**CHRISTMAS DAY (DECEMBER 25)**

“Joy to the world!”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German theologian and martyr saif that “Anyone for whom this sound is foreign, or who hears in it nothing but weak enthusiasm, has not yet really heard the gospel.”

For the sake of humankind, Jesus Christ became a human being in a stable in Bethlehem:

All over the world today people are asking: Where is the path to joy?

The church of Christ answers loudly: Jesus is our joy! (1 Pet. 1:7–9). Joy to the world!”

Each year our country goes into a frenzy of gift buying and gift giving at this time, without a thought to the reason for the season.

But for us Christians, Christ is central to this season.

We have been building up to this day with a tradition called Advent which began at the first Sunday of December. This is the culmination of those weeks. Today is the focus of that time.

Christmas is a story of prophecy fulfilled, of God making good on his promise to redeem humankind. We cannot fully appreciate the story of Christmas unless we understand that promise.

It’s so easy to focus on the birth of this baby without realizing the significance to creation of the birth of this child called Jesus.

Jesus is called by the apostle Paul the second Adam.

As people receive their earthly nature from the first man, Adam, so they receive their new heavenly nature from Christ. The first Adam is the father of those that have secular existence; the second is the father of all, who through faith in Him will, at His second coming, receive spiritual bodies and have eternal life

This baby is about fulfilment of a promise from God in order for him to restore us back into right relationship with him.

God had already sent prophets to bring people back into right relationship with him, but we had killed them and ignored the call to righteousness.

Remember the parable of the wicked tenants in Matthew 21.

God had already given us his written word to bring us into a place of righteousness and we forgot it and lost it and left it unheeded.

The bulk of the Bible was written before Christ appeared.

God knew this failure of ours to rightly align ourselves with him was going to happen so he had a plan right from the start which would fulfil his promise to bring us back to him.

That plan was Jesus – God’s own son.

The prophesies about the significance of Jesus start right back in Genesis – at the time when we first broke our relationship with God – the time of the Fall –the time when Satan won a victory over Adam and Eve, a victory which resulted in Adam and Eve being kicked out of Eden.

And the prophecies continue to the last book of the Old Testament Malachi and into the story of Jesus’ conception.

All through scripture, there is the promise of a coming messiah to deliver God’s people but the people at that time were looking for a political leader to wrench them from the iron grip of the invader Romans and previous oppressors that ran through the countryside; their vision was short sighted and far too narrow.

The Scriptures and the prophets foretold it.

*“A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel.”* (Numbers: 24:17) This was prophesied between 1446-1260 BC

And the ones from the prophet Isaiah, prophesied 740BC

“*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”* (Isaiah 7:14)

And Isaiah 9:6ff that we have looked at over the past weeks, which I won’t repeat.

Isaiah 11:1 “*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit. The spirit of the Lord will rest on him.”*

And from the prophet Jeremiah

Jeremiah:23:5-6 “*The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land … This is the name by which he will be called: the Lord our righteous saviour.”*

The people had a closed view of the prophecy given to Abraham that they would become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth would be blessed in him (Genesis 18:18).They thought he was talking only about Israel, not the wider world of the Gentiles.

They were looking for a messiah - someone of the warrior ilk of David, in response to the prophecy given to David that God would establish his house and his kingdom would be made sure forever and that his throne would be established forever. (2 Samuel 7:16).

The prophecies were interpreted by the people at that time as only relevant to the people of Israel, but they had far wider implications than just a regional leader.

Traditional Judaism (Orthodox and Conservative) never viewed the Messiah as a God-Man, but only a man with unusual power from God who will manifest the functions of a prophet, priest and king in Israel.

Modern Judaism (Reform) has reinterpreted the messianic hope. Instead of a “personal Messiah,” they claim there will come a messianic age which is brought about through the humanist progression of world leaders negotiating for peace. When universal peace, righteousness and justice are established in the world, then Israel will enjoy peace in tier land forever.[[1]](#footnote-1)

They are still waiting for the Messiah or his messianic time to appear.

But instead coming in the way the people thought he would come, God achieved his purpose in a method that would seem a nonsense to Jew and Greek alike.

No one expected the promise to be fulfilled in the way it was, through a child from an obscure village who would grow up to be a simple carpenter, and then preacher, and finally to be handed over to the Romans, tortured and killed.

But we know that is not the end of the story: On the third day this same carpenter rose from the dead, thus defeating Satan and restoring life that mankind lost through sin. He was no ordinary man – he was fully God and fully human. Two into one does go.

We hear confirmation of the prophecies in the angel Gabriel’s words to Mary, and to her cousin Elizabeth about the role her son John would play in announcing the Messiah, Jesus.

We hear confirmation of who Jesus is when the angels appeared before the shepherds in the fields.

Luke 2:10-12 “*Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”*

We hear the fear in the voice of King Herod when the Magi come to him looking for the new king born – he was fearful that the prophecy about the messiah was coming true – the prophecy from Daniel – the prophecy that said

(Daniel 2:44) *the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people. It shall crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever;*

And he learned from his advisors that the messiah would come from Bethlehem, through the prophecy from Micah 5:2-5 *But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. …. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.*

That is why he sent his soldiers to kill all the boys in Bethlehem under the age of 2 years old.

These are just a few of the prophecies about the Messiah and him being Jesus. The prophecies number 72 in all from all through the Old Testament.

The chance of 72 prophesies culminating in one person at one time is mind bogglingly huge (1 out of 2.54 x10 to the power of 28). So big that I cannot even imagine a number that size.

For those who say that the prophecies were later redactions or additions, the Dead Sea Scrolls date back to about 100 years before the birth of Jesus, and they show that the prophecies which Jesus fulfilled were indeed written before his birth.

So, we come to this Christmas Day, not being surprised by an unexpected gift from God of the Messiah, but of recognising a gift foretold for thousands of years before his coming.

We have eyes to see and ears to hear about Jesus and we recognize him as our Lord and Saviour.

We know that God is faithful all through the ages and what he has proven in the past, he is proving now, and he will fulfil his promise to bring all people back to him.

We know that fulfilment time to be when Jesus returns – not as a baby dependent on us to nurture and grow him but he will return in victory and power.

We understand that through Revelation 19 when Jesus is referred to as the rider on the white horse –

11 *Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, “King of kings and Lord of lords.”*

For us at Christmas, we know these things. What about those who do not know these things? What should we be doing as we gather on the beaches and around the BBQ over these holidays – to our families and friends who do not know Jesus?

Paul asks the question in Romans 10:14 and answers it himself so succinctly:

14 *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? … 17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*

As we sit around with our friends and family during these holidays, will you be telling them the story of Jesus and so planting the seeds of faith in their lives?

Is it the churches job to introduce your family to Jesus or is it your role? You may be the only Christian they know. You have the responsibility.

A Barna survey in the US that the people who have the greatest success in speaking to families about God is not the pastor, or Sunday School or Youth group but mum and dad. “The most important social influence in shaping young people’s religious lives is the religious life modelled and taught to them by their parents.”

Barna stated that research underscored the importance of families, not churches, taking the lead in the spiritual development of children. “Parents, for their part, raised their children in the context of a faith-based community that provided security, belonging, spiritual and moral education, and accountability. Neither the parents nor the church could have done it alone.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Barna showed data indicating that in most cases people’s spiritual beliefs are irrevocably formed when they are pre-teens. The researcher noted, “what you believe by the time you are 13 is what you will die believing.”

From Moses we hear the commandment of God: (Deut 6:1) *Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the LORD your God charged me to teach you to observe … 2 so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. …5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. 6 Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. 7 Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. 8 Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, 9 and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

We know Jesus and we have taken the time today to come and worship him. Out of our worship and love of Jesus, we go from here today with a mandate to “*Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation”* (Mark 16:15). The whole of creation that we are to proclaim to starts at your lunch table today with your family.

And you thought you would be putting your feet up this afternoon, filling your face with Christmas goodies and trying on the socks and undies that your kids gave you for Christmas, didn’t you? No, Christmas is a time when family gathers, so it is a time to tell them of the Jesus you love – to tell them of the reason for the season.

What better time than when they are cast in front of the tele or cast on the deckchair in the back yard – when they can’t escape or have an excuse to be elsewhere. Tell them about Jesus. Tell them the Nativity Story. Tell them your testimony. I dare you.

1. https://israelmyglory.org/article/understanding-jewish-tradition-the-jewish-view-of-the-messiah/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.barna.com/research/research-shows-that-spiritual-maturity-process-should-start-at-a-young-age/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)