

*And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.*

Presents for the kids? Check. A few thoughtful gifts for your spouse. Check. A little something for your parents? Check. A gift card for your coworker? A bottle of wine for your boss? A second mortgage to pay for it all? Check, check and checks. Lots of checks.

Yes, the decorations went up, the cards were mailed, the shopping is done, the presents opened, the parties attended, and in the wake of it all Jesus has arrived.

And though this is Christmas, it is not the measure of Christmas. Christmas is measured in what it required of Christ.

If we want to see the meaning of Christmas, we need only to look at one man. Listen to this description of Jesus' birth from the gospel of John: "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" (John 1:14 ESV).

Filled with God's Spirit John writes, "I walked with Jesus, I talked with Jesus, I hugged the guy, broke bread with him -- I watched the man file his fingernails. God sent his Son *into the real world to save real people, the Word became flesh*. That's how real God's love is."

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Yes, the decorations went up, the cards were mailed, the shopping is done, the presents opened, the parties attended, and in the wake of it all Jesus has arrived.

And though this is Christmas, it is not the measure of Christmas. Christmas is measured in what it required of Christ.

If we want to see the meaning of Christmas, we need only to look at one man. Listen to this description of Jesus' birth from the gospel of John: "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" (John 1:14 ESV).

Filled with God's Spirit John writes, "I walked with Jesus, I talked with Jesus, I hugged the guy, broke bread with him -- I watched the man file his fingernails. God sent his Son *into the real world to save real people, the Word became flesh*. That's how real God's love is."

Christmas is about a miracle. Unto us a child is born. The child is God. Jesus came to reveal God. Not the burning bush God. Not the pillar of fire God. Not the fire and brimstone God. But a baby who grows to become a man.

Why did Jesus come to reveal God? He came so some kind of common ground for connecting with us could happen. And in this connection healing, forgiveness and growth could happen. It meant doing the messy work of entering our world so that he could live the perfect life we could not live, and die the death that we deserve.

Why did Jesus come to reveal God? John tells us "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (1:4, NIV). If you take that word for "dwelling" and pull it apart, it literally means "to set up camp." Have you ever been camping? We are talking real camping, not "motor-home, microwave and full-size shower" camping. Real camping involves sleeping bags, tents and making your own outhouse. It does not get more real than seeing someone you love crawl out of a tent at 6 a.m. after eight hours sleeping on the ground. John tells us that the Word became flesh and God himself "set up camp" among us. It paints a vivid picture, doesn't it? Jesus did not arrive on our planet 2,000 years ago and act as some kind of heavenly spectator or holy wallflower. For Jesus, real costly relating meant not only shared space, but also an intimate, shared experience.

Why did Jesus come to reveal God? He changed the lives of 12 disciples by letting them take part in miraculous healings, walking on water and raising people from the dead. It also meant regularly gathering with very real, very messed-up people to share a meal and talk about life. For most, sharing an experience is a little easier at Christmas when family, friends and food are found around every corner. But relating in a real, costly way means taking certain Christmas experiences, like playing cards with Cousin Eddie or untangling lights with your neighbor, and using them as an opportunity to gain trust, make a memory or forge a bond. It also means that later this week when the holidays are done, we continue the messy work of jumping into the everyday experiences of those around us and inviting others to share in ours.

Why did Jesus come to reveal God? For Jesus, everything he did, from entering our world to breaking bread with strangers, was so that he could share God's heart. On the cross he sent a message: "This is how much I love the world I've entered. I'm willing to die for it." And having shared his heart with *us*, he asks the same of us for *others*. Listen to these other words of John, found deeper in the New Testament. *Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another* (1 John 4:11 ESV) In other words, relate with others as Christ has related to us. Speak the tough truth, talk about your faith, express your love, confide your fears, let them in on your hopes. Share your

space, share your experience and share *your* heart. Christmas marks the moment when, in order for our relationship with him to be restored, God sent his Son into the world so that we could have forgiveness, a fresh start, and membership in the family of God.

John's gospel opens with a unique take on the story of Christmas. Jesus is God in flesh, come to shed light into darkness. He came to play a clear song through the white noise of sin and death. It's no illusion. It's no hallucination. Christ has come in the flesh. Those who hear his message, those who receive him as a gift are not high on caffeine or confused with the crutch of religion, we are "children of God." John punctuates this in his letter. And we know that the Son of God came so we could recognize and understand the truth of God—what a gift!—and we are living in the Truth itself, in God's Son, Jesus Christ. This Jesus is both True God and Real Life.

Why did Jesus come to reveal God? The Christmas reason is because He loves you. God likes having you around. He thinks you're the best thing to come down the pike in quite a while. If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If He had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring, and a sunrise every morning. He can live anywhere in the universe and He chose your heart. And the Christmas gift He sent you in Bethlehem? Face it friend, He's crazy about you!" And he came to reveal this to you. Amen.

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