking about various philosophers. If you combine Hegel's definition of absolute with Berkley's concept of a spiritual world, you could conceive of a divine being. When he got off the bus, he decided he should believe that this absolute God or Spirit was real. A few months later he began to formulate what this absolute Spirit must be. Surely it could be a being that revealed itself, "I am the Lord." Realizing this, there is no choice but to pray, something Lewis hadn't done in over 20 years. The real turning point came in 1931. He and some friends took their children to the zoo and they had included the family dog. Dog was a problem. He wasn't allowed in the zoo. C.S. agreed to dog-sit under a tree in the park. It was there that Lewis came to a startling conclusion. When he had left to go to the zoo, he did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. But when he arrived he believed that Jesus was not just Son of God but God Incarnate, his Savior, the only One worthy of trust. (Talk about God sneaking up on you!)

Humbled in his new state, Lewis began to dive deep into the scriptures with newfound understanding. He began to write. In 1941 he burst onto the literary scene with *The Screwtape Letters*, a stunning insight into how Satan and demons try to steal faith. When Tolkien asked him, "How did you come to such a frightening and diabolical vision of hell?" Lewis responded that a muted hell is all around us and he simply conceived of a very nasty government bureau but with more power, spiritual power. World War II had begun. Too old for the army, Lewis spoke on radio BBC religious programs broadcast from London while the city was under periodic air

raids. The broadcasts were appreciated by civilians and servicemen. Air Chief Marshal Sir Donald Hardman wrote, "The war, the whole of life, everything tended to seem pointless. We needed, many of us, a key to the meaning of the universe. Lewis provided just that." In 1943 the episodes were compiled as *Mere Christianity*. In it, Lewis takes the reader through doubt, unbelief, anger at God to see the explosion of faith that anyone can have. More books, 30 in all, during and after the war include titles of *Surprised by Joy*, *A Grief Observed*, and *Chronicles of Narnia*. Lewis was widely read in Icelandic sagas, Greco-Roman myths, and stories from native Americans and Chinese. His anthropomorphic characters in *Narnia* are rich in the heritage of talking animal tales from all over the world while providing the core Christian message. Plays and film has captured *Narnia*. They have been used by God to change the lives of people all over the world.

Thus C.S. Lewis is considered one of the most influential Christian writers of the 20th century and November 22, 1963 is a day to remember.