

A vertical photograph of a beach at night. The foreground is filled with golden sand, marked by a series of dark footprints that lead from the bottom left towards the top left. To the right, the ocean's edge is visible, with white foam from a wave washing onto the shore. The sky above is a deep, dark blue, speckled with numerous small, bright white stars, suggesting a clear night sky. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

*He Left His
Footprints*

by Greg Albrecht

Nothing much ever happened in Mayfair. The usual small town stuff, but nothing really earthshaking. No one had ever left Mayfair to go to Hollywood to become a movie star or to play basketball in the NBA. Most of the young people went to the state university or the local junior college. Mayfair was quiet, and everyone seemed to like it that way.

But then one day Mayfair found out that it was going to be visited by a very important person named Henry Bascom. Bascom, they heard, was coming to spend Christmas in Mayfair, and everyone was excited. Mayfair would finally be noticed. Mayfair would be on the map!

The whole town turned out at the local airport, with the mayor, the high school band, and a key to the city. But the rich and famous Henry Bascom didn't show up at their ceremony. Mayfair threw a party but Henry Bascom didn't come.

While everyone at the airport looked for a rich and famous person, a quiet and unobtrusive man did arrive, and headed into town. The quiet man did not seem to be wealthy or famous and was generally ignored by the citizens of Mayfair. In fact, Mayfair did not really notice or think about the stranger in town, because everyone was caught up in Christmas shopping, decorating, festivity attending and party going. Finally, a poor old gentleman befriended the stranger and asked him over to his house for a meager dinner with his family.

The next day the stranger went back to the airport to leave town, and on his way to the ticket counter he passed by two workmen taking down the sign welcoming Henry Bascom. He overheard one of the workman tell the other, "I can't believe we missed him. He must be in town somewhere, but we missed him." The stranger checked in for his flight, boarded the plane, and left the town of Mayfair behind.

We Are a Visited Planet

Frank Mead, in his short story titled *V.I.P.*, helps us to see that we have all been citizens of Mayfair. So caught up in places

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Plain Truth Ministries
 Pasadena, California 91129
 1-800-309-4466
 www.ptm.org.

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to go and things to do that we miss the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth. So wrapped up with commercialism, materialism, and pageantry that we miss the reason for the season. We have an experience, but miss the meaning.

The Bible tells us that God has visited us. We are a visited planet. In some humanly incomprehensible way, God continued to inhabit eternity while simultaneously becoming flesh, voluntarily subjecting himself to our world of time and space. God, in the person of Jesus, became an embryo in Mary's womb. In some wonderful and unexplainable way, God became a human baby, dependent upon the nourishment given by the body of a young girl. He lived among us, and left his footprints in the same earth we live on today.

This amazing reality distinguishes Christianity from all world religions. The Christianity of the Bible teaches that God came to find us. He voluntarily became one of us to save us, and he loved us so much that he gave his only son that we might have life, and not perish.

In coming to us God chose the path of humility. Jesus, God the Son, was born into humble circumstances, conceived by a woman who was not yet married. Can you imagine the stigma that Mary, Joseph, and Jesus carried when early in his life our Savior began to suffer taunts and derision from people who felt superior by reason of their own birth?

What an irony! God took on human flesh, adding flesh to his divinity, in order to rescue and save us. But instead of seeing the Lamb of God many humans initially saw only a child whose background was questionable—illegitimate and inferior.

God Entering Time and Space

Here's how Philip Yancey, in *The Jesus I Never Knew*, explains the inauspicious arrival of our Lord and Savior. "How many times did Mary review the angel's words as she felt the Son of God kicking against the walls of her uterus? How many times did Joseph second-guess his own encounter with an angel—*just a dream?*—as he endured the hot shame of living among villagers who could plainly see the changing shape of his fiancée?"

"Nine months of awkward explanations, the lingering scent of scandal—it seems that God arranged the most humil-

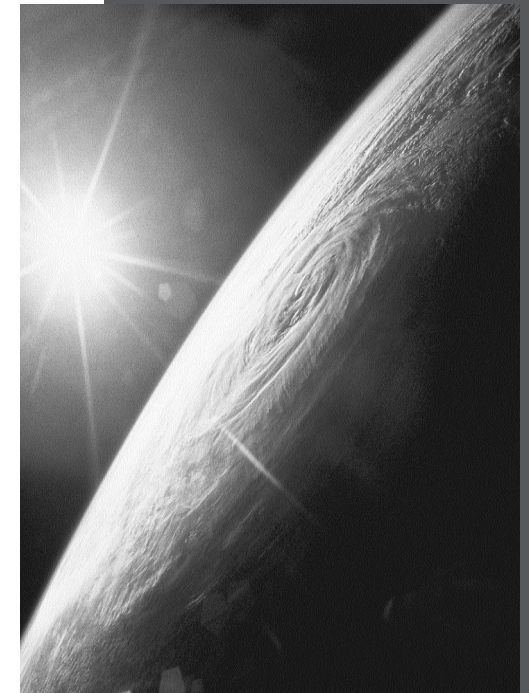
iating circumstances for his entrance, as if to avoid any charge of favoritism. I am impressed that when the Son of God became a human being he played by the rules, harsh rules: small towns do not treat kindly young boys who grow up with questionable paternity."

God came to be with us, and he started out where we all start. As a baby. His first human resting place was not an elaborately decorated nursery. There was no room for him in such a place. His parents could only provide him a feeding trough in which to sleep.

He did not arrive in a way that we would expect—if we had been in charge of the arrival plans we would have done it much differently, wouldn't we? We would have planned for him to be born in a castle or a mansion with servants bustling around, a huge choir singing majestic and triumphal music composed just for the occasion, accompanied by a massive orchestra.

But it was just a simple little family. Mom, Dad and son—except this son was *the* Son. The Son of God. God, in the person of Jesus, was

In some humanly incomprehensible way, God continued to inhabit eternity while simultaneously becoming flesh, voluntarily subjecting himself to our world of time and space....He lived among us and left his footprints in the same earth we live on today.





“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:5-8).

coming to our world to become one of us, to save us from ourselves. No hoopla, no gala celebrations, no fireworks, no marching bands, no pomp and no ceremony.

Still Unwelcome—A Term of Abuse

Like Henry Bascom, Jesus’ arrival did not attract much attention. But over the course of the past 2,000 years his life, death, and resurrection has attracted incredible attention. Hundreds of millions have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, but many others have been, and many remain, unconvinced.

Today, in many parts of our world, Christians are persecuted, tortured, and killed because of their allegiance to the Son of God. Born into impoverished and humble circumstances, Isaiah tells us that Jesus was a “root out of dry ground” who was “despised and rejected by men” (Isaiah 53:2-3). Human beings adore and worship fame, beauty, power, might, and wealth. Here was God in the flesh, who was all of that and more, but he chose to become a human more like us instead of being a human who would be a king in a castle or be chauffeur

feured as a tycoon in a limousine. How can we ignore his endless love, demonstrated by his voluntary act of humility in becoming one of us?

In our Western world, it is not against the law to be a Christian, but Christians are often frowned upon, maligned, and belittled. Many characterize Christians as naive people of faith who believe in primitive myth and superstition unfit for serious consideration. Many modern men and women feel awkward and uncomfortable with Jesus, while at the same time challenged by him. The claims of Jesus are profound and far reaching, and if they are true demand that we accept his authority over our lives.

We feel ill at ease with Jesus because if we accept the simplicity of his teachings and the power of his deity we have to admit that we are not the center of the universe—he is. Thus Jesus and his followers are often greeted with hostility. Michael Green offers this perspective, in the opening sentences of his book, *Who Is This Jesus?*:

“Jesus Christ! Today these words are most frequently used as swear words. We utter them in order to vent our anger or frustration. Fifty years ago it would have been seen as blasphemy to use His name that way. But now it is com-

“This is how Jesus Christ was born. A young woman named Mary was engaged to Joseph from King David’s family. But before they were married, she learned that she was going to have a baby by God’s Holy Spirit. Joseph was a good man and did not want to embarrass Mary in front of everyone. So he decided to call off the wedding. While Joseph was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said ‘Joseph, the baby that Mary will have is from the Holy Spirit. Go ahead and marry her. Then after the baby is born, name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’ So the Lord’s promise came true, just as the prophet had said, ‘A virgin will have a baby boy, and he will be called Immanuel, which means ‘God with us’” (Matthew 1:18-23, The Promise, Contemporary English Version).

monplace. Isn't it remarkable that the name of the Man who founded the world's largest religion should be most familiar as a term of abuse? That does not happen to Muhammed or Buddha, or, for that matter, to Lenin or Mao.

"Modern people in the West are embarrassed about Jesus. It is not fashionable to talk about Him. To mention His name at a party is a sure conversation-stopper....There is something in us that is deeply hostile to Jesus....Had Jesus been a bad man, had He been truculent and vindictive, had he been a mass murderer or a Don Juan, such reactions would be easy to understand. But He was nothing of the kind. He was the most dynamic, attractive, and genuinely good human being who ever lived."

Why Did Jesus Come?

Why did God become one of us? To save us. Jesus came to give us an intimate, personal relationship with him and the Father. Because of our sinfulness we are alienated from God. Nothing we can do can free us from sin and our hostility we have toward God. Only God can fix the problem. God loves us so much that he became one of us to save us.

A lifetime of doing good will not save us. Good actions, works and deeds do not save. Only Jesus saves. It had to be God in the flesh in that feeding trough and on that cross. We cannot save ourselves. If Jesus had merely been another human, who with Superman-like character managed to live a perfect life, then his death could have atoned for one other human life, but no more. The fact that he was (and is) God made his life and death so precious, so expensive, so worthy.

Jesus gave us the greatest gift—himself! It is true that there is too much commercialism and materialism that surrounds Christmas, and that many people completely miss the meaning behind the celebration. But no human commerce, no human decorations, and no human festivities can ever take away the reality of his coming and the salvation he brought.

Jesus made everything new. He reversed human values, turning them on their head. He brought a new covenant, a new relationship with God. Today nearly the entire world, believers and nonbelievers alike, count time as being either before Christ (B.C.) or after Christ (A.D.—in Latin, *Anno*

Domini—"in the year of our Lord").

Humans who wish to ignore his impact on the world should avoid calendars. Every time we write the date on a check, or consult the date on our calendar we give witness to the fact that God came in the flesh.

Jesus changed everything. The river of time turned at his birth and started to flow in the opposite direction. His birth was and is a Continental Divide—on one side history flows in the direction of events that happened before the birth of Jesus, and on the other side in the opposite direction, those things that have taken place since his birth.

James Michener, in his novel *Hawaii* tells about an elderly man who discovers that he has leprosy. It was the Hawaii of almost 150 years ago, and there was no cure for leprosy. Like the lepers described in the Gospels, lepers were also outcasts in Hawaii, separated from their families and forced to live in leper colonies.

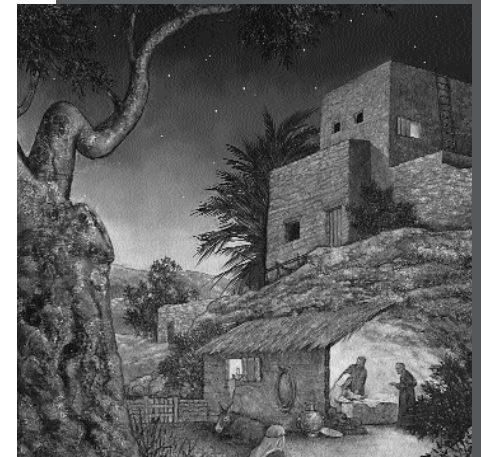
Michener says that when the old man told his family that he had leprosy, his wife offered to be his *kokua*. A *kokua* was someone who did not have leprosy, but willingly volunteered to move to a leper colony in order to

Why Was Jesus Born?

1) The birth of Jesus separates the Christian gospel from all human religions. God became one of us to rescue us from our sin. In one form or another, all world religions teach that the main goal in life is to find God. Christianity teaches exactly the opposite. We cannot find God by and through our own efforts. He came to us. He finds us and he saves us.

2) The birth of Jesus forces us to remember that Jesus was and is God with us. He was not simply a prophet, philosopher, reformer, wise man, miracle worker, or a moral teacher setting a good example. He was all of these and much more.

3) The birth of Jesus is the hinge of history. His birth changes everything. Because Jesus was and is God, his death on the cross pays for my sins and for yours, and in his resurrection we have eternal life. The ultimate question of our lives is "why was Jesus born?"



Jesus is God

1. Jesus came to dwell with us, adding humanity to his divinity, to save us from sin. He was the God-man. Fully human, fully God. “Completely God, completely human,” said the early Christians. The One and Only. Immanuel—God with us.
2. Salvation is through Jesus and by Jesus. Jesus taught that we must come to him, that we must follow him, that we must believe in and trust him. He pointed us to himself. He told us that he is the Bread of life, the Light of the world, the Resurrection and the Life, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
3. Jesus accepted worship. Thomas, who had been skeptical, upon seeing and believing Jesus after his resurrection, fell at his feet and worshipped. He exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).
4. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. He also proclaimed that he would return again in glory in a Second Coming.
5. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, claimed equality with God the Father, first person of the Trinity. To know him, to see him, to believe him and to worship him was to do the same to God.
6. Jesus forgave sin. He claimed authority over the old covenant law. He could suspend and reverse the laws of nature. He healed and gave life.
7. He can transform us. Only God can give new life, heal us and forgive us. Because of the cross, Jesus owns us, having purchased us with his blood. He is not only our Savior, having saved us and rescued us from sin, but he is our Lord, having purchased us and redeemed us.

take care of someone who had leprosy, all the while running the risk of contracting the dread disease themselves.

Before a kokua boarded a ship that would take them to the leper colony, an official stood on the deck and asked them one last time—“Are you sure about what you are doing?”

Jesus willingly volunteered to be our kokua. He willingly became poor that we might be become rich. He did for us what no one else could do, and certainly what we could not do for ourselves.

Immanuel

Matthew records that the angel told Joseph that Mary would give birth to a son and “they will call him Immanuel—which means, ‘God with us’” (Matthew 1:23). This is the message of Christmas. God, who inhabits eternity, the Author of time and space, came to be with us. God, who is bound by nothing outside himself, willingly took a body, subjecting himself to our boundaries, because he loved us. Immanuel is God with an address.

When God, in the person of Jesus, entered into the finite, limited and imperfect world of humanity he chose humble circumstances—an ordinary infant’s cradle in a blue collar, working class home. Mary gave

birth to a boy who did not have a “head start” or special privileges. No special treatment. Just one of us.

The God of all mercy put himself at the mercy of human beings—and at the end, human beings crucified him. He voluntarily humbled himself. He didn’t declare himself to be immune from the suffering, hurt, pain, poverty and indignities that human beings experience. He didn’t ask for special privileges. He knows what it’s like to be human. Immanuel—God with us.

John tells us, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). In *The Message*, Eugene H. Peterson translates this passage in a more contemporary idiom. “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into our neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish.”

The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus was the light of the world, light coming into a world of darkness and evil. The verse we all know so well, that begins “For God so loved the world...” introduces Jesus as the light of the world.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly what he has done has been done through God (John 3:16-21).

When we see and believe, when we gasp at the wonder and the majesty—the depth of his love and his grace—how can we and how should we celebrate and give thanks? Where would we be without him? What can we do to remind ourselves and proclaim to others this amazing story of God coming to be one of us?

The light that illuminates Christmas celebrations is a good start. The beautiful displays of light convey a rich spiritual significance. Inspiring music lifts our hearts. Nativity scenes remind us of his love for everyone—the least and the lost.

Dinners and feasts celebrate his boundless goodness, generosity and grace. Service and outreach to the poor reflect his love and kindness. Gifts to our loved ones, and our gifts to our churches and the ministries we support declare our joy in sharing with others what Christ has given us.

Can Christmas become too commercial? Yes. Do many miss the meaning and significance and just focus on the parties and festivities? Yes. Do some people spend too much money, or eat and drink to excess? Yes. Does that mean we should stop celebrating the birth of our Lord, because everyone doesn't "get it?" Not at all.

Immanuel—God with us. He was with us then, and he is with us now. Immanuel does not mean "God was with us a long time ago." Immanuel means God *is* with us now. God *is* with us when we hear the doctor say, "it's cancer." God *is* with us when our employer informs us that we are being downsized. God *is* with us when our friends betray us and desert us. God *is* with us because he decided to be involved and personal in our lives, rather than distant and impersonal.

Christmas is the time when we turn our hearts to him in special ways—worshipping, appreciating and loving our Lord and our Savior. Christmas calls us to recognize and remember what Jesus did then, and what he is doing now.

The cynic complains that Christmas is hopelessly idealistic, with tinsel, Christmas tree ornaments, sentimental music and mountains of greeting cards. Are they advocating a lack-luster, emotionless Christmas in which we minimize and repress any expression of joy?

Practical folks say that Christmas is too much work, and that it is way too expensive. What a concept! Repay our Lord and Savior, who spared no expense, who sacrificed it all, that we might live eternally—let's give him a cheap birthday celebration! Or if we do spend money, let's make sure we spend it all on ourselves—little or nothing for the work of God of spreading the gospel.

Skeptics may note that Christmas is a huge commercial industry, encumbered with greed and promotion. One big materialistic frenzy.

Skeptics point out that many who "keep" Christmas seem to have no room for Jesus in the inn of their lives. Lots of eating, drinking, and making merry—very little acknowledgement of Immanuel, the guest of honor.

But Christmas must not be defined by inadequate human examples and responses, but rather by the glory and majesty of the event it celebrates. If our efforts are crass, if we miss the point, if we fail to find Christ in the midst of our celebrations—that does not mean that Christmas is flawed.

The Holy One of Israel, Immanuel, God with us, did not only come to be with us then, he is *still with us now*—the Light of the world. Those who love darkness more than the Light may miss him completely—but he is here, now and forever. He stands at the door and knocks. He promises to never forsake us. He tells us to ask for him, to look for him, to seek after him. He is Immanuel—God with us.

"Christmas is the time when we turn our hearts to him in special ways—worshipping, appreciating and loving our Lord and Savior. Christmas calls us to recognize and remember what Jesus did then, and what he is doing now. The cynic complains that Christmas is hopelessly idealistic, with tinsel, Christmas tree ornaments, sentimental music and mountains of greeting cards. Are they advocating a lack-luster, emotionless Christmas in which we minimize and repress any expression of joy?"



Garage Doors and Jesus

My wife and I live in a small home—the same house in which our daughter and son grew up. Our house was built the same year I was born—and as each year goes by I’m painfully reminded that our house and my body seem to need more and more repair and rehabilitation. For years we wanted to replace the original garage door, a sturdy wooden door pulled up and let down by hand with the assistance of massive springs on either side. My chiropractor advised me that the garage door was a culprit for at least one wrenched back. But there always seemed to be other priorities. Now, our children are adults, married, having their own families, repairing their own houses, and building their own lives. We decided that we could probably afford the luxury of a new garage door.

While we were shopping for a new aluminum garage door with an automatic opener, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a feature story about many others in Southern California who were doing the same thing—replacing old, heavy wooden garage doors with lighter, aluminum doors. The article explained that some people in Mexico have been able to construct homes for themselves using these cast-off garage doors from prosperous, north of the border Southern California. A new industry exists as discarded garage doors are purchased, shipped to Mexico, where they are sold as ready-to-use walls and roofs for garage-door homes. What a commentary about the affluence, values and choices available in our North American culture! Apparently, in “garage door villages” in Mexico the size of one’s house is often referred to by the number of garage doors used in its construction.

A garage-door home. I think that’s more like the kind of environment Jesus came to. Each Christmas, since the arrival of our new aluminum garage door, when I think of Jesus’ arrival, I also think about our old garage door—and those garage-door homes in Mexico. Yes, at Christmas it’s wonderful to enjoy special time with family and friends. But as I worship Jesus’ presence, and give thanks for his footprints in the lives of Christians around the world, I take time to reflect that the greatest Gift of all started his life in something like a garage-door house. May we all be reminded that although he is no longer a baby, wise men and women still seek him.

One Solitary Life

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in still another village, where he worked in a carpenter’s shop until he was thirty. Then for three years he was an itinerant preacher.

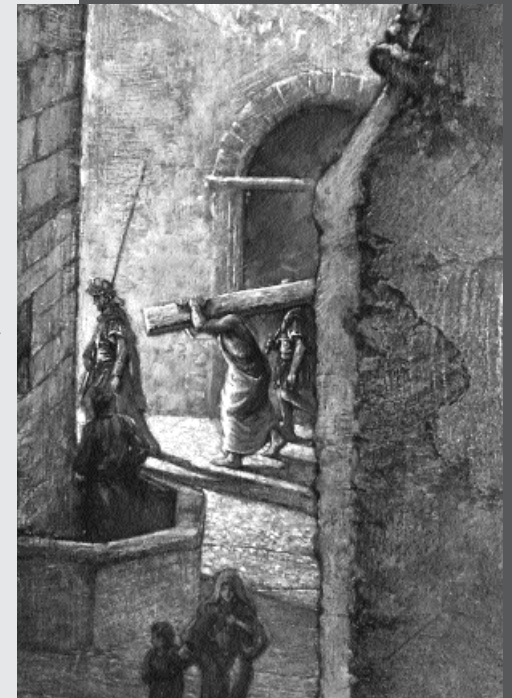
He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a house. He did not go to college. He never visited a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place he was born. He did none of the things one usually associates with greatness.

He had no credentials but himself. He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial.

He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his clothing, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today he remains the central figure of the human race, and the leader of mankind’s progress. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man on this planet so much as that one solitary life.

“This is how much God loved the world: he gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn’t go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again” (John 3:16-17, The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary English, by Eugene H. Peterson).



—Anonymous

***Questions, Misconceptions and Objections
About Jesus' Birth—Who He was, Who
He is and What Christmas is all About:***

One of my co-workers claims that there are absolutely no historical records of Jesus. This co-worker says that Christ could not have been crucified because the Romans kept meticulous records of executions and Pilate would have never carried out a death sentence without the proper “paper work.” Is there any historical evidence of our Lord? Thanks for your help.

Wow! Now that would be an incredible story—if only it was true! Jesus, worshipped and followed by millions for the past two thousand years—never even existed.

Let's suppose that someone wanted to prove that Jesus never existed. First, it would be fair for us to consider their motivation. Motive can quickly pervert and twist reality. Why attempt to disprove Jesus' existence?

The answer is, of course, that if Jesus really lived, and if he really lives today, he presents some real challenges to us. He makes authoritative claims on us—and how we live our lives. It would be easier if we could simply explain away his existence.

Then we could live our lives in any manner we wished. Of course if we fail to disprove his existence, we can do what so many do—simply ignore Jesus and hope he will go away.

Problem is—he won't. He is eternal—the Alpha and Omega, “who is, and who was, and who is to come” (Revelation 1:8).

But, let's leave the issue of motivation behind and consider the obstacles confronting the person who wants to prove that Jesus never existed. The first problem is the Bible itself.

We could attempt to claim that the Bible is just a religious book, filled with myth and superstition. But this tactic has been tried for hundreds of years and the vast majority of scholars have given up. Scientific findings, particularly in the field of archaeology, keep proving the Bible to be true.

We might try literary analysis—but literary analysis along with textual criticism of the Bible only proves a long, careful and accurate transmission and translation of the Bible. The only way to disprove the Bible would be to adopt some methodology that would “prove” that Shakespeare, Dickens, Martin Luther, etc. ever lived, and that what they wrote is “myth.”

But most sane, logical and educated individuals reject such subjective methods, as they are not objectively grounded in fact and reality.

But let's assume we could “get around” the record of the Bible. What other problems would we face if we wanted to prove that Jesus never existed? We would quickly find that there is simply too much secular information, too many documented facts from non-Christian sources, that are not “biased” by a Christian author. These records absolutely prove that Jesus existed. If this methodology doesn't prove that Jesus existed, then no historical figure has ever existed. Not Alexander the Great, Nebuchadnezzar, Nero, King Edward, Louis XIV, Abraham Lincoln—no one! We must discount all history as myth if we set aside original sources that prove that Jesus was a real historical person.

What and who are these sources? Non-Christian authors like the Jewish historian Josephus, the Roman historian Tacitus, and other Roman writers like Pliny, Suetonius and Lucian. Not to mention the facts uncovered by archaeology.

Let's be hypothetical for a moment. Why—just a few weeks after Jesus' death and resurrection, would thousands of people in the city where he was killed believe in his claims? Why would these people believe that he had lived, died, and was resurrected and still alive—now eternally?

Why would they become Christians, and continue to remain Christians, even though at later times in their lives it was illegal to be a Christian?

Why would the original disciples of Jesus go out and die for the same cause? Why, if what they had seen and witnessed was myth and fabrication, would they devote their lives to a lie?

If you wish to study this subject further, two excellent books that provide further information and proofs of Jesus' life are: 1) *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* by F.F. Bruce, and 2) *The New Testament Background* by C.K. Barrett.

Who was the father of Jesus? Jesus said God was his father but Matthew 1:20 says that the Holy Spirit is his father.

The Bible reveals that there is one God who exists eternally as three co-essential and co-equal, yet distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The birth of Jesus was unique, as God came to us in the person of Jesus for our salvation.

Jesus was both God and human equally. He never stopped being the second person of the Godhead, but became human, adding flesh to his divinity. Jesus the man was fathered by God, specifically the agency of the Holy Spirit who overshadowed Mary.

The absolute and continuous claim of the Bible is that there is only one God. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are not three Gods (see Matthew 28:19), they are one God.

Is Jesus God? How can Jesus be God if God is his father? Why would Jesus cry out to God if they are one and the same?

God is one (see Deuteronomy 6:4). Based upon its foundation in Judaism, Christianity has never denied that God is one, but rather affirmed and insisted on that fact. One God - not two, not three, not billions. Just one. Such a belief is called monotheism, and is one of the fundamental features that distinguishes and separates Christianity from all world religions (Judaism and Islam are the exception, as they too are monotheistic). Those who worship more than one god (polytheists) are often defined as pagans (by monotheists) for doing so.

However the Bible, particularly the New Testament, also insists that the Godhead is one but includes God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The entire Bible, of course, is not accepted by monotheistic Muslims, who instead rely upon the Koran, or by monotheistic Jews, who only accept the Old Testament.

In the New Testament Jesus instructs his followers to baptize new believers in the one name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). These three are one, not separate Gods, but three distinct persons of the Godhead who are distinct divine Persons, yet one God. Matthew 28:19 says to baptize in the singular name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One name, three divine Persons.

When the one God, in the person of Jesus, came to this earth to save us from our sins, he came as the God-man. He came as Immanuel—God with us (see Matthew 1:23). He remained God, for by definition God cannot die or stop being God—he is eternal. But in his incarnation the Eternal Son of God, the second Person of the Godhead, took a human body, something that he never was before.

He was Jesus, the Son of God and son of man. Divine and human—the natures were not co-mingled but separate.

In order to do what he came to this earth to do, Jesus laid aside many of the privileges and powers of divinity. He did not have to subject himself to nature, but he did. There were times when he manifested his divinity—when he walked on water, when he healed others, when he created food and

when he resurrected Lazarus from the dead. But there were also many times when he did not use the powers of his deity so that he could be our Savior, such as the time when Judas betrayed him, and Jesus was taken away by soldiers to be brutalized, tortured and killed. Peter tried to prevent the soldiers, actually cutting off the ear of one of them. But Jesus told Peter to put away his sword, letting him know that he had legions of angels to call for his protection if he wished (Matthew 26:53).

Jesus said that he would resurrect his own body from the grave (see John 2:19-22). He was the God-man, both divine and human. When the human Jesus was in the grave, the eternal Son of God was “alive”—just as God is, always has been, and always will be “alive”—for he is eternal.

If Jesus was and is God, then why did he not know everything, why could he die, why could he learn, and why could he be tempted?

The Bible tells us that God, without ceasing to be God, became flesh in the person of Jesus. Without mixing divinity and humanity, he united them together in a unique way. The Bible says that Jesus is the Son of God in a unique sense, and calls him, in John 1:18, “God the One and Only.”

Since Jesus was fully human and fully divine, there are many apparent paradoxes about his life, when seen from our perspective, because we are simply fully human.

Jesus was tempted (Hebrews 4:15), yet God cannot be tempted (James 1:13). Therefore, the humanity of

Jesus was tempted. God is not a man (Numbers 23:19), yet Jesus is both man (1 Timothy 2:5) and God (John 20:28).

God knows all things (Isaiah 41:22-23) and Jesus as God knows all things (John 16:30) but Jesus, the man, did not know the day of his return (Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32).

God cannot be seen (John 1:18), yet men saw Jesus the man (1 John 1:1-2) while they could not see his divinity (1 Timothy 6:16). God cannot die (1 Timothy 1:17), but Jesus, the man, did die (Philippians 2:8). As the God-man Jesus raised his own human body from the dead (John 2:19-22).

God never changes (Psalms 102:26-27), Jesus the man grew and learned (Luke 2:52 and Hebrews 5:8), yet Jesus the Son of God never changes (Hebrews 1:10-12 and 13:8). God is eternal (Psalms 90:2), yet Jesus the son of man was born (Matthew 1:18), while Jesus as the Eternal Son of God always existed (John 8:58).

For seven years I have lived a non-Christian, sinful life. Before this seven year “exile” I was very involved in Christianity. But in the past few months I believe that God is opening his arms to me. It feels great.

I have been investigating many churches, interpretations, doctrines and practices—I just stumbled on your website and have been deeply encouraged to discover the wonderful balance in your answers. It is refreshing. Thank you.

My previous life as a Christian was based solely upon judgment of those who did not “buy” the doctrines I subscribed to and relegating non-believers to eternal damnation. I now realize that such “academic faith” can be woefully unbalanced and betray the true spirit of Jesus’ message. But, I also know that there is a difference between biblical truth and error—so I would enjoy hearing your balanced perspective—about how we can stand for biblical truth without being opinionated.

Thank God for what is happening in your life! We could not agree more. There is far too much denominationalism, criticism, exclusivism (claims of being the “one and only true

church”) and judgmentalism within Christianity. These are the very things that dismayed Jesus about the religion of his day.

Of course, this is not to say that everyone’s view of biblical truth is equal. Doctrinal truth—and error exists—for every truth claim cannot be correct and biblical.

The topics of the nature of God and the nature of Jesus are among the primary issues that Christians have always faced—from the beginning. We can gain a great deal from church history. If Christians of every generation attempt to re-invent the wheel, then we will never learn from the lessons of history, will we? The false teachings that exist today about the nature of God and the nature of Jesus are not new, they have been around for a long time, and are simply, with some modern packaging, the same heretical notions that Christianity faced in the early centuries.

Virtually all groups that “go off the track” in teaching and practice while at the same time claiming to be Christian do so by beginning with a flawed view of God and of Jesus. These teachings, while “academic”, dry and seemingly boring are important. They can either lead to more error, heresy, heartache and pain, or they can help to keep us grounded and centered in Christ. Those who focus on Christ will not be divisive and hard-headed, but will genuinely love and care for others, just as Jesus did and does.

I write to ask if you know when Jesus was born? I was just told that he was not born on December 25th, but actually sometime in the fall. Is this correct?

We need to understand the following as we consider your question, and what it means and does not mean:

1) No one knows the exact date of Jesus’ birth. The date of Christmas was not chosen, nor should it be understood, as the precise commemoration of the birth of our Lord.

2) The date of Christmas was chosen by the early church in the context of their battle with paganism. Christianity was choosing times and dates to celebrate the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In so doing they considered the winter solstice—a pagan orgy-like celebration of the return of the sun.

The early Christians decided that they would deliberately place their celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ at the time of this pagan festival and so claim that time for Christ. The overwhelming irony of the ultimate victory they won is testified to by the fact that Christmas is known around the world, even “observed” (at the very least by having a day off and eating a Christmas dinner) by those who do not even pretend to be Christians.

3) Speculations about the exact date of the birth of Jesus vary—with the two most popular times being the fall and the spring, with winter being a distant third. There are few speculations about a summer birth. These ideas include reasoning from the known, using John the Baptist’s birth date, and the events surrounding it, and then reasoning to the unknown. They involve assumptions and cannot be regarded as authoritative, however interesting they may be.

4) It is true that these ideas and speculations have caused some to miss the reality of Christmas. Jesus IS the reason for the season, not the calendar or chronologies. Christianity at large is well aware that no specific date for the birth of Jesus Christ is known. *Many who engage in trying to “prove” that Jesus was not born on December 25 do not encourage Christians to celebrate the birth of Jesus on the “right” day.*

They engage in such allegations and assertions to “prove” that Christians should not celebrate the birth of Jesus at all! What a concept! Those who claim to be Christians deciding not to celebrate the coming of God in the flesh to save us from our sins!

I have been told that Christ was not born on Christmas. If this is true, why should Christians celebrate this day? Not only that, I heard that it is a day that pagans used to celebrate. Doesn't that prove that we shouldn't keep Christmas?

Christians are not required to observe any days (see Galatians 4:8-11 and Colossians 2:13-17), but rather we should celebrate the fact that God, in the person of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:23) came to this earth to save us from our sins (Matthew 1:21). He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Christmas and Easter, regardless of what happened at those exact times in history, and regardless of contemporary fairy tales and frills such as red-nosed reindeer and chocolate rabbits, materialism and endless parties, stand for the two great events that transform every Christian's life—the birth and resurrection of our Lord and Savior.

There is no doubt that no one knows exactly when Jesus was born. There is no doubt that pagans, long before Christianity, used these very times to celebrate their gods.

The fact that pagans once used these seasons for different purposes doesn't mean that these times are, de facto, pagan. Pagans breathe, eat food, walk, talk, go to school, have careers, etc. Pagans even pray.

If everything done at one time or another by a pagan is pagan, then there will be very little left in life for Christians to do.

Some friends have told me about the true origin of

the Christmas tree. Can you comment? What is the purpose and meaning of the Christmas tree?

What is the “true” origin of the Christmas tree? First, why is it necessary to use the word “true” to qualify origin? Is there a “false” origin? The Christmas tree, as we know it, dates back only a few centuries—it came to North America from Europe. In its early years, the Christmas tree was decorated with fruit considered to be symbolic of the fruit of the tree of life (Revelation 22:2). Some believe that the orbs and ornaments that are commonly used as decorations today are symbols of that fruit.

But I suspect that there is more to your question—as you use the word “true” to modify origin. There are those who claim that the Christmas tree itself is pagan, that it has its origins in paganism, and that not only the Christmas tree but Christmas itself (a celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior) is intrinsically pagan.

Why would Christians start using a tree as part of the festivities celebrating the birth of Jesus? I have already mentioned the tree of life in Revelation 22. For Christians, what other possible symbolism does a tree call to mind?

What about the cross of Christ? Ironically, some of the same people who argue that the Christmas tree has pagan origins conversely argue that Christ was not crucified on a cross because they also claim that the cross has pagan origins. They insist upon the word “stake” (staros) or tree—which is also used in the Bible (1 Peter 2:24; Acts 5:30, 10:39, and 13:29). Is it possible that Christians who first started using the Christmas tree to worship Jesus Christ had the cross of Christ in mind, as well as the tree of life?

Would Christians have remembered that the righteous man is like a tree (Psalms 1)? Or that the righteous flourish like a tree (Psalms 92)? Perhaps Christians, several hundreds of years ago, were thinking of Proverbs 3:8 which speaks of wisdom as the tree of life.

Maybe they remembered that the Apostle Paul wrote of the olive tree, as he talked of the new covenant family of God, the body of Christ, where there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bond or free, but where we are all one in

Christ (Romans 11; Galatians 3:28). Perhaps they could have remembered that Christ made us one, destroying the dividing wall of hostility, by his atoning work on the cross (tree).

Those who claim that the Christmas tree is pagan refer to Jeremiah 10. As they twist and torture this passage into what they want it to mean, they neglect one of the most basic rules of understanding the Bible.

This basic rule is that the passage we are reading must first be understood in its original context before we make an application to our lives.

The passage had to have a meaning then, to those who heard and read it, before it can have a meaning for us today.

This basic rule helps us to avoid leapfrogging over the originally intended meaning of a passage, as inspired by God, and jumping to an unbiblical conclusion.

Following that rule with Jeremiah 10, we will first of all note that there were no Christmas trees in existence when Jeremiah wrote. In fact, there were no Christmas trees until about 2,000 years later! So, was Jeremiah writing about the “true” origin of the Christmas tree?

Not unless God writes the Bible in some secret code, some meaning that no one will understand until some self-appointed leader comes along and “cracks the code”—giving us “insight and understanding” that no one else has. If someone takes that view, it will be difficult to have a rational discussion about the Bible with them—or any subject for that matter.

The Bible is one of the primary ways that God reveals himself to us. Does he keep

things hidden for thousands of years, and then “unlock” the meaning? Paul tells us that “God does not show favoritism” (Romans 2:11).

Why would God hide the “true” meaning of the Bible from hundreds of millions of Christians for almost 2,000 years, and then reveal it to us—actually only some of us, who happen to march to the drumbeat and jump through the hoops of a particular Bible teacher?

So, what does Jeremiah 10 mean? Jeremiah 10 condemns idol worship. If anyone is placing anything in their home, office, garage or car and worshipping it—then that is an idol. It could be a tree, it could be a rock, it could be food, it could be a photograph—an idol could be lots of things.

But most idols are not used for a short time and then thrown away. They are cherished, because they are worshipped.

Do the people worship the Christmas trees they bring into their homes? If so, why do they dump them with their trash a few weeks later?

There are several things to note about the passage in Jeremiah 10. A workman cuts a tree out of a forest and fashions it into an idol.

So, this is not a tree that is simply cut down, but a tree that was used, as wood, to be formed and shaped into an idol—a representation of a pagan god.

The workman uses an axe or a chisel to do the work of shaping the tree into an idol. The passage says that the customs of the people are vain—specifically the one that is being talked about. But not all customs and traditions are wrong, according to the Bible (2 Thessalonians 2:15; Judges 11:39; Luke 4:16).

It is possible for almost anything to be labeled as having pagan origin. But if we avoided all art, decorations, plants, jewelry and geometric patterns and shapes our lives would be drab and colorless. It would be difficult to keep track of time, since every day of the week is named after a pagan god.

The Christmas tree is not pagan—and attempts to prove that it is along with their motives are far removed from the central, plain truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our Mission...

- To proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ through the mass media.
- To challenge non-believers to investigate the claims of Christianity.
- To encourage nominal Christians to come to saving faith in their Lord and Savior.
- To provide Christian instruction and resources that will inspire, edify and uplift.

We Believe...

God:

We believe in one eternal, triune God in three co-essential, yet distinct Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ:

We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, begotten of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, fully God and fully human, the Son of God and Lord of all, worthy of worship, honor and reverence, who died for our sins, was raised bodily from the dead, ascended to heaven, and will come again as King of kings.

The Holy Scriptures:

We believe the Bible constitutes the accurate, infallible and divinely inspired written word of God, the foundation of truth, the fully reliable record of God's revelation to humanity.

Salvation:

We believe that human salvation is the gift of God, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not earned by personal merit or good works.

The Church:

We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.