

MONDAY MANNA

21 December 2020

DETERMINING WHAT CHRISTMAS IS REALLY ALL ABOUT

By Robert J. Tamasy

Over the centuries, countless billions of words have been spoken and written about Christmas. Some commentators still engage in discussions about “the true meaning of Christmas.” But for those of us who believe the Bible, there can be only one meaning: A little baby who would be called Jesus was born in an obscure town called Bethlehem in humble circumstances, yet grew to become the single most influential person in the world. In most of the world, the calendar year is based upon the estimated time of Christ’s birth, hence B.C. (Before Christ) and A.D. (Anno Domini – year of our Lord).

Even though Christmas is typically celebrated on 25 December, no one knows the exact date when the Christ Child was born. However, we do know some things about that event: there were no Christmas trees; Santa Claus was not present; and the only gifts were of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

In today’s marketplace, Christmas is an important time because retail sales increase dramatically. For many stores – and now, online sites – holiday sales determine whether a year has been profitable. That is one reason the retail “Christmas season” seems to start earlier and earlier each year.

Christmas also signifies a time in the business and professional world to assess the past year and start setting new goals for the new year. Holiday parties also have been a popular tradition, although this year, with coronavirus concerns and social distancing, if there are parties, they will probably look different.

Getting back to the significance of Christmas, we find clear explanations in the Bible. The gospel of Matthew offers a very brief account of Christ’s birth, while the gospel of Luke presents the most detail in portions of chapters 1 and 2. However, in terms of why the birth of Jesus Christ is so important, we find the most penetrating descriptions as the gospel of John opens. Here are some of them:

The Word of God, God incarnate. Jesus was not merely a good man, a prophet, or a charismatic religious leader. The Scriptures tell us He was God incarnate, deity in the flesh, who took part in the creation of the world. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made”* (John 1:1-3).

The Light for a dark world. We live in what seems to be an increasingly dark world. Jesus came to bring light to the darkness and to dispel it, ultimately forever. *“In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it”* (John 1:4-5).

The Source of new life. Many of us are aware of flaws, weaknesses, even dominating sins in our lives we would like to change or eliminate altogether. By receiving new life through Jesus Christ, we can experience those changes – not through our own effort, but through Him. *“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God”* (John 1:12-13).

The ultimate example. The Bible tells us Jesus Christ is the Saviour sent from God for all mankind. We also read He was a great teacher, as well as the consummate model of how we should live and interact with others, including God. *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14).

Postal Address:

PO Box 8168,
Woolloongabba, QLD, 4102

ABN: 42 005 622 515

Office Address:

Suite CBMC,
Sung Do Lawyers,
14 Annerley Road,
Woolloongabba, QLD 4102

Email:

admin@cbmcaustralia.com.au

Phone:

07 3172 9365

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

If someone were to ask for your definition of "the meaning of Christmas," what comes to your mind?

What do you think has been the impact of Jesus Christ on the world in which we live, both in terms of life individually and on society? Is there anyone else, in your opinion, who has had a greater impact on the lives of people through the centuries – including the 21st century? Explain your answer.

Has Jesus had an impact on your own life? If so, briefly describe what that has meant for you.

Of the descriptions of Jesus Christ presented in the first chapter of the gospel of John, which is most significant for you – if any?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:

Matthew 1:18-25

Luke 1:26-55, 2:1-20

John 10:10, 14:6-7

2 Corinthians 5:17