

Jesus Is Still the Reason for the Season

In the classic Dr. Seuss book *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, the devilish green Grinch terrorized the docile Whos of Whoville by sneaking into their homes and stealing Christmas right out from under them. When I watch the cartoon version of that story, I realize the same has happened to us—only in our case, we've welcomed the invasion.

The word *Christ* is still in Christmas (if schools still allow the word to be used), but it's hard to find the real meaning of the holiday when you look at our culture. Christmas has been revised, modernized and secularized so many times that an alien visiting earth today would have no idea what this holiday means. Is it about winter weather? Shopping sprees? Santa Claus and elves? Polar bears drinking Coca-Cola? Parties with spiked eggnog? College football?

I'm not against buying and wrapping gifts, hanging lights on your house, hosting parties or watching a championship bowl game. But we miss the greatest blessing if we don't set aside the noisy, glittering distractions of a commercialized Christmas and focus on the One who was born in a manger in Bethlehem.

During the holidays, I always make a point to read the accounts of Jesus' birth in the Gospels. I also have learned to pay close attention to the names of Jesus used in the Christmas story. You might want to share these names with your loved ones at your Christmas dinner or take a break from the stress of the holidays to look up these Scriptures and ponder them carefully.

1. He is the Son of David (Matt. 1:1). Matthew's Gospel, written primarily to Jews, stresses that Jesus was in the

royal lineage of Israel's kings. The genealogy that appears in Matthew 1 traces Joseph, the husband of the Virgin Mary, to David's line—and then back to Abraham. Even though Jesus was not the biological son of Joseph, He could legally claim the family name. He was King of the Jews in the truest sense; yet unlike the sinful kings of Israel, Jesus was the perfect ruler—and His kingdom will never end.

2. He is the Son of Adam (Luke 3:38). Luke's Gospel, written to a Gentile audience, focuses on Jesus' humanity. And the genealogy that appears in Luke 3:23-38 is not about kingly succession. Instead, it traces Jesus' lineage through Mary's family tree and goes all the way to Adam—establishing the case that Jesus was a descendent of the first man. Through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, God's eternal Word impregnated Mary, making her child both God and man. Yet Jesus, unlike Adam, never disobeyed God. He remained sinless so He could sacrifice His life for us.

3. He is Emmanuel (Matt. 1:23). An angel told Joseph in a dream that Mary would conceive a son miraculously—and that His name would be Emmanuel, which means "God with us." Wrapped up in this name is the mystery of the Incarnation. Jesus is, as John's Gospel emphasizes, the Word that "became flesh" (John 1:14). He was with God before the creation of the world as the glorious firstborn Son, but He left the glory of heaven to dwell among sinners on earth.

4. He is Jesus, the Savior (Matt. 1:21). The angel told Mary she would give birth to the "holy child" and that she would call him Jesus, which is the Greek form of the name Joshua (or *Yeshua* in Hebrew). Jesus means "the Lord saves." Just as Joshua in the Old Testament succeeded Moses and took God's people across the Jordan into the Promised Land, Jesus led us out of the wilderness of sin and ushered us "by grace" and "through faith" (Eph. 2:8, NASB) into the blessings of salvation.

5. He is the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6). Angels said to the shepherds in Bethlehem, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased” (Luke 2:14). This hearkens back to Isaiah’s ancient prophecy that the Messiah would institute peace on earth. The gift of Christ was, in fact, the greatest peace treaty ever enacted. Wherever the true gospel of Christ is preached and believed, hatred is uprooted in human hearts and wars and violence cease.

6. He is the Light of the Gentiles (Luke 2:32). Simeon, the old prophet who met Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus outside the temple in Jerusalem, recognized that the long-awaited Son of God was not sent just to Israel but to all people. Jesus’ mission was a global one. This was also confirmed by the visit of the mysterious magi—wise men from a Gentile country who bowed before the Christ child and honored Him as a true king. They knew that some day this King would be worshipped everywhere.

7. He is the Messiah, Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11). This is how the angel described Jesus when he spoke to the shepherds in Bethlehem. The word *Christ* means “the anointed one”; the Hebrew word is *Ha-Mashiach*, or Messiah. It speaks of the deliverer God promised to send to earth. Abraham saw Him from a distance; King David sang and prophesied of Him; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Micah, Haggai, Malachi and many other prophets foretold His coming. He was not only anointed by the Holy Spirit to heal the sick and raise the dead during His short time on earth; He was anointed to die on the cross for our sins and to be raised from the dead so that we could live with Him forever.

The wonder of Christmas is and will always be found in Jesus alone. Take time to pull away from what our culture has made this holiday, and reclaim the miracle of His birth.

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