

I. Introduction

Merry Christmas! During this season, we reflect on the miracle of Jesus' birth and the mysteries revealed in the Christmas story - the virgin birth, the dual nature of Christ, both fully God and fully human, and also the Trinity, because the Son was sent by the Father through the Holy Spirit. These are mysteries that only God fully understands. Yet, it is good for us to take some time to think about these things, because the mysteries of God help to draw us near to Him in worship.

Some Christians even devote their whole life to reflection, writing, and teaching about these and other mysteries of theology. Karl Barth, shown here on the April 20th, 1962, cover of Time magazine, was one such person. His books are required reading in almost all schools of theology and he was undoubtedly one of the greatest Christian thinkers of the 20th century.



There is a story about a time when Karl Barth spoke at the University of Chicago, in the United States. After giving a long, deep, lecture to a large group of theology students and professors, Karl Barth was asked *“Of all the theological insights you have ever had, which do you consider to be the greatest of them all?”* After a moment of quiet thought, Professor Barth answered, *“The greatest theological insight that I have ever had is this: ‘Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.’”*

“Jesus loves me.” And, *“Jesus loves you.”* This is the greatest Christmas gift of all, the love of God for each and every person that He has created. Because of His great love for us, Jesus, came into this world, born as a baby, so that He could be with us and save us from our sins.



One of the Names of Jesus is, “Immanuel,” which means, “God with us.” This Name reminds us of God’s presence with us, but I think it is also means more than that. Jesus is certainly present with us, but He is also with us through the shared experiences of human life. He was born. He grew up. He worked. He laughed. He cried, and He died for us. Jesus understands our hopes and dreams, and our pains and sorrows. Our God is not far off and distant, He is near. He is, “Immanuel, God with us.” And, after His death, He rose to life and He is alive forevermore. His love for us is eternal and unchanging.

John 1:1 tells us that Jesus is the Creator God. **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”** And **John 1:14** tells us that He came to be with us, to live as a man. **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** This is the Christmas story, God, came to live with the men and women He created. God did this because He loves us. **John 3:16**, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** God gave His Son, but the Son is God, so God gave Himself for our salvation. The children have already shared a wonderful Christmas presentation with us, but let’s read the Christmas story again from Matthew 1:18-25.

II. Scripture Matthew 1:18-25 (NIV)

[18] This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.

[19] Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. [20] But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their

sins." [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: [23] "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, "God with us." [24] When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. [25] But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

III. Teaching

The time had come for the ancient prophecies of the coming of the Messiah to be fulfilled. There were many prophecies, but in this passage Matthew quoted just one, **Isaiah 7:14**, **"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."** Matthew tells us twice that Mary and Joseph had not been together physically, and Matthew also tells us twice that the child is from the Holy Spirit. Counting the quoted prophecy, Matthew tells us about the virgin birth five times. It is a miracle, but for the Creator God who made men and women, it is a simple thing. Mary, a virgin, became pregnant by the power of God. But the greater miracle is the identity of the child, "Immanuel, God with us." The child is called Immanuel, because He is God the Son come to be with us. But His personal name is Jesus.

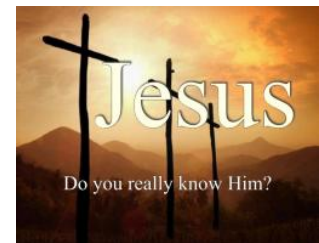


Matthew tells us in verse 21, **"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."** The Name Jesus basically means, "God saves." It was a common name, but the meaning is fulfilled only in this child, the long-awaited Savior, who saves His people, all who trust in Him, from their sins.



God came into this world in the person of Jesus so that He could be with the people He created and experience life as we experience it. And finally, He came to give His life as a ransom for ours through His death on the cross. But He rose again on the third day and is alive forever, and He is here with us now.

Do you know Jesus? Do you really know Him? We need to challenge ourselves with this question from time to time. Some people fall into the trap of knowing about Jesus without actually knowing Jesus. We know about famous people and historical characters, but that is not the same as actually knowing them. Knowing someone requires relationship. And the way to know Jesus is to ask Him into your heart and to walk in a loving relationship with Him.



The Bible is the greatest love story of all. It is full of passion and sacrifice, romance and danger, faithfulness and betrayal. It is the story of God's pursuit of His love, the people that He created. God created us for loving relationship with Him, but we turned away in sin. But the love of God is so strong that He kept pursuing us throughout the Old Testament, coming to His people again and again, until finally in the New Testament, God came to us as Jesus. Jesus, God made flesh, came two thousand years ago, seeking a relationship with us. And through His Holy Spirit, Jesus is here today, seeking a deeper and more loving relationship with you.

Human love stories are echoes of the original love story about God's love for the men and women He created. God created us as men and women, so that we could learn about the beauty and joy of love. When people marry, they often use rings as symbols of their love. Rings are good symbols of love, because the circle has no beginning or end. Just like God's love; it is endless and eternal, without limit and without beginning or end. And when we wear a wedding ring, it is always with us.



IV. Conclusion

This Christmas, let's hold on to the pure, and simple truth. "*Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.*" When we respond to His love we are joined with Him through faith in a loving relationship. And His love is forever.

V. Let's pray.

