

Joy At Christmas

Christmas is a time of celebrating. It is supposed to be a time of joy. But why? Or, perhaps, how?

Christmas is the beginning of the story of the time of Christ on earth, God incarnate, Emmanuel, God with us. It is the story of man's redemption by God, although not the whole story; it is the part of that story that is the realization, the working out, the very DOING of it, in time, on earth, in recorded history.

Jesus came to earth to save sinners. Us. You and me. On the face of it, it doesn't sound all that joyful. God, the Creator of all that is that is not Himself, set aside all the perks of being God and added to His nature the nature of man, to be born as a baby, as one of us. The evidence is that He was born into relative poverty, into a family of the working class, learning Joseph's trade as a carpenter. And it was all business. At about 30, He began the business of preaching, healing, miracles, showing forth the manifestation of God among men – and gaining the hate of leaders of the Jewish nation. He was the promised Messiah, and also the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. He became a man so He could die, and He did die, a painful, public, shameful death. The King of the Jews, on a Roman cross. Where's the joy?

About a week before, He had been hailed as the coming King by so many people. So many of these, it may be, had changed their tune to "Crucify him!" Those who had waited for their Messiah had, many of them, hoped and expected He would deliver Israel from Rome and perhaps from its own corruption. Sure didn't look like it. Where's the joy?

Three days in the grave, and He arose. Wasn't even a big headline at first. The women who came to anoint His body, then a couple of disciples. Then more of them. The Emmaus road encounter. He was seen alive by more than 500. Oh, and there were the resurrections of so many – hard to explain . . .

Jesus came into our world for the purpose of dying, a sacrifice in our place, to pay for our sins. And this was determined by the three Persons of the Trinity in eternity past, even before creation. And so, when I think of the whole experience He chose, even embraced, I have a hard time finding balance in how I should feel. When God must die for such as I, how is that joyful? And such a death – if a bad guy shoots me in the heart, I have pain, but I die, and quickly. A crucifixion, by contrast, was designed for great pain, great suffering of many kinds. When I take what Christmas began on this earth, all of a piece, this was part of it, and even engineered that way. Where do I find joy in this?

And yet, the angel declared to the shepherds, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great **joy**, which shall be **to all people**. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

And so I think on this joy, which is to all people. What could make it so?

- It is to all people; we are ALL sinners, under God's judgment, a severe judgment, entailing eternal separation from God, and torment. So we ALL need a solution.
- A Saviour is born, who can give that solution, not just to Jews, but to ALL people. He is born, present with us immediately on that day. He is no longer a promise of prophecy, but a present reality in the flesh, God with us, Emmanuel.
- As part and parcel of that birth, He, God and man, is destined to die. It will HURT. And, however God's economy is conceived, it must HURT sufficiently to pay for ALL of ALL men's sins, thought, word, and deed, to include Hitler's, Stalin's, and, well, mine. And yours. That's a LOT of hurt. How much is accounted for by the separation of Father and Son for such a period, how much accrues to the various parts of the raw suffering in the flesh – we can't know these things, nor would we want to. But it came dear.
- He did this willingly, because He LOVES us.
- It worked! The sin debt is paid for all men whoever lived, or will. God the Father is satisfied. We are all redeemed, paid for. All that remains for each of us is to believe on Him, His finished work, to acknowledge in our heart that we can do NOTHING to redeem ourselves, but that He did it all, and to accept this precious gift of eternal life.
- He resurrected, and subsequently ascended. He will return, and will rule righteously.
- He will reign forever. Not someone else, but He Who died for us. Who better?

So there is joy to be found. We attach joy to Christmas because it is that day He actually came. We attach joy to Easter because of the resurrection, first Him, later us. We have joy because that is saved which was lost.

These are poor thoughts, but I hope they provoke your better ones.