

The Christmas Story

The creation of human imagination or God's perfect provision?

John 3: 16 - 18

One of the activities that I used to enjoy doing almost on a daily basis was reading the newspaper. There's something about holding and unfolding a fresh, unused newspaper that my smartphone will never be able to duplicate.

But here's the thing: for all the anticipation I feel when I first open the paper, it quickly fades to sadness as I begin to realize that for the most part it's been a bearer of bad news rather than good. I read headlines about ...

political conflict,

lawsuits,

shootings,

robberies,

and natural disasters.

I get especially concerned about the people who have experienced tragedies right here in our local community and often find myself asking the question: Do they have hope?

If I know they do, that at least brings some sort of comfort to my anxious thoughts. But if I'm unsure, I find myself asking ...

"How do people bear life's tragedies if they have no hope?"

In the midst of tragedies, both the hopeful and the hopeless mourn, grieve, and sob. The difference is mainly on the inside, and how we try to go on with our lives after our consolers have gone home and we're faced with our own thoughts all alone.

In today's society there have been continued attempts to explain away the reality of God.

One of those ways is to say that humans simply need a god to help us deal with the tragedies of life. Atheists and those skeptical of God's existence often say that belief in a kind and benevolent god will at least give us a sense of hope that we would not otherwise have if there was no god.

In other words, people like the German philosopher Ludwig Feurbach who said in 1841 that God is not a reality outside of us that we can trust and obey; instead, he is a projection of our own needs onto reality.

God does not create us, we create God, says Feurbach.

It's precisely because we experience pain and suffering that people are forced to create a God to believe in.

I'll give you an example of this:

After Thanksgiving dinner, my family sat down to watch the Christmas movie Prancer, which by the way was filmed in Michigan. Anyway, in one scene, two girls about nine years were discussing whether or not Santa was real. Then the conversation abruptly turned to the topic of heaven and whether or not they thought heaven was real. The first girl said she wasn't sure which caused the other one to jump out of her seat and exclaim ... You're not my friend anymore! When asked why, she said ... If there's no heaven, then what about my mom? To this little girl, the loss of her mom would have been unbearable without hope in an afterlife.

And so over time, God is created to sustain that hope. He has no other reality than what we create for him.

So, this is the question every one of us must face, especially during the Christmas season:

Is this story of the Son of God coming as a human,

born of a virgin,

living a life of sinless love,

and dying for sinners that all who believe might have eternal life

— is this story a creation of human imagination because we need it to be true?

— Or is it true, and therefore we need to believe it?

Is the viewpoint— death is bearable because there is hope— is this the motivation for creating an imaginary Christmas story?

Or does this viewpoint find its source in the reality of the Christmas story?

The answer to this question is more important than anything you will think about this Christmas season—or for that matter, all the rest of your life.

Does our sense of need—for God and forgiveness and help and hope—cause us to create God?

Or do we have all those needs because we were in fact created by God and have rebelled against him?

One of the ways to go about answering this question - “Did we create God out of our sense of neediness or did God create us and then help us with our needs?” - is to listen to the different

testimonies from the Bible about why the Son of God came into the world.

You see, I believe this book is inspired by God and is therefore very powerful to vindicate its own truthfulness. It is like a two-edged sword that penetrates to the division of bone and marrow. And when people give it a chance, the result is often that **not believing** what it says becomes a moral impossibility.

Its testimonies are too penetrating,

its witnesses too diverse,

its insights too high,

its vision of divine things too wonderful,

its authority too compelling,

its love too rare,

its Savior too radical that it should be the mere creation of sinful men.

So, I want to let six of the witnesses speak and testify to why the Son of God came into the world.

The witnesses are Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, and the writer to the Hebrews.

The answers they give are six reasons for Jesus' coming:

1. to ransom many,
2. to call sinners,
3. to give sight to the morally blind,
4. to divide households,
5. to save from divine condemnation, and
6. to give eternal life.

Are these imaginary acts dreamed up because of our need? Or do they meet our needs because they are true?

You must decide.

Let's take these reasons for Christ's coming one at a time and just let the Bible witness to each one in its own words.

1. He came as a ransom for many.

[Mark 10:45](#)—*"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

The reason we need a ransom to be paid for us is that we have sold ourselves into sin and have been alienated from a holy God.

When Jesus gave his life as a ransom, our slave-masters - sin and death and the devil - had to give up their claim on us. And the result was that we could now be adopted into the family of God.

Paul put it like this in [Galatians 4:4–5](#), *"When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons."*

In other words, the redemption or the ransom God secured for us frees us to be a part of God's family!

We had run away and sold ourselves into slavery. But God pays a ransom and redeems us out of slavery so that we can return to the Father's house.

To do this, God's Son had to become a human being so that he could suffer and die in our place and therefore pay the ransom.

This is the fundamental meaning of Christmas.

[Hebrews 2:14](#) puts it like this, *"Since the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death."*

In other words, the reason Christ took on human flesh was so that he could die and in dying pay a ransom and free us from the power of death.

Is this an elaborate creation of desperate human imagination, or is it God's exact provision for our need?

2. He came to call sinners to repentance.

[Luke 5:31–32](#), *"Jesus said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'"*

Jesus came to call sinners to repentance. First, there needed to be a ransom to be paid for sinners. Then, there could be a successful call to sinners. The call is based on the ransom. And Jesus says he came for both of these things.

He does not leave the ransoming or the calling to others. He ransoms and He calls.

Even today he is calling us through the Bible and through the preaching of the Bible. He is calling us this morning.

This is the meaning of Christmas. He came to call sinners.

3. He came to give sight to the morally blind.

[John 9:39](#), *"Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see.'"*

And [John 12:46](#), *"I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me might not remain in darkness."*

Jesus did not merely come to ransom and to call, he also came to open people's eyes so that they can see the light and walk in it.

Our problem is not just slavery needing a ransom, and lostness needing a call, our problem is also moral blindness, needing the gift of sight.

We are simply blind to some spiritual realities that are utterly crucial to see and embrace. This is why Christ came: that those who do not see may see.

Isaiah the prophet writes this about the coming Messiah: *"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."*

This too, is the meaning of Christmas.

4. Christ came to divide households.

[Matthew 10:34](#), *"Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household."*

These words seem quite ominous, but Jesus' point is not that God loves division and strife. The point is that strife and division caused by true allegiance to Jesus are better than no strife and division with no allegiance to Jesus.

The point is that when a person is ransomed and called and given sight, something really radical happens to them!

They see everything differently with new sight,

and they have a new master because of the Savior's call,

and they are wonderfully free from fear and guilt because of that sufficient ransom. And so, they think differently and feel things differently and act differently.

And for some in the family, that can be very threatening, and so tension develops.

For this Jesus came into the world.

This too is the meaning of Christmas.

5. He came to save us from divine condemnation.

[John 3:17–18](#), *"For God sent not the 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."*

God sent his Son to save us from his own just condemnation and wrath. The need for salvation implies that there is a danger we need to be saved from. This danger is sin and death and the devil.

But the most serious danger of all is the danger of the condemnation of God.

If God is for us, then sin and death and the devil will fail in his attempt to destroy us.

But if God is against us, then nothing can save us.

Christmas, the coming of Jesus, is God's way of being for us - if we will believe. *"He who believes is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already."*

6. He came to give us eternal life.

[John 3:16](#), *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes on him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

Christmas means that God sent his Son so that we could believe and have eternal life.

This is what I'm talking about when I pick up the paper and read another story about a tragedy that has happened in our midst.
"How do people bear it who have no hope?"

Our hope is eternal life. And that life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ His Son.

I conclude my message of hope on this first Sunday of Advent with Apostle Paul's benediction and prayer found in Romans 15:13:

*"May the **God of hope** fill you with all joy and peace **as you trust in him**, so that you may **overflow with hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen.*