



A Birth and a Wedding

The Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us.... For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:14, 17).

Every Christmas many neighborhoods feature front-lawn depictions of the Christmas story that include a manger in which Jesus was born. Such illuminated scenes of the birth of Jesus may also include wise men, shepherds, animals and of course Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus.

Other Christmas traditions include trees, mistletoe, cookies, gift-giving, festive meals, ornaments, Santa Claus, Christmas music, and let's not forget, Frosty the Snow Man and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.

Every Christmas you and your family might enjoy *The Messiah*, secular songs like *White Christmas*, or movies like *It's a Wonderful Life*, *The Polar Express*, or one of my personal laugh-a-minute favorites, Chevy Chase in *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*.

There's a lot of this Christmas stuff that is just pure fun and enjoyment, of course, with no biblical or theological significance (apart, of course, from the deeply relevant *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*).

Every Christmas some *bah-humbug* Scrooges object to laughter, joy, merry-making and frivolity. Every year we hear talk about crass commercialism.

Some suggest we all just boycott gift-giving and celebrations, and lock ourselves in our homes and wait until it's over, when life will once again be safe for the self-proclaimed righteous.

A few, who somehow still call themselves Christians, say that the very observance of the birth of Jesus is "pagan" (I am all too familiar with this preposterous notion).

Some fuddy-duddies are offended with people just saying "Happy Holidays"—assuming, I suppose, that if somehow we can just get everyone to say "Merry Christmas" the whole world will, at the very least, accept

Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and, better than that, join their church.

Another familiar tradition includes annual objections to the external trappings of Christmas. Some curmudgeons seem to think that Jesus was all about "all work and no play."

Some of the complaints have become a cliché, like "Put Christ Back In Christmas," or "Jesus is the Reason for the Season," or "Wise Men Still Seek Him."

Here's my question. If we need to "Put Christ Back In Christmas" and remember that "Jesus is the Reason for the Season" and ponder the admonitions that "Wise Men Still Seek Him"—why, oh why, isn't anyone talking about Christmas being a celebration of a birth *and* of a wedding?

I'm not talking about a five-minute ceremony with two witnesses in a cheap, Las Vegas chapel. I'm talking about a huge wedding celebration, where the ceremony itself introduces festivities that go on for many days.

I'm talking about lots of food and lots of drink—I'm not talking about non-alcoholic egg-nog and non-fat cookies.

The first eighteen verses of the Gospel of John introduce us to the miracle, majesty and mystery of Christmas. These verses are the theological bridge between the old covenant and the new, introducing the Creator God of Genesis as "The Word [who] became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). This is a story of one birth and one wedding.

The marvelous miracle and mystery of the pronouncement that "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling [place] among us" is the very heart and core of our faith. A few verses later John helps us understand that the birth of *Immanuel*, God with us (Matthew 1:18), was also a wedding. "For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

COMING SOON!



Greg Williams and wife Susan

Conversations About JESUS

DJanuary 2009, our online church, *Christianity Without the Religion (CWR)*, will offer *Conversations About Jesus (CAJ)*. CAJ will be a once a month sermon/discussion, attempting to engage a younger audience in the life and teachings of Jesus.

CAJ can be a great introduction to Jesus, for new or young Christians, perhaps not yet interested in our primary worship services at CWR.

You and your family—anyone who is young at heart—will want to join your host Greg Williams for *Conversations About Jesus*. Greg lives with his family in Atlanta, where he is engaged in youth ministry. Pastor Greg has effectively ministered to youth for many years—and he's looking forward to leading this monthly discussion, available exclusively at www.ptm.org.



COMING IN
JANUARY 2009
AT WWW.PTM.ORG

commentary

Grace and truth were forever married in the person of Jesus. It was the wedding of heaven and earth. Jesus came in his glory, “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). This is the glorious wedding, spoken of metaphorically by Isaiah, when the desert will blossom spiritually (Isaiah 35:1), inequalities and injustices will be leveled—every valley is raised up and every mountain made low (Isaiah 40:4). This is the cosmic wedding, when the law given through Moses was made obsolete (Hebrews 8:13) and replaced by God’s grace, his free gift of underserved and unconditional divine love.

This divine gift of God’s grace was personally delivered to us in the person of Jesus, the Word, the second person of the Godhead, who created the universe. This is the grand wedding celebration, when grace and truth become one, so that when grace happens, truth happens. This is the glorious wedding when a “righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify” (Romans 3:21).

One of those prophets testified “...let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream” (Amos 5:24).

It’s that baby in the manger who brought both truth and grace together in his own person, so that truth and righteousness no longer simply mean required deeds, which humans are incapable of.

Now, because of that baby, and the atoning work of his cross, the righteousness of Jesus is credited to us by God’s grace. Grace and truth are united. Grace and truth are forever one! This is cause for celebration!

God came to us, in the person of Jesus, so that we might know him. Before the incarnation, the coming of God in the flesh, we could know *about* God. We could know *about* him through the creation, as we see the works of his hands. We could know *about* his holiness through the law.

But we couldn’t know God, personally, intimately, until the wedding of grace and truth. When that wedding was consummated, in the person of Jesus, our relationship with God, initiated by his love, was made possible.

Christmas is about one birth and one wedding, and the leading character in both dramas is Jesus.

Christmas is about God’s love for you and me.

Christmas is about the marriage of grace and truth.

In Jesus, we are able to know God, for Jesus came to make the Father known (John 14:9). In Jesus, God came to this earth to embrace us, love us, and forgive us. In Jesus, we can come to know the core of God’s nature.

Jesus came so that we could know the depth of God’s love.

Christmas is about one birth and one wedding, and the leading character in both dramas is Jesus. Christmas is about God’s love for you and me. Christmas is about the marriage of grace and truth. Christmas is all about the lengths to which God will go to never stop pursuing and loving us.

We have every right, indeed every responsibility, to make merry and throw parties at Christmas. It’s no coincidence that Jesus’ first miracle, creating lots of wine for a wedding, is recorded in the second chapter of John right after the birth and wedding in which he was intimately involved.

Christmas is a stupendous spiritual celebration. Births and weddings are always great times of celebration. How much more when the occasion is the birth of the God-man and the marriage of grace and truth, a union that lasts for all eternity? It’s a match from heaven. □

—Greg Albrecht

THE PLAIN TRUTH