

John 1:1-5, 10-14

Dec. 11, 2022

Galatians 4:4

What Jesus Brings: A Whole New View

Last Sunday night, after the refreshing showers that dampened the day, I went out in the backyard and looked up. The clouds were few and breaking up, so that, the few stars visible in the company of city lights caught my attention. Have you ever been in a place without the distraction of man-made lights, and looked up to see a heavenly panorama? Does it ever cause you to wonder, to stand in awe of the vast beauty and mystery, in which we abide?

I'm reminded of how God spoke to Abram – who became Abraham: *He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."* Genesis 15:5. I'm thinking that Abraham looked at a night sky that few of us regularly lay eyes on. Without the illumination of many electrical devices, the great canopy of millions of pin-pricks of radiance become visible.

Three years ago, when we were at my wife's island home in the South Pacific, I took several of her nieces and nephews out to the backyard one night and asked them to look up at the sky. They, teenagers and young adults, had grown up in New Zealand, in the city. They may have been to the tiny island home of their parents, but had never really noticed what was revealed overhead. On that small plot of earth thrusting up from the endless, surrounding waters, we viewed the heavens so clearly unrolled above. The stars so brilliant as though they had the power to pull your head upward. The Milky Way, like a long, sparkling cloud mistily streamed across the sky, in all its wonderment and hint of something, Someone really, beyond our comprehension. *When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?* says Psalm 8:3-4. How could anyone not wonder and stand in awe at such a splendid and glorious sight? A few moments in such a wondrous presence gives one a whole new view of life and our world.

Consider this: If the Milky Way galaxy were the size of the entire continent of North America, our solar system would fit in a coffee cup. 1977 NASA launched the Voyagers 1 & 2 spacecraft to study our solar system. Since that time, they have been speeding away from the earth at over 30,000 mph. They have departed our solar system, and are now in deep space, and sending information to scientists at JPL Pasadena, CA. When engineers beam commands to the spacecraft at the speed of light, it takes over 18 and 22 hours to reach them. Our solar system with our sun and planets, is but one of several hundred billion other stars and systems in the Milky Way. And the Milky Way is one of perhaps

100 billion such galaxies in the universe. To send a light speed message to the edge of the universe would take 15 billion years... beyond comprehension!

The One who has created the universe, and brought forth life on this small planet, the One who is big enough to speak all of it into existence and hold it in the palm of his hand ... this One must be absolutely, incredibly, awesome. I have a sense that to not be in touch with something that bears the quality of His divine touch, is to know the world only in feeble fragments.

And the most incredible thing of all – as the Psalmist spoke – this God cares about you and me. So much so, that He has personally visited this earth. A stellar anomaly, a brilliant and hitherto unknown star appeared ... the heavenly sign we know as the Star of Bethlehem. At just the right time, the Creator, through His Son, took on human flesh ... like us born into this world as a helpless babe.

He grew up, experienced hunger, thirst, and pain, and finally died on a cross for us – for you and for me. This is so incredible because the Creator of the incomprehensible and vast universe, the Mighty God who stretched out the stars and galaxies ... cares for you so much to that He came in person. The wonder and glory of Christmas is that He made it possible for us to enter a very personal relationship with Him – and that changes everything.

In The Fullness of Time

It says in the Bible: *When the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman...* Gal. 4:4. Not haphazard or an accident, Jesus' birth came at the "right time." God sent His Son in the exact moment and to the exact parents of God's own choosing.

There were a number of things happening in the world that made His arrival timely. Consider language: Because of Alexander the Great's conquests 300 hundred years earlier, the Greek language had become the common language throughout the region. Consider transportation: The Romans had created a road system that facilitated travel from Europe to Africa to Asia. What would God need to spread the news of His love in Jesus Christ strategically throughout the world? A common language would help so that a maximum number of people could hear the gospel. A system of roads and regular shipping would be good so that missionaries could safely travel and spread the word.

But Jesus' arrival was not only on time; it was on purpose. His arrival on our planet has changed everything: Regardless of what anyone may personally think or believe about him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of the Western culture for almost twenty centuries. If it were possible, with some sort of super magnet, to pull up out of history every scrap of metal bearing at least a trace of his name, how much would be left?ⁱ

His ministry changed our treatment of the poor and marginalized. His teaching shaped education. His love transformed medicine. He reframed our use of money and our approach to friend and foe alike. He modeled a quality of personal relationships in his circle of followers. He offered dignity to those denied it, and the salvation that comes with forgiveness. His birth even marks our measure of time. Jesus, God in human flesh and model citizen of God's future age, began to bring the reality of the future into the present.

Unrecognized

Have you ever been dismayed because people didn't recognize you for who you really are? ... Christ Himself experienced that. Maybe it's a tragic irony that we so often do not recognize Him or His power to bring life-giving change. Scripture tells us, *He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him*, John 1:10-11.

Jesus came "home" to the people who should have known Him best ... the people descended from Abraham ...the same one God directed to look at the stars in the sky ... the people to whom God spoke through the psalmists and the prophets ... and they wanted nothing to do with Him. How tragic, for they knew He was coming - God had told them many times in many ways - their Scriptures, our Scriptures, speak of His coming into our world.

Even sadder is that the world that had no room for Him then, has no room for Him now. The majority has never recognized Jesus for who He really is. When He came the first time, Herod hated Him, the scribes ignored Him, and there was no room for Him in the inn at his birthplace in Bethlehem. And yet, though a thousand times in history a baby has become a king, only once in history has a King become a baby.

It was shepherds and the Wise Men—the poor and the foreigners - who welcomed Him to the earth. Look around today. Who speaks of His tremendous grace and truth in public discourse? Where is the Savior's birth in the holiday festivities? Christmas has almost disappeared from our cultural discourse. Where we used to say "Merry Christmas," now we say "Happy Holidays" for fear of offending someone.

All Who Received Him

But the news is not entirely bad. While most of the world ignored Him and His own people rejected Him, there were those who did recognize Him and welcome Him as Lord and Savior. All the apostles and 100% of the earliest disciples were Jewish - His own people. Even in the midst of general rejection, many followed the Lord. ... *to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave*

the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God, John 1:12-13. That was the purpose for Jesus' birth; to make children of God through spiritual rebirth. (See John 3:1-21).

To receive Him means to welcome Him like the invited guest who arrives 40 minutes before the time for your Christmas party, and you're not ready yet. Nevertheless, you walk to the door, open it, smile and say, "Please come in." You "receive" your guest even though he has come early. To "receive" Christ means to welcome Him as an honored guest into your home and heart ... perhaps when you're not ready. Believe in Him means more than just saying a prayer or signing a card. It means resting on Him so completely that He is your only hope of heaven.

By this we gain the "honor" and "privilege" of becoming a member of His family. Everyone is created by God. But the privilege of being His true children is given only to those who by personal faith receive Jesus as Lord and Savior.

This doesn't happen by natural descent. You aren't a child of God just because your parents were Christians or because your grandfather was a Methodist bishop. It matters not if you come from a good family and have a fine education. Okay, this one will date me, but I think you'll get the point: A young man trying to impress a girl says, "I've got an MBA from UCLA." To which she replied, "Yeah, and I've got a VCR from Walmart, but that doesn't mean I know how to use it." The heart of the gospel is this: children born of God ... Salvation is of the Lord, a free gift, sheer grace. The birth of Jesus is an historical reality and He is a spiritual reality today.

He Can Change Everything for You

That first Christmas changed everything in the world, and this Christmas, Jesus can change everything in your world. Jesus still approaches us as ... *the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth,*" John 1:14. The grace He brings to you is the reality that there is nothing you can do that will make God love you more or love you less. God's grace will pursue us from womb to tomb.

At the same time, He is the embodiment of truth. He knows our sins and shines his light on them for us to see. If Jesus were only full of grace, our character would never be transformed because we wouldn't see the need. But if Jesus were only full of truth, it would be too hard for us to bear and our hearts would never be softened. "Truth without grace breeds self-righteousness and crushing legalism. Grace without truth breeds deception and moral compromise."ⁱⁱ Jesus was sent to us full of grace and truth. The Jesus born at

**the first Christmas is the same Jesus who wants to be born anew in your life this Christmas. He wants to fill you and send you and me, to spread truth and grace.
I pray that this will be the year when Jesus changes everything for you.**

When the right time came, God sent his Son ... He was sent for you.

ⁱJeroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New York: Yale Univ. Press, 1999), 1.

ⁱⁱRandy Alcorn, *The Grace and Truth Paradox: Responding with Christlike Balance*, Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2003, back cover.