

I don't know what it is about presents under the tree that just draws kids. Maybe it's the bright wrapping paper. Maybe it's the bows and ribbons. Who am I kidding? I know exactly what it is because I was a kid. Every kid wants to know which presents belong to them. Parents and grandparents want the joy of seeing their little ones open their gifts on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. Kids want to know today what they're getting. How big are my gifts? Can I shake them to maybe figure out what's inside? Kids could care less about the mystery of Christmas when it comes to gifts.

We're just days away from the big day. The gifts have been purchased. Wrapping is wrapping up. Trips to see the relatives have been planned. Excitement is in the air. December has been all about preparation. Buy, wrap, plan. Now the preparation is almost over. The reality is that some haven't been preparing for what Christmas is really all about. They've been counting down days, but it's all about them, their gifts, their days off work, their family time. If you realize you've been having those same thoughts it's time to keep preparing.

One or two days isn't enough time to ponder the wonder of Christmas. Even now, while still in preparation mode we look ahead at what's coming. Better, who's coming. Answering the question of who he is might just be the most important preparation of all. This morning the gospel gives the short version of the most blessed of all births. It lets us...

**Prepare the way: Immanuel comes**  
**His incarnation is a mystery**  
**His purpose is no mystery**

The forgotten man of Christmas first dealt with something he figured never to have to deal with. Happy to see Mary after she'd been away for three months, Joseph caught sight of his wife. They were officially married but due to Jewish marriage practices they weren't living together. The bride and groom waited after getting married a period of time before the groom would take his wife home to live with him. No sexual relations took place during that time. But the couple was married. That's why it surprised, even shocked him, to see that Mary was pregnant. This was disaster. The baby wasn't his but obviously this righteous woman was not so righteous anymore.

Being a righteous man himself Joseph felt he had only one option. **"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."** They hadn't lived together and they were already going to be divorced. The impossible situation kept him up at night. He wouldn't be able to be with her but he surely didn't want her stoned to death for adultery. While he was still wrestling with the decision of what to do one night an angel of the Lord appeared to him. Joseph deserved the facts about this pregnancy and only God could provide them. Mary was with child. **"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."** The father was God the Holy Spirit.

Joseph may have thought of God as far away. God knew what was going on but only really looked in on earth to judge human beings for sinning against him. Any promises of God about a Messiah were old. Joseph hadn't heard of God speaking to the Jews in years. Any misunderstanding about God that Joseph had changed. Those long ago promises of a Messiah were suddenly front and center. Mary would give birth to the God-man. God come to live among humans. God entering human existence, wrapping himself with human flesh, and coming to dwell on earth. God would become conceived, develop inside Mary, and be born. An incarnation of God into man that was a mystery. God who cannot be seen coming to make himself visible to earthly eyes. Immanuel was coming.

What's your take on mysteries? Does everything have to have an explanation? Are you comfortable with some things just not being able to be explained? This child being born of Mary was the incarnate God. That is God in human flesh. But that mystery brings so many questions. Was he sinful? How did the conception happen? Would the child be normal? Was she still a virgin? How could that be possible? If God even exists why would he come to earth? You've probably got more. If you or I get too involved asking questions and demanding answers about this incarnation mystery trying to make sense of it, make it understandable, prove it by science then we're not going to be prepared. We'll end up denying a miracle and a mystery that was never intended to be solved.

Examine this incarnation once again. Joseph had no reason to accept or believe the angel. He knew what he saw and what he saw was a pregnant young wife and he wasn't the father. The angel's story was mysterious. Listen again though, **"What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."** This entire miracle, no the entire life of the Messiah, Immanuel, hinges on that fact. From the Holy Spirit means Immanuel was God in the flesh. God entered our existence. God arouses in you the ability to believe what's impossible otherwise. God was here. Immanuel had come.

Look for God's sign as your source of comfort. One source of comfort from a whole Old Testament full of them. **"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means God with us."** It's truly unbelievable I know. That prophecy was written 700 years before Mary was found to be pregnant. It's a mystery I can't even begin to try and explain. But it's true. Mary was a virgin giving birth to a baby boy conceived by the Holy Spirit. God and man. God incarnate, in the flesh. He was Immanuel, God with us. God here on earth for you. The distance of how far Jesus came as Immanuel we can never understand. But nothing, I mean nothing, shows God's love for us more than God wrapping himself in flesh and blood for you and me.

The forgotten man in this story was of the line of King David. **“Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife.”** This promised Savior was to be of the line of King David. God was helping Joseph through this because the purpose of the Savior was at stake. Joseph was allowed to know the nature of the birth so he could know the purpose of the birth. Jesus would be born exactly how God wanted. Joseph would have more than just a front row seat, he would have an important job. **“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. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him. He gave him the name Jesus.”** By his name we know his purpose. This little child would save people.

Those struggling with the how of Jesus’ incarnation and birth can hardly be expected to understand the why. What was so special about this child? Why this one? Jesus would have been like all the other little kids of the day. He wasn’t living up to God’s expectations or the things God said. Those objections fall away and are overcome by faith. There is nothing more important in all of human history than a baby named Jesus. He is the one we prepare for because he was born to save us. Everything claimed about him is true. Jesus came to assume the stained garments of our humanity. Yet he knew no sin but was made sin for us on our behalf. His death atones for us all. No grave will hold him. Eternity is open wide thanks to him. He defeated Satan. Weak people become the strongest believers to speak for him. He’s not foremost a savior from poverty or illness, from oppression or depression. Jesus’ purpose is no mystery; he comes to save us from our sins.

Joseph accepted this mystery by faith. You’re moved by the same humble faith. This amazing information about a miracle is true. This Son born to Mary is Jesus the Savior of the world. The time has come for spreading that news. As we prepare to celebrate and do what we do on Christmas we can never forget, Christ is the reason we have Christmas. Inviting people we know to hear more about this Savior born to save us is what our invitations for Christmas Eve have been about. Whether on Facebook, on postcards, on business cards, or in just you sharing it by word of mouth, inviting people to hear more about Jesus the Son of God and Savior is what you’ve been empowered to do. You know him, now you want others to know him too.

Christianity is the story of a Grand Miracle beyond understanding. I want Christmas to still have mystery for you. I still think it’s cool to not know what you’re getting until you open the gift. It’s neat to exchange gifts without knowing who gave them. When it comes to the greatest gift of all I want you and me to be fully prepared. The incarnation of Christ Jesus is always something that will remain a mystery. But don’t let that mystery confuse you. The Scriptures reveal we can’t explain how the incarnation happened but we certainly can understand why. His purpose was no mystery. Jesus comes as the Immanuel to save you and me from our sins. He came to be God in the flesh to offer us comfort. Nothing can separate us from him. Nothing can limit our access or remove his love for us. Be prepared this week because Immanuel comes.