

Christmas 2022 Week 1 "Why This Child?"

Introduction

Silence and Darkness.....that's what the world was like.....The last book of the Old Testament was either Esther or Malachai. Those books were finished around 400BC

For 400 years...the Jewish people heard nothing from their God. No manifestations....no miracles...no "hey I am still here"....no one empowered by the Holy Spirit...no prophet speaking for God....not even and good prophetic smackdown....God was silent.

For 400 years....the world was going deeper into the darkness of sin...each generation further from God than the one prior...

The last remaining tribe of Israel...Judah..were going through the motions....Sacrificing animals for their many sins and obeying the religious feasts....but something was missing.....and that something if felt....was God.

Did they finally go too far? The prophets kept warning them that God could give them over to their debased hearts...that God would not wait forever for them to return to Him. Maybe they waited too long. God had flooded the world once before....He promised not to flood the world again...but what if He just walked away? After all, He didn't owe them anything...their sins had caused their death.

They heard crickets....for 400 years...The USA is 240 years old...just to give you some perspective. The Israelites were in bondage in Egypt for 430 years....and they too thought God had given up on them....

The Jewish people began to wonder if they had blown it...would God keep His promise of a Messiah who would save them? Each day...each silent day that went by...each day seemingly darker than the one before.....chisled away at the only thing they still had left....HOPE.

Would God keep His promises? Could they trust Him to save them? Would He keep His promise to Abraham?

The Christmas Story is wrapped in the context of their despair. They didn't deserve for God to rescue them...the save them....but He had promised.

So when God dropped a love bomb on gloom and doom...the angel burst forth and said.....

Luke 2:9–14 (ESV) 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

The Sheperds heard the good news....yes the Messiah has been born...but perhaps a deeper realization drove their joy....God still loves us. He didn't give up on us....He is faithful!

Maybe that is all you need to hear this morning....Perhaps your life up to this moment has been full of darkness....your sins have driven you far from God....you hear that He hasn't given up on you...but honestly deep down you have given up on yourself.

You have lied to yourself and convinced yourself that God can't or will not love you. He may save others...but not you. If that is you...I want you to pay very close attention to something the angel said.

Luke 2:10 (ESV) 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Who is the good news for? How is the great joy for? All the people....a select few? Those who haven't sinned too much? Those that still have faith and hope? NO. The angel says that this is great news and will bring great joy to every human. And that.....most definitely includes you.....and me...and every one else you have ever looked eyes with...and every human that existed long before or will exist long after you are here.

The Arrival

If you haven't experienced the darkness of sin...the hopelessness of your condition...and the longing to fill that void in your heart...then Christmas is just a nice story about Santa and buying stuff.

But we know..this is a great story...it is a story full of wonder...it does bring hope and great joy....but the only way all of that is true...is if it is not just a story....but instead His Story....History.

We don't get saved by a nice fable...we are saved because of a very real...very well recorded moment in History...There as a night...on a particular day...on the hill outside Bethlehem...the one in Judah....when some very young lowly likely female shepherds...had their darkness rocked by a very real chorus of angels and who gave them a great promise.

The day before...darkness and silence from God....the day after....anything but....the light of God exploded on scene that night...The angels full of excitement make the greatest announcement to all of mankind. God knows....God knows your darkness....God knows your despair...God knows your hopelessness...God knows your guilt...God knows your isolation...God knows your loneliness...and God knows your pain.....and most importantly God know you desperately need Him....He is your God...and He is your Savior.

God's response? I AM HERE. I am the Savior....I can be your Savior...You will never have to wonder again...I am IMMANUEL...I am God...and I am and will be with you always. You can choose to never again live in the darkness that suffocated your life. You can't live in darkness when you are a source of God's light.

John 1:1–5 (ESV) 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:9–13 (ESV) 9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:14 (ESV) 14 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.

John said...We have seen His Glory....I was on the mountain with Peter and James...He was in His full Glory....He is God. I have seen it....

Years later in John's Life people who say that Jesus may have been God...but He was never really human....So John writes once again.

1 John 1:1–4 (ESV) 1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

John is testifying to a very real doctrinal truth...A doctrine is a belief we base our lives on, and it's something we contend for, we insist on. In other words, a doctrine first of all is a faith position. It's not something we can prove scientifically. It's not something we prove empirically. Secondly, it's something we live on, we commit ourselves to, we base our lives on. And thirdly, it's something we push, we contend with other people over. That's a doctrine.

The miracle of the Christmas Story is a doctrine called Incarnation...It means that the Messiah was fully God and fully Man all at the same time...never less than fully both.

The text says the invisible has become visible, the incorporeal has become corporeal. In other words, God has become human. The absolute has become particular. The ideal has become real. The divine has taken up a human nature. This is not only a specific doctrine, but it's also unique. Doctrine always distinguishes you. One of the reasons we're afraid to talk about doctrine is because it distinguishes us from others.

On the one hand you've got religions that say God is so present in all things that incarnation is normal. If you're a Buddhist or Hindu, God is imminent in everything. God

is the divine spark in everything, and therefore incarnation is normal. God is incarnate in all sorts of people and things.

On the other hand, the family of religions like Islam and Judaism says God is so transcendent over all things that incarnation is impossible. Jesus as God-man is blasphemous. They say Jesus was a man...but never God.

But Christianity is unique. It doesn't say incarnation (God becoming part of His creation) is normal, but it doesn't say it's impossible. It says that the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ is a universe-shattering, history-altering, life-transforming, paradigm-busting event. Christianity has a unique view on this that sets it apart from everything else.

Only Christians claim that Jesus is Fully God...That He has and will always exist...and that one day...He literally stepped into His creation to save it from itself. He became man....He didn't stop being God...He was fully God and Fully Man...it is a key core doctrine of the Christian faith...it cannot be removed or changed.

You cannot understand the significance of Christmas if you don't understand the doctrine of incarnation.

God is the Almighty One. But he is also Immanuel. If you want a balanced picture of God, you've got to juxtapose those two names. As Mark Batterson says, "He is God Most High and God Most Nigh." He exists outside time and space. He is also Immanuel—God with us. God entered space-time 2,000 years ago in a tiny village outside Jerusalem called Bethlehem.

Galatians 4:4–7 (ESV) 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Jesus was subject to the same spiritual laws that govern all of us. He was also subject to the same physical laws that govern the universe. It's easier for us to accept that Jesus was fully God than that he was fully human.

I have these weird thoughts sometimes. Here's one of them: For the better part of 30 years, Jesus worked as a carpenter. I wonder if Jesus ever missed the nail and hit his thumb. I wonder if he ever got a splinter. I think he did. I think Jesus got bumps and bruises and toothaches and stomachaches and headaches. He got tired and hungry. He got sad and mad. Hebrews 4:15 says he was tempted just like we are, but he never gave into temptation. He suffered like we do—more than we do. We don't serve a scar-less God. We serve a God with scarred hands and feet and side and back. According to Isaiah 52:14, Jesus was scarred beyond recognition.

God put skin on. He became touchable and approachable. Think about this: The Omnipresent One downsized to the confines of a human womb. The Omnipotent One became a helpless baby that had to be fed and nursed and burped. The Omniscient One had to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic. He became nothing. Why? He became

nothing so that we could become something. It's all about trading places or trading spaces.

2 Corinthians 5:20–21 (ESV) 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In other words, Jesus makes us a deal we can't refuse. He says, "Give me all of your sin. I'll give you all of my righteousness. And we'll call it even."

I love the way Dick Foth says it: "He came to our place. He took our place. And he invites us back to his place." That is the gospel in a nutshell.

The Story of Incarnation

I have to take you back about seven hundred years before this birth. So about 2,700 years ago there was a city called Jerusalem. By this time the kingdom that was known as Israel was divided. Also, around this time Jerusalem was under attack by its own brothers and sisters to the north. So about seven hundred years before the birth of this child, Ahaz was king of Judah, the Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom and Syria had come together against the Southern Kingdom, and they were about to invade Judah. At this point Ahaz has a choice to make.

Then a prophet named Isaiah enters into the story. God tells Isaiah to go to King Ahaz, king of Jerusalem, king of Judah, and basically tell him, "Don't worry. I have everything under control. Everything is in my sovereign rule. Ask me for a sign, and I'll give it to you." In other words, God says, "Listen. I'll go one further. Not only don't worry, but ask me for anything to show you. So I can show you how sovereign I am and how powerful I am, ask me anything and I'll give it to you." Now Ahaz was weak, and he was an unbeliever and he rejected God's sign. So God became angry with him, and so God says, "That's fine. I'll go ahead and give you a sign."

Isaiah 7:13–14 (ESV) 13 And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? 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.

That's a very interesting promise, because God was promising Ahaz to be with him. And the name Immanuel means "God with us." And God basically tells him here's the sign. The sign is that a child is going to be born, and this child will be God with you, seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ.

What's fascinating is that when God created everything he was with man in the Garden—God and man living together, God with man. But man rebelled against God, and he rejected God's rule over him and God removed him from his presence. He exiled him out of the presence of God. But there was a promise, and the promise was that through a child, through a child of a woman, war would take place and that child would crush the serpent's head. The child would make war with Satan, and he would be victorious.

So when we come to the birth of Jesus Christ and we look at the New Testament in Matthew's Gospel chapter one, we read of a promise. Keep in mind this is 700 years

after the sign to Ahaz of a child named Immanuel. We read of the description of the birth of Jesus Christ

Matthew 1:18–23 (ESV) 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." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

When Jesus Christ was born Matthew says, "This is it. This is the child. This is the child that will be God with us." The reason we make such a big deal about this child is because the child born in a manger over 2,000 years ago in a place called Bethlehem is God with us. This is the God who desired to be present with his people.

But that's not the only reason we make such a big deal about this child. I want you to notice something else. As I keep reading in Isaiah we go through Isaiah 8 and in Isaiah 8 there's an invasion from Syria that is promised that's going to consume the enemies of God's people. But then in chapter 9 we have this promise. It's a great promise that during the time of darkness, that they are experiencing right now, there will come a great light.

Isaiah 9:2–3 (ESV) 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. 3 You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

In Isaiah 9, in this time of darkness, God promises them that light will come and that this one who brings light is going to put an end to war, oppression, and darkness.

This one will come and end war. All the battle implements, all the battle clothing, everything with blood on it will be gathered and it will be burned as fire because war will be no more. That's the promise that God is giving his people in the midst of the threat of invasion from foreign enemies. Then God explains how all of this will come to be.

Isaiah 9:6–7 (ESV) 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Again with the child! What child is this? That child born over 2,000 years ago in a little town called Bethlehem is not only Immanuel God with us, but the Bible tells us that he is also God for us. Notice the names. This is one who is the light of hope, who comes by way of Galilee. This is where Jesus came from. The light of hope will come in God's gift of a child. In fact, Isaiah 9 tells us that the hope for God's people comes with the mere fact of the child's birth. Just the fact that

he is born brings hope to God's people. But I want you to notice the names that this child carries, names of titles, perhaps, if you will.

Wonderful Counselor

He is Wonderful Counselor. That word "wonderful" means supernatural. So the child will either be a supernatural counselor or he will be a counselor who offers supernatural counsel. This child who will be king, is one who has wisdom from above and he has counsel that is from above. Unlike Ahaz who was afraid of the nations around him and unlike Ahaz who gave poor counsel and unlike all the other kings in the line of David that led Israel and Jerusalem to the pits and to be ultimately exiled, unlike those kings that have foolish counsel and gave foolish counsel, this king will have divine counsel. He will be all wise and he will be all knowing.

Mighty God

But notice, secondly, he is Mighty God. Mighty comes from the word for "warrior." So this child is God with us, who makes war for us. This is the God who fights on our behalf. This is the child that was promised in Genesis 3:15 that would make war with the serpent. He would make war with the enemy of God. He would make war with Satan himself. And this child that will be born is Mighty God. He is God himself who comes down, and makes war with the enemies of his people. He fights for his people.

That is good news. The greatest battle that we see that this child fought was the battle against the devil when he lived a perfect life of perfect obedience and in obedience he went to the cross. The Bible says that he destroyed the works of the devil by dying on the cross and receiving God's wrath upon himself for our sin, because the Bible tells us that Satan is an accuser of the brethren. He is the one who will stand to accuse everyone for every law that they have transgressed, for everything that they have done wrong. He will gladly stand against all who have broken God's law and say, "He is mine! She is mine! I have her! I have him! They have transgressed your law. They belong to me!"

But the Bible says that Jesus went to the cross and he defeated the devil by paying the penalty for sin so that "Whoever believes in Jesus Christ has everlasting life." So that whoever believes in Jesus Christ, on that day when they stand before God as Judge and the devil says accusingly, "I know what he did. I know what she's done," Jesus will reply, "I died for that sin." "There is therefore now no [longer any] condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Jesus says, "Whoever trusts in me, their payment has been paid by my death." This is Mighty God.

Eternal Father

But notice also the title Eternal Father. Not that Jesus is our father, not that there's any confusion in the Trinity. But he will act as a father. He will be a king who will rule on behalf of his people with care and compassion. Unlike the kings of Israel's history, unlike the king of Jerusalem's history who

were selfish and ruled for selfish gain, this king will rule his people with compassion, care, kindness, and mercy. This is the kind of king that people long for. He will deal with his people in a fatherly way.

Prince of Peace

And then finally, he is the Prince of Peace. He is the Prince who brings peace. He doesn't bring peace to the world the way we think of it...No wars, no conflict, no struggles. That will come on His second visit.

This Messiah would bring a peace that comes from the throne of heaven. It is the peace of God, but most importantly it is peace with God. Jesus came to solve your God problem. To overcome the fears that you have about God's wrath and to take the sting out of death....He provides a way for you to have total peace with God even though you initially rejected Him and sinned against Him.

John 14:27 (ESV)

27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Closing

When the fullness of time had come.....when one minute sooner would be too early and one minute later too late.....God broke the heavens and spoke into the darkness after 400 years of silence. He is faithful to do what He has promised to do.

Everything happens through His perfect timing. He has made promises that eclipse your darkness.....Perhaps that is the greatest joy of Christmas.....You can't keep Jesus in the manger. This child saved the world and He saved you. In the midst of your darkness.....He speaks.....that is the message of Christmas....He is the gift to every person.

Many people will be experiencing darkness this Christmas.....many need to know that the light has come into the world....and can walk with them...as Immanuel....You will never have to be alone again.

So I am wondering....Where do you find yourself this Christmas?

Are you a follower of Christ who finds yourself in darkness because of Adam's sin? What I mean by that is that when Adam sinned he introduced chaos, disorder, and disease into this world. There is suffering and darkness that we experience because of Adam's sin, because Adam's sin brings forth death. During this Christmas maybe that's what you have experienced.

Or maybe you have received a diagnosis and you know that it is imminent death in your life and there's darkness over your life. There's a darkness over your family because you're facing death, disease, or some other kind of darkness, not as a result of anything that you've done or as a result of anything someone's done to you, but simply as a result that you're a human being and that you have inherited Adam's sin, guilt, and corruption.

The Good News of the gospel is that Jesus is God with us and God for us. If you look and hope in Christ, and you believe the words of Jesus who said, "He who believes in me even though he dies yet shall he live," you will be saved.

Maybe you are here and you're a follower of Christ in darkness because of the sins of others. Maybe someone has sinned against you. Someone has done something to you and you're experiencing a time of darkness because someone has cheated you out of something. Maybe someone has cheated you in business, relationships, marriage, or life.

Somewhere, somehow someone has done something to you. Maybe they've done something to your family and there's a cloud of darkness over your life, over your family. The Good News of the gospel is that Jesus is God with us and God for us. He is the light that comes to dispel the darkness. You can put your hope and trust in him regardless of the situation that you're in today.

Maybe you're here and you are a follower of Christ but your darkness is because of your own sin. You have done certain things. You have made certain choices and as a result of those choices there's a cloud of darkness over your life, this season, or over your family.

The Good News of the gospel is that because Jesus is God with us and God for us, Jesus Christ paid the penalty for sin on our behalf and that we can look to him and we can find forgiveness. The Bible promises that "if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." You see, the bottom line is this—Jesus is God with us and God for us, so that whatever darkness you're experiencing he is the light that dispels the darkness.

There's another group of people in here, those who are not followers of Christ. They're ones like Ahaz who rejected what God was saying. They reject God's child and they reject God's King. To you I would say this: you can look in hope to Christ that he would be God with you and God for you, that he would bring you out of the darkness of this world and the darkness of the sin that is around you. You can look to hope in Jesus Christ. But be warned that those who reject the King, those who reject this child, will receive God's wrath for all eternity.

The reason we make such a big deal about this child is because this child is the promised one who is God with us and God for us. He has come to save his people from their sins, and he is the only hope that we have. He is the only light that will overcome your darkness...

That's who this Child is. Let's Pray