

Introduction

Christmas is almost here and for what seems like months, we've been bombarded with adverts for presents, food, alcohol, and events to attend. Over the last 20 years or so the emphasis for Christmas has been on consumerism with no thought given as to why we have Christmas at all. I saw an advert on Sky Sports recently that said "*Christmas is for football*". Now, I admit that I love watching football on TV as much as anyone but that statement is wrong; Christmas is for and about Jesus. I do acknowledge that it is highly unlikely that Jesus was born at this time of year since it was more likely to have been closer to the middle of the year. However, it has become tradition to celebrate the event now although it has become romanticised by the thoughts of snow, holly, robins on logs, log fires, and plenty of food on the table. All of that added together means that, sadly, far too few people even think about Jesus at Christmas and even fewer people have any idea Who Jesus is. That situation needs to be rectified and people throughout the country need to be reminded that Jesus should be at the absolute centre of our Christmas celebrations.

In the passage that we read a few minutes ago; **Matthew 1:18-25**; Matthew gives us a short account of the birth of Jesus, how it came about and how Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, reacted to the news that the lady to whom he was betrothed, Mary, was pregnant.

As with all aspects of the birth of Jesus, that synopsis is fascinating. However, for me the key verse in this passage is **1:23** and here Matthew gives a very clear explanation of the basics of the event, "*The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel*" — which means, 'God with us.'" and over the next few minutes I want us to take a closer look at what that verse truly means.

Full verse

In order to do that I'm going to break the verse down to into three short clauses and look at each to see what each part tells us. Before we do that though, it is interesting to note that **1:23** is almost word for word what Isaiah said in his prophecy in **Isaiah 7** when he told us of the birth of Jesus Christ to a virgin and that His name was to be Immanuel. In **1:23** Matthew actually quotes that verse from Isaiah. I also want us to look briefly at **Isaiah 9:6** when the prophet gives a list of four other names for this very special child. Isaiah tells us, "*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*"

Virgin birth

We'll start with the first clause of **1:23** which says, "*The virgin will be with child*". You heard that right, Jesus was to be born to a virgin. Now logic and our knowledge of biology tell us that a virgin birth just isn't possible; it makes no sense to our finite human brain. I acknowledge that modern medicine and science can do some amazing things but they pale into insignificance when we think of what we are being told here. Whilst it may be difficult for us to comprehend we need to understand that this is God we are dealing with and He, as the Creator, has power beyond our mental capacity to grasp. As if to back up that thought we need to look at **Luke 1:34 & 37**. In **1:34** having been told that she was going to have a baby Mary asked the angel, "*How will this be since I am a virgin?*" The angel was happy to respond and in **1:37** reminded her, "... *nothing is impossible with God*". There are

many who fail to accept or understand that statement; they fail to accept that God could do it. However, many such people also fail to accept that God created the universe and everything in it in just six days; He had a much needed rest on the seventh day!

Many seem to think that the birth of Jesus was a late or hasty decision by God in response to events in the Garden of Eden. That isn't the case. Yes, sin entered the world through the actions of Adam & Eve and their defying of God's strict instructions but up to that point God's world was perfect and without sin. When sin did enter His world God already had a plan and that plan involved the Virgin Mary even though she was hundreds of years from being born. In the second half of **Genesis 3:15** we read "... *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel*". God is talking to the serpent who tempted Eve to eat from the forbidden tree of knowledge, cursing it by condemning it to crawl on its belly and eat dust. The serpent was also to be crushed by the seed of the woman. I admit that this isn't an easy verse to understand but careful reading with some added research shows that the woman can be seen to be Mary whilst the offspring is Jesus. Jesus was to come and crush sin and the serpent of sin once and for all.

Baby boy

When a couple have a baby, whether it be the first, second or subsequent, they never know what sex it will be. Of course, these days modern technology is able to detect the sex although many choose not to know until the big day arrives; it's a wonderful surprise and blessing to see your new born child for the first time and I know from experience that the important thing is that the baby is healthy. Mind you, I did learn something new recently. Have you ever heard of a gender reveal party? I'm told that couples now hold a party at which they proudly reveal the gender of their yet to be born baby. That sounds to me to be yet another money making opportunity and in many ways takes the joy and excitement of having a baby; that's my opinion of course and you are at liberty to disagree! However, here in **1:23** we are told that Mary "*will give birth to a son*". That is a clear and unequivocal statement; this baby will be a boy, no ifs or buts. It was all part of God's plan that the baby would be a boy as he was to be the Son of God. Lest there be any doubt about that we learn from **Luke 1:35** that the angel Gabriel told Mary "*The Holy Spirit will come upon 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.*"

Name

In **Matthew 16:14-16** Jesus asked His disciples who people said he was "*They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'*" "*But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?'*" Simon Peter answered, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" In asking that question, Jesus didn't just mean by what name they called Him but rather Who He really was. In his prophecy Isaiah had said that the baby would be a boy and His name would be Immanuel. This third clause in **1:23** sees Matthew echoing Isaiah's prophecy that the baby would be called Immanuel as if that were a name. However, this wasn't just a name for Jesus but also described that He was to be "*God with us*". God wanted to be with His people; to live amongst them; to share their lives; to share their daily problems and difficulties; to bring them to salvation.

The name Immanuel is used only three times in Scripture in [Isaiah 7:14 & 8:8](#) together with this verse here in [Matthew 1:23](#) and it may possibly be used in [Isaiah 8:10](#) where we see the phrase “*God with us*”. God had been with His people in the Garden of Eden and if you aren’t sure about that then just read [Genesis 3:8-9](#), “*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”* Whether or not Adam & Eve saw God is debateable as they hid from Him out of their shame at being naked. The ensuing conversation could well have taken place from behind bushes and trees but would still mean that God was present. Later in [3:21](#) we read “*The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.*” I would suggest that those two verses together indicate God’s presence with them.

We find a list of four other names in [Isaiah 9:6b](#) where the prophet tells us “*he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*” Amazing! Notice though that these aren’t just names for Jesus they are also roles that He was to play and there is so much packed in to there meaning that they are worth us thinking about briefly.

This baby boy was to be a Counsellor and that can be seen in two ways. Firstly, it could relate the wisdom that the Lord would exercise in government. Secondly and possibly more importantly to everyone is that He would be a personal Counsellor to all who believed in Him as Lord and Saviour. The Pharisees and priests of the time had a tendency to set themselves apart and be rather aloof and there seems to be little evidence that they ever provided the wise counsel that many of the people needed. Jesus was particularly critical of the Pharisees for the way they behaved and especially their attitude towards the people they were meant to help and lead in their daily spiritual lives. In [Matthew 23](#) Jesus addressed the crowd and His disciples in a passage that is titled “*Seven Woes*”. In those verses He was critical of many aspects of the Pharisees performance and in [23:1-4](#) we read, “*Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ‘The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practise what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.’*” The Pharisees were far from being the Counsellors that the people needed and, amongst many other things, Jesus came to rectify that situation. If you think that those criticisms sound a little harsh I suggest you read [Matthew 23](#) in full to see what else Jesus had to say.

Jesus was to be the One Who was to walk beside people and provide that support and counsel they so badly needed. Today we are able to pray and bring our troubles to Christ in that way knowing that He will not only listen but He will also answer. Remember, though that the answers always come in His timing and not necessarily ours. All of this was to come, at some time in the future, from the baby born of a virgin.

This new born baby would grow into an omnipotent, supreme ruler Who; as King, would also protect His people. The writer of Deuteronomy expanded on this thought when he wrote, “*For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing.*” ([Deuteronomy 10:17-18](#)). That final sentence talks of the very people who modern governments tend to ignore. God will never ignore them and He loves everyone equally.

The baby would also become the Everlasting Father, a name that carries with it a range of thoughts of His role. That word “*everlasting*” brings with it the thought of “*eternal*”; He Himself will be eternal and last for all time. All those who believe in Him and accept Him as Lord and Saviour will receive eternal life spent with Him in paradise. As Father He will also care for His people in the way that a Father should. We have seen recently some dreadful reports of how fathers have treated their children, some even being found guilty of murdering them. Our Father in heaven will be totally different since He will protect and care for His children. Later in his prophecy, Isaiah wrote of the Father, “*He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.*” (Isaiah 40:11).

There is so much turmoil in the world today and politics doesn't seem to have the answer. The only One Who can resolve that and bring the peace that the world so badly needs is Jesus Christ. That is why one of the names that Isaiah prophesied He would be given was “*Prince of Peace*”. In Luke 2:13-14 the Apostle tells us, “*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.’*” Not only is there turmoil all around the world but there also seems to be even more turmoil in people's daily lives as they battle with marital problems; financial difficulties; housing problems; employment worries; addiction issues; and of course, mental health concerns. Jesus came to bring peace to such people if only they would invite Him into their lives and come to faith in Him as Lord and Saviour. As the Prince of Peace, Jesus can bring the peace into people's hearts and lives, a peace that Paul describes as being “*the peace of God, which transcends all understanding*” not only that but it “*guards your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 4:7) to protect them from future difficulties whenever they arise.

God with Us

Even a cursory glance at Scripture shows that God wants to be with His people. He didn't create the universe and the people in it in order to be aloof and apart from them; He wants to be part of their daily lives. That is one of the reasons why Jesus came into the world as a new born baby. He came to live an ordinary life among ordinary people. He was the Son of God and yet claimed no extra privileges because of that status. He was chastised by His earthly parents in just the same way that any other young boy would have been. When He began His earthly ministry He moved among the people; He lived with them; spoke to them; healed them; taught them; and very importantly, loved them.

But then He was arrested, tortured and put to death on the cross at Calvary. Did that mean that God was no longer with us? That may have appeared to be the case given that the risen Lord ascended into heaven to be with His Father. However, God had already planned for this and stuck to the promise that Jesus made in John 14. In that chapter we see Jesus telling His disciples that He would be leaving them and would prepare a place for them. A key verse comes in John 14:16-17 where Jesus told His worried disciples, “*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever [my emphasis] — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.*” In Isaiah 9:6 we saw the prophet tells us that the baby to be born would be a “*Wonderful Counsellor*”; now in John 14:16 we see the Holy Spirit referred to as “*another Counsellor*”. Jesus may have returned to heaven but God in the form of the Holy Spirit will still be with us; God will always be with

us and will never leave us on our own. What a comfort that thought is; to know that God will always be with us just as was promised in [Isaiah 7:14](#).

Why

The question must surely be, why would God go to all this trouble? Why would He send His Son as a new born baby, conceived and born in such strange circumstances to be with us? To answer that we need to look back to [Genesis 3](#) and understand that sin entered the world through the actions of Adam & Eve. God abhors sin and sinners although He still wants to be with us. Consequently God sent Jesus into the world in the way that He did to deal with sin once and for all. Jesus was born and raised with an ordinary family and lived amongst ordinary people just like you and me. He wasn't born as a King in a Palace but as a servant in a stable. He did all the things that a young boy would do as He grew up. He attended the local school, went to the synagogue and helped His earthly father in his trade. At 8 days of age He was presented in the Temple just as other young Jewish boys would have been. At the age of 12 He went to Jerusalem with His parents and when He disappeared for a while He was chastised for worrying them. He may have been the Son of God but that didn't make Him exempt from being disciplined by His Mum & Dad!

It was when Jesus started His earthly ministry that we see the full reason for His being with us. He performed numerous miracles; He healed those who were sick; He raised people from the dead; and most of all He preached that sinners must repent of their sins and seek God's forgiveness. Given that God's forgiveness involved the shedding of blood of a sacrifice, Jesus became that sacrifice and willingly shed His blood on the cross of Calvary. Consequently all who accept Him as their Saviour are forgiven and become part of God's much loved family.

That is why Jesus came to be with us. He came to bring salvation and eternal life to all who accepted Him and placed their faith in Him as their Lord and Saviour. Everyone who does that will be assured that God will always be with them in the form of the Holy Spirit, and He will be with them in the same way that Jesus was when He walked the earth 2000 years ago.

Conclusion

When you look at [Isaiah 7:14](#) and [Matthew 1:23](#) they look fairly straightforward in their meaning. However, when we dig a little deeper we learn an awful lot more about Jesus and why He came to be with us. To be called a King and Prince of Peace seems a lot for a young baby lying in a manger and yet that is what God intended.

At a time when we traditionally exchange gifts, God sent us the greatest gift of all when He sent His Son, Jesus Who to live among us; to be with us. Jesus came to be with us but then to die; He came to pay the price for our sins. If we come before Him as repentant sinners to seek His forgiveness He will welcome us with open arms and bring us the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life with Him. As you think about Christmas this year think about Jesus and all that He does for you every day and if you don't already know Him, ask Him into your life, seek forgiveness in Him and receive the wonderful gift of eternal life.