

Reflections on the Incarnation II: Christmas is for Sinners - John 1:29

Introduction – There are wonderful stories of the birth of Jesus in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. There are none here in John. John's gospel begins with the point of the second Person of the Trinity, the Word, becoming flesh and dwelling with us (1:1-4, 14). John tells us that the purpose of His gospel is that “*you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name*” (John 20:30). In other words, Jesus was born to take care of a problem, a very deep problem encompassing the entire created order due to the rebellion of the first human stewards, our first parents, of this world. Deck the halls and fa-la-la-la-la-la, pour another cup of eggnog and hang a wreath; yes, go celebrate. But never forget the true meaning of Christmas. Jesus is the reason for the season!?! Well, yes and no. Actually, we were the reason for the season. We (including you and me) were a mess and something had to be done (paraphrasing Athanasius).

The Word Became Flesh in Order to Be the Lamb of God (John 1:29) – John (the Baptist) declares the reason God became incarnate. His primary reason was not to be the great Example of human living, the new Leader of the new administration (although He certainly is both). He came primarily as the great Savior, the Propitiator, the only Way our sins could be removed from us and we be reconciled to the Father.

THE Lamb of God – To the Jew, the sacrifice of lambs was common. Daily sacrifices of lambs were made at the house of God (Exod 29:38-46). The Passover Lamb celebrated the blood sacrifice and preparation for deliverance. But none of those sacrifices could take away our sin (Heb 10:4-7). They all pointed to what Isaiah prophesied, that One would be “*led as a lamb to slaughter*” (Isaiah 53:7).

Christmas is for Sinners – The Lamb of God had to come because we could not and would not come to God ourselves. Rom 3:9-11 summarizes well the truth of our situation. None are righteous (v10) and none can remove the stain of our sin, the desire to rebel, and nothing can quell our self-centeredness in all our actions (Rom 3:23). There is none who understand (v11) for in our fallen state, everything God says about our nature is nonsense (1 Cor 2:14). And while mankind is terribly, even desperately, religious, none of us seek God (v10). We cover ourselves and hide from God with our religions, just like Adam and Eve in the shame of their nakedness.

...Which is Why Christmas Can Be So Hard – (Side note of sorts) – Christmas in this stark, fallen world is no more like the sappy, sentimental Christmas movies any more than real combat is like the old professional wrestling shows. Christmas is not “really about the children” or “really about family” or “really about faith and human love.” Because of sin, Christmas comes amidst economic hardships, strained and even ruined family relations, physical ailments and disease, and stress about the coming year. But this only proves that we need “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*”

Christmas is for Sinners... - ...because the Lamb of God came to take away the sin. The Incarnation is the preparation for the propitiation (sounds like a deep-south revival meeting, but I digress). Christmas exists not because we loved God, but because God loved us. While it is God's holy anger that demands a propitiation, it is His holy love that is the source of providing a propitiation which we never could provide (and never wanted to). This is the nature of God's love towards the world. “*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 4:10). It was God's pleasure, therefore, to send His Son to atone for our sins. It was His glory to send One who would rescue, ransom, and redeem those who were lost and enslaved in their sin and rebellion to Him. This gift was not only the result of His love (John 3:16); it was the very essence of it: “*In this is love...*”

Advent is for Sinners – Advent (and Lent) have traditionally skewed towards seasons of penance rather than an overflow of celebration. This is an unhealthy mistake; in Christ we do not need weeks of introspection in order to get rid of our sin (1 John 1:9). On the other hand, when we honestly meditate on the meaning of Christmas (see above) we ought to acknowledge and confess our sins (1 John 1:10). In other words, Advent/Christmas ought to be a season of renewal, more and more reconciliation, and growing hope and celebration for all Christians because “*the Lamb of God*” was born and has taken away our sins. And finally because –

Christmas is for Sinners, and the Sin of the World – The Propitiation is “*for the whole world*” (1 John 2:2); the Lamb of God takes away the “*sin of the world.*” He comes to make His blessings flow *far as the curse is found*. Abraham couldn't count the stars (Gen 15:5) and John couldn't count the number of the redeemed (Rev 7:9-10). One of the reasons that Christians need to work on Christmas celebration (and Easter and every Lord's Day) is because we don't yet live like we believe it. Maybe another string of lights would help...