

cally among us does not diminish this purpose for his coming. After all, when Jesus was parted from his disciples and carried up into heaven, “They worshipped him!” (Luke 24:52).

How do we worship Christ?

Seek Him, as the Wise Men Did

Our pilgrimage is no longer to a humble stable but to heaven where Christ is. Christ was born to live and preach and die and rise to heaven to draw us up to him. God drew the wise men to him by means of a star. God draws us to him by his Word and Spirit. Christ is our bright and morning star (Rev. 22:16; 2 Peter 1:19). “Seek the Lord while He may be found...” (Is. 55:6).

As the wise men sought Christ they were filled with joy (v. 10). Christmas teaches us that it is a joyful thing to seek Jesus. The Christian journey is riddled with trials and difficulties but the brilliance of the One whom we seek gives us joy for sorrows. “And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Is. 35:10).

Give Him Gifts as the Wise Men Did

In every season of the year the Psalmist’s question should be ours: “What shall I render to the Lord, for all his benefits to me? The answer isn’t gold, frankincense and myrrh but a blameless and holy walk (1 Thess. 3:9-4:2). The truly wise person still offers Christ a humble spirit and, in faith, bows before his God.

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ASSESSING ADVENT, PART TWO

FOUR (MORE) REASONS WHY JESUS CAME TO EARTH

BY WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN

We’ve all seen the bumper stickers: “Keep Christ in Christmas.” Most of us would instinctively agree with that idea. Still, the slogan is a bit vague. If we didn’t mind using the whole bumper we might better to say it this way: “How can we celebrate Christ’s first advent in a way that honors him better?” One sure way to answer this question is to gain a better understanding of why he came.

It is traditional around Christmas time to think about the story of Christ’s birth. It *feels* like Christmas when we can picture the shepherds, the wise men and the stable. But in order to understand the magnitude of the main point of the story (the Son of God assuming flesh), we need to learn from the rest of the Bible why Christ became incarnate. Answering the “why” question

should also enlarge our vision for the Christmas season, helping us answer important questions like, “What is the point of our gatherings? What is it that we are commemorating this season? How can this season bring hope?”

Throughout the Bible many reasons are given for Christ’s first advent, many by Christ himself. Last year we considered four reasons: He came to become like his brothers, bear witness to the truth, bring light to a dark world, and save sinners. We’ve just scratched the surface. Let’s scratch a little deeper.

Christ Came to Reveal Sin

On the night in which he was betrayed Jesus said: “If I had not come and spoken [to the world], they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin” (John 15:22).



Christ reveals sin as the perfect prophet. God had sent prophets into the world since the beginning. Their primary job was to expose the people's sin and point them to Christ. Nonetheless, the sinfulness of sin was not fully revealed until Christ came to earth (Acts 17:30; Cf. Lu. 12:48). Part of the reason for God's forbearance in the Old Testament era was because the prophets, priests and kings themselves were sinners. None of God's earlier messengers embodied the stark contrast between God's holiness and man's sinfulness.

Christ's absolute holiness provided the perfect backdrop against which the heinousness of sin could be exposed. This is especially true since the worst sin ever committed was against him who knew no sin.

Each year Martin Luther would compose a hymn for the annual Christmas Eve festival held in his home. The hymn for 1535 contains these words:

"Tis Christ our God, who far on high had heard your sad and bitter cry; Himself will your Salvation be, Himself from sin will make you free.

...Thus hath it pleased Thee *to make plain* the truth to us, poor fools and vain, that this world's honor, wealth and might *Are naught and worthless in Thy sight.*

Ah, dearest Jesus, *holy Child,* Make Thee a bed, soft, *undefiled,* Here in my poor heart's inmost shrine, That I may evermore be Thine.

How often do we hear newborns described as innocent? The Bible teaches us that this really isn't true of any newborn. "Behold," says David, "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). The same could be said

of any other human being. But, Christ was born as the innocent one.

The glory of the gospel is that the innocent one not only teaches us our sin; he also takes it upon himself. He became sin for us.

Christ Came to Destroy Satan's Works

The Devil has always raged against the church (John 8:44). But Jesus' physical entrance into the world heightened the intensity of the battle between God and Satan. In his Revelation, John sees a "great fiery dragon" standing before "the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born" (Rev. 12:3,4). Eight chapters later that dragon was "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone... [to] be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10).

There is a bitter end in store for the devil and his workers (Matt. 13:39-42; 25:41). Therefore, like a man on death row with no possibility of parole, the Devil and his host "to the utmost of their power as murderers [watch] to ruin the Church and every member thereof...daily expecting their horrible torments" (Belgic Confession, Art. 7).

While the devil rages we must not lose hope. Christ came to destroy the devil's works. "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8; Cf. Heb. 2:14).

Throughout Jesus' earthly ministry he exercised power over the devil and his demons (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 8:31; Acts 10:38). As Jesus died on the

cross, it seemed like the devil had won. In reality, by his own death, Christ had conquered that great enemy death which entered the world through the devil's work. He had crushed the devil's head (Gen. 3:15).

Christmas is a time for us to remember and participate in Christ's devil-destroying work. Let us not engage in that which Christ came to destroy. Because Christ has conquered, his disciples *can* resist the devil (Eph. 6:11, James 4:7). Let us also not have a defeatist attitude as Christians. Christ is our devil slayer. And in him we have power over the devil as well (Acts 13:9-12).

Christ Came to Give Eternal Life

We all have earthly bodies which are corrupted by sin and naturally destined to decay and judgment. All the money in the world could not buy a remedy for our corruption. We need a cure from heaven.

Christ, in his incarnation, provided that cure. "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

Christ was sent into the world as the cure for sinful flesh. His flesh is heavenly, untainted by corruption. Christ gives his own flesh as a ransom for the life we forfeited by sin. His life must go for ours that ours may be spared. Jesus teaches us here to eat his flesh. In fact, Christ presents himself here as the real food. Matthew Henry said that "Everything else we eat is as shadows compared to Christ."

Christmas isn't just a time to think or talk about Jesus. We must eat him. How do we "eat" Christ?

First, develop an appetite for Christ by committing your heart to him, believing that only he will be sweet and fulfilling. Second, ruminate on him. Like a wine taster, don't allow his doctrine to pass by too quickly. Apply every "bite" of his person and work to your life. Third, delight in him. Enjoy him. The best food is both nourishing and tasty. Finally, feed upon him regularly. Make him your favorite food.

When you eat something (ideally) you trust that it will be good for you. You commit that food to your body and it becomes part of you. Something similar happens when we "eat" Christ by faith.

In order for the Bread of Life to be consumed to our benefit, it had to be broken. Christ was broken on the cross so that we can share in his life. Christ came to give eternal life.

Christ Came to Be Worshipped

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem...wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him'" (Matt. 2:1,2). "And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child... and fell down and worshipped him" (Matt. 2:11).

What a privilege these wise men had! They saw Christ in the flesh. They worshipped him face to face. They gave gifts to their Savior. Christ came to be worshipped. But just because Christ is not presently, physi-