

The Event of Christmas

This Week's Devotions

Matthew 1:18-25

Luke 2:1-20

Isaiah 7

Isaiah 9

Psalm 22

Romans 5:1-11

Isaiah 9:6-7

6 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.¹

What do you do on Christmas?

Should a Christian celebrate Christmas?

How did the miracles of the Old Testament prepare us for Christmas?

Consider the birth of Isaac (Gen 17:15-21), Samuel (1 Sam 1:1-2:10), and John the Baptist (Luke 1).

How did God reveal Himself to people?

Why was the birth of Jesus necessary?

For you, what is the most significant point about Christmas?

¹All Scripture taken from the New King James Version, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1998, c1982.

Have you ever stopped to think about why Christmas was necessary? How important is the incarnation (incarnation is the birth of Jesus, the God-man). I have heard a story that goes something like this:

There was a family living in the backwoods. Christmas eve arrived and the wife/mother and children washed and scrubbed to go to church. Dad was exhausted from the day's usual work efforts and expressed neither the ambition nor the desire to attend the worship service. Off goes the rest of the family to church while Dad curls up in his favorite easy chair in front of the fire.

Dad promptly falls asleep. Some time later, Dad awakes to a terrible sounding thump in the background.

Wait, there it is again – and again. Dad arises slowly to investigate.

Looking out the front window, Dad is amazed to discover a fierce snow storm swirling around his home. The snows already several inches deep and the wind has created deep drifts.

Just then a duck slams into the window! Thump!!

This is the noise Dad has heard. A flock of ducks lost in the storm are attracted by the light of the blazing fire.

Donning winter garb, Dad moves out into the storm. He tries yelling at the ducks. He stands in the yard flailing his arms. His goal is to chase the ducks into a shelter away from the storm. The ducks seem oblivious to his efforts.

Thump! Thump! More crash into the windows. Oh, what can he do? Snow and ice hang from his hat. His breath is cold, freezing in his throat. If he doesn't do something soon, the ducks will die in the storm.

He rushes to the barn doors and swings them open. He runs back to the yard jumping, waving his arms about, screaming at the top of his lungs, every effort directed at forcing the ducks into the shelter of the barn. All of his efforts fall short. He runs back to the house, returning moments later with grain and corn. He lays a path of food to the barn. If only he can entice one or two ducks to follow the food path, maybe the others will follow.

Still, his efforts are in vain.

Dad stands in the yard, in the middle of the storm, searching for answers.

"If only," he thinks, *"I were a duck, I could lead them into the barn."*

The story does not fit God's thought patterns, but the results are similar. God thinks, *"If only I were a human, I could show mankind how to find Me!"*

The prophecies of the Old Testament make it clear, at least from our perspective, that God's plan for the salvation of mankind began long ago and followed a very precise path. He is not Dad struggling in the storm looking for a means of saving us. No, God's plan was very precise and leads us directly to Christmas.

There are 89 chapters in the Gospels. They cover a period of approximately 35 years. Of these, 84 ½ chapters cover the last 3 years of this period, with 30 of these covering the last week of Jesus' life. There are only 4 ½ chapters which cover the first 30 years, yet, without the birth, the rest would not be necessary.

Christmas in this context means the celebration of the birth of Christ. The word comes from "Christ Mass," the celebration of the Christ. It is the story of God with us, of Immanuel come to earth, so that He may save us.

Matthew 1:21

And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

Notice the preciseness of God's map. The genealogies Matthew and Luke trace the "Seed" of Genesis 3:15 from Adam, to Abraham, to Judah, to David, to Mary and Joseph (Matt 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38).

The announcement of the coming Christ will be fulfilled with the birth of John the Baptist. Luke's birth story includes great detail on John's birth (Luke 1). The birth story of John is of little benefit to the actual Christmas story, but adulthood will find the Baptist fulfilling the prophecy of the herald of the Christ.

Micah's vision of the Christ being born in Bethlehem is fulfilled as the Roman Caesar moves into God's plan. The census forces Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem where Jesus is born. As Paul will later write, *"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons"* (Galatians 4:4-5).

This fullness is a carefully orchestrated movement on the world stage as all the players take their place. The fullness involves more than just the Jewish people. The Romans have moved into control of the world, creating peace and roads. Although an oppressive government, the Romans have created control of different cultures and religions, setting the stage for the quick, sudden growth of Christianity.

And, thanks to the efforts of Alexander the Great, all the world speaks Greek. There is a common language for all to speak.

Then, in the quiet of the night, in a manner not fitting the King of the universe, God enters the world as a little child, in a dirty manger, in a little town, away from the lights of Hollywood and CNN. The entire action reminds us of God talking to Elijah.

1 Kings 19:11-12

11 Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; 12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

The still small voice of God has spoken in this scene announced by the angels, not to the kings, rulers, rich, or famous of the world, but to the everyday people. God came to save the ducks! And we, the everyday people, are the ducks. In fact, anyone who accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior is part of the everyday people, one of the "ducks." This is the basis of Christmas.

The event we celebrate is the birth of God. Many have argued over the years that Christians should not celebrate Christmas. They claim the celebration is the adoption of a pagan holiday. They find the season to be commercial, not religious.

And, they are right – Christmas may well be partly based upon pagan holidays. And, in today's materialistic world, it certainly is commercial. But, does that mean we should not observe Christmas? I would answer with an emphatic NO!

It is true that potentially many pagan holidays were "incorporated" into defining the date of December 25. These include the Roman birthday of the unconquered sun (the feast of Saturnalia), the feast of Dionysus, and

the Jewish feast of lights (Hanukkah). The Eastern church still celebrates the birth on January 6.

December 25 is defended as "the" date by a long line of church fathers. The date was used as early as AD 98 and observed in December on an irregular basis until around AD 360 when it became a fixture. During the interim, a variety of other dates were observed as the birth date of Christ. The important point is that the birth of Jesus was always observed in some fashion by the Church.

And, as the world turns farther and farther away from God and the Bible, more and more materialism slips into the "celebration" of the event. It becomes that much more important for us to remember the reason for the Christmas celebration (Luke 2:21-40). But, as Christians, our response should follow the pattern of the Bible.

We may not know the precise date of Jesus' birth, but that is not really very important. The Church has chosen December 25 as being the symbol for the date of Christ's birth. There is a Christmas song based upon Matthew 2:10 that sums up our proper response:

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

- j The angels "sang" as they announced the birth.
- j The shepherds rejoiced.
- j The wisemen will eventually bring gifts.
- j Isn't this the pattern of our response?
- j Anna and Simeon did not worry about the date of Messiah's birth. They looked to the promise fulfilled in this little child.

And what a promise it was. Consider the true gifts of Christmas –

Consider, based solely on Romans 5, the gifts of Christmas:

- j Jesus, a gift of God the Father, without cost, which gift is acquired by faith and by justification (v1)
- j Peace with God (v1)
- j Access to God (v2)
- j Hope of glory of God (v2)
- j Triumph over tribulation (v3,4)
- j Love and the Holy Spirit (v5)
- j Freedom from the wrath of God (v9)
- j Salvation (v10)
- j Rejoicing (v11)

