



Every year we celebrate Christmas and for most people it's a really big deal. Homes are decorated, cards are sent, gifts are bought, parties are thrown, church services are attended, songs are sung, special Christmas programs are on TV, we watch the movie *Elf* because it is the best Christmas movie ever, and people travel long distances to see family and friends. All of this is done to celebrate the birth of a peasant boy, born two thousand years ago in the Middle East. It's an incredible thing if you think about it. But, sadly, for many people, Christmas is more of a hassle than a source of happiness. It can be a source of stress, anxiety, and depression. Christmas for some is endured, not enjoyed, and there are many reasons for that. Maybe that's what some of you are experiencing this year. Some of you might even be asking yourselves, "Why do we have to celebrate Christmas?" What's the big deal?"

Why do we celebrate Christmas? Why did God send his Son into the world? Think about it—God could have chosen a thousand ways to communicate with us, but since he designed us, he knew the best way to communicate with us would be face-to-face. God didn't send an angel or a prophet or a politician or an ambassador. God came himself. One of the titles for Jesus is, "Immanuel" which means "God with us." God once lived among us in the flesh. He came as God's Son. But why? Why would God leave his heavenly throne and enter our world as a vulnerable baby? Today I want to offer three reasons why Jesus came to earth. This list isn't all inclusive but all three of them come right out of the letters of John, what we've been studying these past few months. The first reason why Jesus came was to make our joy complete.

Why Did Jesus Come?

To make our joy complete

The Christmas story is all about joy. For some of us, joy is often not a word that describes the Christmas season. Busy is usually a better description. Before Jesus was born, there were some shepherds who were busy in a field late at night and suddenly a choir of angels surrounded them and they were terrified! Remember the story? Luke describes it this way, "*But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people'*" (Luke 2:10). The Christmas story is good news of great joy. Why is it that joy seems hard to come by these days? We live in a society where everybody is selling joy. There is a multi-billion dollar marketing industry telling you that joy can

be found in a bottle, pill, or a new sports car. John tells us one of the main reasons why he wrote the church this letter, "*We write this to make our joy complete*" (1 John 1:4). As an elder and Apostle, John gets great joy when the church understands the message of Jesus Christ and lives it out. On the other hand, as followers of Jesus, we get great joy when we are growing in relationship with Jesus.

John the Apostle understood the meaning of Christmas. Because Jesus Christ came, he writes, we have a joy that transforms our lives. The problem is we mistake happiness for joy, but the two are very different. Happiness is a temporary emotion we feel for a period of time. Joy is more permanent. Joy is not based on circumstances either. Some of the most joyful people I know have been through awful things. These people have experienced new life in Jesus and as a result have found great joy throughout their circumstances. Sadly, all too often, some of us don't experience joy in our lives. Maybe it's because we are looking for joy in the things the world has to offer. It's true, material things will bring us some happiness, but not joy. Maybe you've slowly walked away from Jesus and have looked to stuff, people, or circumstances to bring you joy. It's so easy, even during the Christmas season, to neglect our personal relationship with God. If you've been longing for great joy and have not found it, maybe you need to renew your commitment to Jesus today. Maybe the gift you need to give Jesus is a fully surrendered heart. After all it is his birthday. Jesus came to give us joy and he wants you to experience it this Christmas.

How do you find ultimate joy and satisfaction in Jesus Christ? Pastor Tim Keller uses the following example as an illustration:

"Do you remember when your mother used to say, 'Don't eat candy before meals'? Why did she say that? Because she knew it would ruin your next meal. The trouble with eating candy is that it gives you a sugar buzz, and then you don't feel hungry. Candy masks the fact that your body needs proteins and vitamins. The sugar buzz from candy masks your hunger for the real nutrients that you don't have.

"Things like sex, power, money, and success—as well as favorable circumstances—act like spiritual sugar. Christians who have these spiritual candies may say, 'Sure, I believe in God and I know I'm going to heaven,' but they're actually basing their day-to-day joy on favorable circumstances. When the circumstances change, it drives us to God, because when the sugar disappears,

when the candy gets taken away, we're forced to pursue the feast that our souls really crave. We'll hunger for the spiritual nutrients we really need."

Has the candy been taken away from your life yet? Are you hungering for real spiritual food. It's found in Jesus. Jesus came to give us long lasting joy. But that's not all. He also came to show us his love.

To show us His love

At some point in everyone's life we will eventually wrestle with the question, "Does God really love me?" Anyone ever been there? I sure have. We can believe in God, go to church and have an understanding of his love. But, to believe that he loves you personally, just as you are, right where you are at, is life transforming. God's love is often tested by the problems and trials of life. Someone close to you gets in an accident, or you lose your job, or your child walks away from the faith. It's at those moments you'll wrestle with God and wonder where this loving God was when that happened. And our enemy, the Devil, loves to add fuel to the fire by whispering lies in our ears, "If God really loved you, he wouldn't allow that to happen." John tells us that the God who is love came to show us exactly what his love is all about. Love came down in person. Look at 1 John 4:9-10: *"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."*

I want you to notice first that it was not our love that got this thing started. We didn't reach out to God in love first. No. God's love came first. He sent his Son Jesus to show us what love is all about. Our love is a response to his love. How do you know someone loves you? Is it because they tell you they love you? Absolutely not. Love is most clearly seen in actions and in truth. The only reason we know God is love is because of what he did in history. What did he do? John tells us three things. First, "he sent his one and only Son into the world." No one denies that Jesus of Nazareth ever lived. People deny who he claimed to be. Jesus was God's Plan A. God has no other Son but Jesus. He is completely unique. There is no greater gift God could give other than Jesus. That's why Apostle Paul calls him, *"God's indescribable gift"* (2 Cor. 9:15). God's gift was sent to die for us.

John goes on to say that Jesus was an "atoning sacrifice for our sins." Jesus lived a sinless life and died on a cross to pay for our sins so that we might live with him forever. And John says the greatness of his love is seen in who it is God sent his Son to die for. God gave his Son to die for rebellious people who wanted nothing to do with him. That's you! That's me! God loves those who are unworthy of his love and really deserve judgment. That is real love.

The great preacher Haddon Robinson once shared a story in a sermon about a couple titled, "The World's Best Love Story." He writes:

"There was once a young man from Chicago who went down to the bluegrass regions of Kentucky where he met and wooed a young woman who ultimately came back to Chicago as his bride. They enjoyed three lovely years of marriage, and then one day in the midst of a sickness in a seizure of pain the young woman lost her mind. When she was at her best, she was a bit demented. At her worst, she would scream, and neighbors complained because the screams cut the air and it was hard to live with.

"And so the young businessman left his home in the middle of Chicago, went out to one of the western suburbs, built a house, determined that there he would try to nurse his wife back to health and sanity again. One day the family physician suggested that perhaps if he were to take his wife back to her Kentucky home that something in those familiar surroundings would help her restore her sanity, and so they went back to the old homestead. Hand in hand they walked through the old house where memories hung on every corner. They went down to the garden and walked down by the riverside where the first cowslips and violets were in bloom. But after several days nothing seemed to happen.

"So, defeated and discouraged, the young man put his wife back in the car, and they headed back to Chicago. When they got close to the house, he looked over and discovered that his wife was asleep. It was the first deep, restful sleep she had had in many weeks. When he got to the house, he lifted her from the car, took her inside, placed her on the bed, and realized she wanted to sleep some more. So he placed a cover over her and then just sat by her side and watched her through the midnight hour, watched her until the first rays of the sun reached through the curtain and touched her face. The young woman awoke, and she saw her husband seated by her side. She said, 'I seem to have been on a long journey. Where have you been?' And that man, speaking out of days and weeks and months of patient waiting and watching said, 'My sweetheart, I've been right here waiting for you all this time.'"

Haddon continues, "And if you ask me, 'Where is God?' the answer is very much the same. He's right here, right here waiting for you to respond with love to love, waiting for you to respond with trust to promise, waiting for you to cast yourself with a reckless abandon upon the grace of God, and waiting for you to discover what it means to be loved by God."

Have you discovered what it truly means to be loved by God? Christmas is about Almighty God coming down into the world as a baby and then dying on a cross. God became breakable and fragile. God became someone we could hurt. Why? Because of love. He wanted us back. What John is saying all throughout his

letter is if you believe this and take in the truth of what he did for you—how loved and affirmed you are—you'll be able to let down your own barriers and you'll be able to love. The is one more reason why God sent Jesus. He came to give us eternal life.

To give us eternal life

When you open your gifts this Christmas will your life be any different? When you receive the gifts that have been bought for you by loved ones, will they change your life any? Probably not. What happens when a person receives God's gift of Jesus? The Bible says that when we accept, open and enjoy God's gift of Jesus, our lives are never the same again. The indescribable gift of God transforms our lives. Let me explain why.

John wrote his letter to testify to one single truth—Jesus is God. Even though he became a man, he never ceased to be God. God lived among us. He came as the Word. He was with God in the beginning. He was God. John tells us this message appeared as the Word of life. Jesus is not an addition to your already full life. Jesus is the source of real and meaningful life. Jesus is both the message of eternal life and the source of eternal life. Listen to what John wrote earlier in his biography of the life of Jesus, *“In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind”* (John 1:4). Then in John's letter to the church in Ephesus he writes, *“And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life”* (1 John 5:11-12). God has given us the greatest gift of all, eternal life.

All you have to do is read the Gospels and you'll see that Jesus was all about life. To believe in Jesus is to have life (John 3:15-16). Jesus is called the author of life (Acts 3:15). We are saved by his life (Romans 5:10). He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). Eternal life is life abundant; life exciting; life adventurous, full, meaningful and relevant. God's gift to man at Christmas is eternal life. John says, he who has the Son has life, because the Son is life!

People like to ask me if I enjoy performing weddings or funerals better. My answer usually surprises them. I enjoy funerals much more. Weddings are all about the couple; no one cares what the pastor says! But, at funerals, especially tragic ones, people are usually really open to God. People actually want to hear what God has to say about life after death. A 2012 interview with the actor and film director Woody Allen says that “Allen has been confronting the horror of mortality...since he was five.” In the interview Woody Allen explained, “There's no advantage to aging. You don't get wiser, you don't get more mellow, you don't see life in a more glowing way. You have to fight your body decaying, and you have less options. The only thing you can do is what you

did when you were 20—because you're always walking with an abyss right under your feet...which is to distract yourself. Getting involved in a movie occupies all my anxiety...If I wasn't concentrated on distractions, I'd be thinking of larger issues. And those aren't resolvable, and you're checkmated whichever way you go.”

God doesn't want you to be so busy during this season and like Woody Allen distract yourselves from thinking about “larger issues.” Many people today think they are on a journey to find God not realizing God has already found us. He came to our world and lived among us. He reached out his hand of friendship first. The Bible says that we were born lost and without hope. Since the Garden of Eden, humanity separated itself from a holy God. The Bible says we are slaves to three things: our self, sin and the devil. If you are like me, you have habits you can't break, thoughts you don't want, emotions you don't like, fears you can't hide, regrets you can't let go of, and you say things you wish you didn't say. The Bible calls this sin. The funny thing about the word **sin** is that the letter “l” is right in the middle. Whenever I place myself at the center of my life, I sin.

Jesus came to save you from sin and from yourself. He wants to remove your guilt, bitterness, resentment, addictive habits, and fears. Who can save us? Not the government. Not business. Not academics. Not philosophy. Not being really good, tolerant and nice either. The problem of sin lies in the human heart and only God can transform the heart. God's gift of salvation in Jesus Christ is where true freedom, real purpose, and eternal life are found. In Jesus your past is forgiven, your present is given purpose, and your future becomes even brighter.

Here's the big idea for this Christmas—God the Father sent his Son Jesus to make our joy complete, to show us his love, and to give us eternal life. How do you get these gifts? Just like all the gifts you will be given on Christmas day, you receive it, you believe it's yours and you say thank you. John encourages us to do the same. Receive Jesus, believe in him and say thank you. Once you receive Jesus into your life you begin to learn how to follow Him and trust him. It's a life long process. Jesus came not as a philosophy to be discussed, or a theory to be debated, or a concept to be pondered. Love came down, God became a person to be followed, enjoyed, and loved. Let's follow Jesus. Let's enjoy Jesus. Let's love Jesus this Christmas.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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