

Why Celebrate Christmas? Three Reasons to Rejoice in the Birth of Jesus

By
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Introduction

Houses decorated with bright lights and trees selling like hotcakes at Lowes are just some of the signs that the American Christmas season has arrived. But besides enjoying the lights and trees, eating Christmas cookies, singing Jingle Bells and engaging in other seasonal activities, Christmas is a time in which we will reflect upon or be confronted with the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even if we are not Christian, our attention will be directed to Jesus' birth by manger scenes, the words of Christmas songs that we either sing or hear and the plays that we see.

But why celebrate Christmas? Why make such a big deal about the birth of Jesus? The answer can be found by looking at the reasons he was born. Unlike us, Jesus' existence did not begin at his conception. Being God the Son, he always is. Indeed, prior to the first Christmas, he, as God, dwelt in heaven, full of glory, splendor and majesty. But then, at just the right time, he willingly humbled himself by coming down from heaven to be conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Consequently, to inquire into the reasons for Jesus' birth is tantamount to asking why God became a man. And as we search the Scriptures, we discover at least three reasons the Son of God came into the world. First, Jesus was born to destroy the Devil. Second, he came into the world to save us from our sins. And third, he came to become the king of kings and sit on the throne of David.

We will look at these three reasons in turn and in so doing we will begin to appreciate the supreme importance of Christmas.

Jesus was born to destroy the Devil

The Bible, in numerous places, indicates that one reason Jesus came into this world was to destroy Satan. Consider the following passages:

“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).”

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He [Christ] himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil (Heb. 2:14).”

To fully appreciate this reason for Jesus' birth, we need to go back to the beginning. And in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. After making everything just right, God made

man, male and female in his own image on the sixth and final day of his creative work. He then placed the first two human beings in the Garden, where they enjoyed the presence of God and the bounty of His creation. There was no death or misery of any kind. Life was good. Peace reigned between God and man and between Adam and Eve.

But then one day, the Devil, in the form of a serpent, shows up at Adam and Eve's front door. The Devil or Satan, himself a creature of God, had at one time served God. But he, in his pride had broken ranks and rebelled against the Almighty, taking many angels with him. He then becomes God's archenemy.

Being God's adversary is not exactly an enviable position. To paint the picture for you, think of a toddler taking a swing at King Kong. How does a creature get at the Creator who is all powerful, all knowing and all wise? Quite simply, you don't. The next best thing, however, is to go after man who is made in God's own image, which is exactly what Satan is attempting to do when he knocks on Adam and Eve's door. By casting doubt upon God's goodness and truth, and by promising that they could be like God, Satan seduces Adam and Eve to the Kingdom of Darkness. Although man can never be like God, for he will either be a slave to God and righteousness or a slave to Satan and unrighteousness, Adam, blinded by pride, believes the lie and so rebels against God. As a result, he plunges himself and all of mankind under the power and reign of the Devil (1 John 5:19; Eph. 2:1-3).

Instead of leaving man to suffer the fate of his actions, God decides to deliver him from the Kingdom of Darkness. He first promises to do so right after the fall in Genesis 3:15: "And I will put enmity Between you [the Devil] and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel." Here God promises that a descendent of Eve will one day come and destroy the Devil: He shall bruise his head. With this promise, the battle lines are drawn and the war begins in earnest between God and Satan. God will send a Savior (a conqueror, a mighty warrior) who will destroy the works of the Devil and set man free. And the Devil will, from this point on work vigorously to stop God's promise from coming true, which as we now know finds its fulfillment in the birth of Jesus, the son of Mary.

Throughout the period leading up the birth of Christ, if we would pull back the curtain to peer into what is going on behind the scenes, we would see the Devil doing his best to eradicate the seed of the woman. He begins with the ungodly Cain murdering his righteous brother Abel. Yet, the hope carries on in Eve's third son, Seth. Satan changes tactics and uses marriage between the godly and the ungodly to wipe out the godly seed (Gen. 6). This approach nearly works, as the newfound alliance dilutes the true religion causing man's wickedness to flourish to the point where God decides to destroy man from the face of the earth. There is, however, one righteous man, Noah. God delivers him and his family from the flood, thereby keeping the hope of a future Savior alive.

From the numerous peoples that come from Noah, God chooses Abraham. The promised deliverer will be one of his descendents. A difficulty arises, however, in that Abraham's wife Sarah is unable to have any children (a consequence of the fall). As nothing is impossible with God, Sarah conceives and gives birth to the promised child, Isaac, in her old age. Isaac's wife Rebekah also has a hard time conceiving, yet God is faithful and she eventually gives birth to

twin boys, Esau and Jacob. The promise is carried on through Jacob. He has 12 sons so the question of an heir is not an issue. Survival during the seven year famine, however, is. To keep them and the promise alive, God uses the wicked actions of 10 sons against 1 son, Joseph, to send Joseph to Egypt so that he might be in a position to save them all from the severe famine. With Joseph being Pharaoh's right hand man, Jacob and his family move to Egypt, where after a long period of time, his family turns into a nation, containing as many people as the stars in the heavens.

At this juncture, Satan executes a violent assault on Israel in order to nullify God's promise. We learn in Exodus 1, that Pharaoh first enslaves the entire nation of Israel and then he orders the killing of all Hebrew male babies. Killing all the males would effectively destroy the nation as the remaining girls would be amalgamated into the Egyptian culture and people. The continuing line leading to the coming Savior would then be wiped out. God counters this attack with the Hebrew midwives who refuse to carry out Pharaoh's orders and by raising up Moses to lead his people out of Egypt.

While in the Promised Land, God chooses Jesse's youngest son as the one through whom the Savior will come. The Messiah will be a son of David. For a time things go fairly smoothly with just a few bumps in the road; but a tense moment occurs after the death of Ahaziah, the seventh king after David. Upon his death, Ahaziah's mother Athaliah, kills all the royal heirs, that is, all the sons of David. She murders all of them, except one. Unbeknownst to her, little Joash is rescued from among the king's sons who were being put to death. Satan is again frustrated after another close call. But though he loses another battle, he is far from giving up the war.

During the reign of Ahaz, Syria and Israel combine forces to blot out the house of David and set up their own king in Jerusalem (Isa. 7). God promises to Ahaz that their attempt will fail: "It shall not stand, Nor shall it come to pass (Isa. 7:6)." To confirm his promise, God gives a sign: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

Further attempts are made to wipe out the line of Christ: the wickedness of the people that leads to their Exile, the mixed marriages of the Jews who remained in Jerusalem, and the decree to exterminate the Jews during the time of Esther. All of them are unsuccessful, which sets up a climactic battle wherein Satan launches another violent assault to destroy the one who is supposed to destroy him.

In Matthew 2 we read that after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem looking for the one who had been born King of the Jews so that they might worship him. After finding out where the Christ is to be born from the chief priests and scribes, Herod tells the wise men to go look in the little town of Bethlehem. He also directs them to bring back news of his exact whereabouts. Ostensibly Herod wanted to know where Jesus was living so that he too might worship Him. But in reality he felt threatened by this newborn king. So to protect his dynasty, Herod decides to kill the child. Behind this, is Satan working in the son of disobedience for his own purposes: kill the seed of the woman! After countless failed attempts, Satan can now taste victory. With the help of the OT and the bright star, the wise men have found Jesus. Having worshipped him and given him gifts, they are ready to return to Jerusalem

to tell Herod where he is. And Herod will not waste any time in killing the young king. The war will soon be over and he, Satan, will emerge triumphantly.

God, however, is not one to be defeated. He warns the wise men in a dream to avoid Herod. So they return to their own country another way (Matt. 2:12). God also warns Joseph in a dream to take Jesus and Mary and flee to Egypt for a time because Herod is seeking to destroy Jesus. This Joseph does (vs. 14). And just in time too! Because Herod becomes furious that the wise men did not return to him and decides to put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under (vs. 16). The Apostle John graphically depicts this scene and Satan's involvement in Revelation 12:3-5:

“And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.”

Still, all is not lost for Satan. Although he failed to keep the seed of the woman from coming into the world, there is still the opportunity to do to Jesus what he did to Adam. Adam led mankind into the Kingdom of Darkness. Jesus has come to lead us out. But if Satan can get Jesus to remain in his domain, then all will be well. And this is what he tries to do when he tempts Jesus in the wilderness.

While desperately hungry, Satan tempts him to use his divine power to save himself by turning stones into bread. Although not a sin in and of itself, it would have been for Jesus because it would have disqualified him from being our human mediator and savior. Appealing to Scripture, or rather twisting the meaning of Scripture, Satan urges Jesus to tempt/test God. Knowing that Jesus has come to take away his kingdom, Satan freely offers it to him, if only he will bow down and worship. Unlike Adam, Jesus resists the Devil at every turn, remaining faithful to his father in heaven.

Destroying the devil, however, requires more work than simply resisting temptation. Jesus is going to have to go on the offensive, and conquer Satan's stranglehold over us. That this is what he aimed to do is demonstrated by his many miracles, especially his casting out demons. In Matthew 12:28-29, Jesus interprets his exorcisms with these words: “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.” Jesus is going to bind Satan (the strong man) and plunder his house (lead us out of Satan's kingdom and into his own kingdom).

How Jesus does this exactly is nothing short of extraordinary. The Devil is still desperate to eliminate Jesus. He enlists Judas, the unbelieving Jews and Romans to execute Jesus. In so doing, he undoubtedly thinks he will win. But just the opposite happens. For Jesus willingly lays down his life in order to crush and destroy Satan. By suffering and dying, Jesus administers the fatal blow and sets us free! As he himself says: “Now is the judgment of this world; now the

ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself (John 12:31-32; cf. Col. 2:13-15)".

According to Revelation 20 Satan is now bound "so that he should deceive the nations no more." No more will Satan be allowed to entice us into sin, seduce us into error and keep us under his influence. For he has been cast out as ruler and prince of this world. The seed of the woman has crushed the serpent's head. The works of the devil have been destroyed. Consequently, all authority and power now belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why the good news of the Gospel can go out into the world to tremendous success! Indeed, Paul was sent to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles "to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God (Acts 26:18). Hence, all who believe and receive the Gospel are said by Paul to be delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col. 1:13).

With good reason then, we sing these words during the Christmas season:

*God rest you merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay,
Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas day,
to save us all from Satan's pow'r when we were gone astray*

*"Fear not, then," said the angel, "let nothing you affright;
this day is born a Savior of a pure virgin bright,
to free all those who trust in him from Satan's pow'r and might."*

O Come, thou Rod of Jesse, free thine own from Satan's tyranny

Jesus was born to save us from our sins

A second reason for Jesus' birth is, like the first one, mentioned by John in his first epistle: "And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins (1 John 3:5)." Consider also 1 Timothy 1:15: "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Jesus, God the Father's only Son, was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary so that he might deliver us from our sins. To unravel this great truth, we are going to again begin at the beginning.

In the beginning there was no sin. After God had made everything in six days, he declared that what he had made to be very good. This pronouncement included the first two human beings: Adam and Eve. They too were good. After all, they were created in God's own image in knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

Some people believe that man today is basically good. Sure, man does some bad things (how could anyone not admit that!), but deep down man is basically good and not evil. This is an unbiblical view of man as he is today, but it also does not properly depict Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were not basically good! They were truly and fully good! And they were made that way by God. They weren't made neutral or with an inclination towards evil. They were created

upright with a heart to serve and obey God. However, our first parents were created in such a way that they could fall away from their state of righteousness and holiness. In other words, although they were good, they could sin.

Sin, according to 1 John 3:4, is lawlessness. More specifically, sin is breaking God's law, either in doing what he forbids, or failing to do what he commands. God is the Lord, creator and ruler of the entire universe. Human beings, therefore, are obligated to honor and keep His commandments. Hence, sin is simply a failure to obey God's law and submit to his authority. That is why John defines sin as lawlessness, or literally "without law." Sin disregards God's law. In effect, it becomes a law unto itself, determining good and evil, right and wrong. So when God created man, he made him upright, with a loving and obedient heart, yet in such a way that he could sin.

One special command that God gave to Adam, after he had placed him in the Garden, was to not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For in the day that he eats of it he will surely die (Gen. 3:17). Disobeying God's commands leads to death. As Paul says, "The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23)."

Death in Scripture includes physical death and all the miseries of this life. But at its heart, death is separation from God. Perhaps the best way to explain death is to contrast it with life. Like the word "death," "life" in Scripture is a broad term. It includes physical life and experiencing the joys and pleasures of this world. But life is also defined as dwelling in the presence of God. Jesus says that life is knowing God (John 17:3). This makes perfect sense because God is the giver of life and of every good and perfect gift. Death, on the other hand, is being cast out of God's presence, and suffering his just wrath. The Scripture speaks of a second death, referring to eternal death that is when death will be experienced in its fullness and for all eternity. It is described in terms of being cast out of God's presence, removed from all good things, and thrown into the lake of fire. But those who receive eternal life, are brought into the unadulterated presence of God, and inherit all things. To sum up, life is fellowship with God and enjoying His creation, while death is separated from God and experiencing his wrath.

Sin, as we have already noted, leads to death. Rebel against your Creator and death in all its forms will be your experience. Reject God, and you will have your wish. But life without God is anything but pleasant. Satan understands this all too well when he comes to Adam and Eve in the form of a serpent. In tempting them to sin, he shows his true colors. He wants Adam and Eve to die! He wants them to relinquish their good life and enter into the world of suffering. Now of course, if he were open and honest about his malicious intentions, he would have been rebuffed instantly. This is why he comes deceitfully, making God out to be the malevolent one, and promising them that they will not die but rather experience even greater things by doing what God had forbidden them to do. Well, as you know Eve believes the lie, eats the forbidden fruit, and then gives some to Adam. He then, in rebellion against God, eats it. And in so doing, Adam plunges all of mankind into sin and death.

To fully grasp our situation and also what Jesus has come to do for us, we need to understand Adam's relationship to us. Adam was not just the first man and thus everyone's forefather. He was also mankind's representative. He did not act, therefore, merely as a private person, but as a

public figure for the whole of the human race. God had so ordered the world that the standing or falling of mankind rested in Adam's performance. If he obeyed, we would receive life. If he disobeyed, we would inherit death. Paul makes this point in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15.

Rom. 5:12, 15, 17, 19: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned... For if the many died by the trespass of the one man... For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man... or just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners". 1 Cor. 15:21, 22: "For since by man came death...For as in Adam all die".

It is for this reason that it is wrong to say that man is basically good. Since Adam's first sin, everyone is born into this world a sinner and thus is basically evil; though kept from being fully evil by God's grace. Hence, David says that he was sinful at birth, sinful from the time his mother conceived him (Ps. 51:5).

So when Adam sinned, he plunged himself and all of mankind into sin and death. He and Eve were cast out of the garden and thus from the presence of God. They became sinners and inhabited a sin-cursed world. They would die a physical death as their bodies would return to dust. And they stood condemn to die the second death, eternal death. This then is the situation they walked into, and which every descendent of Adam walks into when he is born.

The good news, however, is that instead of leaving Adam and Eve, and the rest of mankind, to suffer the consequences of their actions, God chose to save. He immediately promises to save man from his sins in Genesis 3:15. We have already noted that this verse refers to Jesus conquering Satan's rule over us. However, it also refers to his delivering us from our sins because the two are interconnected. Satan's scepter is our sin. He is able to rule us because of our sin and sinfulness. Save us from sin and we will be delivered from Satan's tyranny. Hence, as we shall see, what Jesus does to save us from our sins is the same thing that he does to deliver us from Satan.

God's promise of salvation from sin and death is gradually revealed over the course of redemptive history. In the early days, it is implied in the covenant promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, namely, that God will be their God and they will be his people and that they will inherit the land of Canaan. To have God as your God is to be in fellowship with Him. To inherit Canaan is to inherit the renewed earth as we learn in Romans and Hebrews. Man lost fellowship with God and Paradise through sin. That God now promises to give both back to man, implies that he will save them from their sin. The covenant promises therefore can be seen as a promise of the forgiveness of sins.¹

How God is going to fulfill this promise is hinted at in Genesis 22, where Isaac is spared from death and a ram sacrificed in his place. A much more detailed explanation, however, is given by Moses. The Mosaic Law, on the one hand, shows us our problem: our sin, our guilt, our unholiness and consequent lack of fellowship with God. On the other hand, the Mosaic Law

¹ See Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 43.

provides the solution to our problem: forgiveness of sins, and the way of holiness and thus fellowship with God.

That Israel had to daily offer sacrifices for their sins and that they were not allowed to enter into the holy of holies indicated that salvation was not to be found in keeping the Mosaic Law. As the author of Hebrews says, it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. The redemptive laws of the OT were simply shadows and pictures of how God would one day take away our sin, i.e. through a substitute who would shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins. The promise of forgiveness in the OT was therefore only prospective, dependent upon the coming Savior.

The Psalms and Prophets expound and expand upon the Mosaic Law. Besides the numerous declarations and promises of forgiveness we read in Isaiah about God's servant who will be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. He will make his soul an offering for sin and bear the sin of many (Isa. 52-3). Zechariah refers to a future day when a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." Daniel also speaks of a future day to make an end of sins and to make reconciliation or atonement for iniquity (Dan. 9:24). Jeremiah tells us that God will make a new covenant wherein all will know the Lord for He will forgive their iniquity and their sin he will remember no more. Ezekiel uses similar language as Jeremiah, speaking of how God will cleanse us, give us a new heart and put His Spirit in us so that we might walk in holiness and righteousness. And then we will dwell in the land and be God's people (Ez. 36).

Many, many years go by after the last of these promises about salvation from sin are made. In fact, some four hundred years go by without even a word from the Lord, let alone the fulfillment of his promise. But then one day, the angel Gabriel appears to a young woman, Mary, who is engaged to a man named Joseph. He tells her that even though she is a virgin, she will conceive and give birth to a son (Luke 1:26-38).

When Joseph finds out that his fiancée is pregnant, he decides not to marry her. Yet, being a decent man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, he purposes to break the engagement quietly. "But as he considered this," Matthew tells us in 1:20-21, "an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Notice first of all the Mary's son is to be called "Jesus." Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Joshua" which means "Yahweh saves." In particular, the angel says that Mary's son, who is in fact Yahweh, will save His people from their sins. At long last, the promised seed of the woman, and the one Moses and the prophets wrote about has come.

Secondly, notice the uniqueness of Jesus' conception. Mary had not known a man. She was a virgin. Yet, she became pregnant by the working of the Spirit of God. In Luke 1:35, Gabriel tells Mary that "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." Being conceived in Mary's womb and born of her indicates the normal humanity of Jesus. The

role of the Spirit in his conception points to his uniqueness. The language used in this verse is reminiscent of the creation account in Genesis 1, where the Spirit of God hovered over the primeval waters. The point being made seems to be that the Spirit has begun the work of the new creation.² Just as God created Adam as the head of the old creation, and presently sinful creation, so now God has begun anew with Jesus, as the head of the new creation, the redeemed and renewed creation. In short, he had to be a Second Adam (righteous and a public figure) to undo what Adam did. Thus the Holy Spirit sets him apart at his very conception so that he might save his people from their sins.

That Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15) is a point that is made over and over again in the NT. At the beginning of his ministry, John the Baptist sees Jesus and declares “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).” Jesus’ miracles of healing which is simply the undoing of the consequences of sin pointed to the reality that he came to save sinners. The healing of the paralytic highlights this because in that passage he equates his power to heal the man with his right to forgive his sins (Mark 2). Jesus’ friendship and ministry to sinners indicated that he came to save them. As a physician attends to the sick, so he came to heal the sinner. On the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, telling his disciples that the cup is his blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:28). After Jesus rose from the dead, he told his bewildered disciples that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations (Lk. 24:46-47). Paul says that Jesus was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25); that Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3) and that Christ gave himself for our sins (Gal. 1:4). See also 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 1:3; 9:26, 28; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 1:7; 2:2.

Jesus’ sacrifice for sins, however, does not personally benefit anyone, unless and until they are united to Him. By nature, we are united to Adam and so inherit his guilt and corruption. All in Adam, therefore, die because sin. Jesus, the second Adam, by his death and subsequent resurrection, has provided purification from sin and eternal life. But in order to receive these things, you need to be in Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:22 says: For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. Paul emphatically proclaims that redemption and forgiveness of sins is in Christ (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). Indeed, every spiritual blessing is in Christ (Eph. 1:3). The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

How can you be in Christ and so receive the forgiveness of sins? The united testimony of Scripture is by believing and trusting in Jesus (John 3:16; 8:24). “To Him [Christ] all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins (Acts 10:43; cf. Acts 13:38; 26:18).

With good reason then, we also sing these words during the Christmas season:

*Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in thee.*

² See *ibid*, 79.

*No More let sins and sorrow grow, nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.*

*Light and life to all he brings, ris'n with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.*

Jesus was born to be king

A third reason for Jesus' birth is one that is emphasized by both Matthew and Luke in their respective accounts of the first Christmas. And it is this: Jesus came to be King. Once again, we will begin at the beginning so that we might gain a fuller understanding of this reason for Christ's coming into the world.

In the beginning, man was created and commissioned to rule over the world. After God made Adam and Eve, he blessed them and commanded them to preside over all that he had made. Genesis 1:28: "Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." This command, which is often referred to as the cultural mandate, is reiterated in Psalm 8:6-7. Man, therefore, was made to be God's vice-regent on earth. God did not intend for us to escape the world, spending all of our time in solitude, reading and praying. Rather, he made us in his image equipping us with all the necessary tools like our mind (reason) and senses (eyes, ears, etc.) to go out into the world and reign over it.

Sin, however, has affected man's ability to rule over the world. Taking dominion became difficult if not impossible. The curse given to Adam explains it well (Gen. 3:17-19). From it we learn two things. First, our rule is resisted and frustrated. In other words, the world works against us. Weeds grow and dogs bite. Homes are reduced to rubble by tornadoes, and an athlete's dreams of Olympic glory are shattered by an injury. Second, our rule is terminated by death. The ultimate resistance and frustration is death. We are here today, gone tomorrow. Although we were set apart to reign over God's creation, sin and death has destroyed any chance of fulfilling that calling in any meaningful way.

The good news, however, is that instead of leaving man to suffer the full consequences of his actions, God promised to one day restore him as ruler over all. God did so immediately after the fall in Genesis 3:15. We have seen already how this verse refers to God's promises of conquering the devil and delivering us from our sins. Yet, it also refers to restoring man as ruler because all three aspects are interconnected. Just as sin brought us under the reign of death and Satan, so it has kept us from properly taking dominion over the earth. Thus, as we shall see, Christ's death and resurrection, not only led to his victory over Satan, setting us free from sin and death, but it also led to his coronation as ruler over all the earth. And we who are in Him, reign with him.

That the seed of the woman would come to rule over God's creation, thereby enabling man to fulfill the original creation mandate is implied in God's covenant promise to Abraham,

particularly his promise of the Land, which refers to the gift of the renewed world. This aspect of the promise is then developed in the rest of the OT. God promises to David that He will establish his house and kingdom forever (2 Sam. 7:14-16). In Psalm 2, God promises to crown his anointed one (the Messiah) and to give to him the nations for his inheritance and the ends of the earth for his possession (cf. Ps. 45; 110). Isaiah speaks of one who will sit upon the throne of David, reigning over all (Isaiah 9:6-7; 11; 40). Daniel refers to a day when the God of heaven will set up a kingdom, led by the Son of Man, which will never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44; 7:13-14). Zechariah 9:9-10 states that the coming King will speak peace to the nations, and that his dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.

So during the days of the OT, God gradually revealed information about a coming king, a son of David, who will rule over all the nations. Then, at long last, when the time was ripe, the Angel Gabriel appears to young Mary and informs her that she will conceive and give birth to this promised king. Luke 1:30-33:

Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

Further confirmation that Jesus is indeed the long-awaited king is given by the wise men from the east. They arrive in Jerusalem looking for the one who was born king. They did not inquire whether a king was born but simply where he was living because they were convinced that the King of the Jews had already come into the world. After receiving help, they eventually find Jesus, who they acknowledge as the king, by worshipping him and showering him with gifts. Jesus himself implicitly claims to be the promised king by riding into Jerusalem on a young donkey in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, while he explicitly says he is a king in his answer to Pilate’s question (John 18:37).

To take control of the world, usher in the Kingdom of God and restore fallen man to his office of vice-regent over God’s creation, Jesus first had to conquer our enemies, namely, Satan, sin and death. And so it was only after he had died and rose again from the dead that he was crowned King. After his resurrection, and shortly before his ascension to the right hand of God the Father Almighty, Jesus told his disciples that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him. Paul says in Ephesians 1:20-23 that God raised Jesus from the dead and then seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, placing all things under his feet. Similarly, he says in Philippians 2:5-11, that Christ humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Then, on the basis of his obedience, God highly exalted him and gave him the name which is above every name so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of those in heaven and of those on earth, and of those under the earth. Hebrews 1:3 concurs, noting that when Jesus had by himself purged our sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

That Jesus is now King of kings, and reigns over, not just Israel or the church, but the entire universe is a theme that runs throughout the NT. In fact, the kingship of Christ is at the very

heart of the Gospel message. The Gospel can be summarized with these words from Isaiah, “Your God reigns!” (Isa. 52:7) or Peter’s “Jesus is Lord” (Acts 2:36).

There are numerous implications of this great truth, but one is that in and through Christ we become what we were created to do, namely rule the world. The author of Hebrews, in expounding Psalm 8, says that Jesus was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death and then crowned with glory and honor (vs. 9). For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings (vs. 10). In other words, Jesus as the second Adam fulfills man’s destiny to rule over all. Christ came to redeem man and to do what Adam failed to do so that all who believe in him will share in his glory and honor. Paul says that we are co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). And Jesus promises in Revelation. 3:21: “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

It is not surprising then that we sing these words during the Christmas season:

*Come to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn King.*

*Joy to the World! The Lord is come: let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room, and heav’n and nature sing.*

Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King.”

*Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne.*

Conclusion

Why celebrate Christmas? Why rejoice in the birth of Jesus? We do so because Jesus was born to destroy the Devil, to save His people from their sins, and to become King. If you are a Christian, during the Christmas season, indeed during the whole year, let these truths sink deep down into the core of your being so that they then resurface in a life that is holy and pleasing to God.

If you have not come to Jesus in faith, trusting in Him to deliver you from the kingdom of darkness, to purify you from your sins and to be your King, then do so now! “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16-18).”