

CHRISTMAS THROUGH THE EYES OF JESUS

HEBREWS 10:5-7,10

The Christmas story is a grand epic of drama and suspense. It's chalked full of majestic moments. God tinkered in time and an avalanche of miracles followed!

Joseph and Mary were visited by angels - divine emissaries with mysterious messages... *Shepherds* were stunned when the sky became heaven's stage, and the angelic host played a private performance heralding Messiah's arrival... In a far-away land *Oriental Wise Men* noticed a celestial signal shining in the night sky, and they began their trek to worship the King... After being warned of a *hit-man named Herod*, Joseph smuggled the assassin's target - a baby - down to Egypt. He narrowly averted disaster for all humanity.

The Nativity narrative is full of high drama, but one scene stands out. It's shot *on location* in heaven. The intensity peaks on the doorstep of heaven when the Father and His only Son exchange their farewells...

Imagine, a young man in his military fatigues saying good-bye to his parents. He embarks on a deployment to a far-away battlefield... Well, Jesus was heaven's soldier. And in Hebrews 10 He kisses His heavenly home good-bye and boldly departs for the battle.

Usually when we read the Christmas story we turn to the book of **Matthew** and read of *Joseph and the wise men* - or to **Luke** and recall *Mary and the shepherds*. We don't turn to **Hebrews**... But the opening act in the Christmas drama is recorded for us in Hebrews 10:5-10. Here's an important, yet overlooked scene.

Hebrews 10 records the conversation Jesus had with His Father on the day He left heaven for his tour of duty on Earth. Here's Jesus' words just before He left His *eternal home* for His *embryonic home*. God's only Son quoted *Psalms 40* - a prophecy of His *Incarnation*...

Hebrews 10:5 tells us, "Therefore, when He (that is, Jesus, the Son of God) came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You (God the Father) did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come - in the volume of the book it is written of Me - to do Your will, O God.' Then verse 10, By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

When Jesus said His good-byes in heaven He had an understanding of what awaited Him on earth. He knew that the wages of sin had always been death.

For centuries, Jesus had gazed down from His lofty perch in heaven. He'd watched Jewish priests sharpen their knives and slit the throats of innocent lambs.

Jesus had kept one eye on the sacrifices, but His other eye was on His Father. He watched the Father God *receive the sacrifices*, but *achieve no satisfaction*. There was *reluctance* in the Father's *acceptance*. The look He saw in His eye indicated all was not quite right.

By the time Jesus entered the world, the Father had tired of animal sacrifices. All the blood of bulls or lambs could do is *cover sin - not change the sinner*. At best the sacrifices secured a *parole*. It would require a sinless sacrifice for God to grant a *permanent pardon*. *But where would the Father go for such a sacrifice?*

That's when the Son stepped up and said, "**Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me.**" Jesus would be the spotless lamb.

The Bible teaches that "**God is spirit**" - and spirit has no blood. A spirit neither cuts, or bruises, or bleeds... From heaven Jesus saw the blood flow from the animal's throat. He imagined what it'd be like to bleed.

And this is why He says, "**a body You have prepared for Me.**" From Day One bleeding was in His future. Cold steel would open the tender skin of Mary's baby.

From the moment Jesus left heaven He was headed to the cross. Philippians 2 says of Jesus, "**Being found in the appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross...**" The *manger* was the beginning of a *mission*. The Bethlehem baby was born to die!

One author articulates it this way, "**Here's a side to the Christmas story that isn't often told... Those soft little hands, fashioned by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb, were made so that nails might be driven through them... Those baby feet - pink, and unable to walk, would one day walk up a dusty hill to be nailed to a cross... That sweet infant's head with sparkling eyes and eager mouth was formed so that someday men might force a crown of thorns onto it... That tender body, warm and soft, wrapped in swaddling clothes, would one day be ripped open by a spear.**" And then he draws the conclusion, "**Jesus was born to die.**"

Revelation 13:8 calls Jesus the "**lamb slain from the foundation of the world.**" Long before the moment Jesus stepped out of heaven and headed to this earth, He was fully aware of where the road would eventually lead. Yet come what may - *piercing steel, and angry mobs, and jealous Jews, and even Roman crosses...* Jesus was all about doing the Father's will!...

Recall a few years ago we did a series of messages that featured our own Christmas cards. And the design we chose **for faith** was of a man standing on a diving board, with the shadow of the crucified on the water. This represented Jesus on the edge of heaven, knowing exactly the splash He would make on earth, yet still being brave enough to take the dive.

Imagine, the courage it took to take that first step. British Philosopher GK Chesterton once wrote, "[Alone of all creeds, Christianity has added courage to the virtues of the Creator.](#)" *Jesus, be careful where you step, it's a long way down.* That first step was more like a leap. Yet Jesus took it regardless... He knew the Father's will. *He recalled the look in His Father's eyes.*

For our sake, the Son wanted forgiveness to be full and free... For God's sake, sin had to be punished, and justice served... Jesus knew what needed to happen, and had the wherewithal to get the job done.

It reminds me of the first-grader who came home from school in tears. Her teacher had asked the students to make a Christmas banner. When the little girl showed the class her banner... *the teacher sneered - the other kids made fun... she was crushed.*

Of course, her mom was up in arms. After hearing the story she asked her daughter what she'd written on her banner. The girl replied, "[Mary had a little lamb, and named Him Jesus.](#)" That mother made sure that every year thereafter her daughter's banner was the centerpiece of their Christmas. Here is the core of the Christmas story, it's heartbeat, "[Mary had a little lamb!](#)"

Jesus' *mission* was no *mystery* - the coming of "[Mary's little lamb](#)" was foretold in scores of Scriptures! Hebrews 10:7 sums up the whole OT, "[In the volume of the book it is written of me - to do your will, O God.](#)"

The Father served notice that a sinless sacrifice would inevitably be necessary... But what's so clear in Scripture, isn't necessarily palatable to human tastes.

It seemed weird - *why would God go so far out of His way just to die?* To Jesus' contemporaries the cross was the piece of the puzzle that just didn't seem to fit.

Trust me eyebrows were raised when the wise men showed up with their gifts. Myrrh is a ground up resin, used as an embalming fluid. *Who gives formaldehyde at a baby shower?* What a bizarre gift for a baby.

When John baptized Jesus in the Jordan, he introduced Him to His subjects - not as the promised king, but as "[the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!](#)" John knew before Jesus would wear a *crown of glory*, He first would wear a *crown of thorns*.

There's a line in a poem by Nancy Shaw. The author imagines herself as Mary. She lays her newborn baby in the manger, and ponders how far he's come...

["Quiet He lies whose vigor hurled a universe. He sleeps whose eyelids have not closed before. His breath, so slight it seems no breath at all, once ruffled the dark deeps to sprout a world... Breath, mouth, ears, eyes - He is curtailed. Who overflowed all skies, all years - older than eternity - now He is new... Now nailed to my poor planet, caught that I might be free, blind in my womb to know my darkness ended.](#)

Brought to this birth, for me to be newborn." And then Ms. Shaw adds the shocking, sobering truth, "And for Him to see me mended, I must see Him torn."

Flash ahead some thirty years and imagine Mary at the cross. She's watched her Son - the body of God - the body God prepared for His Son - bleed, and tear, and rip open. The final sacrifice is now on the altar.

I have no doubt, that from His cross, again the Son looked into the Father's eyes - but this time there was *no reluctance* in God's *acceptance!* On the altar called the cross the problem was finally solved, the penalty was paid in full, the demands satisfied once and for all. This time Jesus saw only approval in His Father's eyes, so He cried out with a loud voice, "It is finished."

And *it is finished...* at least from God's end of the deal. Absolution is no longer allocated in installments. No longer do sacrifices have to be repeated. Today, forgiveness flows with no strings attached! And it's offered *fully and freely* to you, tonight. Jesus did all that had to be done to insure for you a permanent pardon.

Often we despair of the evil in our world, even the evil we find in us. But "The Christian message is not look at what the world is coming to, but look at what has come into the world." Jesus has done what none of us could ever do. Now, all that's left *unfinished* is for you to open your heart, and receive His offer by faith.

Realize, it doesn't matter tonight that you're willing to say Christ died for the sins of the world. Faith gets diluted - it loses its punch - when it's applied in general.

When Jesus forgives He doesn't look at a globe. He looks into a set of eyes. This time it's *your eyes!* Jesus always makes His pardon intimate and personal.

"The world" in general can't think, or feel, or talk, or act. It doesn't recognize its sin as an act of defiance. It doesn't see that its sin is breaking God's heart. The world feels no remorse. It can't confess. It won't turn from sin. Oh, the world spins, but it stays on the same axis - it never really moves or seeks after God.

But you, a person, can think about what you've done. You can feel the pain you've caused, and the shame you've brought. You can confess your sin, and express your remorse. And you can call to Jesus to come to you, to forgive you of your sin, and to change your life. You can *look into His eyes* and find His acceptance.

The Baby in the manger was born to die, yet most people don't like to think about the cross at Christmas.

Christmas is about joy, and birth, and new life.

The cross is an ugly, nasty, tasteless reminder of man's dark ages, when men acted in barbarous ways. The cross is an offense to dignified sensibilities...

Most folks want Christmas to be a time for tinsel, and glitter, and blinking lights, and evergreen trees, and warm fires, and tasty eggnog, and fuzzy feelings... The focus at

Christmas is supposed to be peace on earth and good will toward men. *Why spike the Christmas punch with a reminder of violence and suffering?*

Don't spoil the serenity of the season with images of gore and bloodshed. We all want Christmas to be the one night when everyone pretends the world is okay!

When my son, Nick, was in the third grade his class had a Christmas party. Evidently, a face painter was recruited for the celebration. As the kids left that day, Kathy noticed that all of them had Nike swooshes, or candy canes, or jingle bells painted on their cheeks.

But not Nick... he did sport a *Christmas tree* on his right cheek, but on his left was a *cross!* The tree was pretty. It was done in bright green and gold. Obviously, the face painter had done lots of Christmas trees. But the cross was pale blue. It was a make-shift color - not the color you'd normally choose for a cross. In addition, the strokes looked rushed, and the lines were uneven.

It was equally obvious this particular face painter didn't do many Christmas crosses... *It took a child's spiritual insight to add the cross to Christmas.*

I hope this year you'll add the cross to your Christmas. If it wasn't for the cross there'd be no reason to celebrate at Christmas time, *or at any time for that matter!* The values we treasure at Christmas like love and peace, giving and good will - were purchased and made possible by Jesus on the cross.

Whenever you turn on a Christmas light don't forget *the Light* that shined into the darkness - *yet the darkness comprehended it not.* My sin and your sin nailed Jesus to the tree. Jesus was born to die for us!

The crib and cross go together. As Amy Carmichael put it, "[The cross always stands near the manger.](#)"

Have you heard the legend of the holly branch? Some people say the crown of thorns the Roman soldiers weaved together to mock the Messiah was formed from a branch lopped off a holly bush.

Cynical soldiers cut off a thorny limb. They bent it into a crown, and shoved it onto the head of Jesus.

Today we hang holly wreaths with red berries on the doors of our homes, or on the walls of our churches.

The holly makes for a pretty decoration, but it makes for a far better symbol... When you look at a holly wreath remember *the crown of thorns*. Think of the red berries as stained with the drops of blood that dripped from Jesus' brow... *He did it for you.* [Tonight, will you say "No," to the King whose love flows down His face?](#)

Whenever I lead a tour to Jerusalem, we visit a site called the [Lithostrata](#) - it's Latin for "[Pavement](#)." The Lithostrata is the floor on which Pilate's Judgment Hall stood. You can see the pavement stones to this day.

And it was on this floor that Jesus was beaten and scourged. His blood was splattered onto these very stones. And ironically, they're reddish in color, as if tinted with blood. For Jesus' precious blood trickled into the crevasses between these stones. That's why it's always stunning to me to realize as you stand on the pavement that the DNA of Jesus is literally under your feet. To me, this is the *holiest ground* in the *Holy Land*.

One year we were in Jerusalem at Christmas time, and I was given a unique Christmas present... I saw something at the Lithostrata which I had never seen before. On my way out, there it was... *a stone manger*.

At the scene of Jesus' execution - at the awful, brutal place where Roman executioners implemented what was called "[the half-way death](#)," there it was a *manger*.

On the day Jesus left heaven for earth, he said to the Father, "[A body You have prepared for Me...](#)" A few months later Mary laid that same body in a manger.

Of course, that body grew, did kind deeds, worked miracles, confronted hypocrisy, taught God's people a better way to live - never once falling prey to sin.

It was the Prophet Isaiah who predicted what would eventually happen to that body, "[He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.](#)" *Spirit doesn't bleed*. Thus, for the sacrifice to be offered, a body was laid in a crib.

That's why to see a manger at the pavement in Pilate's Judgment Hall, brings the story full circle!

It's interesting, historically, on the time line, Christmas occurs before Easter. But personally, in our lives God reverses the sequence, *it's the cross that comes first...* When I renounce my pride and selfishness, and embrace the cross - His sacrifice for me - *with all my heart...* it's when I believe that Jesus died to end my sin, and rose to forgive me, and change my life forever... that's when my heart is transformed into a manger... that's when God's Son is born in me!

In a spiritual sense, the Christmas miracle happens again and again - not in Bethlehem, but in hearts that believe! Embrace His sacrifice, and you'll find the Savior moving, and growing, and working inside of you!

Tonight, I'm going to lead us in a prayer. If you want to pledge your allegiance to Jesus, and experience the forgiveness of the Savior, this is your opportunity...

It's been said, "If Christ were born a thousand times in Bethlehem, and not born in my heart, I would be lost forever." Don't let tonight's opportunity pass you by...

Trust me, all the gift-giving tomorrow will seem a little hollow - *not nearly as meaningful as it could be* - if you walk out tonight without receiving **the greatest gift**.

To see Christmas through the eyes of Jesus is to see our need for a Savior. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice! He bore our sin and died in our place. To see Christmas through *His eyes* is to trust our lives to Him.

If you need a Savior, I invite you to pray with me now... Let's all close our eyes. I'll pray, and you repeat after me: "Jesus Christ, Lord before time began - *born in Bethlehem, risen from the dead* - come to my heart tonight and be my Lord and Savior. - *I have sinned, but I trust in you as the sacrifice for my sin.* - I believe you're the only one who can save my soul and I ask you to do it now. *Thank you for forgiving me. Amen.*"