

# Your Best Christmas Ever?

*What's the best gift you can receive this year (or any year) for the holidays?*

By Marilyn Adamson

Beyond the fictional creations of Santa, Rudolph, and The Grinch Who Stole Christmas, we find the historical reality of the birth of Jesus. In real time and place, his presence made such an impact that today we date our calendars "2000 A.D." The significance for you today? Read on.

Why it is that the whole world celebrates the birth of Jesus? This little baby, born to a carpenter's family in the obscure town of Bethlehem in the Middle East, has a following today far beyond the borders of the U.S. The largest Christian church in the world is in South Korea. Now, the whole world doesn't celebrate my birthday. Why is he so special?

Well, Jesus said he was God. If you look at Buddha or Mohammed or the Dalai Lama, they identified themselves as prophets or spiritual guides. In contrast, Jesus clearly and repetitively told people he was God. A pretty lofty statement.

Jesus claimed he could give people eternal life and forgiveness for their sins...abilities that clearly belong only to God.

His communication was also unique. Jesus didn't teach people ten steps to achieve holiness, or personal disciplines to reach God. If you want to know God, Jesus said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me."<sup>1</sup> He asked people to focus on himself with statements like, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."<sup>2</sup>

A lot of people are comfortable giving Jesus the status of an inspired teacher, maybe even a prophet. But what if this Jesus whose birth we celebrate is really the Messiah? What if he is God in human form whom so many of the Old Testament prophets wrote about?

The prophet Micah said the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. David said



he would be one of his own ancestors. Isaiah said he would minister in Galilee and die by torture. And on and on, well over 100 specific prophecies to help people identify the coming Messiah. Jesus fulfilled every one of them. The chance of any person fulfilling even eight of these prophecies is one in 100,000,000,000,000,000.<sup>3</sup>

"At a Bible study I met a Jewish woman who told how desperately she had prayed every day that she would find the truth about how to have a personal relationship with God. The very thought that Christ might indeed be the Son of God, the Messiah, frightened her. 'O God,' she often prayed, 'please be anyone but Jesus!'"<sup>4</sup> But in her search, everything indeed pointed to Jesus, and today she gladly calls herself his follower. What draws people today in India, China, the Middle East, people throughout the world, to worship this Jesus? What is so appealing about him?

At first people followed Jesus because of his compassion and the miracles he performed to meet peoples' needs. He gave sight to the blind. He made the lame beggars walk. Because of him, the mentally ill could think soundly. We're told, "Jesus went about all the cities and villages...healing every disease."<sup>5</sup>

And Jesus' healing went beyond the physical. There were deep emotional needs he met. To a paralytic man, Jesus said, "Take heart, your sins are forgiven." People bristled at Jesus' comment, "This is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus responded to them, "So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...he said to the paralytic, 'Take your mat and go home.' And the man got up and went home."<sup>6</sup> That kind of settled it.

To a woman who was in her sixth relationship, after having five husbands, Jesus challenged her to know God's love so that her thirst for love would be satisfied. To others he offered peace in the midst of difficulties. "In the world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."<sup>7</sup> He positioned himself as stronger than our problems, capable to meet our needs.

Who wouldn't want to be declared forgiven? Wouldn't you want all your sins erased? Who wouldn't want peace or joy? Jesus talked about giving people a whole new life. Prophets and teachers couldn't do this for them, but Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."<sup>8</sup> No



wonder people followed him.

But there is more to Jesus than what he offers us. There is an authenticity to his character, to his words, which gave people then, and people today, reason to trust him. When confronted, he invited his greatest critics to point out whatever sin they saw in his life. And they were speechless. One time soldiers were sent to arrest Jesus and they came back empty-handed. When their superiors demanded an explanation, the guards simply said, "No one ever spoke the way this man does."<sup>9</sup>

In the midst of a raging storm at sea, Jesus made the storm cease immediately at his command. The others in the boat "were filled with awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?'"<sup>10</sup>

Jesus plainly said who he was. "I and the Father are one. If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them...know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."<sup>11</sup> Did his audience understand his message? Absolutely. "This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him...he called God his own Father, making himself equal with God."<sup>12</sup>

Jesus so thoroughly equated himself with God that he said to know him was to know God (John 8:19; 14:7), to see him was to see God (John 12:45; 14:9), to believe in him was to believe in God (Mark 9:37), to hate him was to hate God (John 15:23), and to honor him was to honor God (John 5:23).

Now I should interject here, a former die-hard atheist is writing this. I thought people believed in God simply out of need. I was stunned when someone showed me clear, scientific evidence for God's existence, and equally impressive facts supporting Jesus being God.<sup>13</sup>

Part of enjoying all the celebration of Christmas is understanding who was born that day. The Christmas carols suddenly take on more punch. "Joy to the World, the Lord has come." Jesus was not another prophet or great teacher. This was God revealing himself to us as one of us.

The question is why did Jesus come to earth? What was his agenda, his purpose?

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You know how life at times can seem lite, without real meaning? Even at Christmas we can finally receive the gift we've wanted since July, but life can still lack depth. That's because God created our lives to be most fulfilled by being in relationship with him. Jesus gives us that relationship. "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God."<sup>14</sup>

To be honest, a lot of people try to approach God the wrong way. They try to earn God's acceptance by living a "good" life. Then they reason with him. "God, I've tried to be a good person. I've tried to be kind and generous. I've sometimes gone to church. I've prayed. And I've never murdered anybody." Sounds good.

But Jesus said we need to know what his standards are. Just how good a life would we have to live? Jesus said, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."<sup>15</sup>

Let's be brave and see how perfect we are. Imagine trying for an entire day not to be judgmental. I'd have to totally avoid contact with all people for the day, especially...oh, never mind. But let's assume you're living and breathing, engaged in conversations and noticing what people are saying. Can you listen to someone's list (for the 37th time) of how much they drank last night, AND totally stay clear of thoughts like, "When will you get a life?" Or how would you do with a very diverse group of people engaging in a discussion about abortion, civil rights, homosexuality or religion? Think you could refrain from a condescending, harsh comment? Yes? How about your thoughts? Sometimes we judge someone instantaneously, almost without thinking. Imagine your prof walks into the room with orange pants and a green corduroy blazer in May. For some, that's not engaging your imaginations, that's reality. But, do you laugh at him with your buddy? What if your professor is going through chemotherapy, and has no money? You just judged him.

Okay, let's ease up on the guilt. Let's pretend you tried hard, were very focused and didn't harshly judge someone all day. Wouldn't it irritate you to hear so many other people's judgmental comments throughout the day? I know that if I were trying that hard, I'd develop a very self-righteous attitude, which also would not line up with God's standard of perfection. The Bible says we all sin. Not a surprise to me.

But what did surprise me is that the Bible states that my sin has separated me from God. It's like an impenetrable wall. The Bible says, "the wages of sin is death,"<sup>16</sup> or eternal separation from him.

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Number one on Jesus' agenda for coming to earth was to pay for our sin. The Bible says, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us."<sup>17</sup> It's like the woman who was arrested on a drunk-driving charge. The judge ruled thirty days or \$1,500 bail. As the woman was agonizing over this, the judge



stepped around to the front of the bench, pulled out his checkbook and paid the \$1,500 fine. Why? The judge was this woman's father. As an honest judge he couldn't overlook his daughter's guilt. But as a loving father, he paid the penalty for her.

If we could have gained a relationship with God based on our living a good life, Jesus didn't need to come to this world, and he certainly didn't need to die on a cross for us.

But out of tremendous love for us, Jesus was tortured, whipped, nailed to a cross and died of slow suffocation. Three days later he rose from the dead. Having done so, he now offers us complete forgiveness and a relationship with him.

The catch is we must individually accept his gift. I used to think a relationship with God is something that just "happens" to a person or it doesn't...like winning the lottery or being struck by lightning. But actually it's a personal decision.

God offers us a relationship with himself, and it's our decision whether or not to respond to his offer. Jesus put it simply, "I stand at the door [of your life] and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him."<sup>18</sup>

When we respond to this offer and ask him to come into our lives, we begin a relationship with God that lasts eternally. The Bible states, "I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know you have eternal life."<sup>19</sup>

Instead of knowing about God, we begin to know him personally. We begin to see his unconditional love for us. God has said, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you."<sup>20</sup> Whatever issues or circumstances arise in our lives, we have hope, knowing God's power, certain of his love.

Opening the door and asking him to come into our life doesn't mean suddenly becoming religious. It means having a relationship with God, at his invitation. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life, he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst."<sup>21</sup>

Since my background is in advertising, I don't want to be guilty of "overselling." So let me pose this question: To accept God's gift of forgiveness and a relationship with him, would it mean life will suddenly get easier? No.

For example, one Christmas, I was eight months pregnant with our first child, and things were not going well. In the course of the pregnancy, I was told there were serious health concerns about the baby. Looking at these

complications, what did it mean to me that Jesus came to give us life more abundantly?

It meant that I knew the God of the universe, the One who had created my child and who infinitely loved me. I knew that God held my baby's life in his strong hand. Shortly after Christmas, I went into labor to deliver stillborn a little girl.

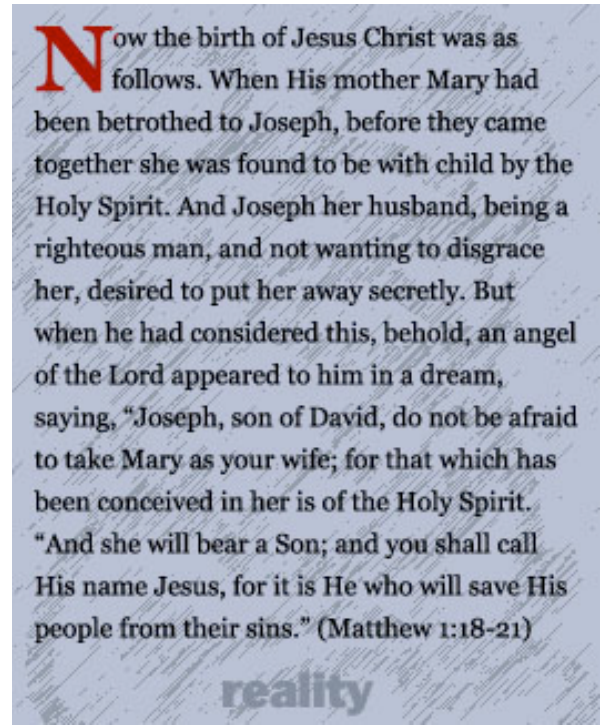
I don't cry easily, but for the next two weeks, I cried a lot. Yet in the midst of the sadness over our baby's death, and throughout the traumatic pregnancy, God gave me his peace. Never did I experience turmoil, anguish or resentment, which would have been natural. But my heart was at peace.

I don't know why God allowed our baby to die. But I do know that God has reasons, and they are kind and just. From all I've seen God do in my life, I knew he could be trusted. God fully protected us from depression over our daughter's death. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."<sup>22</sup>

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Whatever is going on in your world this Christmas, there is no better gift you can give yourself than to receive the One who came to earth and died on your behalf. He offers you complete forgiveness and the ability to know him on a personal level resulting in a more fulfilling life. He is God and he asks us to place our lives under his direction. As long as we rely on our own good life and ourselves we distance ourselves from God and we remain separated from him by our sin. He asks us to empty our hands of our efforts and instead receive his gift of forgiveness and a relationship with him.

I'd like to give you the opportunity right now to ask him into your life. You will never find a better offer, nor make a better decision. I'll help you put it into words. You could say to him, "Jesus, thank you for dying for my sins and



paying the penalty. I open the door and invite you into my life. I want to know you. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me an eternal relationship with you."

If you asked Jesus into your life right now, he promises to never leave you. Jesus said (speaking of us as his sheep), "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one can snatch them out of my hand."<sup>23</sup>

I found that one of the best ways to get to know him better was to read the gospel of John, which is the fourth book of the New Testament in the Bible. You'll be amazed. It seemed like Jesus was speaking straight to me, answering my questions, like an intimate chat over coffee. Also, you might find it helpful to look for a church where the Bible is taught.

There is no greater joy at Christmas, no more fulfilling gift, than entering into a personal relationship with Jesus. You could look forward to Christmas, not dependent on how your family acts or on what gifts you receive, but having the peace and joy that comes from having a relationship with God. Instead of just knowing about him, you can know him, personally, and understand what Christmas is all about..."For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him, should not perish, but have eternal life."<sup>24</sup>

- (1) John 14:6
- (2) John 8:12
- (3) Josh McDowell, *A Ready Defense*, (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life, Publishers, 1990). p. 213.
- (4) Erwin W. Lutzer, *Christ Among Other Gods*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994) p.100.
- (5) Matthew 9:35
- (6) Matthew 9:6,7
- (7) John 16:33
- (8) John 10:10
- (9) John 7:46
- (10) Mark 4:41
- (11) John 10:30,37,38
- (12) John 5:18
- (13) For proofs, check out EveryStudent.com.
- (14) John 1:12
- (15) Matthew 5:48
- (16) Romans 6:23
- (17) 1John 3:16
- (18) Revelation 3:20
- (19) 1John 5:14
- (20) Jeremiah 31:3
- (21) John 6:35
- (22) John 8:12
- (23) John 10:27,28
- (24) John 3:16

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**Please note:**

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If you have already received Jesus Christ into your life, here is a site to help you grow in your relationship with him, [www.StartingwithGod.com](http://www.StartingwithGod.com).

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