

# Advent and Christmas

## Part 2 – Christmas isn't in the Bible, but is it Scriptural?

No one knows for certain when Christ was born. The Bible doesn't tell us, either. Nor is there any command, or even suggestion, in either the Old or New Testaments, that we should set aside a day to celebrate Christ's birth. There's no historical evidence from early church times of Christians keeping a Christmas festival, and no completely convincing proof yet that December 25<sup>th</sup> was the likely day of his birth. So how, and why, did Christmas become such an important day for Christians, when the Bible is so vague on its origins, and just as vague on the date?

Because Christians realized who Jesus was. He was the Son of God, yet born as one of us. He slid down his Mother's birth canal like any other human baby, popped out all purple and puffy-faced, gulped his first breath, blinked his first blink and spent the next several months yelling for food, warmth and comfort. And the most the Son of God could do for several months was wave his arms around and kick his legs in those odd, jerky movements babies do, while gurgling away and dribbling, and staring cross-eyed at the ceiling. But that blob of roly-poly humanity was God. It was God lying there blowing bubbles and doing suck-in-air laughs, and pretending he was smiling when he was really just filling his pants.

But it took nearly 4 centuries for Christians to catch on that Jesus was both fully human and fully God. Oh, the shepherds got it, but who listens to shepherds? The Wise Men from the East got it too, but they slipped off back to their homeland without a whisper to anyone of what they knew. Simeon got it, and said the most remarkable things about the baby Jesus in the Temple at the redemption of the firstborn ceremony. But did anybody charge off through the Temple yelling, "Hey, listen up everybody to what Simeon just said about that baby over there with Joseph and Mary. He said 'salvation is now out in the open for everyone to see'," **Luke 2:30** (The Message).

Salvation available to everyone through a baby?! "What kind of baby is this?" most people could have asked, but they didn't. And most people didn't ask much about Jesus **after** that either, meaning that God in a human body spent a fairly ordinary childhood helping his Mother with her growing brood of children and assisting his Dad with the carpentry business. He "was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him," **Luke 2:40**, so he certainly stood out as something special, but no one thought to connect this bright, shining child with the promise of a Saviour. How could a fully human child have the capacity to save anyone? Only God could do that.

His parents got a bit of an eye-opener in **verse 49**, though, when Jesus turned 12 and they lost him in Jerusalem (verse 41). After three days of searching they found him in the Temple, utterly at home and unperturbed, [“sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers,”](#) **verses 46-47**. But even all those learned scholars didn't think to ask if this amazing lad might be the Messiah.

And his Mother's only reaction to this astonishing sight of Jesus holding the religious leaders completely spellbound was, [“Son, why have you treated us like this?”](#) To which Jesus answers with this little eye-opener, [“But why did you need to search? Didn't you realize I'd be here at the Temple in MY FATHER's house?”](#) **verse 49** (Living Bible).

Good point. Why would his Mother be so frantic and so surprised at finding Jesus in the Temple, having been told directly by an angel 12 years earlier that [“the holy one to be born”](#) from her body [“will be called THE SON OF GOD,”](#) **Luke 1:35**? So she knew who Jesus was. Not only was he her son, he was also the Son of God. God, therefore, was his Father. And where did God, at that point in Jewish history, dwell? In the Temple. So where would God's Son naturally go after finding himself left behind in Jerusalem? To the home of his Father. Which is exactly what he did, providing clear evidence that this fully human 12 year old child born of a woman was **also** the Son of God. [“But”](#) - going back to **Luke 2:50** - Joseph and Mary [“did not understand what he was saying to them.”](#)

And nobody, it seems, **tried** to understand either. So here was Jesus, the Son of God, growing up through his teenage years and beyond with no one really understanding who he was, not even his Mother. But then came another eye-opener, when John the Baptist burst onto the scene quoting **Isaiah 40:3-5** about [“preparing the way for the Lord,”](#) because, **Luke 3:6**, [“all mankind will see God's salvation,”](#) the same phrase Simeon had used when he lifted up the baby Jesus in his arms in the Temple.

They all **could** have known who Jesus was, then. They'd been told enough times already - by an angel, by Simeon, by Anna who [“spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem”](#) in **Luke 2:38** - meaning this human Jesus really was the Saviour - then by Jesus himself in the Temple calling God his Father, and now by John the Baptist crying out, “the Messiah's on his way!” But the best anybody could come up with in reaction to all this evidence was [“wondering in their hearts if JOHN might possibly be the Christ,”](#) **Luke 3:15**. So, after all those staggering statements made directly about Jesus - and by Jesus himself - all they could come up with was, “Well, maybe this John chap is the Messiah we've all been hoping for!”

Clearly, then, it takes a while to catch on to who Jesus is, even when you've got the Father himself saying, [“You are my Son”](#) at Jesus' baptism in **Luke 3:22**. To most people, Jesus was a great prophet and teacher (Matthew 16:14, John 3:2), but not God's Son.

There was one brief moment when Peter understood who Jesus was, in **Matthew 16:16**, when Jesus asked Peter point blank who he was, and Peter answered, “[You are the Christ the Son of the living God.](#)” But when Jesus was hauled away to be crucified, Peter denied even knowing Jesus as a person, let alone as the Son of God!

What we see, then, is people not only having difficulty knowing who Jesus was in the first place, but denying or doubting who he was when the chips were down. Why? Because there’s a devil, whose great aim in life is to cast doubt on who Jesus is.

He even tried to cast doubt in JESUS’ mind who he was. “**IF you are the Son of God,**” he taunted in **Matthew 4:3**, in the hope of getting Jesus to do something that would prove he wasn’t the Son of God. And later, the devil asked if he could have a go at Peter too, as we see in **Luke 22:31** when Jesus said to Peter, “[Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.](#)” The devil wanted permission to test Peter like he’d tested Jesus, knowing that Peter would be leading the church later on, and if he could cast just the slightest doubt in Peter’s mind about Jesus really being the Son of God, then Christianity wouldn’t have a message worth listening to. “**BUT,**” Jesus continued in **verse 32**, “[I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail,](#)” because faith in Jesus being the Son of God is what this human life of ours is all about.

Scripture makes that clear in **John 6:28**, when people asked Jesus, “[What must we do to do the works God requires?](#)” - or, “What’s the most important thing we can do in this human life of ours, from GOD’s point of view? And “[Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: believe in the one he has sent,’](#)” **verse 29**. And why should we believe that? Because, **verse 40**, “[my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.](#)”

Everything important to a human life comes down to one thing, therefore. It’s realizing who Jesus is. It’s opening one’s eyes to the obvious, that Jesus had to be much more than merely a great prophet or wise teacher, or a “wonderful example of how to live,” because Jesus had the power to resurrect people to eternal life. The obvious conclusion to which is? Jesus must be fully God too, because only a being with **eternal life himself** can give eternal life. Our lives and our future rest entirely in his hands, therefore. And that was God’s Plan before our universe was even created, that all us humans would “[be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ,](#)” **Ephesians 1:5**, because to Jesus he gave the power to make us into sons of God too.

But the sticking point for so many people, especially Muslims, is that we’ve now got a human being born from a human mother called Jesus who’s **also** the Son of God with the power to raise people from the dead into the same relationship of sonship with the Father that he’s always had himself. How is that possible, they ask? How can anyone be God and human at the same time?

So people say he was either human or God, or that God created Jesus, as Jehovah's Witnesses preach today and the Arians preached in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The problem with Jesus being a created being, though, is that created beings have never been perfectly reliable. God's first created beings, the angels, revealed a deep down weakness that made one third of them into demons, and human beings - as we see in the Garden of Eden - fell at the first fence. Jesus, therefore, couldn't save us as a created being because created beings can't guarantee they can even save themselves!

But as GOD he could save us. As our Creator he could RE-create us into something brand new too. He could even remove the curse of created beings being unreliable. How? By living HIS life in us, because his life HAS been totally reliable. His love for his Father has never failed. The secret to us never failing or "doing a Satan," therefore, is to have the same love for the Father that his Son has. But how, as created beings, could we ever GET that kind of love, since we obviously don't have it naturally?

Simple: the Son of God would live his relationship with the Father **as a human being**, and then live what he lived as a human being in us. It was the perfect solution. To create a perfectly reliable human being who'd never stray from God, our Creator would live a perfectly reliable human life that never strayed from God himself, and then, when he returned back to God and his powers were fully restored, he'd make us into human beings like himself. He'd begin the process during our human lifetime, and then raise us up into his full human likeness at the resurrection, from which point we could live forever as he does, basking in the Father's love and loving the Father so much in return that never, like Jesus, would WE be tempted to stray from him either.

And when Christians in the 4<sup>th</sup> century realized all this, they came up with a celebration of it, called Christmas. It sprang from the realization of who Jesus was, and why, as the Son of God, he came to us as a human being. What stirred it was the running debate in the Church as to whether Jesus was a created being or God, and if he was God, how could he be human too? And why, if he was God, would he have to be born and live as a human being to save us? They were good questions. But they'd already been answered - by Jesus himself - in **John 17:26**, when he made it very clear as to why he, the ever-living Son of God, came to this Earth as a fully human baby as well. Here it is, in his own words: "I have made you (the Father) known to them, and I will continue to make you known, in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

The Son of God came to us as a human being to reveal the Father's love. How? By, first of all, walking around in person and telling people about it, of the love the Father had for him and the love he had for his Father. But even better was demonstrating it in person so people could see it with their own eyes. They heard this human being calling God his "Father," and look at the power he had. And then they heard him say he'd raise them into that same life and relationship with God that HE had.

And Christmas serves as a wonderful reminder of that, that all year the Son of God is raising us into the same life and relationship with God that HE had as a human being. It reminds us that Jesus was born as a human being so he could live the human life and relationship with God that we couldn't live and experience ourselves. Every second of every day, therefore, he's enabling us to grasp and experience what he HE's known and lived with forever - the Father's love. Jesus knows exactly what that love feels like, having lived in the embrace of his Father's love for eternity. His greatest wish for us, therefore, is that "the love you (the Father) have for me MAY BE IN THEM," so that WE can know the Father's love too.

That's not all Jesus is doing every second of every day either. God also "sent his Son, born of a woman....that we might receive the full rights of sons," Galatians 4:4-5, and what that does for us is **verse 6**: "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'" God sent the Spirit to give us the same love for him that Jesus had as a human being. The "Spirit of his Son" is now upon us.

Thanks to God sending Jesus as a human being, then, we get to experience two things that Jesus experienced as a human being. First of all, his Father's immense love for him, and secondly, his total love for the Father, neither of which we are remotely capable of knowing naturally, let alone experiencing. But thanks to Jesus living that relationship with the Father as a human being, the Spirit can now live that relationship Jesus had with the Father in us, so that we too come to realize we have a Father in heaven who really loves us, and find ourselves trusting and loving him in return.

It was just before writing this that I went to the Father to talk to him about a situation that was really bothering me, because I knew if I didn't handle it right it would not only affect me, it would affect my family, my churches and my attitude toward the Church in general. But that's amazing, because I didn't think twice about whether God was real or not, whether he was listening or not, whether he was interested or not, or whether he'd answer or not. I just knew. And that, I realized, is the true Spirit of Christmas; it's the Spirit of the Son of God now living the human life of Jesus in me, so that I too can experience the same open, loving, trusting relationship with God that Jesus had as a human being.

The devil, meanwhile, tries to cast doubt on such a relationship being possible. He constantly sneaks it into our thoughts that we have to win God's love by good behaviour, and prove we love God by doing lots of good things. But Christmas reminds us that's a lie. God sent his Son because we **couldn't** love God, not because we could. As humans we've proved again and again, starting with Adam and Eve, that we simply don't have the capacity to love God. We don't have the capacity to believe he loves us, either. **So God sent his Son to be the human we couldn't be.** And that's who Jesus is and will always be, the Son of God living his human life in us.

That's certainly who Jesus was to Paul, because Paul discovered that HE didn't have the capacity to love God, either. But, he realized in **Galatians 2:20**, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me," meaning that Jesus was now living the human being that Paul could never be IN him.

But that's why the Son of God was born as a human being, to nail our old empty, failure-prone, guilt-infested lives on the cross with him, and bury them forever. "For you died," Paul writes in **Colossians 3:3**, "and your life is now hidden with Christ." Our old life is gone, and the life we now live, tucked away with Christ like a full and endless bank account that never runs out, is the life Jesus lived as a human being that the Spirit is now living in us every day.

And the purpose for all this happening to us is that "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory," **verse 4**. Because CHRIST is now our life, the time is coming when we'll experience everything he's experiencing in HIS "glorious" humanity. We'll know the Father's love as he knows the Father's love, and be able to love the Father as he loves the Father. Because that was God's purpose for creating us in the first place, that we share the same glorious relationship with the Father that the Father and the Son have always shared together.

But to accomplish that, the Son of God had to live that relationship with the Father as a human being for us, because we couldn't live it ourselves. That's why he came, to live the human life he created us to live, kill off the pathetic results of our efforts to live that life on our own strength, rise to the Father to receive the power to give us his perfect human life in exchange for ours, and then come again to enable us to live his human life to the full, forever.

That's why we need a whole season called Advent, meaning "Coming," to remind us of ALL the reasons why Jesus came as a human being, because it involves more than just him coming to die. He not only came to die, he came to LIVE a human life too, the human life that we couldn't live ourselves. And right now he's coming to us a second time through the Spirit to live that human life he lived IN us. And one day he'll come again, a third time, but this time to live his human life to the full in us, for always.

And Christmas Day was created to remind us of that, of what got this whole process started. It was the birth of the Son of God as a human being. Fully God became fully human. Our Creator became his created - so that HE could be what he created us to be, and then receive power from his Father to RE-create us like himself.

Advent and Christmas in their original intent and meaning, therefore, are thoroughly Scriptural. But what about the 12 days of Christmas? They're not in the Bible, either. So, are they Scriptural too?

(Continues in Part 3....)