

Advent Points to Remember...

The Heart Of Christmas

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Merry Christmas, everyone. The time has finally come, it is Christmas Day. Today we join a long line of Christ-followers who have, for centuries, remembered the arrival of God through the birth of his son, Jesus. I get the sense that many of us in the room today need to be reminded of the wonder of this night and the hope, peace, joy, and love that it ushers into our busy, hectic, distracted, and chaotic lives. Jesus is the heart of Christmas. It is all about him, and it is all for him. In order to fully embrace Christmas, we turn our attention toward him.

THE HEART OF GOD IS REVEALED THROUGH THE ARRIVAL OF JESUS

The fact is we are all longing to feel like we belong—like we are loved just as we are—like everything is as it should be. However, our longing meets the reality of the world we live in. All around us is brokenness, and many of us feel like we are alone. There is a reason why we often feel like we don't quite fit. There is a reason why it seems like there is a void within. It is because this world is not our home. We were made for something more. God's heart is for us to awaken to this fact.

- The Presence of God Produces Confident HOPE
- The Presence of God Secures Genuine PEACE
- The Presence of God Brings Lasting JOY
- The Presence of God Guarantees Everlasting LOVE

Matthew 1:18-25...18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. 20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." 22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name IMMANUEL," which is translated, "God with us." 24 Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, 25 and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

The author tells us two very important pieces of information in this passage that reveals the heart of God for us and the heart of Christmas for the world.

1. The arrival of Jesus was to save people from their sins.

The world makes Christmas about so many other things, but its true meaning falls squarely on God's dealing with our greatest limiting factor. Sin is any way that we miss the intention God had for the world when he created it. Greed, gossip, unfaithfulness, hatred, racism, etc. all fall short of the glory of God. All of us have been subject to sin's evil influence and have felt the effects of sin's rule and reign. God's heart of compassion moved Him to send Jesus as the way of rescue for the world.

2. The arrival of Jesus was so God could be with us.

Jesus was given the name Immanuel which means *God with us*. This was a revolutionary thought at the time of Christ's birth. Every culture surrounding Bethlehem saw their gods as angry deities who punished and corrected their subjects from afar. But this God so loved his broken creation that he wanted to come near. He became one of us, with flesh and blood, to mourn when we mourn, hurt when we hurt, and weep when we weep. God identifies with us so that we are given the opportunity to identify with Him.

We needed Jesus. We need Jesus. Someone once said it this way:

If our greatest need had been information,
God would have sent us an educator.
If our greatest need had been technology,
God would have sent us a scientist.
If our greatest need had been money,
God would have sent us an economist.
If our greatest need had been pleasure,
God would have sent us an entertainer.
But our greatest need was forgiveness,
so God sent us a Savior.

A Savior is one who eliminates any barrier between us and God. A savior welcomes us into a safe place alongside a God who loves us.

This love of God is spoken of in a passage that is a bit of an unconventional Christmas narrative. The book of John gives us a new perspective of what took place in Bethlehem on that Christmas night.

Read John 3:16

Because of God's great love for us, he sent Jesus; but often we forget, Jesus agreed to come. God sent Him, but Jesus came. When Jesus came, he so clearly lived with an unwavering commitment to his purpose. In other places, he says himself that he came to "seek and save the lost."

JESUS LEFT HIS HOME TO SHOW US THE WAY HOME

Jesus gave up the splendors of heaven to walk in the brokenness of earth. Jesus laid aside his divinity to put on humanity. He did it all for one reason and that was to make a way for us to return home to God.

Story: Have you ever been lost? Maybe you found yourself in a place that you had never been before. A few years ago, my son wandered off on his own at a Christmas festival in our community. There were hundreds of people packed into a small city square. Food, lights, and music were cause for a bit of a chaotic scene. We suddenly realized our son was no longer by our side. At first, we calmly walked around and called his name; but with no response, it quickly escalated into full-blown panic. He was only five at the time and rather short, so we could not find him anywhere. Just as we were about to get the authorities involved, we heard a small voice say, “Mom.” To our great relief, a wonderful elderly woman had seen our frightened son crying and gently took his hand to lead him back to us. We were so grateful and thanked her profusely because our son once was lost but then he was found. *(Tell a story here about being lost and found.)*

Far too many of us are living our lives with no direction, carelessly making decisions that put us in

danger and keep us far from God. Christmas is God’s way of pointing us back to the place where we belong. Christmas is God’s way of leading us by his grace to our eternal family. We don’t have to live our lives lost and broken because God’s great love has made a way.

John says the key to finding our way back home is belief in Jesus. When we believe in him, we save ourselves from perishing or being lost forever, and we are given a new life that will last into eternity in our true home that is heaven. The Greek word for believe is *pisteuo*, which means “to be persuaded by someone or have a confidence in someone.” A belief in Jesus is more than an intellectual exercise. Belief in Christ is to be so persuaded and confident that our lives are transformed, and our words, actions, and thoughts become dictated by our faith, hope, and trust in him. This is a work of the Spirit of God and not something we can do on our own. This is why Jesus came to rescue us. He does the work when we submit to him.

BELIEF IN CHRIST ALLOWS US TO LIVE TODAY AS WELL AS FOR ETERNITY

At the heart of Christmas is Jesus’s invitation to join him and experience the full life that is available through him. The mission began thousands of years ago in a small Bethlehem town but continues on to this very day. Of all the gifts you could possibly receive and give over the coming days, this gift is by far the most valuable because it can save your soul.

And that is the call today. Will you join Jesus in his work in the world of rescuing all of creation? Will you trust him with your life and unapologetically believe in him? God so loved the world that he sent Jesus in the form of a vulnerable baby to begin a powerful movement that is still active today. What began in an unassuming cradle led tragically to a Roman cross, but it ended victoriously with an empty tomb.

Invitation - Poem

**What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a Shepherd, I would bring a Lamb.
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part.
What can I give Him? I will give my **HEART!****

PRAY

Lord Jesus, for too long I have wandered lost in my life. I know that I am a sinner and that I cannot save myself. No longer will I ignore your invitation to join you. By faith, I gratefully receive your gift of salvation. I am ready to trust you as my Lord and Savior. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for coming to earth. I believe you are the Son of God who died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead on the third day. Thank you for bearing my sins and giving me the gift of eternal life. I believe your words are true. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus, and be my Savior. Amen.