

by Kenneth Gible

# DO YOU NEED CHRISTMAS?



It's a common complaint that Christmas involves too much rushing around, too many presents costing too many dollars. Christmas in our country equals big bucks; but that isn't what I'm talking about.

**D**o you need Christmas? That's an odd question, isn't it? Notice that I didn't ask, "Do you like Christmas?" And I didn't ask the question so often asked at this time of year, "Are you ready for Christmas?" I asked, "Do you *need* Christmas?"

I think you do. I think you need Christmas in order to see, understand and appreciate what it means to be human.

But please understand that when I say "Christmas," I'm not talking about the North American version of Christmas.

Almost everyone moans about the stores setting up their Christmas displays in October. It's a common complaint that Christmas involves too much rushing around, too many presents costing too many dollars. Christmas in our country equals big bucks; but that isn't what I'm talking about.

What bothers me is the trivialization of Christmas.

Take, for instance, the music. Undeniably, the most beautiful music belongs to this season of the year. No other collection of words and melodies equals the songs of Christmas. But when they seep into our ears from every audio system in every store, elevator and office, they lose their beauty. They are reduced to the commonplace, the trivial. They are taken away from us.

Our need for Christmas has almost nothing to do with the trivialized version of the season. It has everything to do with a simple story that goes back two millennia.

In that story we learn something essential about Christianity. We learn that Christianity is not a philosophy of life or a legal code or even a mystical, spiritual revelation. In Christmas we see that Christianity rests on a *person*. Christianity makes the astounding claim that God comes to us in the person of Jesus; he comes breathing, eating, talking, touching. God meets us face-to-face, person-to-person. The theological word for it is *incarnation*. The best word for it is *love*.

In the Christmas story there are angels appearing to Mary and Joseph, there are heavenly choirs and a mysterious star. But these are all the trappings, the extras added for poetic or other effect. The essence of the whole thing is a baby, a flesh and blood child who is born like every other child, with the mother gasping for breath as she painfully pushes the infant into the world, its wet and messy arrival accompanied by squalls loud enough to hurt your ears and melt your heart.



IMAGE BY MARY WEGNER—FTM



When you stop to think about it, there is no way anyone would have guessed God would come to earth this way, despite what the Hebrew prophets had said. Micah foretold that Bethlehem, a little village, would be the birthplace of Israel's king. But nobody was paying much attention to what Micah had said. And anyone who might have peered into the stable that night and seen the child lying in the cattle's feed trough would not have guessed in a million years that this was the Savior of the world. There was nothing very grand about the birth of Mary's son.

But if there was nothing grand about his birth, there was something intensely human about it. And that is the important thing. For in this birth, the ineffable God, the One whose being spans galaxies of galaxies that we have not yet begun to measure, this mighty God willingly and graciously entered into an intimate relationship with humanity. And so this wondrous

When you stop to think about it, there is no way anyone would have guessed God would come to earth this way, despite what the Hebrew prophets had said. Micah foretold that Bethlehem, a little village, would be the birthplace of Israel's king.

event, Christmas, is at the same time incredible and our only hope.

It is incredible because how can we imagine the divine become human? It is our only hope because without it we each pass quickly to the grave, one mere speck on an infinite and meaningless canvas of time and space.

Christmas is about relationships—God's reaching out to us, our reaching out to each other. We send out our Christmas cards by the millions with a silent longing to be in touch with those whose stories have interwoven with our own. And between the neatly printed lines of verse there are unwritten questions: "Do you still remember me? Are you still there? Still my friend? Do you still care?" Christmas is about relationships.

To enter into a relationship with another is to make oneself vulnerable, and God took that risk, too. The child in Bethlehem grew up to walk the path of obedience all the way to a criminal's death. That's why, in the Christmas story, the flickering lantern that lights the dark stable walls in Bethlehem casts shadows that form themselves into a cross.

To let Christmas truly touch us, we must enter fully into the joy

and the pain of the human condition, a condition in which God entered fully and freely.

At Christmas, we see and feel the subtle interplay between the divine and human as at no other time. And despite the holiday advertising blitz, despite the determined efforts of so many people to turn Christmas into triviality, there is something about it that makes even the most hardened cynics among us pause for a moment.

The message is there—that God comes into such a world as this, comes to stand with us and laugh with us and suffer with us. Yes, even to suffer with us—whether the pain be a hunger for food to fill empty bellies or hope to fill empty hearts.

For that is the truth of the Christian faith, just as it is the truth of Christmas—love. It is as unsentimental and as strong and as human a message of redemption and hope that the world has ever known.

And it's why I still need Christmas, and so do you, and so does this weary, weary world. □

*Pennsylvania resident Kenneth Gible is a church pastor and freelance writer.*

In this birth, the ineffable God, the One whose being spans galaxies of galaxies that we have not yet begun to measure, this mighty God willingly and graciously entered into an intimate relationship with humanity.

# WHO IS JESUS?

God in the flesh. The Alpha and the Omega. Immanuel. Lamb of God. Messiah. King of kings. Lord of lords. He changed lives when he walked this earth. He's changed lives for almost 2,000 years. He can change yours!



- Send your order to Plain Truth Ministries Pasadena, CA 91129
- Or for credit card orders call us toll-free at 1-800-309-4466

(Available only in the U.S. and Canada)

## PLAIN TRUTH MINISTRIES

PASADENA, CA 91129



Send me the Plain Truth cassette tape series *Who Is Jesus?* (3 programs) for \$12 which includes shipping. RS003

Plain Truth magazine PIN number:

-

Name

Address

City

State  Zip

(Available only in the U.S. and Canada)