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Looking Forward to Christmas

1 Peter 1: 10-12

Introduction

Are you looking forward to Christmas? Some of us are.

Maybe you're thinking about the presents you're hoping to get. Something fun to play with; something nice to wear; something tasty to eat. Maybe you're thinking about Christmas dinner. All that food, pulling crackers, telling jokes. Or perhaps you're thinking about visiting family. Seeing people you haven't seen for ages. It's good to have something to look forward to like that.

The Bible is full of people looking forward to Christmas. Do you know the difference though? They didn't know when it was going to happen. It's easy for us: when is Christmas? 25th December! But in our reading, Peter tells us the prophets searched and inquired carefully. They knew that Christmas was coming. God had promised that he was going to send someone, a chosen one, who would bring salvation. They wanted to know who it would be, and when it would happen. But God only showed them a little bit.

Isaiah

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
[Isaiah 9 v 6]*

He showed a bit to Isaiah. Imagine Isaiah writing this down as God revealed it to him: "*a son is born*" - ok, fair enough, that's quite a common thing; "*the government shall be upon his shoulder*" - so he's a ruler, good - one of our own people will appear and he will be a great leader; "*wonderful counsellor*" - so he'll be wise, that's good too - a great ruler who will rule with justice and wisdom; "*Mighty God*"! Wait a minute! You can't just call anyone mighty god. What's happening here is that God isn't just going to send a prophet, he's going to send his son. "*Prince of peace*"! And this is why. He's going to bring peace between man and God. That means he will need to deal with sin.

This was so exciting. Isaiah wanted to know more about this great messiah. If he searched the scriptures he would have found clues all over the place.

Micah

*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days.*

[Micah 5 v 2]

When god spoke to Micah, he showed them where it was going to happen. Bethlehem was going to be where he was born. Not Jerusalem, where the temple and palace were, but in this small, unimportant town. Micah knew this was the town King David came from. He lived there when he was a shepherd boy and he grew up to be a soldier and a king. Probably the greatest king that Israel had.

And again we find out that this promised one is going to be a king, a ruler. But not just a normal king. This is a king “*whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*”. This is talking about God becoming flesh. God becoming human and living among his people. This is amazing news!

Zechariah

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

[Zechariah 9 v 9]

When god gave his word to Zechariah, he told him the purpose for sending his son, and the manner he would be announced. He would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, as a very humble man. And of course we know that when Jesus was getting near the time for the cross he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. All the people knew what that meant because they knew their Bibles. They had read Zechariah and knew how the king would come.

But look at why he was to come. He was going to bring salvation. The people needed that. Their relationship with god had been damaged because of their sin, and they needed someone to deal with that sin. Here was God sending his son to make a way of salvation, for people to be born again and adopted into the family of God. This was fantastic!

Fulfilment

All through the Old Testament people are looking forward to Jesus coming. Just like Peter said. In fact he said even the angels are excited. They long to look into the mysteries of Jesus.

But many people didn't really read the scriptures properly. They took the ordinary bits and looked forward to those things, but threw away all the amazing, supernatural promises.

They looked for a king, a wise ruler, born in Bethlehem, who would come into Jerusalem riding a donkey. Jesus was all these things, but he was so much more as well. He was the Son of God. He was from the very beginning, and when he came into this world it was God becoming flesh. He was righteous, perfect, sinless, and came to bring salvation to all those who believed on him, so that they could have peace with God. Wasn't that so much more than a man on a donkey wearing a crown?

The children showed us some letters at the beginning. They spelled out Christmas and told us what each letter could mean. They could have been different. After all, what does Christmas mean to most people these days?

C - Cards - nice to receive from friends and family

H - Holly - it's nice and green in the Winter and looks good in a wreath

R - Reindeer - of course we might think of Rudolph and friends

I - Icicles - Christmas is at a cold time for us

S - Sleigh - full of presents for us to play with

T - Tree - it's lovely to have a Christmas tree in the house, with tinsel, lights and baubles

M - Mistletoe - maybe if you hang it over the door you might get a kiss

A - Angel - the sort that looks pretty and sits on top of the tree

S - Sprouts - well, somebody must like eating them with their Christmas dinner

These are all nice things. They're good to look forward to at this time of year. But if that's all we're thinking about we're missing out the best part, just like those Jews who saw Jesus and thought he could be king and fight the Romans. Like the children told us, Christmas is about the chosen one, the son of God, come down to earth to live a sinless life and die on the cross for our sins.

But what about the presents? Surely that's the best bit of Christmas Day, when you wake up and creep downstairs and open your presents.

Did Jesus bring any presents? He certainly did. He grew up and became a man, he taught, healed and fed, and then he gave himself. He went to the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. An offering to take away the wrath of god. A gift - what does it mean to those who accept him?

. A new life

. Adoption into the family of god

. A clean heart

. A promise of heaven

Aren't these great presents? They are ours if we accept that we are sinners, that Jesus paid the price for our sin, and that we want him to be king in our lives.

I hope you have a happy Christmas, and I hope Jesus is the centre of it.