

What's the Point of All This?

(*"Believing Christmas" Part 2 of 3-part apologetics series*)

John 1:1-5,14 and Genesis 1:1-3 on December 17, 2023

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Well, by this point in December, most of us are in full swing with all of the various Christmas decorating, shopping, cookie making, etc. It can get to be an awful lot of work and time and money and hullabaloo, would you agree? It can leave us wondering: "What's the Point of All This?" As I was driving down to the Twin Cities this past week, I saw a billboard that gave some familiar Christmas advice: "So be good for goodness sake." I don't even remember what it was advertising, but it did bring the song to mind:

"You better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout,
I'm telling you why: Santa Claus is coming to town.
He's making a list, he's checking it twice, he's gonna find out who's
naughty or nice. Santa Claus is coming to town.
He sees you when you're sleeping, and he knows when you're awake,
he knows if you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake."

"So be good, for goodness sake." If only being good was this easy, this simple: Just be good... for goodness sake! It's a bit more complicated than that though because...

Our world has been broken by sin.

This is our human dilemma, which is why "being good for goodness sake," isn't really quite so easy. This Christmas advice isn't particularly effective in helping us "be good." Wouldn't it be nice if there was such an easy solution to all of the brokenness in our world? If there was one silver bullet, that helped all of us "be good" all of the time, and get along with everyone all of the time?

- > If we could all just "say no to drugs" and then there'd be no more drug problems?¹
- > If Russia would just tell Ukraine that they're sorry, and make reparations, and then stay out of their country?
- > If all of the refugees who are fleeing from their homelands, with just the shirt on their backs, could simply stay in their own countries because the violence would stop, and the economy would improve, and the political corruption would be cleaned up?

¹ <https://www.history.com/topics/1980s/just-say-no>

Wouldn't it be so great if there weren't so many difficult problems in our world?

- > Problems like Bemidji schools needing to shut down earlier this month due to a credible threat of violence.²
- > Problems like pornography which is destroying the lives of so many men and women.
- > Problems like modern-day slavery and human trafficking which number in the tens of millions, including our own local missing Indigenous People.³
- > Problems like the constant barrage of financial scams, including the one to steal millions of dollars that were supposed to be used for feeding hungry children.⁴

Unfortunately, the list of problems in our world goes on and on. I think we can all probably agree: Our world has been broken, and, according to the Bible, it's been broken by sin. This Christmas message from the Santa Claus song, "so be good for goodness sake," just isn't cutting it. That's the bad news; we're in trouble and we need a solution.

In the Bible, John's Gospel teaches us that... (John 1:1-3,14)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." Later on, in verse 14, John then clarifies, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...." So, "the Word" to which John is referring is Jesus Christ.⁵ Verse 14 is talking about Jesus' incarnation, when He took on human flesh and came and lived on this planet, at the first Christmas. In other words, one of the names for Jesus is "the Word." In verse 1, John begins his gospel good news at the very beginning. Not just the beginning of Jesus' physical life in verse 14, when He was born at the first Christmas, but at the very beginning of time, way before He had a physical body. John begins His gospel good news before the beginning of time as you and I know it, in eternity past.

This is what John's talking about in verses 1-3, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him [Jesus] all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." John is going all the way back, to a time before this world was even created. Back when God the

² <https://www.valleynewslive.com/2023/12/06/suspect-arrested-connection-threat-that-shutdown-bemidji-schools-today/>

³ Learn more here: <https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu> and here: <https://www.bemidjipioneer.com/topics/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women>

⁴ <https://www.fox9.com/news/feeding-our-future-more-people-charged-fraud-case>

⁵ John doesn't explicitly name Christ until John 1:17.

Father, and God the Son, were there together in eternity past. Not only was Jesus WITH God, but Jesus WAS God. Verse 3 explains that through Him, through Jesus, all things were made. John is writing with an intentional echo from Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” So you see, as John begins to write his Gospel account about Jesus, he begins by declaring just how great and powerful this newborn baby truly is. How great and powerful, He has always been:

- > In the beginning, Jesus was the Word; in fact, He’s always been the Word.
- > And, in the beginning, the Word was with God, which means that Jesus Himself was with God in the beginning.
- > In the beginning, the Word was God; not just with God, but actually God in His very nature, in His very essence. The fact is, Jesus has always been God.^{6 7 8}

This is why we rejoice in Jesus as “Emmanuel,” “GOD with us.” Jesus is fully God, and He came to this earth as fully man, a fully human, human being. Jesus’ incarnation, His taking on of human flesh, is “God’s ultimate self-disclosure.”⁹ And it’s God’s self-disclosure that gives humanity hope, not only hope for the problems and brokenness in our world, but also the hope that our human existence isn’t utterly meaningless.¹⁰ But... Why? To what end? What’s the point of this self-disclosure, of God Himself coming in human flesh? Why leave the comforts of heaven?^{11 12} Why indeed...

We find the reason why in the continuing parallel between Genesis 1 and John 1. Genesis 1:2-3 continues, “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. 3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.” And John 1:4-5 says, “In him [*Jesus*] was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” John is declaring the wonderfully Good News about Jesus!

⁶ See Romans 9:5.

⁷ Jesus is “not only preexistent to creation, but eternal. ...That He is *with* God demands a personal distinction within the Godhead. That He *is* God demands inclusion in the Godhead.” *The Reformation Study Bible*, Ligonier, Sanford, FL, 2015, p. 1851 theological note, “The Deity of Christ.”

⁸ Jesus is fully God, as God the Son, which means He is distinct from God the Father. I appreciate how my Study Bible describes Jesus as “God’s own peer and God’s own self.” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2146 footnote on John 1:1.

⁹ *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2146 footnote on John 1:1.

¹⁰ A number of people might argue that God coming in the flesh is moot, since they don’t believe that God even exists. However, Rebecca McLaughlin makes the sobering point, “if there is no God, then we’re left with a disturbing reality: we live, and then we die, and like the billions of homo sapiens before us, we are forgotten. ...So, what is the alternative? Light Shines in the Darkness.” (*Is Christmas Unbelievable?*, The Good Book Company, 2021, pp. 50-51.)

¹¹ See 2 Corinthians 8:9 and Philippians 2:6-11.

¹² One of my very favorite answers to this question is the story of “The Man and the Birds.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gY2pTAAAn9pc>

In Jesus we find the life and light that we need. You see, John wants us to consider the parallel between the physical light that God gave this world at creation, and the spiritual light that God gave to this world at the first Christmas. The same God who spoke physical light into this world with His WORDS, is same WORD who shines spiritual light into this world. This reference to “darkness” in verse 5 is talking about something far more serious than the absence of light, it’s referring to the evil in this world (the kind of problems we listed earlier: violence, pornography, human trafficking, financial scams, and so on).¹³ The end of verse 5 declares some wonderfully Good News: “the darkness has *not* overcome it!” All of the problems and brokenness in our world cannot overcome the light of Christ.¹⁴ Just as God’s physical light is greater than this earth’s physical darkness, so also God’s spiritual light is greater than this earth’s spiritual darkness.

So, today’s sermon title asks the question: “What the Point of All This?” and the answer, is that...

Christmas shines the light of Christ into our darkness. At that first Christmas, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us....” (John 1:14) As crazy and fantastical as it might sound, this is the claim of Christmas: that God chose to come in the flesh, and to live among us as a fellow human being. He personally delivered the light that our spiritually dark and troubled world so desperately needed. God, in His great mercy and kindness, humbled Himself to become like one of us, so that He could die as one of us, and thereby pay for our redemption. God’s rescue plan for His beloved creation, required Him to come and die for us, because all of us have gone astray and fallen into the darkness of sin. That is the point of all this.

This leaves each one of us with a personal decision to make. John 1:12 says, “Yet to all who did receive him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” The reason we need Christmas is that our world has been broken by sin. In Jesus we find the life and light that we need. **The only question that remains, is whether we’ll receive the light of Christ by believing in His name, or whether we’ll reject it and remain in the darkness.**

¹³ See *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2146 footnote on John 1:5.

¹⁴ Consider Romans 12:21.