



WHY CHRISTMAS MATTERS

IF CHRISTMAS IS TRUE, THEN IT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

BY TIMOTHY J. KELLER

We sing it every year in our Christmas carols, especially in “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” when we cry out: “Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity.”

The Apostles’ Creed doesn’t use it, but it teaches the doctrine of it when we read, “conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.”

Incarnation. If you understand the word *incarnation*, you’ll understand what Christmas is about.

Christmas is frankly doctrinal. The invisible has become visible, the incorporeal has become corporeal. In other words, God has become human.

This is not only a specific doctrine, but it’s also unique. Doctrine always

distinguishes you. One of the reasons we’re afraid to talk about doctrine is because it distinguishes us from others.

Here’s why the doctrine of Christmas is unique. On one hand, you’ve got religions that say God is so immanent in all things that incarnation is normal. If you’re a Buddhist or Hindu, God is immanent in everything. On the other hand, religions like Islam and Judaism say God is so transcendent over all things that incarnation is impossible.

But Christianity is unique. It doesn’t say incarnation is normal, but it doesn’t say it’s impossible. It says God is so immanent that it is possible, but He is so transcendent that the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ is a history-altering, life-transforming, paradigm-shattering event.

Christmas is not just frankly doctrinal; it’s also boldly historical. The manger, the resurrection, the story of Jesus is not just a story. It’s true.

This goes completely against what the average person believes. The average person says they’re parables. They’re legends. They didn’t happen.

The point of Christmas is that Jesus Christ really lived, and He really died. It happened in history. He did these things. He said these things.

You may think: *What’s the big deal? You’re being doctrinaire here.* No. People say: “I like the teachings of Jesus. I like the meaning of these stories—to love one another, serve one another. I like that. But it doesn’t matter if these things really happened. Doctrine doesn’t matter. What matters is you’re a good person.”

The great irony is, that *is* a doctrine: it’s called the doctrine of justification by works. What they’re saying is that it doesn’t matter that Jesus actually lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died; all that matters is we follow His teaching.

That is a doctrine that says: “I’m not so bad I need someone to come and be good for me. I can be good. I’m not so cut off from God and God is not so holy that there has to be punishment for sin.”

The Gospel is not that Jesus Christ comes to earth, tells us how to live, we live a good life and then God owes

us blessing. The Gospel is that Jesus Christ came to earth, lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died, so when we believe in Him we live a life of grateful joy for Him. If these things didn’t happen, if they’re just parables, what you are saying is that if you try hard enough, God will accept you.

If Jesus didn’t come, the story of Christmas is one more moral paradigm to crush you. If Jesus didn’t come, I wouldn’t want to be anywhere around these Christmas stories that say we need to be sacrificing, we need to be humble, we need to be loving. All that will do is crush you into the ground, because if it isn’t true that John saw Him, heard Him, felt Him, that Jesus really came to do these things, then Christmas is depressing.

First John 1:3 says, “Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son.” “Fellowship” means that if Jesus Christ has come, if Christmas is true, then we’ve got a basis for a personal relationship with God. God is no longer a remote idea or just a force we cower before, but we can know Him personally. He’s become graspable.

If Jesus Christ is actually God come in the flesh, you’re going to know much more about God. You’re seeing Him weep. You’re seeing Him upset. You’re seeing Him cast down. You’re seeing Him exalted. If Jesus is who He says He is, we have a 500-page autobiography from God, in a sense. And our understanding will be vastly more personal and specific than any philosophy or religion could give us.

Look at what God has done to get you to know Him personally. If the Son would come all this way to become a real person to you, don’t you think the Holy Spirit will do anything in His power to make Jesus a real person to you in your heart? Christmas is an invitation to

know Christ personally. Christmas is an invitation by God to say: *Look what I’ve done to come near to you. Now draw near to me. I don’t want to be a concept; I want to be a friend.* **R**



TIMOTHY J. KELLER is the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City.

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