

# 636 What's So Important about the Birth of Christ?

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## God's Answers to Life's Questions

Many people think about the birth of Christ this time of year. No one really knows what time of year He was born. Today we're asking the question, "What's So Important about the Birth of Christ?" This time of year many people think of the birth of Christ and the holidays. We are not really concerned about the holidays today, but we are concerned about who Jesus is and why He came into the world. The birth of Jesus is in the Biblical record one of the most amazing events of all time. We're going to take some time to look at the birth of Christ in prophecy, in history, and in theological meaning. While the Bible never speaks of a holiday honoring the birth of Christ, the Bible shows that his birth and life would change the world. We can all be thankful that Jesus came into the world.

If you were a Jew living in the first century BC, your hope would be placed in the coming of the Messiah. You would have in your heart this belief that the Messiah would come sometime in your lifetime. You would believe that he would come and change the world. You would recall the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." The Messiah was to come miraculously, born of virgin—a woman who had never known a man. This may sound strange to some, but it is actually a bit of a restatement of the very first prophecy of Jesus, a prophecy found in Genesis 3:14-15. These verses come as a result of the sin Eve committed because of the serpent's temptation. The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat all the days of your life; And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel." It is interesting that the hostility is between the seed of the Devil and the seed of the woman. If all people came from Adam and Eve (who is the mother of all the living—Gen. 3:20), why does the Lord speak of the seed of the woman? Could it be here that Eve is not in mind but rather Mary and the Virgin Birth?

Galatians 4:4-5 says, "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." Jesus had a relationship to a woman that he did not have to a man. Of course, Matthew 1:18-25 tells us why: Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus." You see, Mary was the mother of Jesus; but Joseph was his father only legally. Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit miraculously. This is why Jesus at the tender age of twelve, when he spoke about his father, spoke not of Joseph but of his Father in heaven.

This passage reveals two things about the coming of Jesus. First, his name "Jesus" reveals that He will save His people from the sins.

The Jews in those days thought their Messiah would come to set up an earthly kingdom, that he would sit on a throne like David, and be the leader of the world politically as well as religiously. But they misunderstood. The Messiah was never to set up a physical kingdom on earth but came to set up a spiritual kingdom. Jesus said in John 18:37, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." I am amazed a little at some folks today who believe that Jesus will come back to the earth to set up a physical kingdom and reign from Jerusalem. Jesus certainly is a king; He is in fact the King of kings. His kingdom, however, is not like the imperial kingdoms of this world. His kingdom is spiritual and present here on earth today; it is the church. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18-19, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." In this passage the church and the kingdom are associated. One doesn't build one thing and give the keys to another. The church, my friend, is God's kingdom today; and it is a spiritual kingdom with spiritual blessings.

How is it, then, that Jesus will save his people from their sins? The writer of the book of Hebrews helps us to understand that and helps us to understand the mission of Jesus. Hebrews 10:4-7 says: For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says (quoting Psalm 40:6-7), "SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME; IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN YOU HAVE TAKEN NO PLEASURE. THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.'" Jesus came into this world to die. He offered his own body as a sacrifice for your sins and mine. In order to sacrifice a body, Jesus had to have a body, so He came to this world by being born. He came to do the will of God. Jesus understood that sacrificing himself on a cross would not be easy. We can only appreciate Him all the more as we see Him in the Garden of Gethsemane just before his crucifixion, praying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus was willing to sacrifice Himself—I can hardly understand such wonderful love. Peter said in 1 Peter 2:24, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." The death of Jesus on the cross is so meaningful because Jesus as the Son of God came to live as a human being and to die as a sacrifice.

The second important fact about the birth of Jesus is that He is Immanuel, that is, "God with us." We can understand a little about God because of Jesus. John 1:1-4 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men." Jesus as the Word was God. He came to us to bring life. In verse 14, John said, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." What was at first Divine became flesh and dwelled with us so that we could see God's glory. Jesus came to us full of grace and truth. Verses 16-18 in the New American Standard Bible explain, "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus

Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*." No human has ever seen God, but we can understand something about God because we have seen Jesus. Jesus makes God known to us; He explains the nature and the character of God. He is indeed God with us. In John 14:7 Jesus said, "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."

Paul reveals that Jesus is both Divine and human, one who existed from eternity in the form of God but willing to take on flesh as a man. He explains in Philippians 2:5-8, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Jesus humbled himself in so many ways. He was born to a poor family, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. He grew up working as a carpenter with his father. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich." He emptied himself of all the glory and power and safety of being Divine to become a human, so that He could die for our sins. He is truly God with us and for us and to us. We owe Jesus everything, because of all that He has done for us. Because of the willingness of God to make Himself known through Jesus, we can have a personal relationship with our Creator. We are not alone in this world. It could not have been easy for Jesus to do the Father's will and sacrifice his body on the cross, but He was willing to do that because of his love for us.

When Jesus was born, the Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him" (Matthew 2:2). The star rose when the child was born and it came to rest over the place where the child was. We don't much about that star, but it was unusual; it revealed to these wise men where the King was to be born. Do you know of any other king whose birth was marked by a special star? The chief priests and the scribes pointed to Micah 5:2 and Bethlehem. 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.' Micah prophesied 700 years before the time of Christ where the Messiah would be born. Jesus was not born in Jerusalem as some say, for if he had been, this prophecy would have failed. Bethlehem lies on a hill six miles outside of Jerusalem with a valley in between. They are not the same place; rather Bethlehem was just a village. The wise men presented gifts to the one they regarded as king, gifts of gold, myrrh, and frankincense. They would not have given these choice and lavish gifts unless they believed that He truly was the great King God gave to mankind.

When Jesus was born angels appeared in the sky announcing his birth. Luke 2 tells how the angels appeared to the shepherds out in the

fields announcing the birth of Christ the Lord in the city of David (Bethlehem). The angel told them, "And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" The shepherds went to Bethlehem and found the baby in the manger just as the angel said. The mangers of Bethlehem were not of wood but of stone; a manger would have been an odd place to find a newborn baby. But the message of the angel was true. Christ the Lord had been born. And we ought to be so very thankful that He came into this world to save sinners—you and me. When that child was born of a virgin, fulfilling the prophecies, announced by angels, seen in the star by the wise men, and longed for by the Jews, the world still did not understand all the changes that would take place because of him. How He held the hope of a lost and dying world! How He loved that world enough to leave heaven and come to men, who were cruel and did not appreciate him. He died for them anyway. He loved them anyway. Because he did, you and I have hope of salvation and an inheritance with God eternally. Thank God Jesus came into the world.

The Scriptures give us several reasons why Jesus came into the world. 1 Timothy 1:15 says "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Because I am a sinner, his coming into the world cannot be taken lightly. Jesus is my Savior, the only Savior of the world. It took His blood to cleanse me from my sins, and I am so thankful. Luke 19:10 says "the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." God was seeking us sinners in Christ. God knew that we were lost, and so He sent His Son Jesus to find us and to save us. God cared about our souls even when we did not. He took the initiative to reach to us and find us in Christ. John 10:10 says Jesus "came that they may have life and have it abundantly." The life Jesus gives is so much better and sweeter than the lives men live without him. Many people give their lives to sin and think they are really living, but they find in time that they are simply slaves to their own desires. Others live lives alone and in quiet desperation, because they don't know the joy and peace that Christ brings. Jesus said in John 18:37, "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Jesus came to tell us the truth about God, about ourselves, about sin, and about our need to serve Him. You can't find that truth in anyone else. That's why we all need to come to Jesus and to love Him. No other person in all of history had a birth like His. No other person can save you from sin, can give you an abundant life, or can tell you the truth the way He can. Serve Him.

The Christmas holidays, as I have said, are not mentioned in Scripture. The human tradition of making a holiday out of his birth began 400 years after the time of Christ. Being a Christian is not defined by celebrating holidays; it is found in serving the Lord everyday. To become a Christian one must believe Jesus is Christ the Lord, repent of his sins, confess the name of Christ before others, and be baptized (immersed in water) for the forgiveness of sins. When you do, the Lord will wash you completely clean and add you to His kingdom, the church. Won't you do that today?

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