

What is Christmas?
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December 24, 2021

What is Christmas all about? Think of all the activities we engage in. The present exchanges; the cookie exchanges; the parties; the dinners; the shopping; the incessant snacking. And what about all the traditions we have? Family get togethers; special meals; going to church; carol singing; hanging lights; looking at Xmas lights; hanging stockings and making resolutions to lose weight on January 2nd.

When I was little, I always hoped for a white Christmas – sometimes it happened – which brought the anticipation of sledding down the road, snow forts, snowball fights...and crying, because I had shards of snow thrown in my eye. I remember the aroma of pies cooking at my grandmother's house, which always included some hellish creation known as minced meat pie...and there was the adult egg nog that "us kids couldn't drink" ...I always wondered why it was so special.

We would have lights hanging on the house – blue lights, like ice color blue –which made the snow glow & sparkle at night. The Christmas tree inside the house was always real with big colored light bulbs – you know, the kind when 1 bulb burned out, the whole light string stopped working – that's when I learned about cuss words; the tree always gave off that subtle spruce pine smell – it was wonderful – with of course, the ever-present danger of it burning down the house. And then there was the annual cookies & milk set out for Santa Clause...who could never quite finish eating them all – despite being huge & gluttonous...what a mystery.

Well, I'm sure you have your own glorious memories of Xmas; your own cherished traditions to tell of – but is this what Christmas is all about?

Let me read Matthew 1:18-21. ¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Here, we read of what Xmas is about... It is the Son of God, taking on a human nature, to save His people from their sins; "She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

The human name Jesus is ordinary...it was common in that day...but it has extraordinarily significant meaning...it means YAHWEH saves. YAHWEH – the covenant name of God – the same God, who told Moses, I AM who I AM, will save My people Israel out of the bondage & tyranny of Egypt! Mary, you will give birth to a Son...but not any ordinary son, but One who has no beginning & no ending...One who is eternal...a Son who will rescue. He is YAHWEH, the great I AM – the God who saves...the ONLY God who can save! He is Deity wrapped in humanity; divinity robed in flesh...His name will be Jesus.

But, saved from what? What is He delivering His people from? Verse 21 says, “their sins.”

We are a people born in Egypt in bondage to sin. We are all under the tyranny of sin – and we will all face the same destiny...death. Well what is sin? The Bible defines it as “transgression of the Law of God” (1 Jn. 3:4). That is to say, it is a breaking of God’s Law, whether in “a word, by deed, or through any desire in opposition to the eternal law of God.” (Augustine). You & I have inherited sin from our parents...going back to the Garden of Eden. Therefore, you & I have been corrupted by the pervasiveness of sin, thereby willfully breaking God’s Law.

There is no distinction...whether Jew or Greek, all are under sin! For there are none righteous, no, not one. No one understands, no one seeks for God; All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” “And wages of sin is death” (Romans 3:9-18, 23, 6:23).

That is what God declares about you and me. There is no escape for us from this ever-present reality. The world we live in testifies to this fact over & over again through physical death, hatred, violence, immorality, & more.

Listen please... We miss the meaning of Christmas...because we do not think we are as bad as God says we are. We miss the significance of Christmas...because we do not want to believe we are under the severe & sure penalty of God.

There was a sermon preached in 1741 by a preacher named Jonathan Edwards (Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God). He warned the people listening of the justice of God & pled with them to consider the significance of Christ and be saved from the eternal consequence of sin. Edwards preached, “Almost every natural man that hears of hell, flatters himself that he shall escape it; he depends upon himself for his own security; he flatters himself in what he has done, in what he is now doing, or what he intends to do.”

[But,] “The sword of divine justice is every moment brandished over their heads, and ‘tis nothing but the hand of arbitrary mercy, and God’s mere will, that holds it back.”

Everyone look at me...listen to these words...“The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, [He] abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; His wrath towards you burns like fire; He looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire ... you are ten thousand times so abominable in His eyes, as the most hateful and venomous serpent is in ours.”

Please do not dismiss what he said. We need rescued, from sin that rightly incurs God’s justice of holy wrath in eternal Hell. You say, “Whoa, c’mon Troy...it’s Christmas, bring it down a notch & lighten up.” And I say to you, “You’re right, it’s Christmas...Christ was born to save you from the eternally dreadful punishment of your sins!”

Listen to the mercy of God. The angel says: “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” Do you hear God’s mercy? It’s here; it’s what Edwards pled for to his audience. You see, God didn’t have to rescue sinners. He was under no divine obligation to do so. He doesn’t have guilt cajoling Him to act. But God...being rich in mercy...super-abundant...gives it to people who don’t deserve it.

The apostle Paul declares: “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy” (Titus 3:4-5). Again...Do you hear it? Mercy came that night and His name is Jesus. This is what Christmas is about.

Let me quote Edwards one more time... hear his warning & hear his plea...“The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present; they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given; and the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course, when once it is let loose.” With the advent of Christ, that deluge of God’s consuming wrath is stopped...it’s let loose on Jesus in our stead...He saves us by sacrificing Himself...He took God’s righteous fury. His salvation is only applied when we trust in the Person of Jesus Christ alone, through confession of personal sin & turning away from it, toward Jesus for life...salvation comes through Him and no one else...“for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12) “... for He will save His people from their sins.” This is what Christmas is all about. Merry Christmas everyone.