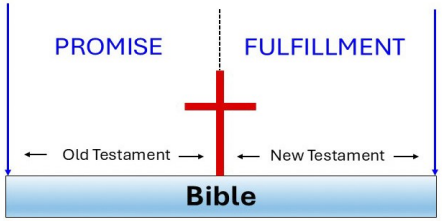
… an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Mat 1:20-21 NLT).

dominates their lives, that they don't see themselves as the hard-hearted, proud rebels that God sees!

Christmas is Good News

2000 years ago, God kept His promise to the first Adam, that He would send a Saviour to rescue His people from the vice-like grip of sin and Satan, enabling them to get right with God, be forgiven of their sin and guilt, and live in a restored close relationship, firstly with Almighty God, and with His people. Across OT redemptive history, God progressively revealed more and more information about this deliverer whom He would send that some of lost mankind could again experience the life God had designed them for, but which was lost because of sin. For thousands of years all who "*called on the name of the Lord*" (Genesis 4:24) looked forward eagerly to the fulfillment of God's great redemptive promise of restoration. Luke begins his work by reminding his readers that it is "*an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us*" (Luke 1:1). The angel Gabriel appeared to a priest and his barren wife to announce they would have a son who would herald and "*make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Lk 1:17),* reminding God's people of past occasions when God had miraculously intervened to open closed wombs. God was on the move again. Six months later Gabriel brought another message from God to a young unmarried, poor, betrothed couple announcing that Mary would conceive by the Holy Spirit and give birth to a son whom they would call Jesus, who would be great, and the Son of the Most High God: the long awaited son of King David, whose kingdom would never end. And so,



Jesus, the Christ, God's redeemer, prophet, priest and king was born in a humble setting near Bethlehem, exactly fulfilling the prophetic prediction of the prophet Micah eight centuries earlier:

"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past" (Micah 5:2 NLT).

God's promised Son and redeemer was born far from the capital of the major world empire, Rome; far from the city lights of Jerusalem, in a stable among the animals adjacent to a guest house. Few knew; few cared: the important people of the world went about their important business, while God announced what was the most momentous event in world history with a spectacular sound and light show:

"She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. [8] That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. [9] Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, [10] but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. [11] The Savior – yes, the Messiah, the Lord – has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! [12] And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." [13] Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others – the armies of heaven – praising God and saying, [14] "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased" (Lk 2:7-14 NLT).

Matthew records that "wise men" came looking for Jesus (Mtt 2:1f). Wise people still do. God's King and Messiah has come, to deliver His people from sin and Satan and, as the 2nd Adam, earned eternal life for them, doing what Adam failed to do. Christmas has changed this world forever. Has it changed you?

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Why The World Needs



Christmas

What is Christmas?



Modern NZ is dominantly a secular country, where "Christmas" means different things to different people e.g. a time to: buy gifts; get hecticly busy; celebrate the end of another year; have a holiday break etc., or all of the above and more.

This is all very different than the first Christmas, recorded for posterity in the world's best selling book, the Bible, God's written word of truth to mankind. At the beginning of the New Testament, in the gospel accounts of Matthew (1:18f) and Luke (1:26f), the Bible reveals that Christmas is primarily about the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, in fulfillment of God's redemptive plan! Jesus came to deliver His people from bondage: firstly, to sin (a terminal spiritual condition) and secondly, to the evil spiritual powers that now dominate humanity. Jesus is God in human flesh, the long promised Messiah, or Christ, or deliverer, whom Scripture states came from heaven to earth on a rescue mission: to save/restore those who acknowledge that He is God's solution to the problem of human sin.



What's the Problem?

The Bible records that when God created the universe, He made human beings as the apex of all His created works - moral creatures who know what is right and wrong. God is absolutely good, perfectly holy and morally pure, righteous and excellent. He always thinks, speaks and acts in good and right ways. God made people in His likeness to enjoy a harmonious and fulfilling personal and morally based relatioship with God. Things began well, but by the third chapter of the Bible, Genesis 3, this all "turned to custard," when Adam and Eve, the original human couple, succumbed to the subtle deception of God's command. Adam was God's appointed representative of humanity - our federal head, meaning he acted on our behalf. Despite living in a paradise setting, gifted to them by their Creator, the first humans disobeyed God as they sought to live autonomous and independent lives. In God's eyes their disobedience was an act of cosmic treason. The consequences of this action were also cosmic: the human consitution was instantly changed. Mankind was plunged into a state the Bible labels as "sin" and God imposed the threatened penalty of death on His now sin controlled human creatures.

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard (Rom. 3:23 NLT).

We regard death as the natural endpoint of physical life, but it is unnatural - it is God's judgment on mankind: a just consequence of our federal representatives act of insurrection. God also applied other penal sanctions: a curse upon both human beings and on Satan who, as a result of sin, became mankind's de facto invisible spiritual master. Sinful humans could no longer associate with a morally holy God, so God drove them into the wilderness beyond their garden sanctuary (Eden) where - figuratively speaking - we all now begin life, separated and estranged from God, no longer able to enjoy the abundant and satisfying life for which God made us because of sin.



Why Does this Matter?

Sin is not just external wrong moral thoughts, words, or actions: it is an internal, dominating spiritual condition of rebellion against God. Every person now starts life physically alive but spiritually dead. If we end our days in this state, God warns us that He will cast us into the place of torment that He has reserved for sinners - hell. Sin causes everyone to be rebellious i.e. to reject God and spurn His sovereign right to rule over His creation, including we humans. In our pride, we delude ourselves, thinking - though we are finite creatures - that we know better than the infinite Creator God, who designed and made us, how to run our lives! As a result, we now live under God's just wrath and condemnation, facing the certainty of His righteous judgment, fully aware that we will have to stand before God, the righteous judge of all mankind, to give an account for our rebellion. But even though we know these truths, the Bible reveals that we deny and suppress them, constantly trying to create a different reality for ourselves, all despite the fact that deep down in our hearts, we know that we are only deceiving ourselves! How foolish we are. God says we are broken, living in bondage to sin and Satan, in a broken world. And with each passing day, we further violate God's righteous moral law (which He gave to us for our good, that we might experience the very best life possible) so that our sin debt and guilt before God just keeps growing.

And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment (Heb. 9:27 NLT).



Bad News is Necessary!

Without an appreciation of the bad news, no one would seek to get right with God or to discover the good news that God has provided in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Most often, most of the time, most people simply ignore what God says, prefering to believe - like our first parents - that we are automous individuals, who really are masters of our own destiiny. Sin causes us to be think irrationally i.e. we each have our own belief system (world view) and we are convinced that we are right, despite the reality that our world view is often inconsistent, or at odds with the truth that God has revealed! And so thousands die each year estranged from God, unconcerned that they face the prospect of a terrible future after death finally ends their earthly journey. Why don't they seek the truth? Because sin is so pervasive, and so completely

