

Greg Laurie: Will Your Christmas Be Real or Fake?

You can have Christmas without Santa and his elves, without Frosty the snowman, without Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer and without Dasher, Dancer, Prancer and Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner and Blitzen. You can have Christmas without Mr. Grinch, Ebenezer Scrooge and Tiny Tim. But you cannot have a real Christmas without Jesus.

Otherwise, it's a fake Christmas.

Don't get me wrong. I like Christmas. But the problem is that we have made Christmas almost too beautiful with our horse-drawn carriages, snow, crackling fireplaces and hot cocoa. We have bathed the nativity story in blue light, with music swelling in the background. It's all wonderful, but sometimes I think we've missed the raw power of the story by making it almost sentimental.

We've romanticized Christmas or even homogenized it, taking the real edge off the story that God Almighty came down from heaven to be born on the floor of a stable. To think that God did all this for us is more powerful than any romanticized version of Christmas.

Jesus came at the appointed time, at the perfect time. The Bible tells us, "But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born from a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4-5).

Understand, things were very dark in Israel at this time. The people were living under the bondage of the Roman empire that bludgeoned everyone into submission through Pax Romana, a forced peace. You either did what Rome said or you paid the

price.

Add to this the fact there had been 400 years of icy silence from heaven. There was no prophet speaking for God, nor were there any angels bringing messages from God. There were no miracles being performed. Nothing was happening. There was just chaos, violence and misery.

Speaking of this time, Isaiah 9:2 says, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them the light has shined." The term for "darkness" speaks of evil and ignorance.

The people were living in a time filled with evil and untold suffering, a time filled with violence, oppression and injustice. It sounds a lot like today. They were waiting for something to happen. And something did happen. At the right moment, God sent His Son.

Think of what He did for us. Think of all He gave us for us. The Bible tells us, "Being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. but He emptied himself, taking upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil. 4:6-7).

Jesus didn't empty Himself of His divinity; He emptied himself of the privileges of divinity. He walked among us as a man—a sinless man. He lived our life and died our death. He did come to this earth. That is what we celebrate at Christmas. It's a time to honor the One who was born with God's people.

The Bible also tells us that one day, Jesus will come again. But this time, He won't be coming to a manger; He will be coming back in glory.

In His first coming, He was wrapped in swaddling clothes. In His second coming, He will be clothed royally in a robe dipped in blood.

In His first coming, He was surrounded by animals and shepherds. In His second coming, He will be accompanied by saints and angels.

In His first coming, there was no room for Him in the inn. In His second coming, the door of the heavens will be opened to Him.

In His first coming, He was the Lamb of God who would die for the sins of the world. In His second coming, He will be the ferocious Lion of the tribe of Judah, bringing judgment. This is the day the Bible speaks of when it says, "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil. 2:10). Jesus is coming again.

Jesus also can come into your life right now. He can enter into your world today, if you will ask him into your life. Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). These words of Jesus are for any person who is stressed-out.

Are you stressed out right now? Sometimes even in the celebration of Christmas, we forget all about Jesus because we are in such a rush, going here and there. We can be so busy in the celebration.

Jesus is saying, in effect, "Come to me with your problems. Come to me with your worries. Come here and find rest from me."

You have a choice this year: Either you can have a real Christmas, or you can have a fake Christmas. Either you can have the fake version, or you can have the real version with Christ himself living inside of you.

God is offering to forgive you of all your sins. God is offering to give you a second chance in life. God is offering you a ticket to heaven, a guaranteed reservation. He is saying

this can all be yours if you will reach out and accept his gift.

The gift of eternal life is the only gift that keeps on giving. There are no batteries required. There is no assembly required. All you have to do is reach out, receive it, and just say thank you. {eoa}

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