

Psalm 2(Opening)

- ¹ *Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?*
- ² *The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,*
- ³ *“Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us.”*
- ⁴ *He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision.*
- ⁵ *Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,*
- ⁶ *“As for me, I have set my King
on Zion, my holy hill.”*
- ⁷ *I will tell of the decree:
The LORD said to me, “You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.*
- ⁸ *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.*
- ⁹ *You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”*
- ¹⁰ *Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.*
- ¹¹ *Serve the LORD with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.*
- ¹² *Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

Christmas – what’s it all about, anyway?

Well, depending on whom you ask, you’ll get different answers.

If you walk up to a kid at Wal-Mart or Target and asked them, they’d tell you it’s all about getting toys. Well, let’s be honest here. If you go up to about 75% of the population these days they’d tell you it’s about getting toys; or at least stuff.

Some people will tell you that family is what Christmas is all about. That can be both good and bad.

It’s good to get together with your family. Sometimes the holidays are the only time of year you may see some members of your family (and that could be a good thing).

Sometimes the only good reason to get together with your family is to remind yourself why you don’t get together with your family more often. But that’s OK. Every family has nice people, mean people, crazy people, and people who are sort of teetering on the edge between all three.

Every family has at least one of those “strange” people. You know the type, the strange uncle, or strange cousin, the one no one really talks about much. You know, “Oh, that’s Uncle so-and-so. We don’t talk about him.” Here’s a big surprise for you. I’m probably considered that person in my family. The one that’s just a little bit “out there”, not quite what anyone would have expected. Maybe a few fries short of a Happy meal.

I imagine Jesus was that “strange” person in His earthly family. Take a look at Mark chapter 3. In verses 20 and 21 we see the way His earthly family was reacting to Him and His teachings.

Mark 3:20, 21

²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

Remember what we've already talked about with Jesus' situation. Joseph is not around anymore; there were always questions about who Jesus' father was, because Mary was pregnant before she and Joseph were married; He was poor, and probably the primary "bread winner" for his family. So this poor, "fatherless", man of questionable background who grew up in the backwoods hick town of Nazareth, was out wandering around in Galilee, of all things, preaching! How could this guy have the background and experience to be doing that? Where'd he learn all this?

Jesus did have an earthly family, and the people there in Nazareth especially knew that. In Mark 6:3 His family is listed out for us. This is some of the people of Nazareth talking:

Mark 6:3

³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

Now if we jump back to Mark 3, starting in verse 31 this time, we see Jesus' reaction to the way his family was treating him.

Mark 3:31-35

³¹ And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." ³³ And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

Jesus here is expanding the expected definition of His earthly family. Anyone who does the will of God, Jesus' Father in heaven, is in His family. I don't think that He's disowning his family, like some people have said may be the case. I think He's adding to his family; his **real** family; explaining what you need to do to be one of God's children.

You see, the Jews believed they were special; because they were God's chosen they could do no wrong as long as they followed those rules that Moses gave them; especially the sacrifices that God told them to do at particular times and for particular reasons. As long as you follow the rules, and you were a Jew genetically, you were OK in God's book and everything was fine. Jesus was stirring the pot here, showing people that it was more than just following the rules. Jesus said in verse 35 "whoever does the will of God, he is my brother, and sister and mother."

But here's the question I'm sure that Jesus was posing to the people around him: What does God want you to do? The answer to that question is in Micah 6:6-8.

Micah 6:6-8

⁶ *"With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"
⁸ He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?*

So, we can see from this that it's not about the sacrifices that we make. That's not how we become or stay Jesus brother or sister or mother. The Jews of Jesus time were doing those sacrifices (and so was Jesus, because He was following the Law of Moses). But there was more to it than that.

Everyone assumed that Jesus was just another man, and by human standards, He wasn't very important. In fact, by human standards, He was pretty insignificant. Why, if Jesus was fully God and fully man, did he choose to be so insignificant? The prophet Isaiah said that He would be, in Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53:1-3

*¹ Who has believed what he has heard from us?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*

*² For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.*

*³ He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

Jesus was the way He was on earth because that's exactly what God needed Him to be. If Jesus had been born to an important family, people would have followed Him just because of His background, not His message.

I think that's the most important thing to remember about the Christmas story. It's not the baby Jesus. Well, it is, but it isn't. It's the message behind Jesus. It's the fact that God sent a representative to the earth; a representative who was fully God and fully man as well; and the reason? To seal a new covenant with His people; this covenant

would be one that encompassed all people who were willing and committed to being included in it, not just those who were from a particular bloodline. Anyone who chooses to could be in God's family simply by adoption through obedience. And God didn't send just any representative to carry this message, but He sent His son; His only son. There's a very familiar scripture that says all that.

John 3:16-18

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

How do we know that Jesus was the only Son of God?

Well, when He was baptized by John, God said that He was His son, in Matthew 3:16 and 17.

Matthew 3:16, 17

¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

And if that wasn't enough, God said it again on the mountain top where Jesus took Peter, James and John, and where Jesus met with Moses and Elijah, in Matthew 17:5

Matthew 17:5, 6

⁵ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with

whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.

John understood Jesus being the son of God (eventually). The Jewish law required at least two witnesses to give testimony in any legal case against someone to prove an accusation was true. In 1 John 5, starting in verse 6, John says this:

1 John 5:6-12

⁶ This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷ For there are three that testify: ⁸ the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. ⁹ If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. ¹⁰ Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. ¹¹ And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

So John is saying there are not just two witnesses, but three witnesses that confess that Jesus is the son of God. The first witness is the water, Jesus’ baptism. God spoke at Jesus’ baptism, as we saw in Matthew 3, saying that Jesus was His son. The second witness is the blood, His death on the cross. In Matthew’s account of the crucifixion, we see many confessing that Jesus was the Son of God.

Matthew 27:50-54

⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs

also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

The third witness is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the power of God in us that allows us to believe, that convinces us He is God's Son, and also gives us the power to do what's right, to obey His will.

Yes, Christmas may not truly be the birthday of Jesus, and probably isn't. But, it's a good time of year for us to help people better understand who He really was, and possibly get them to believe that He is more than just a baby sleeping in a manger on a card. He was the perfect sacrifice for our sins, and as a risen savior is seated at the right hand of God.

1 John 5:1-5 (Closing)

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. ⁴ For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Questions

1. How do you celebrate Christmas? Do you have any specific traditions? Where do those traditions come from?
2. Do we need a special day to celebrate Jesus? Colossians 3:17 says “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”
3. What about opportunity? Is Christmas a good opportunity to let people know the truth about Jesus?