

THE REST OF THE STORY

By

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While the Bible doesn't give the date for the birth of Jesus, nor mention any celebration over his birth, it has become the highlight for Christians all over the world. But something is wrong. If the birth of Jesus is as meaningful as the celebration called Christmas indicates, why isn't this meaning reflected in all of society where the celebration is taking place?

Retail stores began gearing up for Christmas early enough to give people two months to buy decorations and preparations for the celebration. But you can be sure that the next day after Christmas everything pertaining to Jesus will be ripped out of the stores as soon as possible. Our Pharisee-dominated culture does not favor the businessman who openly honors Messiah Jesus. All this indicates that in spite of Christmas being the biggest holiday of the year, the idea that Jesus is actually the Messiah, the one anointed as Lord and King, is not to be taken seriously.

The picture book nativity and the Hallmark greeting card have given us a cute sanitized view of Jesus. We see a sweet smelling baby in a soft blanket, in a cozy crib of fresh straw. The well-groomed donkey stands by with a cow and sheep; all cooperatively fitting into place. The whole event is portrayed a-la Walt Disney.

Along these lines, B. Russell Holt wrote: "So? What does it matter if we carry a romanticized version of the nativity around in our heads? Probably not much; unless along with it we unconsciously subscribe to a 'gospel according to Disney.' A Jesus who begins life in such a cuddly, cute way with angels and shepherds and white, little lambs will probably go on to grow up Disney-like, animatedly meeting one perfectly choreographed adventure after another until the happy ending of a glorious resurrection and triumphant return to heaven."

In contrast to the observance of other birthdays, Jesus is celebrated as a child as if he continues to remain a child. Certainly he was unique in birth, being begotten by Almighty God and conceived by a virgin, and this uniqueness is essential in recognizing his person and his purpose. But by keeping Jesus an infant in the manger it becomes easy for people to celebrate him without giving heed to his purpose and accomplishment.

Miraculous as his conception was, Jesus was born as we all are. After nine months of gestation he was born of a woman, with pain and blood. Although we don't know the exact date of Jesus' birth, we know that by Jewish law he began his ministry at the age of 30 when he was baptized and empowered by God's holy spirit. From that day for three and a half years he preached the good news of the Kingdom, spoke the words of God, and did the works of God. (John.5:19; 14:10; 15:15)

The prophecies concerning the advent of the Messiah did not concentrate upon his infancy. They speak of a mature man; a suffering servant, a man despised and rejected, a redeemer and a king.

The first announcement of Christ's coming was in Genesis 3:15, in which God addressed the serpent and said that the seed of the woman (Christ) would bruise the serpent's head while the serpent would bruise his heel, thus indicating both Christ's suffering and victory over death.

The prophecy concerning Bethlehem focused, not on a baby, but on a ruler. **“As for you, Bethlehem Ephrata, little as you are among the thousands of Judah, from you shall he come forth to me, who is to be ruler over Israel”** (Micah 5:2).

The most complete prophecy of the Christ is found in the grand poetry of Isaiah, chapter 53.

“He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised; and we esteemed him not.” v.3

Like all who live to please God rather than man, Jesus ran all the risks, and suffered the consequences. Peter said, “He went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). He gave until there was no more to give, and in return he received criticism and scorn. He is still despised by the Christophobes (Christ haters) of the world.

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” v.6

When we think of sin that is worthy of death, we think of serial killers or cruel dictators. But “every one” has sinned and gone astray, and Jesus suffered the penalty for us.

“He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth: as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who among them considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due?” vs. 7,8.

We must meet Jesus, not at the manger, as pleasant as that might be, but at the cross, where he was slain like a sacrificial lamb to pay the penalty for our sin.

“And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death; although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him; He hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand. He shall see the travail of his soul,

and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; and he shall bear their iniquities.” vs. 9-11

The reality of the world of wickedness is drowned in a sea of fantasy and pagan tradition, but man still stands in desperate need to have his sins forgiven.

“Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the Transgressors.” v.12

To Mary the angel Gabriel announced that Jesus would “save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21), but this was to come only after he set an example for us all by a life in which he “learned obedience by the things that he suffered; and being made perfect he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.” (Heb. 5:8, 9)

There was a glorious wonder in the birth of Mary’s baby, God’s own Son, but it would have been in vain and soon forgotten had he not lived to resist every temptation, to obey the Father’s will, die for our sins, then be resurrected and exalted to be Lord and King. Our songs are not the mere songs of revelry enhanced by colorful lights, tinsel, and the spirit of festivities, but expressions of joy because our sins are forgiven; we have been rescued from death and made heirs of God with the assurance of eternal life.

Billy Graham once told the story of his friend’s little girl looking at the Christmas tree and at the presents under it and asked the question, “Where does God fit into all of this?” I don’t know what they answered, but I think a better question for all of us would be, “Where do I fit into all of this? Just how do I honor Christ my Lord?”

In spite of all the fantasy interwoven into the nativity story through the world’s traditions, it still may be a great opportunity to exalt Jesus as Savior and Lord. It is a time to teach children that it is God, not Santa Claus, who bestows good gifts, and that:

*God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John. 3:16

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