

In a culture that can be described as post-Christian, why do we still celebrate Christmas?

What is the point of Christmas if we leave out Jesus? I fear that in a generation to come we will still have this celebration called Christmas because the retailers demand it, but nativity scenes will be illegal and all reference to Jesus will be taken out. When that time comes, people may begin to ask, why do we celebrate Christmas?

In Isaiah 9 we read about two tribal areas in the northern kingdom of Israel: Zebulun and Naphtali. In 732BC the Assyrian army attacked and overran the northern Kingdom, and the first two tribes to be routed were Zebulun and Naphtali. The area became dominated by Gentiles and was known as Galilee of the Gentiles, as described in Isaiah 9:1. Over time it was inhabited by many different peoples and became known as Samaria. At the time of Isaiah's early prophetic ministry—before any of this had taken place—it must have been inconceivable to the Israelites that this region would be inhabited by Gentiles. In fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, this part of Northern Israel was the first to be overrun by the Assyrians, the first to fall into darkness, and by God's wonderful grace, they were also the first to see the light of the promised Messiah (Isaiah 9:2).

Jesus could have launched his ministry anywhere. In fact, it would have made sense for him to start his ministry in Jerusalem, as this was a major hub. Instead, as we read in Matthew 4:13, when Jesus began his ministry, headed to Capernaum, which was in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. Not only is this significant because Jesus is coming to the area where the destruction of Israel began, but Jesus was also demonstrating that he was coming for both Jews and Gentiles. In verse three we read; "You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy". Here the prophet is speaking of God enlarging the nation of Israel through the inclusion of the Gentiles.

As a result of Jesus' coming, the kingdom of heaven expanded because Jesus came for both Jew and Gentile. We who have believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are part of the Kingdom of God, grafted into the nation of Israel. This is an incredible prophecy that Isaiah pens. The Old Testament has over three hundred prophecies directly relating to Jesus. So, the first question is:

Why Prophecies?

The role of a prophet is to preach, to declare the truth of God's Word, declaring to the current age the eternal truths of God. Frequently in the Old Testament the prophets spoke about a coming champion. At the time of the prophets, Israel was a dying nation; many of the people had been taken into slavery and exile. They had lost their identity; the people yearned for the days of David and Solomon when the nation was at its greatest and most powerful. It was in this troubled era that God used the prophets to encourage the nation and give them a glimpse of greater days ahead.

The prophecies were necessary because when combined, they reveal that Jesus must be the Son of God, the promised Messiah. Today, even though we have seen the fulfillment of almost 300 prophecies about Jesus in the Gospels, we need the prophecies just as much as the ancient Jewish nation needed them.

They needed the prophecies as a warning to keep them faithful and hopeful. We need them to remind us that Jesus was no ordinary man, and that God always fulfills His promises.

Every year we read those familiar words in Isaiah 7:14; “*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*”

Immanuel means; “God with us”, God in human form, which leads us to our next question.

Why Did God Become a Man?

The answer to this question starts with the creation of the universe. God created all things; Jesus spoke all things into existence (see John 1:1-4). In the Garden of Eden there was perfect communion between God and humanity, but then man sinned and a gulf formed between God and man. Mankind and all of creation has suffered as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve. The gulf that separates God and man is so great that mankind could never cross over back to God, no matter how good man tries to be, or how many laws man tries to obey. We can never be good enough to restore our relationship with God.

The problem needed a solution, and it had to come from God. The first step was for God to introduce Himself to mankind. We could not connect with God, but He could connect with us and reveal Himself to us. But an infinitely holy God could not simply reveal himself to sinful man, so God had to become like man and take on flesh in the form of a baby, supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. The Creator became like one of His creatures in order to display His character and nature to mankind and provide a way to reconcile man to God (John 14:9).

This leads us to our third question:

Why Do You Need to Believe?

Isaiah 9:6 states; “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...”

“For to us a child is born” shows that Jesus was born just like any other person; he was fully human.

Then we have the phrase, “to us a son is given”. We can compare it with John 3:16, which says, “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son...*” The Almighty God gave His only son: why? Why did God give His only son? The rest of John 3:16 explains; “*...so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*”

This is the miracle of Christmas, the significance of this special time of the year. God sent his son to dwell with man so that we might live eternally in His presence. All we have to do is believe and rest our hope fully on Jesus.

Have you believed this good news and surrendered to Jesus as Lord of your life?