

Christmas

UNWRAPPED



Touching Lives
with James Merritt

CHRISTMAS UNWRAPPED

SERIES OVERVIEW

In this very special Christmas series, we are going to breakdown several elements of the Christmas story in order to gain a better understanding of the miraculous and praise-worthy details of Jesus' birth. We will take a look at the biology of Christmas, the theology of Christmas, and finally the doxology of Christmas as we unwrap the best Christmas gift of all time - our Savior, the Son of God.

SERIES VERSES

Matthew 1:18-25

John 1:14-18

Philippians 2:5-11

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PART 1: Christmas Biology

Matthew 1:18-25

OVERVIEW

The story of Christmas begins with the virgin birth of Jesus. This virgin birth remains the second-most controversial miracle in all of history, second only to Jesus’ resurrection. Unfortunately, this miracle has been under intense scrutiny by scientists, physicians, and people who simply say common sense tells us this isn’t possible. But as you will see as we begin this study, the virgin birth is essential to Christianity, and if you understand Christmas biology you will see why.

KEY POINTS

It is not without significance that the very first gospel begins in the very first chapter with establishing right away that Jesus was both human and divine. Matthew is going to tell us three things that are true about this baby that was indeed born two-thousand years ago.

1. We Believe Jesus Was Conceived by the Spirit of God

The first seventeen verses of Matthew’s gospel list out the genealogy of Jesus. However, the way Matthew chooses to describe Jesus’ immediate family is unusual and should be noted. He says, “...Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah,” (Matthew 1:16). If you will notice every single person listed in that genealogy has a father except Jesus. Jacob was the father of Joseph, but it does not say that Joseph was the father of Jesus. Although, in Jewish tradition, genealogy is always passed through the father and not the mother. Matthew wants to be clear. Jesus did not have a human father. But Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and Mary was a virgin.

2. We Believe Jesus Came as the Son of God

Now the facts are these so far...Joseph is engaged to a woman named Mary, with whom not only has he had no sexual relations, but she has had no sexual relations with any other man. Mary was a virgin, as was Joseph, and they both know they are about to become parents of a son. But the question remains again, “Whose son is he?” This is where the angel comes in and says, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God,” (Luke 1:35).

There you have it – Mary is the mother of Jesus, and Jesus is the Son of God. Going a step further, it’s important to understand that Jesus is not the Son of God because He was a descendant of David (though He was). He was not the Son of God because He died for our sins (though He did). Jesus being the Son of God was not being dependent on either of these circumstances being true, but rather these circumstances are true because He is the Son of God.

3. We Believe Jesus Covered Our Sins with God

As soon as the angel announced Mary’s pregnancy, Mary and Joseph are told to name their son, “Jesus.” It was a common, ordinary name. Jesus is

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Matthew 1:18-25

the Greek form of the Hebrew “Yeshua,” which is the Hebrew form of the English name “Joshua.” This name literally means “God saves.” That one name tells us two things about Jesus that the virgin birth confirms. On the one hand, He is a human being with a human name that came to live among us. But on the other hand, He is also God who came to save us. That is why He alone qualifies to be the one thing that this world needs more than anything else, and that is a Savior.

If someone is going to save us from our sins, this person must be a human being who can die, but He also must also be a sinless human being so He can die for my sins and not His own. This is why Jesus was born like all babies are born, but He was not conceived like all babies are conceived. He was not just a son; He was God’s Son. He was not just human; He was a sinless human. He was in no way a sinner, but He was in every way a Savior. Now, we understand why we celebrate Christmas the way we do. It all begins with Christmas Biology. No one was conceived like Jesus was conceived. No one lived like Jesus lived, and no one died like Jesus died. No one came back from the grave like Jesus came back from the grave. No one except Jesus qualifies to be our Savior.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why do you think it was important that Jesus had an earthly mother but not an earthly father?
2. Keeping in mind what we discussed in today’s message, how would you explain the virgin birth to someone who might be skeptical of this historic miracle?

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PART 2: Christmas Theology

John 1:14-18

OVERVIEW

The hardest thing to believe about Jesus is not how He got here or what He did while He was alive on the earth. The real difficulty is truly understanding Jesus Himself and who He was as God in the flesh. The hard message for many to swallow is not the Good Friday message of atonement, or the Easter message of resurrection, but the Christmas message of incarnation. The first Christmas gift ever given was given by God Himself, and it is the greatest Christmas gift ever given because the gift was God Himself.

As we move from Christmas Biology to Christmas Theology, we will learn that Christmas doesn't just celebrate how Jesus was conceived, but Christmas also celebrates who Jesus was when He was born.

KEY POINTS

It is the "who" of Christmas that makes the "what" of Christmas so important, and the "why" of Christmas so understandable. Christmas theology teaches us three things about this baby that was born two-thousand years ago.

1. Jesus Entered into Life with Us

In just ten words, one sentence, John makes an earth-shattering declaration, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). John is being as physiologically precise as he can be. Jesus Christ was God who became a human being. That is what the word "incarnation" means. In other words, God, without ceasing to be God, became a human being. He took on humanity, but He didn't lose His divinity. He was one hundred percent human and one hundred percent God, which is why John added that He "made his dwelling among us."

John was trying to explain that when you meet Jesus, you were meeting God face-to-face. That is why the supreme way and the greatest way to meet God is through Jesus Christ. You see, God has revealed Himself in three ways. In creation, God has revealed His power. In scripture, God has revealed His principles. And in Jesus, God has revealed His person.

2. Jesus Existed in Eternity Before Us

Now, the disciple John interrupts his own narrative to quote something John the Baptist said about Jesus later on, "John testified concerning him, He cried out, saying, 'This is the one I spoke about when I said, "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me."' (John 1:15) John wants us to understand that this Jesus, though He was born in Bethlehem, did not have His beginning in Bethlehem. The phrase that John uses is extremely emphatic. He does not say, "He was before me." Literally he said, "He was first before me." In other words, John's existence began when he was born, but Jesus existed before He was born.

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PART 2: Christmas Theology

John 1:14-18

Our birth was our beginning. His birth was not. He had no beginning just as He has no ending. He has always existed from eternity past to eternity present. Jesus is the only baby to be born in history who at the moment He was born was older than His mother and the same age as His Father. Only a baby who was God could fit that description.

3. Jesus Expresses God to Us

No John wraps up this neat little theological present and ties a bow on it with these words, "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God, and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (John 1:18). Jesus was not a humanized God or a deified man; He was the God-man. He was all that God was and all that man was.

Everything that God is Jesus is. Everything that God has Jesus has. Everything that God does Jesus does. Do you want to come to God? Come to Jesus? Do you want to know God? Know Jesus. In Jesus, you don't just see God, you don't just hear God, and you don't just feel God. With Jesus, you **know** God.

The first time ever, two things are true because of this Christmas Jesus. First, you can see God and live, and second, you can know God and live forever. You know suffering? So did Jesus. You know temptation? So did Jesus. You know disappointment? So did Jesus. You know heartache? So did Jesus. You face death? So did Jesus. He experienced all of that as man, but He overcame it as God. That is the glory of the story of the theology of Christmas.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. It's one thing to see or hear someone. It's an entirely different thing to know someone personally. Do you find yourself seeing God work or hearing Him speak, but not taking the time to truly get to know Him?
2. What is something you can begin doing today to know God better and to grow in your relationship with Him?
3. Even though Jesus lived a perfect life, He experienced every hardship and temptation we face today. What is something you are struggling with that you can hand over to Jesus, knowing He has dealt with the same pain and difficulty you're feeling?

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PART 3: Christmas Doxology

Philippians 2:5-11

OVERVIEW

The word "doxology" comes from two Greek words, one which means "praise" or "glory" and the other one which means "word." A doxology is literally a word or an expression of praise and glory. To understand Christmas doxology, we turn to a man who unlike the shepherds and (a little later on) the wise men, was not at the birth of Jesus. This man is the apostle Paul. As a writer of Scripture, he never explicitly talks about the birth of Jesus. Unlike the disciples, he never physically met Jesus, but he did meet the risen Jesus. Though he never mentions of the biology of Christmas, and doesn't dwell on the theology of Christmas, he does record the greatest doxology of Christmas. He shows us the full meaning of Christmas. He shows us Christmas completely unwrapped. He tells us the rest of the story.

KEY POINTS

1. Be Thoughtful that Jesus Identified with Us

To begin, Paul takes us backstage behind the curtains of eternity and shows us what took place before Jesus was even born. He says, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking in the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Philippians 2:5-7).

When Jesus got on the ladder of humanity, he started out on the lowest rung. Though he was a king, he took the form of a slave. This puzzled so many people who met him -- even his own disciples. They were expecting him to be born into royalty and be surrounded with servants. And yet, he came to serve. The Christmas birth begs the Christmas question, "If Jesus was God, why did He identify with us as a human being?" Why would the Son of God leave the glory of heaven to come to earth as the son of man? Why would He leave a throne as a king and come to earth as a slave? Why would He leave a place where He is exalted to come to a place where He would be executed? This brings us to the next part of the doxology of Christmas.

2. Be Thankful that Jesus was Crucified for Us

Paul continues speaking about Jesus saying, "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:8). Jesus went from sitting on a throne, to laying in a manger, to hanging on a tree. He went from being a king with a crown, to a baby with diapers, to a criminal on the cross. Why? Because your soul was more important than His blood. Your eternal life was more important than His earthly life. Your place in heaven was more important to Him than His place in heaven. In other words, the one person who had the right to demand his rights gave up His rights for us. He didn't play the God-card. He humbled Himself by obeying God to the point of death.

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FREE AT LAST

PART 3: Christmas Doxology *Philippians 2:5-11*

Understand, Jesus didn't die out of obligation; He died out of obedience. When His Father asked Him to leave the glory of heaven for the grief He would get on earth, He said yes. When the Father asked Him to die for sins that we committed, He said yes. The Father did not force death on Jesus. He didn't coerce the Son to die. It was the Father's will that He die, but it was the Son's decision to carry out His Father's will. He never called Him to die, and He did not compel Him to die. The Roman soldiers didn't overpower Jesus and forcibly take Him to the cross. Jesus actually overpowered the Roman soldiers and allowed them to take Him to the cross.

3. Be Mindful that Jesus is Magnified Over Us

Paul climaxes everything he says about Jesus with these words, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name," (Philippians 2:9). The word "therefore" is important. In light of the fact that Jesus was willing to go low, in fact to go to the lowest, He will wind up elevated and exalted to the highest. But in order for that to happen, Jesus became like us. He suffered like us and He died like us and for us, so we could be like Him and live with Him forever. That is Christmas Doxology.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus chose to leave His heavenly glory to come to earth as a servant so ultimately you could have a relationship with Him?
2. Have you ever considered that no one ever forced Jesus to die for you, but rather He went to die of His own accord? Does that fact make you view Jesus' life and death any differently?

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We want to invite you to join us on this incredible journey to East Africa in the fall of 2020. It will be a magical and inspiring ten days! You will experience a Swahili worship service in an African Church, the excitement of serving a needy community in Nairobi, Kenya and God's wonderful creations in the Masai Mara. Prepare for a trip of a lifetime! Sign up immediately as space is limited. We look forward to being with you and sharing this wonderful experience in exotic places!

*in Christ,
James and Teresa Merritt*