

The Year-Round Implications of Christmas

Why Christians Believe Jesus' Birth Opens the Door to Knowing God

By Neil Smith©, December 18, 2010
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There is nothing quite like the Christmas season, is there? Time with family and friends and the opportunity to drink again of the joy of the incarnation. I had the opportunity to preach this past Sunday for a pastor friend of mine who was on vacation. I bumped into an old tutor on the way to that sermon who reminded me of the marvel of Christ's birth.

His name is Hebrews II and about two decades ago he answered this question of mine: "Why did Jesus come as a baby?"

It's a fair question. After all, two gospel writers don't mention Bethlehem and with the exception of Luke's brief treatment of Jesus' childhood visit to the temple, we know nothing about his early years. God could easily have materialized as an adult and still rescue us. So why come as a baby?

That old master, Hebrews II, juxtaposes an observation about God with a response from Jesus. (Heb. 2:10-13) The Father determines that if a liberator is going to personify His loving character -- be compassionate and able to deliver us from our self-centered plight -- He must experience human suffering and the worse possible death.

Remarkably, while still in heaven, Jesus knew his Father's heart and offered himself as just such a Liberator. So we read:

*"Jesus doesn't hesitate to treat them as family, saying, (Verse 11b)
"I'll tell my good friends, my brothers and sisters, all I know
about you;" (Verse 12a) and "I'll join them in worship and
praise to you." (12b)*

Again, he puts himself in the same family circle when he says:

"Even I live by placing my trust in God." (13a)

And yet again:

"I'm here with the children God gave me." (13b)"

(Message Translation)

Check it out! In the first and last lines of this response to God's heart (Verses 12a and 13b), he affirms with words that he's a member of our race. In the intervening lines he involves himself in distinctively human activities. He teaches, worships and trusts God. Is it possible that old Hebrews II is revealing to us that, in Jesus, God Himself **actually became** a human being?

I have a confession to make. I was fifteen years into my "professional ministry" experience and my understanding of Jesus went something like this: "He was divine, became a man, died and then returned to heaven and once again became God, reigning."

But then my tutor, "Heb" (that's what his friends call him - feel free) taught me that Jesus didn't just become a man for his 33-year stint on earth, but became a human being forever ... without losing one ounce of his deity.

Jesus' humanity is confirmed in every crucial event. He died in a human body, and was raised bodily. Many saw Him physically ascend and some blessed generation, many more will literally see Him return in His resurrected, eternal body.

Now we understand why he had to arrive as a baby. There was no other option. He came to become a member of our race. That's how all **real** human beings come into this world.

This is the unfathomable, inexpressible, eternal wonder of the universe. Angels break into our history to introduce this Emmanuel (Emmanuel meaning: "God with us"). Only, he was "with us" in a manner we never would dare imagine. On Christmas morn He actually became a member of our race and remains so forever. Dare I say it this way; there is a man (the God-man to be sure) at the right hand of God.

What a difference this makes! In Jesus, God has been where we are yet to go and knows all the pain, temptations and suffering we will ever experience. "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" is the prophet's description of him.

John Stott has said it this way:

"In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?"

Edward Shillito, in "Jesus of the Scars," which was written in the aftermath of World War I, says the same poetically:

*"The other Gods were strong; but thou was weak;
They rode, but thou didst stumble to a throne;
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak;
And not a god has wounds, but thou alone."*

Silent awe and deep joy is to be our gift to the marvelous Emmanuel.

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