

Christ came to save sinners...and that I'm one of them!

Several years ago I sat next to the bed of a man who was in his last years in a nursing home. As we talked about his life he began to painfully recall some of the sins he had committed. Beginning to weep he blurted out, "I'm such a terrible sinner. I'm such a terrible sinner." I said to him, "That's wonderful!" He looked at me as if I had misunderstood him so I explained: "You *are* a terrible sinner. But that's wonderful because it was exactly for people like you that Christ came to earth."

Paul doesn't just say that he is a *terrible* sinner. He says he's the worst. Isn't he exaggerating? No. Paul refuses to focus on the greatness of the sin of others but only of his own sin. If he had been the only sinner in the world, Christ would still have had to shed every drop of that precious blood to save him.

Great sinners need a great Savior. And that is exactly what Christ is. Christ, says Hebrews 7:25, is able to save to the uttermost; that is, completely! If he can save a Paul who was a blasphemer and a murderer then he can be a Savior to you.

Are you a flesh-and-blood sinner in need of the light of God's truth? Then Christmas is for you.



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A PUBLICATION OF:
COVENANT REFORMED CHURCH
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4 (More) Reasons
Why Christ
Came to Earth

Join us for a **Christmas Eve service** as we explore more reasons for Christ's advent.
(47 S. Church St., Carbondale, 7pm, Dec. 24th)

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PROCLAMATION

Promoting robust, religious thought in the tradition of orthodox, historic Christianity
December 2010, Issue 18

Assessing Advent:

Four Reasons Why Jesus Came to Earth

BY WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN

Rudyard Kipling called "Why" one of the "six honest serving-men" who taught him all he knew. "Why" is a marvelous teacher because it helps us to identify the purposes, reasons and meaning behind events that we observe.

Christ himself frequently employed this "serving man" as he taught about his first coming. Learning the reasons for his advent will help us more deeply celebrate his birth and understand how it is connected with the rest of his life *and* why it is important for our lives.

So why did Christ come to earth? Here are a few reasons:

To Become Like His Brethren

"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Him-

self likewise shared in the same (Heb. 2:14; Cf. vv. 15-17).

Christ came to earth as God to partake of our flesh and blood. This is a profound statement. The baby in the manger had the same human nature as you and me, only without sin.

Christ was born as the perfect human. As the perfect man, Christ represents the hope of imperfect men. Sometimes little babies inspire the hope of a fresh start. Much more so *this* little baby.

His incarnation says to us, "You cannot solve your problems on your own. You cannot attain perfection and peace by your own strength. I am what you need."

Christ did not come to earth simply to be our moral example. If he had, he could have come as an angelic being without our flesh and blood.



Instead, he came to become like one of us so that he could raise us up to be like him.

This purpose of Christ's coming relates directly to his death, as Hebrews 2 says. Christ came to be like us so that his death would actually accomplish healing for us.

By faith, when we think of Christ we see ourselves in him. As we glimpse into the manger we can say, "There is my flesh and my blood." As he grows and matures and continues to do the will of God, we can say, "There is my flesh and my blood." As he goes to the cross and bleeds and dies, we can say, "There is my flesh and my blood." When we see Christ seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, we can say, "There is my flesh and my blood" (Cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 49). And when we see Christ return on clouds of glory to take us home to be with him we can say, "There is my flesh and my blood."

None of this would be true if Christ had not taken on our flesh and our blood and been born in a rude stable in Bethlehem.

To Bear Witness to the Truth

"Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice'" (John 18:37).

Christmas is a curious time of year because it tends to bring together people of various back-

grounds. Even those who disagree regarding significant truth claims seem to mutually enjoy the so-called "Christmas spirit." The amazing thing is that Jesus declared to Pilate on a world stage shortly before his death that he came "to bear witness to *the* truth" (and by implication to expose falsehood).

We live in a day where the existence of truth itself is questioned. Sometimes we may even wonder whether truth matters.

When we think about Christ's coming, we should be considering the truth claims to which Jesus' birth testifies. He came to testify to the truth that all men are sinners and that God hates sin. But he also came to address the problem of sin through his righteous life and redeeming death.

Notice how freeing this truth is. Pilate questions the very existence of truth and his life bore the fruit of these doubts. He lived in fear of losing his position. He gave deference to the mad requests of the people against his own conscience. He disregarded the sane advice of his wife who urged him to have nothing to do with Jesus' death. Pilate was in bondage because he didn't know the truth.

When we look to Christ by faith, we will be overwhelmed by the radical truthfulness of God and the radical deception that is found in each of us. As Paul says in Romans 3:4, "Let God be true but every man a liar."

Jesus said, "The truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Christ came to bear witness to the truth that frees. Have you received his testimony?

To Bring Light to a Dark World

"I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46).

There are few things in this world that are more precious to us than light. We take light for granted but when it's gone we notice. You may remember the last time you tried to find your way in the darkness. You probably held your arms out in front of you as you groped for something to take hold of (Cf. Acts 17:27).

The world into which Jesus came was dark. There was little true religion being practiced even by God's people. The religious leaders had become little more than legalistic life coaches. A pagan nation, Rome ruled over much of the world. Men and women lived without a light to guide them.

In this way, every person is conceived into this world. We can't see which way to go because of our spiritual darkness. We can't make sense of our lives until the light of Christ shines into our hearts, leading us to God.

How appropriate, that the birth of Christ was marked by a bright star and bright lights. The Shepherds were watching their flocks by night. All of the sudden, in the midst of this darkness, "an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them..." (Luke 2:9). Later, the Magi were directed to Jesus by a bright star (Matt. 2:1-12).

A more glorious light accompanied Jesus life and ministry. The Apostle John says that when the Word became flesh he beheld his glory (John 1:14). Shortly before his death Jesus said, "A little while longer the light is with you...while you have the light believe in the light, that you may become sons of the light" (John 12:35,36). In this same context, Jesus says, "If I am lifted up I will draw all peoples to myself" (John 12:32).

When Christ was born, the light fell, as it were, from Heaven. As Christ ministered throughout his earthly life the light was held close to the ground. But when that light was lifted up it shone for all to see! On the cross the spotlight of God was shining upon his justice and love.

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sinner in need
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To Save Sinners

"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:15).

The first coming of Christ was the implementation of a rescue plan conceived in the mind of God from eternity past. He did not come to promote holiday cheer. He did not come to boost end of year sales or to be the central figure in a nativity scene. He came to save sinners.

Paul recognizes who that sinner is when he says, "...And *I* am the chief of sinners." It's not enough to say that Christ came to save sinners. Each of us needs to affirm that