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The “Why” of Bethlehem (Isaiah 9:1-7)

Many at Christmas focus on **how** Jesus came – the events surrounding the coming of our Savior. The baby in a manger. The shepherds in a field. The wise men who journeyed from afar. It is most important that we focus on **why** Jesus came – why God took on human flesh in the form of a baby and became a man. It is when we contemplate this astounding truth that we grow in our appreciation of all that God has done for us through Christ.

Octavius Winslow encourages us:

...If we desire the advancement of the Divine life within us, we must know more of Jesus—we must discern more beauty in our Beloved—we must see more of the glory of our Incarnate God—we must know more of the love and grace of the Father in the gift of His dear Son—we must, in a word, grow in the knowledge of God and of Christ.¹

In our last study we considered how some churches use the Advent season to help focus on these truths. Candles are lit the four weeks before Christmas to point to the hope, peace, love, and joy that are found in the coming (advent) of Christ. There is no better way for us to grow in our knowledge and appreciation of Christ’s coming than to consider Isaiah’s message concerning the coming of our Lord.

We noted that Isaiah is often called the “Evangelical prophet” because of how much he wrote concerning Jesus Christ and what He would do for us. 700 years before it took place, he clearly wrote of His birth:

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. (7:14)

Isaiah wrote of both Christ’s first coming at Bethlehem and His second coming to rule and reign forever:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders;

*and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. **Isaiah 9:6-7***

Perhaps most poignantly, Isaiah writes of our Savior’s suffering and death:

*⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. ⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. **(53:4-6)***

The “What” of Bethlehem

As we look at Isaiah 9 we find a wonderful statement of what took place when Jesus was born in Bethlehem:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us... (9:6)

Here, in the Old Testament, we see a clear reference to perhaps the most astounding truth of Christianity – that the baby born in the manger was both God and man. “**A child will be born to us...**” refers us to the events we are so familiar

with in the Christmas story. **“A son will be given to us...”** points us to the fact that this was the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity. God Himself took on a human nature. He was fully human, yet He was also fully God. That is the most amazing truth about Christmas. That is **what** happened in Bethlehem. It may help us grow in our knowledge and appreciation of what Christ had done for us to consider **why** God the Son became a man on that first Christmas day.

The “Why” of Bethlehem

As we study the rest of the Bible, we find several reason why God became a man.

To Reveal God to Man

Jesus became a man so that He could best reveal God to us.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. Hebrews 1:1-2

To Live Under the Law and Obey in Every Point

Jesus became man so that He fulfill God’s law on our behalf. His obedience and righteousness are credited to us when we repent and trust Him.

Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ But John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?” ¹⁵ But Jesus answering said to him, “Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Matthew 3:13-15

To Be Able to Die

Jesus became a man so He might be able to die on our behalf. **“The person who sins will die...”** (Ezek. 18:20) **“The wages of sin is death...”** (Romans 6:23). As sinners who have broken God’s law, we deserve not only physical death, but also the eternal punishment due all of us who have sinned against an infinitely holy God. Jesus died on our behalf but He also endured the wrath and punishment of God for us!

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Romans 5:6

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 1 John 4:10²

To Give Us a Perfect Example How to Live

Jesus also took on humanity so He might show us the perfect and greatest example of how to live.

“For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.” John 13:15.

Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus... Philippians 2:5

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps... 1 Peter 2:21.

To Be Our Great High Priest

Finally, Jesus became a man so that He could become our Great High Priest – the One who represents us before God. The writer of Hebrews explains it well:

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:14-16

- As we take to reflect this Christmas season, it may help us grow in our knowledge and appreciation of God and all He has done for us through Christ to consider the “Why” of Bethlehem. You may want to spend some time considering each of these reasons why the Son of God became a man for us.

¹Winslow, Octavius. *Evening Thoughts*. 1858. Kindle location 455.

²Propitiation is the removal or satisfaction of God’s just wrath against us through the death of Christ.

BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays, 12:00 Noon

MCMANUS (House) CONFERENCE ROOM

(252-M Located by minority offices near House chamber)