THE DAWNING OF INDESTRUCTIBLE
JOY
ADVENT 2020
DECEMBER 21-25
JOHN PIPER

DECEMBER 21

Get Your Eyes Ready for Christmas

> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."
>
> **MATTHEW 16:15 –17**

The absolutely indispensable work of God in revealing the Son—both then to Peter and now to you and me—is not the adding to what we see and hear in Jesus himself but the opening of the eyes of our hearts to taste and see the true divine glory of what is really there in Jesus.

When people have doubts about the truth of Jesus, don't send them away to seek special messages from God. Point them to Christ. Tell them what you have seen and heard in his life and teachings. Why? Because this is where God breaks in with his revealing power. He loves to glorify his Son! He loves to open the eyes of the blind when they are looking at his Son!

God does not reveal his Son to me by coming to me and saying, "Now, John, I know that you don't see anything magnificent in my Son. You don't see him as all glorious and divine and attractive above all worldly goods. You don't see him as your all-satisfying treasure, and you don't see his holiness and wisdom and power and love as beautiful beyond measure. But take my word for it, he is all that. Just believe it." No!

Such faith would be no honor to the Son of God. It can- not glorify the Son. Saving faith is based on a spiritual sight of Jesus as he is in himself, the all-glorious Son of God. And this spiritual sight is given to us through his inspired Word, the Scriptures. And the eyes of our hearts are opened to recognize him and receive him not by the wisdom of flesh and blood but by the revealing work of his heavenly Father.

The apostle Paul said, "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

How shall you prepare your heart this Christmas to receive Christ? Fix your gaze on him in the Bible. Look to Christ! Con- sider Jesus. And pray. Look beyond your own flesh and blood, and ask that God would give you eyes to see and ears to hear that you might cry out with Peter, "You are the Christ the Son of the living God!"

DECEMBER 22

Something Worth Singing About

There are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much

more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. . . .

> "This is the covenant that I will make . . .
> I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts,
> and I will be their God,
> and they shall be my people."

HEBREWS 8:4 –10

Here we see that Christmas means two things. First, it means the replacement of Old Testament shadows with reality. The temple and sacrifices and priesthood and feasts and dietary laws were all shadows and copies of the reality in heaven. That reality is Jesus Christ and his work as our High Priest and our sacrifice and our focus of worship. Jesus fulfills and replaces the shadows of the Old Testament.

Second, it means that God makes the reality of Christ real to us personally by the work of the new covenant when he writes his truth on our hearts. God moves powerfully into our hearts and minds to overcome our resistance to the beauty of his reality. He writes his will—the truth of the reality of Jesus—on our hearts, so that we see him for who he really is and are willing and eager to trust him and follow him— freely, from the inside out, not slavishly under constraint from outside.

God is just and holy and separated from sinners—sinners like you and me. This is our main problem at Christmas—and every other season. How shall we be put right with a just and holy God? Nevertheless, God is merciful and promised in Jeremiah 31 (five hundred years before Christ came) that someday he would do something new. He would replace shadows with the reality of the Messiah. And he would powerfully move into our lives and write his will on our hearts so that we are not constrained from the outside but are willing from the inside— to love him and trust him and follow him.

That would be the greatest salvation imaginable—if God should offer us the greatest

reality in the universe to enjoy and then move in us to see to it that we could enjoy it with the greatest freedom and the greatest pleasure possible. That would be a Christmas gift worth singing about. And that is exactly what he has done.

NOTES

DECEMBER 23

Our Deepest Need at Christmas

> He shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord,
> in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
> And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.
> And he shall be their peace.
>
> MICAH 5:4 – 5

"He shall be great to the ends of the earth," Micah prophesies. There will be no pockets of resistance unsubdued. Our security will not be threatened by any alien forces. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess him Lord. The whole earth will be filled with his glory.

And "he will be our peace." Yes, in this context that includes final, earthly, political peace. Micah spoke of it already in Micah 4:3:

> He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations far away;
> and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;
> nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

One day the ruler—the King of kings and Lord of lords—will return and make that a reality. The great Christmas carol will finally be fulfilled:

> He rules the world with truth and grace
> And makes the nations prove
> The glories of his righteousness
> And wonders of his love.

But there is another, deeper peace—a peace that must hap- pen before there can be peace on earth. There must be peace between us and God. Our unbelief and his wrath must be re- moved. That is our deepest peace—and our deepest need at Christmas.

Micah knew it was coming. He had experienced it person- ally (Mic. 7:8–9). He describes it beautifully at the very end of his book, in Micah 7:18–19:

> Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

This was the great work of the Messiah yet to be done. Yes, there are enemies on earth that must be defeated if we are to have peace. But, oh, the great enemy called sin and judgment— that is the greatest and worst enemy. The gospel at Christ- mas is: Christ has trampled this enemy underfoot at the cross. So for everyone who trusts in him, their sins are cast into the depths of the sea.

Therefore, we say not, “Glory to us,” but, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

DECEMBER 24

Enjoy All the Promises of God

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
    who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
    one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
    from ancient days.
Therefore he shall give them up until the time
    when she who is in labor has given birth;
then the rest of his brothers shall return
    o the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength
    of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

MICAH 5:2– 4

Christ is the yes of all God’s promises, so if you trust him, they will all be your inheritance. Already Micah made clear that Christ will secure for us the promises of God. How did Micah show us this?

Any Jewish person in those days, hearing Micah predict the coming of a ruler out of Bethlehem who would feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, would think immediately of two people: David the king and the coming Son of David, the Messiah. There are at least three links with David in this text:

(1) David was from Bethlehem—that’s why it was called the “city of David.” (2) David

was a ruler in Israel—he was the greatest ruler, a man after God's own heart. (3) David was a shepherd as a boy, and later he was called the shepherd of Israel (Ps. 78:71).

The point of these three links with David is this: Micah is reasserting the certainty of God's promise to David. Recall from 2 Samuel 7:12–16 that God said to David,

> I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.

The amazing thing about Micah is that he reasserts the certainty of this promise not at a time when Israel is rising to power but at a time when Israel is sinking toward oblivion. The northern kingdom is destroyed, and the southern kingdom will come under the judgment of God. The promises of God looked impossible.

Micah's point was this: *the coming of Christ was the confirmation of the promises of God*. Here's the way Paul put it in Romans 15:8: "Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs." Or as he said in 2 Corinthians 1:20, "All the promises of God find their Yes in him."

If you are "in him" by faith, you will inherit all the promises of God. Micah's prediction came true in Jesus. And thus all the promises were confirmed. God has told the truth. Christmas is God's great confirmation of all his promises. If Christ has come, God is true. And if God is true, all the promises will come true for all who trust him. Receive this unspeakable gift.

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DECEMBER 25

Grace: The Dominant Note of Christmas

> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh
>
> JOHN 6:51

There is no traditional Christmas story about the birth of Jesus in the Gospel of John. You remember how it begins: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Instead of putting the Christmas story up front with its explanation, John weaves the story of Christmas and the purpose of Christmas through the Gospel. For example, after saying that the Word “was God,” John says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (John 1:14–16).

So the eternal Word of God took on human flesh, and in that way the divine Son of God—who never had an origin, and never came into being, and was God, but was also with God— became man. And in doing this, he made the glory of God visible in a wholly new way. And this divine glory, uniquely manifest in the Son of God, was full of grace and truth. And from that fullness we receive grace upon grace.

That is the meaning of Christmas in John’s Gospel. God the Son, who is God, and who is with God, came to reveal God in a way he had never been revealed before. And in that revelation, the dominant note struck is grace: from the fullness of that revelation of divine glory, we receive grace upon grace.

Or as it says in John 3:16–17, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, [that’s Christmas and Good Friday all in one] that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world [Christmas is not for condemnation], but in order that the world might be saved through him [Christmas is for salvation].”

And at the end of his life, Jesus was standing before Pilate, and Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” And Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world [this is the purpose of Christmas]—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice” (John 18:37).

What was the effect of the truth that Jesus witnessed to with his words and his whole person? He told us in John 8:31– 32, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” So the

meaning of Christmas is this: the Son of God came into the world to bear witness to the truth in a way that it had never been witnessed to before.

He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). And the aim of giving himself as the truth to the world is freedom. You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. Free from the guilt and power of sin. Free from deadness and blindness and judgment.

How does that liberation happen? Recall from John 6 that in coming down from heaven, Jesus was planning to die. He came to die. He came to live a perfect, sinless life and then die for sinners. John 6:51: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, so that he could give his flesh for the life of the world. We sinners can receive grace upon grace from his fullness because he came to die for us. Christmas was from the beginning a preparation for Good Friday.

So throughout the Gospel of John the meaning of Christ- mas becomes clear. The Word became flesh. He revealed the glory of God as never before. He died according to his own plan. Because of his death in our place, he is bread for us. He is the source of forgiveness and righteousness and life. This is the great meaning of Christmas in the Gospel of John. Indeed in the world. Today.

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