

General's Christmas article 2023

The scene was a familiar one. A street filled with festive lights and decorations, music playing and crowds of people moving along, taking note of all the Christmas details. Right at the end was a house that was in relative darkness, with just a small box containing a nativity scene set up on the front lawn. Most people did not even bother to check it out. Most simply considered the Christmas display was over before they reached that house. But right there was a visual representation of the quiet heart of Christmas. Not a flashy display. Not a lot of lights and sounds. Just a quiet focus on the one who is born to be our Saviour.

I sometimes wonder whether it is easy for us to miss the quiet heart of Christmas. Even when we are looking at some of the Christmas story we may miss the central message of it all. Each of the gospel writers presents Christmas in a different way. Some might say that only Matthew and Luke include the Christmas story. But I want to suggest to you that each of the gospels brings its own special emphasis.

Mark – possibly the oldest of the gospels – does not have any birth or infancy stories. Instead, Mark's 'Christmas' is embedded in the opening words, 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God' (Mark 1:1 *New King James Version*). Jesus is shown to be Son of God from the very beginning. That's the good news.

John also does not contain birth or infancy stories, but shows the centre of Christmas originating in the heart of God. The word made flesh dwells among us – full of grace and truth.

Matthew opens with a long list of names in Jesus' family tree. It's easy to skip over this and miss its significance. Included in it are five women who all showed remarkable faith, despite that society may have judged them harshly. Tamar – who tricked her father-in-law into pregnancy; Rahab – a prostitute who helped the Israelite spies; Ruth – a despised foreigner; Bathsheba – an adulteress; and Mary – an unmarried mother. Each were part of Jesus' family history. If Jesus will later be shown to identify with sinners, it's because it's 'in his genes'. Jesus is connected with people like us who – despite sinfulness and frail humanity – show faith. *Matthew* then makes the connection with Jesus being Immanuel – God with us, in our humanness. All of this happens *before* the traditional Christmas characters – the Wise Men – even appear. They come to find the one born to be King.

Luke has the angels announcing that Jesus is the Saviour, Christ the Lord. This is not given to the people who you would expect, but rather to shepherds – often considered to be religious outcasts because of the nature of their work. For such as these, living on the margins of society, Jesus comes as Saviour.

Each of the gospels presents a different view of Christmas. It's easy for us to become so engaged with the trappings of the Christmas story. That may include things that we have become accustomed to, that are not even mentioned in any of the gospels. Instead we can sometimes miss the quiet heart of Christmas as related in Scripture.

This year, perhaps we can focus again on what the gospels actually tell us about the coming of Jesus. One who comes for those who are sinners and outcasts. One who comes to be King. One who comes to be Immanuel – God with us. One who comes to be our Saviour. One who has existed from all eternity.



With all the other things that happen at this time of the year, may we focus our hearts and minds on the quiet heart of Christmas: the reality of who Jesus is. The Son of God. The eternal Word made flesh. Our King. Immanuel. Our Saviour. Christ the Lord.

With the songwriter, we say 'O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel.'

May God bless you at this Christmastime and throughout the coming year.

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General