

Come with me for just a moment back in time before America was discovered by Europeans and before Christ was born and further back before Abraham and even before Adam, even before there was space. In the beginning God created space and matter (Genesis 1:1<sup>i</sup>). That is the beginning of the universe as we know it, but let us go back even further. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God (John 1:1<sup>ii</sup>). Word here is *logos* in Greek. It is translated as communication, thought, reasoning, computation, and divine expression<sup>iii</sup>. This One who was incarnated in the womb of Mary was with the eternal God who is outside of time and space as we know it, and yet is also present in it all. Their heavenly counsel determined to make sentient beings who would join them forever in the worlds they were about to create. They also determined that these beings would be made in their own image with a body soul and spirit, a parallel to the Word, also referred to as the Son, the Father, and the Spirit, our triune God (Genesis 1:26<sup>iv</sup>). The world in which they would live was to help them see the wonder of their Creator. The physical things would help them understand the triune God who created them (Romans 1:20<sup>v</sup>). Because the Creator is love (1 John 4:8<sup>vi</sup>), He would form them to be in devoted union of male with female, which we call marriage. It was to help them understand their relationship with the Word. Intimacy, commitment, and sacrificial love in marriage would help them understand the union they could have with the Word. In addition, the choice of whom they chose to spend their life with would also be an illustration of the choice we have in selecting whom we will sacrificially serve.

In order for them to choose to have a loving relationship with God, they had to be able to choose freely, for without the deliberate commitment of the heart there can be no depth of relationship. A bride who has no choice in the matter of who she marries may or may not commit her heart. Love cannot be forced.

This is the point at which our human understanding breaks down. We can only guess at the heavenly counsel that determined to allow man to fall of his own volition and devised a way for our redemption and restoration. How could we not only be restored but have a greater revelation of the riches of God's love? And because love begets love (1 John 4:19<sup>vii</sup>), how could our union with the love of God be displayed in such a way that man's limited understanding could grasp its depths? The Father, Son, and Spirit saw and agreed together on a wonderful but costly plan. Man could not restore himself. God must intervene and provide a way for man. To do so He must become a man.

<sup>16</sup> *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* John 3:16-21 The way to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden was shut because to live in our fallen state would be a kind of hell (Genesis 3:24<sup>viii</sup>). Man had to be redeemed first. There had to be a way for our sins to be justly forgiven and our hearts transformed back to a state of willing surrender to the love of God. Jesus declared that He is that way to the Father, the only way (John 14:6<sup>ix</sup>). <sup>4</sup> *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,* <sup>5</sup> *to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.* Galatians 4:4,5 The Spirit of God formed in the womb of the virgin Mary the Word made flesh (John 1:14<sup>x</sup>; Isaiah 7:14<sup>xi</sup>). The Prophet Isaiah had predicted it 700 years before. <sup>6</sup> *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon*

*his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* Isaiah 9:6 The child born to us is the Son of God given for our salvation. He was the only human ever born who did not have a sin nature. He was the only person to ever live out to perfection every law that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai (John 8:46<sup>xii</sup>). His every action was at the direction of His heavenly Father (John 5:19<sup>xiii</sup>). He only spoke what the Father instructed Him to say (John 14:24<sup>xiv</sup>). For thirty years He cared for His family as His earthly father had died. Patiently He waited to hear the call to begin the mission He was sent to fulfil.

Finally, the day came. He was sent to His cousin John the Baptist to be baptized in the river Jordan. John had a revelation of who his cousin was. Pointing to Jesus He proclaimed, *“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”* (John 1:29)! He told Jesus that he was unworthy to baptize Him and that Jesus should baptize him. But Jesus said it had to be this way. When Jesus came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove upon Jesus and a voice sounded from heaven. “You are my beloved Son. With You I am well pleased (Luke 3:22<sup>xv</sup>). God had told John this sign would happen to the Messiah (John 1:33<sup>xvi</sup>). <sup>32</sup> *And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. <sup>33</sup> I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>34</sup> And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”* John 1:32-34

For three and half years Jesus taught His twelve disciples along with many others. He showed us how to live and communicated the very words of God. He prepared His disciples to communicate what His life and death were all about, but there was one thing they would only understand after His death.

<sup>17</sup> *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.* John 3:17 This was the plan from heavenly counsel. The sinless Son of God would take the sins of the world upon Himself and suffer death which was the penalty for those sins. Then whoever freely chose to accept what Jesus had done for them in love, could receive forgiveness from God and begin that transformation that will one day end in our complete restoration (1 John 3:2<sup>xvii</sup>). That is what it means to be saved, to be born-again. Through Jesus’ sacrifice in our place, we can receive God’s forgiveness. We can be a part of the bride of Christ. The plan from before time began can be fulfilled in all who receive Jesus.

Jesus taught that there is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for their friends (John 15:13<sup>xviii</sup>). He wanted us to understand that when He died for us, we were seeing the greatest love that anyone could witness. But this was not just one man dying to save another, this was the Lord of all creation humbling Himself and suffering and dying to make us His own. This was the greatest condescension of divinity that we might experience the greatest exaltation anyone can ever know.

<sup>6</sup> *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*  
<sup>7</sup> *For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—<sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* Romans 5:6-8 It was not because of anything good that we did. It was because His gracious act could transform us. It was all because of what He could do in us. He saw past our present condition, our evil thoughts and actions, all our selfishness and sees what He can make of us if we are willing to surrender to His love.

Man gets down on one knee and presents a ring and asks for the bride's agreement to marry him. Jesus came down from heaven, humbled Himself, and went to the cross to make it possible for us sinful creatures to say, "Yes, I will be yours and yours alone!" No one has ever done more to win his bride. No one has ever done more to beautify his bride. No one will ever offer his bride a more glorious future.

But there are many who refuse such amazing love. They want something that the world offers more than they want this relationship. They have been convinced that there is something more satisfying in creation rather than the Creator (1 John 2:15<sup>xix</sup>). They want love, but they do not want to give themselves wholeheartedly to another. Ego and selfish pleasures blind them to what they are missing.

<sup>18</sup> *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.* John 3:18 They refuse to believe in His name. When the Bible mentions His name, it is referring to the sum of His attributes. That means they refuse to believe He is loving, gracious, kind, and true. They do not believe He loved them to the extent of dying for them. While we who believe were once just like them (Ephesians 2:1-3<sup>xx</sup>). But when we believed in who Jesus is and what He has done for us, we came out from under the condemnation of God upon our wicked nature. But having been drawn by the Holy Spirit (John 1:9<sup>xxi</sup>), they refuse to come out from under that condemnation and experience forgiveness. Sometimes it is because they think they are good enough and do not realize how holy God is. Other times it is because they do not want to change the ways they find pleasure. They know God would make a change in their lives.

<sup>19</sup> *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.* John 3:19 John wrote in the first chapter of his Gospel that <sup>4</sup> *In him was life, and the life was the light of men.* John 1:4 The life of Jesus is the light of mankind. How He lived, what He taught, how He died and conquered death is spiritual light. Light is what enables us to see the physical world. The life of Jesus enables us to see clearly the spiritual realm. John went on to say that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it (John 1:5<sup>xxii</sup>). Light dispels darkness. When they killed Jesus, they thought they extinguished the light. But the light was in the Apostles. And when Pentecost came the light was in the 120 in the upper room (See Acts 2). The light dispelled the darkness in 3000 souls that day (Acts 2:41<sup>xxiii</sup>). It is the same light that can dispel the darkness in us. It is the light of who Jesus is and what He has done for us.

This is what we celebrate this season. This is a Christmas verse. Light has come into the world. That is why we share gifts. It is because we have received the greatest gift of all, forgiveness and spiritual light in our spirit. It is the light that guides us through the darkness of this world. It gives us that sense of warning when we are going the wrong way. We call Him the Holy Spirit. He draws us into an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus (John 15:26<sup>xxiv</sup>). He calls us to act as Jesus' hands and feet, helping others, sharing the good news of what Jesus has done for us, lifting up the weary hands and strengthening the weak knees (Hebrews 12:2<sup>xxv</sup>).

This verse tells why people prefer the darkness. Their works are evil. <sup>20</sup> *For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.* John 3:20 You will often find that those who do not want to hear the good news of Jesus become agitated and even aggressive when you try to share

about what He has done for us. I have always thought it strange how evil governments hate Christians. We are good citizens. We try to help others. We pray for our leaders. Maybe it is not in the way they would like us to pray, but we want them to do good for the people they are over. And yet, we see this illogical hatred such as putting little old ladies in jail for praying at abortion clinics. In some countries just sharing the gospel can land you in jail. China bulldozes church buildings if they do not promote the state above God. It forbids Christian teaching to children. In Pakistan Christians have the most menial jobs like street sweepers, brick makers, and janitors. Even in our current administration we saw during the pandemic, liquor stores and strip clubs could be open, but not churches, which is a denial of constitutional freedoms, and if they dared to open they faced fines. In Canada they imprisoned pastors. Why? It is not because we are dangerous or cause trouble. This verse tells us that it is because they hate the light. The light exposes their evil deeds. We call abortion murder. We believe there are only two genders (Genesis 1:27<sup>xxvi</sup>). We declare God is the supreme authority and that we should obey God rather than man when the two conflict (Acts 4:19<sup>xxvii</sup>). We do not believe civil justice is for one group and not another, for we are all made in God's image. We will not be silent in the face of evil. We must let the light of Jesus shine. So it is not us they fear, but the light that Jesus shown into the world, the light that now shines in us. It shines in our love, in our lack of fear, in our boldness to share Jesus, and in our speaking out on moral issues.

*<sup>21</sup> But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.*" John 3:21 Truth lovers come to the light. They do not have to remember which lie they told so that they can keep their stories straight. They do not have to operate in the dark so that no one will see them. Their life is an open book that they hope others will read because of what Jesus has done in them.

I have preached in the past on when Jesus was really born, and where His birthplace was in Bethlehem, but what really matters is that light came into the world. God loves so much that the heavenly counsel made a way for us to be included into the family of God. *<sup>11</sup> For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,* Hebrews 2:11 Jesus is the One who sanctifies us. He is not ashamed to call us brothers because He is making us holy like He is holy. That is a reality and a process. In the Father's timeless eyes, the work is finished. Right here in our earthly plane we are being sanctified as the Holy Spirit works in our lives every day (Hebrews 10:14<sup>xxviii</sup>).

God stretches the parallels in this earthly life to give us an idea of what is awaiting us. **Brothers, bride, fellow heirs, sharers in His glory, the heavenly city, the temple, kings and priests, and similar descriptions are used to describe our heavenly state.** And it was all planned before time began, even Jesus' sacrifice of Himself for us. I do not think we will realize how glorious a plan it is until we see Jesus face to face.

When we step back and see the big picture, that birth in Bethlehem is such a dramatic moment. God stepped into His own creation. Years ago, I wrote a chorus to describe that moment: Laying His glory and splendor aside, He entered the work of His hands, The only way we could understand, He alone our salvation plan. God of the heavens leaving His throne, God of the heavens leaving His own, He became a man! Immanuel God with us, Immanuel as a man Immanuel the Father's plan, Immanuel perfect sacrifice Lamb.

Our study in Revelation showed us that Satan knew this moment was coming and was laying in wait like a dragon to devour baby Jesus (Revelation 12:2-4<sup>xxxix</sup>). He knew the ancient prophecy that Jesus would crush his head (Genesis 3:15<sup>xxx</sup>). As soon as he located the birthplace, he inspired Herod to send his soldiers to kill the toddler by killing all the baby boys in Bethlehem. But God had warned Joseph in a dream and the holy family had already departed to Egypt (Mathew 2:12<sup>xxxi</sup>).

We do not know how many times Satan tried to deter Jesus' mission or end His life. We do know that he tempted Jesus in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-10). And there was one final temptation on the Mount of Olives the night that Jesus was betrayed. But Jesus committed His will to the Father's will because He knew there was no other way to make us His bride, to save us from eternal judgment (Mark 14:36<sup>xxxii</sup>).

He was brutally crucified, died, and was buried. But the secret part of the story that Satan did not know was that in dying for others, Jesus would defeat death and hell. He would take back the keys and rise from the dead. In doing so He completed His mission and showed us that He can and will raise us also when He returns (1 Corinthians 6:14<sup>xxxiii</sup>; Romans 4:25<sup>xxxiv</sup>).

What does Christmas mean to us? It means our amazing God decided to create us, set His love upon us, allows us to choose to go our own way, graciously sent us His only Son who lived the perfect life, died the death we deserve, and rose victorious over death and hell so we can be assured that in Him is life! He walks with us and talks with us. He guides us day by day and will see us to our heavenly home. That is why we can with joyful hearts say, "Merry Christmas!" To those who are in Christ, it is the best news we could ever hear. Heaven came down to make us the bride of Christ. All glory to the three in One who are fulfilling this glorious plan. If you have not surrendered your heart to the love of Jesus, there is no better day than today to do so. Jesus became a man to live, die, and be raised that you might have the light of life.

#### Questions:

- 1 What was before space, matter, and time?
- 2 Why is freewill necessary?
- 3 What came first in God's plan to redeem us?
- 4 By what names did Isaiah predict we would call the son?
- 5 How did John know Jesus was the son mentioned in Isaiah's prophecy?
- 6 Why will people be judged?
- 7 Why do people and governments hate us?
- 8 What are the expressions Scripture uses to describe us?
- 9 Why did Satan try to kill baby Jesus?
- 10 What does Christmas mean to you?

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#### <sup>i</sup> **Genesis 1:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

#### <sup>ii</sup> **John 1:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

<sup>iii</sup> Vines definition of Greek words.

#### <sup>iv</sup> **Genesis 1:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

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<sup>v</sup> **Romans 1:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

<sup>vi</sup> **1 John 4:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

<sup>vii</sup> **1 John 4:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us.

<sup>viii</sup> **Genesis 3:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

<sup>ix</sup> **John 14:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

<sup>x</sup> **John 1:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

<sup>xi</sup> **Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

<sup>xii</sup> **John 8:46 (ESV)**

<sup>46</sup> Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?

<sup>xiii</sup> **John 5:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

<sup>xiv</sup> **John 14:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

<sup>xv</sup> **Luke 3:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

<sup>xvi</sup> **John 1:33 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

<sup>xvii</sup> **1 John 3:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

<sup>xviii</sup> **John 15:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

<sup>xix</sup> **1 John 2:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

<sup>xx</sup> **Ephesians 2:1-3 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

<sup>xxi</sup> **John 1:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

<sup>xxii</sup> **John 1:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Acts 2:41 (ESV)**

<sup>41</sup> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

<sup>xxiv</sup> **John 15:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Hebrews 12:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,

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<sup>xxvi</sup> **Genesis 1:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Acts 4:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge,

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Hebrews 10:14 (NIV)**

<sup>14</sup> because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

<sup>xxix</sup> **Revelation 12:2-4 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. <sup>3</sup> And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. <sup>4</sup> His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.

<sup>xxx</sup> **Genesis 3:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

<sup>xxxi</sup> **Matthew 2:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

<sup>xxxii</sup> **Mark 14:36 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

<sup>xxxiii</sup> **1 Corinthians 6:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> **Romans 4:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.