

WHAT IF THERE HAD NOT BEEN A FIRST CHRISTMAS?

By Robert J. Tamasy

This week millions of people around the world, on every continent, will celebrate Christmas which commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ. This holiday is probably the most widely recognized of any annual observance, although not everyone celebrates it for the same reason.

This time of year, the question is often asked, “What is the true meaning of Christmas?” Surprisingly, there are many varied responses. In the marketplace, Christmas often means the most profitable time of the year, a season when revenues generated can ensure that businesses can balance their ledgers and finish the year with a financial surplus. It can also signify a time for a brief respite from heavy workloads as workers enjoy holidays with families and friends.

Christmas can mean a lot of things to different people. However, in reality the real meaning of Christmas can be summed up by the words of John 1:14, “The Word [Jesus Christ] became flesh and made His dwelling among us.” Jesus, the Son of God, took on human flesh to live among us. Christmas marks His birth, but the exact date has been debated through the centuries.

A better question might be, “What would the world be like if there had not been a first Christmas?” I think this is best considered in light of Christ’s life, His teachings, and ultimately, His crucifixion and resurrection. Without His birth, none of the rest would have been possible. Consider the following:

God can relate to our struggles. When we pray, or seek to interact with God, there is a tendency to complain, ‘Lord, You just do not understand.’ However, we are assured that is not true: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus taught us about genuine, sacrificial love. In the history of mankind since the life of Christ, His followers have commonly been in the forefront of not only teaching about Him, but also demonstrating His love to people in need by their actions. These have included founding educational institutions, hospitals, orphanages, and conducting disaster relief efforts. These all have been inspired by Jesus’ teachings about putting others’ needs ahead of our own. “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you...” (Matthew 7:12). “Jesus replied... ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:39).

Christ died that we might live. As we survey events in our communities and around the world, we observe the extreme brokenness that afflicts all of humanity. Many initiatives have been developed seeking to remedy these problems, but the root cause is something the Bible calls “sin.” When Jesus died on the cross, this was by intent, not by accident. He died for our sins,

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taking our deserved penalty upon Himself, so we could be promised eternal life. “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

The Lord provided the greatest gift of all. Christmas is time for exchanging gifts, but no gift can ever approach the magnitude of the gift God offers to all – the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Savior and Lord. “For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. When you think about Christmas, what thoughts come to your mind? What memories or feelings are stirred in your heart?
2. The question is raised, ‘What if there had not been a first Christmas?’ Pondering this, what do you think our world would look like if Jesus Christ had not been born?
3. During the Christmas season Jesus is typically portrayed as a baby in a manger, surrounded by his earthly parents, farm animals, and perhaps angels? Why is it important not to confine our thinking about Him to this image?
4. Jesus Christ’s birth, death and resurrection are all intertwined, according to the Christian faith and biblical teachings. Is this true for you? Why or why not?

Challenge for This Week

In participating in the celebration of Christmas this week, take some time to reflect on the verses cited in this Monday Manna and consider the impact the birth of Christ has had on your life, your family, and even your business and professional career.

If you have the opportunity, share with someone else what Christmas means in your life.

NOTE:

For more about what the Bible says, consider the following passages:
Isaiah 7:14, 9:6; Micah 5:2; Matthew 1:18-2:12; Luke 2:1-20; 1 Corinthians 5:21

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