

# The Meaning of Christmas

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[ 0 : 00 ] I want to read from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2, verses 1 through 20, about the birth of our Lord in Bethlehem.

If you don't have a Bible, there's Bibles in the pews that you can use if you want to read along with me. If you don't own a Bible, please take that Bible home with you tonight as a gift from our church to you, a Christmas gift, in our hopes that you'll continue to be reading the Word of God.

And you can stay seated as I read the story of our Savior's birth from Luke, chapter 2, verses 1 through 20. In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed who was with child.

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and lied him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn.

[ 1 : 23 ] And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.

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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased. When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us. And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the thing that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

[ 2 : 38 ] And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them. Luke and Matthew's Gospels record the birth of Jesus.

They tell us about Mary and Joseph, the angels, the shepherds, and the wise men. These are the scriptures we read, we study, and hear preached this time of year.

And that's wonderful. We should cherish these stories. However, as we read and reflect on these passages, it's essential for us to remember and understand why Jesus came and what he came to do.

1 John chapter 1 verses 1 through 4 is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. It tells us why Jesus came and it tells us what Jesus came to do.

I'm going to read that passage to you. 1 John chapter 1 verse 1.

[ 4 : 08 ] And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. In this passage, John, one of Jesus' 12 disciples, an eyewitness to his life, his death, and his resurrection, offers a concise explanation of what Christmas truly means.

And that's what I want us to contemplate this evening. You might not immediately think of 1 John 1 through 4 as a Christmas passage, but my goal is to show you that it is.

This passage contains profound truths that answer the question, what does Christmas mean? It contains truths that shape and inform our understanding of Christmas.

The first truth is that Christmas means that salvation is by grace. In the first chapter of John's gospel, he identifies Jesus as the Word, just as he does in this first letter.

There he says, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

[ 5 : 27 ] In him was life, and the life was the light of men. In the first verse of 1 John, Jesus is called the Word of life.

In 1 John 1, verse 2, Jesus is called the eternal life. The implication isn't that Jesus has eternal life, or merely that he gives eternal life, but that he is eternal life.

Where did John get this idea? Well, he heard Jesus say it, and he saw Jesus do things that verified his claim. For example, in John 11, that passage records Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead.

Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days when Jesus arrived. When one of Lazarus' sisters, Martha, heard that Jesus had come, she went out to meet him.

And John 11, 21 through 27, records their conversation. Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

[ 6 : 37 ] But even now, I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again. Martha said to him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Do you believe this? She said to him, yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world. Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life.

And then he demonstrated that he is the resurrection and the life by raising a dead man back to life.

John 14 records the last supper that Jesus had with his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion.

Jesus knew that those events were imminent. And he knew how confusing, how disparaging, and how terrifying they would be for his disciples. So he spent his final hours preparing them and encouraging them so that they would not be troubled about what was soon to take place.

[ 7 : 46 ] Jesus was going to the cross. He was preparing and making the way for them and for us to have peace with God and possess eternal life with him.

Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples, didn't understand what Jesus was talking about. Like the rest of Jesus' disciples, Jesus' leaving and dying didn't make sense to them.

John 14, 4 through 7 records Thomas asking that question. Thomas said to him, Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way? And Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on, you do know him and have seen him. Jesus is saying here that he is in a way to God.

He is in a way of salvation. He is the way to God. He is the way of salvation. In the Bible, God tells us that God is holy and that we are sinful while he is sinless.

[ 8 : 53 ] And because God is holy, he is perfectly just. Our sin is rebellion against the character and commands of our creator. And sin separates us from him. Thankfully for us, while God is just, he is also love.

John 3, 16, Jesus said, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Salvation isn't based on our being good or doing enough good things to counter all the bad things that we've done to put us on the nice list instead of the naughty list.

Christmas means that God has come. Jesus, the eternal word of God, added a human nature to his divine nature. In his divinity, he was able to live the sinless life that we're incapable of living.

In his humanity, he was able to atone for our sins. In faith in him, we receive his righteousness and we receive his life, eternal life.

[ 10 : 00 ] The truth of Christmas is that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Christmas means that salvation is by grace, which leads us to the second truth.

The second truth, John talks about that informs our understanding of what Christmas means. The second truth, Christmas means we have fellowship with God.

Again, in verse 3, John says, 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.

John wants us to believe his testimony that we would have fellowship with the Father and the Son. The Greek word translated as fellowship is *koinonia*.

That word describes a deep, intimate bond. John is saying, I've heard Jesus. I've seen Jesus.

[10:59] I've touched Jesus. I've heard him say that he is the eternal life. I saw him raise dead people to life. I touched the wounds where he was pierced on the cross after he rose from death to life.

I know him. And I want you to know him too. Christmas means that God went to infinite lengths to make himself one whom we can know personally.

It makes us feel good when someone that we think is important, someone usually of a higher position than us, makes some kind of effort to get to know us personally.

That could be a boss at work. It could be an upperclassman in school. Somebody who you think is important who makes an effort to know you.

And then in knowing you, if they see you at work, at school, or in public, they recognize you and they come to you and they say your name and they ask you questions about your life because they know who you are.

[12:06] It makes you feel special, doesn't it? At Christmas, we are reminded that God who is greater and higher than any other has come so that we may have fellowship with him, that we would know salvation and know peace and feel safe in this world, trusting that God not only saves us, but he knows us and he keeps us.

We don't have to remind God of who we are when we pray to him. He knows his children and he loves them. God announced the birth of his son to shepherds, which during this time was one of the lowest classes of people in ancient Jewish society.

Christmas means that no matter how unimportant you may think that you are, no matter how unimportant others might make you feel, God, in his love, sent his son that you would experience his salvation and that you would have a personal, intimate, eternal life and fellowship with him.

Christmas means salvation by grace. It means fellowship with God and finally, it means joy.

Christmas means joy. Verse 4, and we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. complete. John is saying, my joy will not be complete until you have experienced the same joy in fellowship with God that I have and that others who know Jesus possess.

[13:50] In John 16, 22, Jesus promised his disciples, so also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice and no one will take your joy from you.

In John 17, 13, Jesus prays on his disciples' behalf, interceding for them and he says to the Father, but now I know I am coming to you and these things I speak in the world that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

The joy that Jesus speaks about is not temporary, but it's permanent. It's not giddiness that goes away in the face of negative circumstances.

It's a constant, consistent reality in knowing that God saves us, he knows us personally, he loves us, and he will keep us stable no matter what we face in life.

In the last volume of *The Lord of the Rings*, there is a moment when the future looks hopelessly bleak. Gandalf and Pippin return from an audience with Denethor.

[15:01] That did not go well. The wizard seems to be crushed under the weight of trouble taking place in Middle Earth when suddenly, Gandalf puts his arm around the hobbit's shoulder and he laughs.

The story says, Pippin glanced in some wonder at the face now close beside his own, for the sound of that laugh had been merry. Yet in the wizard's face he saw at first only lines of care and sorrow, though as he looked more intently he perceived that under all there was a great joy, a fountain of mirth, enough to set a kingdom laughing were it to gush forth.

The salvation that Jesus brings, the fellowship he gives and has with us is like a subterranean river of joy, a fountain of mirth, a joy that cannot be taken away from us, a joy that he's given to us because he endured the cross for us.

As Hebrews 12, 2 says, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

The Christian life begins in the simple, ordinary act of humbly asking God to forgive us of our sins. Then the life of joy grows in us as the years go by, as we continue to follow Jesus and know him and our faith is increased in him and our hope grows in him and our love for him as we learn the true meaning not just about Christmas but about life and about eternal life.

[ 16 : 59 ] So tonight we thank God and we praise God for Christmas. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for this time that we've had to gather in this place and to worship you.

Lord, you are truly worthy. Father, we thank you for what Christmas means. That Lord, in your love, you came. You lived a sinless life that we could not live and in your love, Lord, you died on the cross in our place for our sins.

And because you are life, because you are eternal life, you rose again. And Lord, you've promised that those of us who have confessed and repented of our sins and turned to you that that life, Lord, is something that you give to us.

And you know us intimately and personally. And Father, you give us reason to be joyful always. And so, Lord, tonight as we prepare to depart from this place in a matter of moments and we go on with our other Christmas festivities or plans, Father, help us to not forget the true meaning of Christmas and the joy that is had in Jesus Christ.

And Lord, may we be who you have enabled us to be as your followers, the most joyful people in all the world, because Jesus has come. And we look forward to his coming again.

[ 18 : 30 ] Lord, we love you. And God, we thank you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Silent night Holy night All is calm All is bright Round yon virgin Mother and child Holy infant Such tender and mild Sleep in heavenly peace Sleep in heavenly peace Sleep in heavenly peace

Silent night Holy night On the star Lent by night With the angels Let us sing Hallelujah Hallelujah To our King Christ the Savior Is born Christ the Savior Is born

Oh