

Inside Life

Issue 37
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The Christmas Story: Does It Still Matter?

Coping with Loneliness
at Christmas

Jesus Christ
Superstar or Superstition?

The Jam Jar
and the Coffee Cups



Inside Life

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Inside Life

PO Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland 0750
Phone: 09 489 8910

Email: insidelife@gci.org.nz
Website: www.insidelife.org.nz

Editor: Rex Morgan
Graphic Design: Philip Baldwin

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Inside Life is a magazine of understanding. Rather than just reporting on life, **Inside Life** seeks to delve inside the marvellous mystery that is life, to discover what it is all about. What does life mean? Where did it come from? How can we make the most of it?

Inside Life provides insight and answers to life's deep questions and challenges, and aims to provide articles of lasting hope, help, and encouragement for successful living in today's fast-moving world.

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Our Cover: *Christmas is an exhilarating time of year. A hectic time pulsating with sometimes frantic gift-buying and partying. It has become such a commercialised, consumer-driven event that the original meaning behind the festival can be all-too-easily overlooked, ignored, or forgotten. Several of our articles in this issue focus on the lasting spiritual values that stand behind the celebration of Christmas.*

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The Christmas Story: Does It Still Matter?

By Rusty Wright

What does Christmas mean to you? Times with family and friends; perhaps carols, cards, television specials; maybe hectic shopping, parties, and eating too much.

All these and more are part of a modern Christmas. But what about the first Christmas? Why is the original story—the baby in a manger, shepherds, wise men, angels—important, if at all?

May I invite you to consider eight reasons why the original Christmas story matters, even to you? You may not agree with all of them, but perhaps they will stimulate your thinking, and maybe even kindle some feelings that resonate with that famous story.

First of all, the Christmas story is important because it is...

A Story That Has Endured

For two millennia, people have told of the child in a Bethlehem manger; of angels who announced his birth to shepherds; of learned men who traveled a great distance to view him.¹

That a story persists for many years does not prove its truthfulness. Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy survive in the popular imagination. But a twenty-century tenure at least merits our consideration. What deep human longings does the Christmas story portray? Why has it connected so profoundly with millions of people?

Is the story factual? Curiosity prompts further investigation.

Secondly, the Christmas story is also...

A Story of Hope and Survival

Jesus' society knew great pain and oppression. Rome ruled. Corrupt tax collectors burdened the people. Some religious leaders even sanctioned physical beating of Jewish citizens participating in compulsory religious duties.²

Joseph and his pregnant wife Mary travelled a long distance to Bethlehem to register for a census, but could not obtain proper lodging. Mary bore her baby and laid him in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. Eventually, King Herod sought to kill the baby. Warned of impending risk, Joseph and Mary

fled to Egypt with their son, and then returned home after Herod's death.

Imagine how Mary felt. Traveling while pregnant would be challenging. Fleeing to another nation lest some king slay your son would not be pleasant. Yet she, Joseph, and Jesus survived the ordeal.

In the midst of social and cultural challenges, the Christmas story offers hope and encouragement toward survival and hope of new life linked to something—someone—greater than oneself. One of Jesus' followers said Jesus' "name... [would] be the hope of all the world".³

So, the Christmas story is important because it has endured and because it speaks of hope and survival.



Although it is not known how many wise men traveled to Judea to find the infant Jesus, three are popularly shown in Christmas art: one black, one caucasian, and one oriental.



Reason number three: the Christmas story is...

A Story of Peace and Goodwill

Christmas carollers sing of “peace on earth”. Greeting cards extol peace, families desire it, and the news reminds us of its fleeting nature.

Psychologist Daniel Goleman in his best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence* tells of boarding a New York City bus to find a driver whose friendly greeting and positive disposition spread contagious warmth among the initially cold and indifferent passengers. Goleman envisioned a “virus of good feeling” spreading through the city from this “urban peacemaker” whose good will had softened hearts.⁴

The Christmas angel announced to some shepherds: “Don’t be afraid!... I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! The Saviour—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David!”⁵ A crowd of angels then appeared, praising God and

proclaiming peace among people of good will.⁶

The Christmas story brings a message of peace that can soothe anxious hearts and calm interpersonal strife.

Reason number four: the Christmas story is...

A Story of Family

Christmas is a time for family gatherings. This interaction can bring great joy or great stress. Estrangement or ill will from past conflicts can explode.

Joseph and Mary had their share of family challenges. Consider their circumstances. The historical accounts indicate that Joseph’s fiancée became pregnant, even though she was a virgin. Mary believed an angel told her she was pregnant by God. Now, how would you feel if your fiancé/fiancée exhibited apparent evidence of sexual activity with someone else during your engagement? Suppose your intended said that God had sanctioned

the whole thing. Would your trust and self-esteem take a nosedive? Would you cancel the wedding?

Joseph, described as “a just man, decided to break the engagement quietly, so as not to disgrace... [Mary] publicly”.⁷ But an angel appeared to him in a dream, explaining that the child was conceived in her by God, and told him to “name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins”.⁸ Joseph followed those instructions and cared for his family. His continuing commitment to Mary and Jesus played a significant part in the boy’s birth and early childhood. With God’s help, the family overcame major obstacles. And so can your family.

Fifth, the story of Christmas is also...

A Story of Humility

When kings, presidents, and other rulers appear in public, there is often great pomp. From a biblical perspective, God came first, not as a ruling king, but as a servant, a

baby born in humble circumstances. His becoming human helps humans identify with Him.

Imagine that you and your child are walking in a field and you encounter an ant pile with hundreds of ants scurrying about. In the distance, you see a construction bulldozer approaching. Suppose your child asks how to warn the ants of impending danger. You discuss various possibilities: shouting, holding up signs, etc. But the best solution would be if somehow your child could become an ant and warn them personally. Some ants might not believe the danger. But some might believe and take steps to ensure their safety.

Paul, an early follower of Jesus, wrote of the humility Jesus displayed by becoming human:

Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross. Because of this, God raised him up to the heights of heaven.⁹

The Christmas story speaks of family and humility. But is it true?¹⁰

The sixth reason why the Christmas story matters: it is...

A Story That Was Foretold

Jesus' followers noted numerous clues to his identity, prophecies written many years before His birth.¹¹

The Hebrew writer Micah told around 700 BC of deliverance through a coming Messiah or "Anointed One" from Bethlehem.¹² We know that "...Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea..."¹³

Isaiah, writing around 700 BC, foretold that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. He wrote: "The Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will

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give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel".¹⁴ The name "Immanuel" means "God with us". Biblical accounts claim Jesus' mother was a virgin when she bore him.¹⁵

Additional prophecies concern the Messiah's lineage, betrayal, suffering, execution, and resurrection. Peter Stoner, a California mathematician, once calculated the probability of just eight of the 300 prophecies Jesus fulfilled coming true in one person due to chance alone. Using estimates that both he and classes of college students considered reasonable and conservative, Stoner concluded there was one chance in 10¹⁷ that those eight were fulfilled by fluke.

He says 10¹⁷ silver dollars would cover the state of Texas two feet deep. Mark one coin with red fingernail polish. Stir the whole batch thoroughly. What chance would a blindfolded person have of picking the marked coin on the first try? One in 10¹⁷, the same

chance that just eight of the 300 prophecies "just happened" to come true in this man, Jesus.¹⁶

In a similar vein, consider the seventh reason why the original Christmas story matters. It is...

A Story That Has Substantial Support

Can we trust the biblical accounts of the Christmas story? Consider three important points:

1. Eyewitness Testimony

The Gospels—presentations of Jesus' life—claim to be, or bear evidence of containing, eyewitness accounts. In a courtroom, eyewitness testimony is among the most reliable evidence.

2. Early Date

Dr. William F. Albright, one of the world's leading archaeologists, dated every book of the New Testament (NT) before about AD 80.¹⁷ There is no known record of NT factual authenticity ever being successfully challenged by a contemporary.



Some 300 prophecies concerning Jesus' lineage, birth, betrayal, suffering, execution, and resurrection can be found in the scriptures of the Old Testament.



You can celebrate this Christmas knowing that you are a member of Jesus' family.

3. Manuscript Evidence

Over 24,000 early manuscript copies of portions of the NT exist today. Concerning manuscript attestation, Sir Frederic Kenyon, director and principle librarian of the British Museum, concluded: "Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established".¹⁸

The Christmas story is notable for its enduring messages of hope, peace, goodwill, family, and humility. It was foretold by prophets and has substantial manuscript support. But there is another reason for considering the story of Jesus' birth, perhaps the most important.

Reason number eight: the Christmas story is...

A Story of Love

Jesus' followers taught that his conception and birth were part of a divine plan to bring us genuine peace, inner freedom, and self-respect. They believed the biblical God wants us to enjoy friendship with Him, and meaning, and purpose. Alas, our own

self-centeredness separates us from Him. Left to our own, we would spend both time and eternity in this spiritually unplugged state.

Jesus came to help plug us into God. Mary's baby was born to die, paying the penalty for our self-centeredness, which the biblical documents call "sin". If I had a traffic fine I could not pay, you could offer to pay it for me. When the adult Jesus died on the cross, he carried the penalty due all our sins, then rose from the dead to give new life.

Jesus explained: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life".¹⁹ God can become your friend if you believe in him, that is, if you trust him to forgive you. He will never let you down.

Perhaps you are becoming aware of the importance of the Christmas story in your own life. Might you like to receive Jesus' free gift of forgiveness and place your faith in him? You can celebrate this

Christmas knowing that you are a member of his family.

Christmas is meant to celebrate peace and joy. Amidst the busy-ness of shopping, parties, presents, and fun, remember that the Prince of Peace came to spread peace and joy to all who believe in Him.

Notes

¹ Details of the Christmas story are in Luke 1-2 and Matthew 1:18-2:23.

² Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973 printing of the 1883 original), i:372.

³ Matthew 12:21, *New Living Translation*.

⁴ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997), ix-x.

⁵ Luke 2:10-11 NLT.

⁶ Luke 2:13-14, *New American Standard Bible*.

⁷ Matthew 1:19 NLT.

⁸ Matthew 1:21 NLT.

⁹ Philippians 2:6-9 NLT.

¹⁰ For more on evidence for Jesus, see www.WholisJesus-Really.com and www.probe.org.

¹¹ For a summary of prophecies Jesus fulfilled, see Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1979), 141-177.

¹² Micah 5:2.

¹³ Matthew 2:1 NASB.

¹⁴ Isaiah 7:14 New International Version.

¹⁵ Matthew 1:18, 22-25; Luke 1:27, 34.

¹⁶ Peter W. Stoner, *Science Speaks* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 99-112.

¹⁷ McDowell, *op. cit.*, 62-63.

¹⁸ Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1940), 288; in McDowell, *op. cit.*, 41. McDowell develops these points in pp. 39-41ff.

¹⁹ John 3:16 NLT.

Rusty Wright is an author and lecturer who has spoken on six continents. He holds Bachelor of Science (Psychology) and Master of Theology degrees from Duke and Oxford Universities, respectively. www.RustyWright.com

On Another Planet

by James Henderson

Stop the world, I want to get off!

What with all the political shenanigans that constantly assail us, and the general parlous state of the world, I've felt often like that in the past few weeks.

And now there appears to be somewhere I could go to. It's called K2-18b, and, according to scientists, it may be able to support life. The reason for this is that K2-18b appears to be in the Goldilocks Zone, meaning it orbits its nearest star at a distance which makes it neither too hot nor too cold, and just right for the existence of liquid H₂O, otherwise known as water.

What's more, the planet is roughly twice the size of Earth, so there would be plenty of room to get far away from the madding crowds.

There are, however, a couple of drawbacks. I would need to lose some weight as the gravity is much stronger than here on Earth. And there are intense UV rays, so I would need to put on lots and lots of sun block. I would also have to wait around until we develop much faster interplanetary space craft as, currently, it would take a million or so years to get there.

But let's not be negative. As Angelos Tsaras, an astronomer at University College London, said:

A fanciful travel poster from the future, advertising Kepler-16b, which orbits a pair of stars. Unlike K2-18b, it is a gas giant similar to Saturn, so it would have no solid surface to stand on. The view here imagines a nearby moon. Prospects for life on this unusual world aren't good, as it has a temperature similar to that of dry ice.

"This is the first potentially habitable planet where the temperature is right and where we now know there is water". He continued: "It's the best candidate for habitability right now".¹

It has been argued that, if life is found outside our own blue jewel of a planet, then Christianity becomes irrelevant because it's only about how Jesus saves earthbound human beings. Wrong, actually!

Christianity is much more than that. Jesus Christ came and will come again to restore and reconcile all things—not just humanity—to God. Because of Jesus, the Bible says "All the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and a t o m s — get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant h a r m o - nies".² Even those dead

places where life is unlikely or where life might exist, but not quite as we know it.

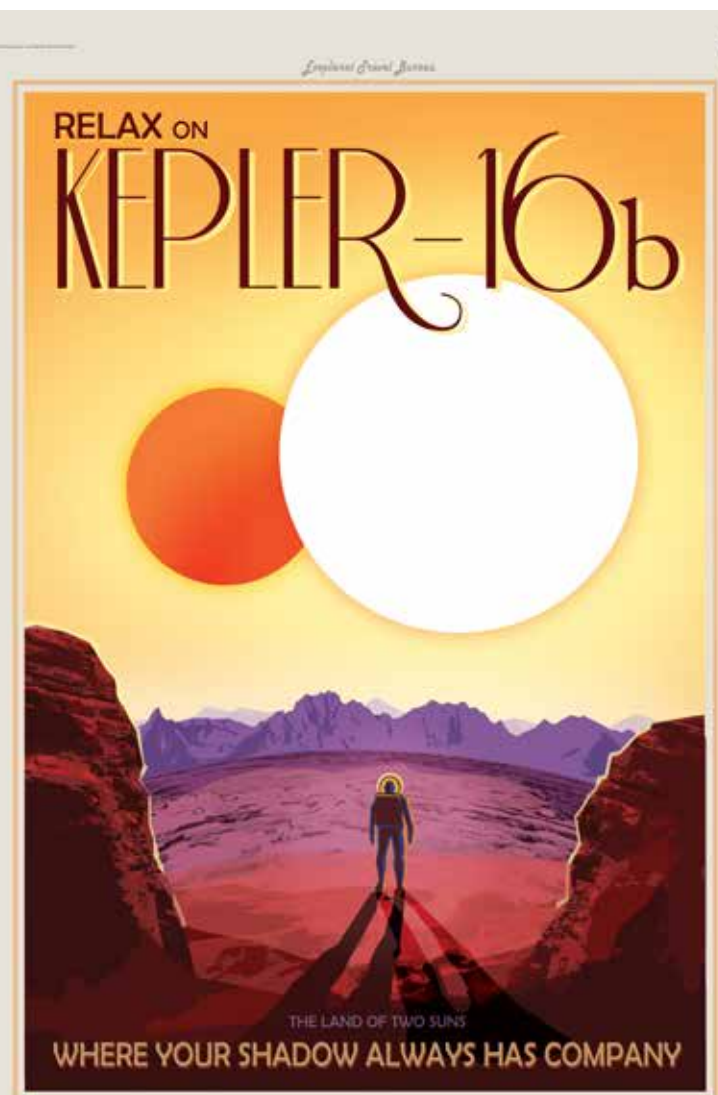
A renewed universe, wouldn't that be great? Then maybe we could get off this world and boldly go explore somewhere new and exciting.

Fancy a trip to K2-18b?

Notes

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2019/sep/11/rockysuper-earth-k2-18b-named-most-habitable-known-world-beyond-solar-system>

² Colossians 1:20, *The Message* version.



Like Luke Skywalker's planet "Tatooine" in Star Wars, Kepler-16b orbits a pair of stars. Depicted here as a terrestrial planet, Kepler-16b might also be a gas giant like Saturn. Prospects for life on this unusual world aren't good, as it has a temperature similar to that of dry ice. But the discovery inspires that the world's name should survive in anything but science fiction.

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Jesus Christ... Superstar or Superstition?



It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. The coloured lights are going up, carols have taken over the airwaves, Santa is visiting the mall, shoppers crowd in to buy gifts for friends and family, brightly decorated trees have pride of place—what an exciting time of year!

Billions of people around the world, Christians and non-Christians alike, look forward to and celebrate this immensely popular holiday.

But where did Christmas come from?

The word “Christmas” is a shortened form of “Christ’s mass”, referring to a church service to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, around 2000 years ago.

But did Jesus Christ in fact walk the earth? Was Jesus really an historical person, or is he just a legendary figure?

Millions worship him as their “Saviour”, claiming that he was resurrected from the dead. Others say he was no more than a wise and respected teacher. Dan Brown’s novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, posits that he was a mere mortal who married Mary Magdalene and fathered a child. And some hold that he never existed at all.

The 1970s rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* asked the question “Do you think you’re what they say you



There are some notable references to Jesus in some of the oldest literature we possess, including prophecies recorded in the book of Isaiah, preserved in the scrolls recovered from the caves of Qumran.

are?” Who was—or is—Jesus? Is he a Superstar, the Son of God and Saviour of mankind, or is this all just superstition?

What Does History Say?

Jesus’ life is recorded in some detail in the Bible, but that is no surprise, as the writers were his followers. If such a significant person existed, surely other writers would have referred to him?

Actually, he wasn’t all that important at the time. He was an itinerant preacher who enjoyed limited popularity for a very short

time within a small community in a remote province on the eastern edge of the vast Roman Empire. Very little literature of that time has survived to the modern day.

However, there are some notable references to Jesus in some of the oldest literature we possess.

Tacitus, a Roman historian writing around AD 115, reported on the Emperor Nero’s decision to blame the Christians for the fire that destroyed Rome in AD 64 in the following words: “Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted tortures on the

Christ the Redeemer?

The iconic Christ the Redeemer statue was created by French sculptor Paul Landowski, and built between 1922 and 1931 atop the Corcovado Mountain in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The statue weighs 700 tons and stands 38 metres tall. It was chosen as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World on 7 July 2007 in an online poll of 100 million voters.

The title “Christ the Redeemer” refers to the Christian belief that Jesus came to earth as the Redeemer of mankind, saving humanity from the penalty of its sin.

The statue is truly a magnificent monument. But is Jesus Christ really the Redeemer of mankind? The accompanying article explores the historicity of Jesus, and the validity of his claims.

Christians. Christus (the Latin spelling of Christ), from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus...

Suetonius, another Roman historian contemporary of Tacitus, tells us that in AD 49 "...since the Jews were constantly causing disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus (a common misspelling of the name of Christ), he (the Emperor Claudius) expelled them from Rome".

Another Roman writer, Pliny the Younger, who was governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, referred to the Christians in a letter to the Emperor Trajan in around AD 112. "They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath... never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery..."

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, writing around AD 93, referred a couple of times to Jesus in his work, *Antiquities of the Jews*. In one section he referred to James, "the brother of Jesus who was called Christ". Another passage states: "About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man...When Pilate condemned him to be crucified, those who had come to love him did not give up their affection for him...And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day".

There are also references to Jesus in the Talmud, a collection of Jewish rabbinical writings compiled from AD 200 to 500. Many of these references were derogatory, as the rabbis were antagonistic to his teachings, but they do help establish his historicity.

Lucian of Samosata, a second century Greek satirist, wrote: "The

Christians...worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account".

So there are indeed a number of historical evidences that Jesus actually did live, in addition to the many pages recorded in the New Testament gospels. These biblical references constitute valid evidence of Christ's historicity too. The New Testament has been shown to be a genuine, accurately transmitted historical record, with thousands of manuscripts extant today, dating as far back as AD 100.

Now, let's return to the question posed in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, "Do you think you're what they say

"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg—or he would be the devil of hell.

you are?"

What, or who, did Jesus say he was? A quick overview of the New Testament reveals that Jesus made some startling claims about himself.

Amazing Claims

What would you say if you heard someone on the street, or maybe one of our politicians in the Beehive, declare loudly: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to God but by me".

What an outrageous claim! You would probably have questions about the speaker's sanity.

But that was only one of the claims of Jesus. He also claimed to have shared the glory of God before the world began! He claimed to have been alive before Abraham,

who lived around 2,000 years earlier. He claimed to be a heavenly king. He claimed that he was going to die and come back to life. And after that, he was going to return to earth again to judge the world. He claimed to be able to forgive sins, something that only God can do. He even claimed that he could give people everlasting life.

The list of staggering claims goes on and on!

He claimed that he was "the Christ, the son of God". He claimed to be one with God. And he even claimed he was worthy of worship.

A line from *Jesus Christ Superstar* says: "He's a man, he's just a man".

If Jesus was just a man, all of the claims listed above are lies, because clearly he represented himself as more than just a man, he made himself out to be God.

Many people feel that Jesus was a good man, a wise and peace-loving teacher who taught helpful moral principles. But if

he claimed to be God when he was only a man, he was telling a blatant lie, deceiving his followers, and therefore could not be an honest and good man.

Noted author C.S. Lewis brought out this point tellingly in his book *Mere Christianity*.

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg—or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.

True or false?

Let's consider the possibilities logically. When Jesus said: "I and the Father are one", he was claiming to be God. This statement can only be either true or false.

If it is true, then he is the Lord. If it is false, either he knew it was false, in which case he was a liar, or he didn't know, in which case he was a lunatic. There isn't any alternative.

So we are left with three possibilities. Because of what he said, Jesus was either the Lord, a liar, or a lunatic.

Let's look at the options. Firstly, was Jesus a liar?

If he was, then he was a particularly evil and villainous liar, deliberately misleading millions of people to trust their lives to him, and even to die for him. And of course he died for his teachings himself, an incongruous thing to do if he was a liar, because he could have easily changed his story and lived. There was no motive for him to lie—his claims brought him hatred, rejection, misunderstanding, persecution, torture and death.

Few people claim Jesus was a liar. Even sceptics agree that he had a pure and noble character. He taught high principles of honesty, love, and virtue, and by all accounts lived a morally faultless life. It doesn't make sense that such heartless hypocrisy and deceitfulness would come from someone who was as unselfish, loving, caring, compassionate and careful about the truth as Jesus was. It just doesn't fit his psychological profile.

Was Jesus a lunatic? Once again, his character demonstrated the opposite. He was a man of wisdom, logic, mental health and creativity. How could a madman possibly have come up with the consistently pure and noble teachings of Jesus? Those teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mount, are still

The God Delusion?

Oxford University Professor, David Dawkins, published a bestseller entitled *The God Delusion* in 2006. The book contends that belief in a supernatural creator is a delusion.

To Dawkins, Jesus Christ is a superstition rather than a superstar. He says: "Faith is the great copout, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence".

Christians hotly debate Dawkins' stance, and rather than evading evidence, they claim to provide abundant evidence for their beliefs. The accompanying article considers some of the evidence for Christian belief in the historicity of Jesus.

today regarded as a paragon of moral principles.

Jesus was continually challenged by the highly educated scholars and lawyers of his day, but he always responded with quick and intelligent answers that amazed and outwitted them. In the face of tremendous pressure he remained calm and composed. He didn't display any of the characteristics of imbalance or abnormality that point to insanity.

There isn't even a shred of evidence that Jesus was either a liar or a lunatic. This leaves just one alternative, that he is who he said he is, the Lord.

But let's examine this a little further. Is there any other evidence to demonstrate Jesus was more than just a normal human being? Yes, there are at least a couple of things that indicate he is divine. Firstly, he fulfilled hundreds of prophecies written about him prior to his birth. Secondly, after he died he came to life again.

Predicted centuries in advance

Books proved to have been written hundreds of years before Christ's birth state that a Messiah was to come who would be a Jew, a descendant of King David, and would be born, to a virgin, in Bethlehem. Other predictions stated he would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey,

would speak in parables, and would be betrayed by a friend, for 30 pieces of silver. Yet other prophecies recorded that he would die with criminals, pierced in the hands and feet, with his executioners gambling for his clothing, that none of his bones would be broken, and that he would be buried in a rich man's tomb.

There are literally hundreds of such predictions in the Old Testament, and Jesus fulfilled every one of them. Professor Emeritus of Science at Westmont College, Peter Stoner, used the aid of 600 students to carefully calculate the probability of anyone conspiring to fulfil these prophecies. He conservatively estimated that the chance of one man fulfilling just 48 of the recorded predictions was one in 10 to the power of 157, an almost inconceivably large number.

One of the prophecies written by King David about 1000 years before Jesus was born stated that he would be resurrected from the dead. This is probably the most difficult prophecy for someone to engineer of his own accord. If it is true, it is really worth sitting up and taking notice of. Think of it—do you know anyone who has come back to life after being dead several days? It is a stupendous proof that there is something very special about this man, that he is a superstar rather than a superstition—if it is true.



If Jesus' disciples had invented the story of his resurrection, they certainly they wouldn't have made women the first witnesses of the empty tomb and the risen Christ, as women's testimony wasn't accepted in that culture.

So is there any evidence for this astonishing claim that Jesus was resurrected?

The Tomb Was Empty

Jesus himself predicted his resurrection so clearly that the Romans made sure they carefully guarded the tomb in order to prevent the disciples stealing the body or claiming he had risen. When the disciples did start proclaiming that the tomb was empty, all the Romans needed to do was to reveal the body and the Christians would have been silenced. But realising the body was gone, the authorities tried to explain it away by concocting a lie that the disciples had stolen it.

The argument that the disciples made up the resurrection story doesn't add up because they themselves didn't believe it, until Jesus himself convinced them it had happened. If they had invented the story, certainly they wouldn't have made women the first witnesses of the empty tomb and the risen Christ, as women's testimony wasn't accepted in that culture. And if they had made it up, would they really have died for such a lie? Each of the disciples was viciously persecuted and most were brutally murdered for their belief in Jesus.

know him. Amazingly, all of them were suddenly transformed after the death of Jesus, from men who were terrified and desperately discouraged into men who confidently and boldly stood up, defying prison and death, for their master. How can that transformation be explained? The only way that makes sense is that they had seen that Jesus was indeed resurrected.

In a letter written to one of the churches in Greece soon after the resurrection, Paul claimed that 500 people had seen the risen Christ. Many of those witnesses were still alive when Paul made this claim. If it was untrue, the sceptical Greeks could have easily disproved it.

Paul himself was a violent opponent of the Christians, vehemently terrorising and killing them. But overnight he suddenly changed and began risking his life for the message he had hated so much. The reason he gave for this was that he had seen the risen Christ, and indeed there is no other way to make sense of it.

Interestingly, millions of other people since that time have claimed they also have a relationship with Jesus and he has transformed their lives.

Prior to Jesus' death, they had all deserted him in fear of their lives, with Peter even swearing in cowardly fashion that he didn't

It still happens regularly today. Former criminals, gangsters, liars, and thieves have suddenly changed their lifestyles and started trying to be kind-hearted, generous, and loving. This is only possible on such a wide scale because Jesus was resurrected, and is still alive today, and in a position where he can influence people's lives. If you'd like more information on how Jesus works today, why not visit your local church this weekend? Or if you prefer, feel free to write to "Inside Life", P.O. Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland 0750, for more information.

Jesus Christ is not a superstition. There is ample proof that he lived, died and was resurrected. He is indeed the Son of God, a Superstar, and the Saviour of mankind.

Notes

- ¹ Cornelius Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, 15.44.
- ² Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, Book 5.25.
- ³ Pliny, *Letters*, 10.96.
- ⁴ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.9.1.
- ⁵ Flavius Josephus, *op.cit.*, 18.3.3.
- ⁶ Lucian, *The Death of Peregrine*, 11.13.
- ⁷ John 14:6.
- ⁸ John 17:5.
- ⁹ John 8:58.
- ¹⁰ John 18:36–37.
- ¹¹ John 12:32–33.
- ¹² Mark 14:61–62.
- ¹³ Luke 5:20–21.
- ¹⁴ John 11:25.
- ¹⁵ Matthew 16:16–17.
- ¹⁶ John 10:30.
- ¹⁷ John 20:28–29.
- ¹⁸ Genesis 49:10.
- ¹⁹ 2 Samuel 7:12.
- ²⁰ Isaiah 7:14.
- ²¹ Micah 5:2.
- ²² Isaiah 62:11.
- ²³ Psalm 78:2.
- ²⁴ Psalm 41:9.
- ²⁵ Zechariah 11:12–13.
- ²⁶ Psalm 22:16–18.
- ²⁷ Psalm 34:20.
- ²⁸ Isaiah 53:9.
- ²⁹ Psalm 16:10.
- ³⁰ Matthew 28:13.
- ³¹ John 20:19.
- ³² 1 Corinthians 15:6.



Author unknown

A professor was speaking to a group of business students and, to drive home a point, used an illustration those students will never forget.

As he stood in front of the group of high-powered overachievers he said: "Okay, time for a quiz". He pulled out a very large jam jar and put it on the table in front of him. He also produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar.

The Jam Jar

When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked: "Is this jar full?"

Everyone in the class yelled: "Yes!" The professor replied: "Really?"

He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. He dumped some gravel in and shook the jar, causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. He then asked the group once more: "Is the jar full?"

By this time the class was on to him. "Probably not", one of them answered.

"Good!" he replied, reaching under the table and bringing out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in the jar and it went into all of the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question: "Is this jar full?"

This time the students replied with a unanimous "Yes!"

The professor then produced two cups of coffee from under the table, and poured the entire contents into the jar, effectively filling the empty space amongst the sand. The students laughed.

"Now", said the professor as the laughter subsided, "I want you to recognise that this jar represents your life. The rocks are the important things—your family, your children, your health, your friends, your education, your dreams. If everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full.

"The gravel is the other things that matter, like your job, your house and your car. The sand is everything else—the small stuff. "If you put the sand into the jar first", he continued, "there is no room for the gravel or the rocks. The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff you will never have room for the things that are important to you.

"Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take time to get medical checkups. Take your spouse out to dinner. Visit a friend in hospital. There will always be time to vacuum the floor and watch the TV soaps. Take care of the rocks first—the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand".

One of the students raised her hand and inquired: "What about the coffee?" The professor smiled. "I'm glad you asked. It just goes to show that no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a cup of coffee with a friend".

and the Coffee Cups



Coping with Loneliness at Christmas

by Rusty Wright

Tis the season to be... gloomy? Feeling low this Christmas season? You're not alone.

Amid cheery songs, festive parties, gifts, and good wishes, many lonely people are crying or dying on the inside. Maybe you're one of them. I was.

During a horrible year, my wife of 20 years divorced me, my employer of 25 years fired me, and I had a cancer scare. As I drove home one night,

lovely Christmas music came on the radio. Melancholy aching hit me. I was still processing the deep pain of abandonment and loss.

No fun.

Blue Christmas

Romantic estrangement, family

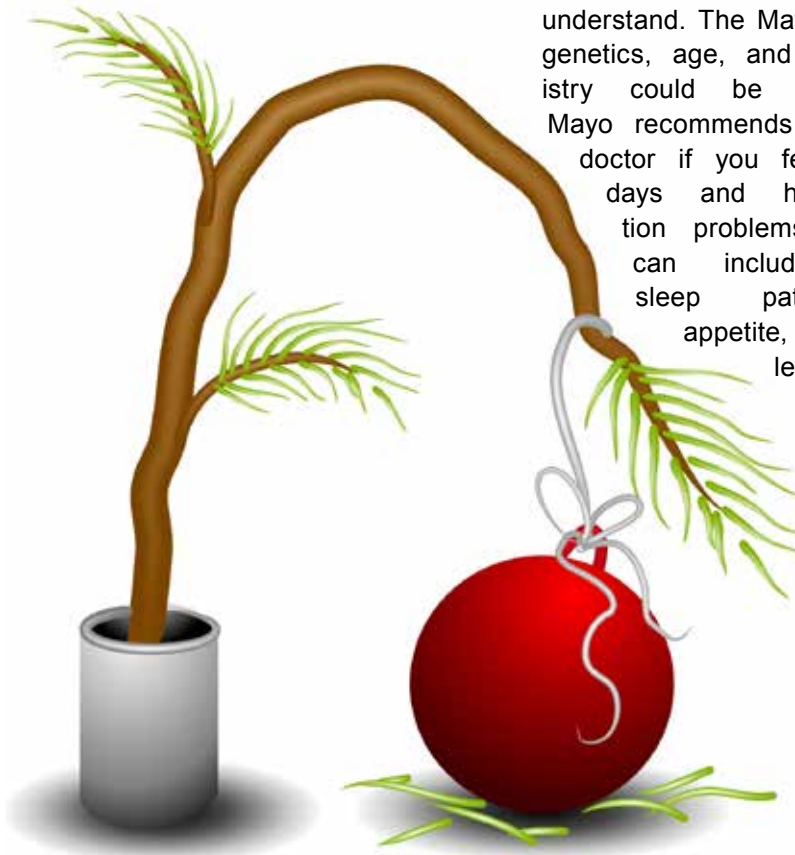
strife, and bereavement can make your holidays dismal. One of Elvis Presley's most popular songs was "Blue Christmas". A lonely crooner mourns heart-breaking lost love. Performers from The Beach Boys to Celine Dion, Loretta Lynn, and Jon Bon Jovi have recorded it.

Does even thinking about that song make you depressed? The spoofed "Porky Pig" version could get you laughing. Google will take you there. But please, wait until finishing this short article to search, OK?

Several factors can produce Christmas blues.¹ Hectic activity can bring physical and emotional stress. Overspending can produce financial pressure. Year-end reflection and focus on loss can magnify sorrow.

McGill University psychologist Dr. Michael Spevack notes: "Over-eating and over-





understand. The Mayo Clinic says genetics, age, and body chemistry could be the culprits. Mayo recommends seeing your doctor if you feel down for days and have motivation problems. Symptoms can include changing sleep patterns and appetite, feeling hopeless, contemplating suicide, or seeking comfort in alcohol.⁴

Coping

How can you cope with Christmas loneliness?

optimum physical and mental health in our fragmented society. He says some California physicians give volunteerism “prescriptions” to their Medicare patients.⁵

Seek counsel. I used to be embarrassed to obtain professional counsel. Now I recommend it. We all can use good advice navigating life’s storms.

Develop spiritual roots. I’m glad that before my dark days began, I had a friendship with God.

Tired of friends who betray, manipulate, disrespect, or desert you? God won’t. He cares for you, values you, will listen to you, and comfort you. You can trust Him. He always wants your best.

One early believer put it this way: “Since God did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won’t God, who gave us Christ, also give us everything else?”⁶ His point: God loved us enough to send Jesus, his only Son, to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our wrong, our sins. What a demonstration of love! I can trust a God like that. Then Jesus rose from the dead so He could live inside us and become our friend.

Notes

- ¹ “Christmas Holiday Depression”, 18 December 2005, www.medicalnewstoday.com.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Mary Cartledgehayes, “Blue Christmas—Grieving through The Holidays”, *Christian Century*, December 27, 2003, www.findarticles.com.
- ⁴ “Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)”, *Mayo Clinic Staff*, September 24, 2007, www.mayoclinic.com.
- ⁵ Stephen Post and Jill Neimark, *Why Good Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007).
- ⁶ Romans 8:32.

Rusty Wright is an author and lecturer who has spoken on six continents. He holds Bachelor of Science (Psychology) and Master of Theology degrees from Duke and Oxford Universities, respectively. www.RustyWright.com

drinking combined with a decreased amount of sleep is also a formula for extreme emotional swings”. Depression can lead to thoughts of suicide, especially among the socially isolated, he says.²

The “Empty Chair”

Is your family apart this season by necessity or choice? Maybe an “empty chair” reminds you of your pain. Does Christmas “Ho, ho, ho” contrast with your deep anguish?

One widow recalled how she felt during the Christmas after her husband’s death:

Little mattered to me. I didn’t want to hear carols. I didn’t want to be cheered up. I didn’t want to look at perky Christmas cards. I wanted the same thing I’d wanted every day for eight months: the strength to force myself out of bed in the morning, to brush my teeth, and to eat.³

One possible influence, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), is a form of depression the medical community doesn’t completely

Some suggestions:

Spend time with people, especially positive ones who lift your spirits. Perhaps you’ll be grateful for their cheer.

Exercise regularly. Blood pumping can help clear your mind.

Eat right. Chocaholics beware. Overindulgence can mean temporary highs followed by disappointing flab.

Lights on! Enjoy sunlight, outdoors if possible. Brighten up your home and workplace. Light therapy sometimes helps SAD.

Budget your gift spending and stick with your budget. Prevent January bill shock.

Talk about your feelings. Keeping them bottled up can mean anxiety, ulcers, sour disposition, and/or explosion. Need a trusted, listening friend? Try a local church.

Give to others. Volunteer. Medical professor Stephen Post is convinced that giving is essential for

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