CHRISTMAS: it’s all about family
Christmas: it’s all about family

For most of us, Christmas is a great time for enjoying a few days with the people we care about. We share good food, bad cracker jokes and plenty of presents! But for some, the absence of family makes the Christmas holidays a difficult season.

Whether you’re surrounded by family or not, Christmas is a time when Christians celebrate that God has allowed us to be truly family with Him. Even though we often ignore or reject God, He sent His Son, Jesus, to bring us back into a relationship with Him in an amazing way.

During Jesus’ time on earth, God made Himself known to a number of specific people. These meetings are recorded in the Bible, and they make it clear how much God wants to be in a close, family relationship with all of us. They also make it clear how far He is willing to go to restore that relationship . . . Let’s look at some of the Bible’s examples.
The angel said to her … “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus … his kingdom will never end.”

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” —Luke 1:30-34 (NIV)

God’s first appearance to Mary was to announce that she, a virgin, would have a baby! Are virgin births possible? Logically, no. Everybody knows virgins can’t get pregnant. Yet Mary, the virgin, gave birth to a Son. As the angel said to Mary, “With God nothing will be impossible” (v. 37).

Does it even matter?
A baby was born. So what?
Actually it matters a great deal. Jesus is God (another name for Jesus is Immanuel, meaning ‘God with us’—Matthew 1:23) and He became human. The virgin birth shows Jesus was still fully God on earth. As He is God, Jesus can offer us a kingdom (that is, a place to live or a ‘family’ to belong to) that goes beyond death and “will never end”.

Christians believe in the virgin birth because they believe in a God who can work outside of the physical laws He created. God alone can bring forth a child from a virgin.
The Shepherds

And then the angel said to [the shepherds]… “For there is born to you in the city of David a Saviour … Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill towards men!” —Luke 2:10-14

Who normally hears about world-changing events first? Presidents, world leaders, governments—how about shepherds? God didn’t announce the arrival of His Son behind closed doors to the ‘important’ people. He told ordinary ‘nobodies’. The shepherds were out in the fields, away from everyone else and probably smelling of sheep.

Why did God tell them first? Because He wants everyone to be able to join His family. This family isn’t just for those who feel “good” or “important”; it’s for those who feel left out, abandoned or forgotten.

The message was “on earth peace, goodwill towards men!” This isn’t just about being nice to each other. It’s a promise of peace and goodwill from God towards us. We largely ignore Him, hurting Him and those around us by the self-involved way we live. We deserve His anger and rejection, but He offers peace and acceptance.
And when the wise men had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense and myrrh. —Matthew 2:11

Visitors on Christmas day—love them or loathe them, at least they always bring gifts! Gold wouldn’t be so bad. How about frankincense or myrrh? Frankincense is a scented resin or balm that can be used to make perfumes. Back in the days of the Christmas story, it was also burned with sacrifices as an offering to God. All in all, it’s an odd ‘new baby’ present. You won’t find much frankincense in the maternity ward today. The same goes for myrrh. This was used mainly to preserve dead bodies to stop them going ‘icky’ before burial. These are strange Christmas presents. Perhaps these wise men weren’t so smart after all!

In fact, these gifts actually revealed the reason Jesus was born. He is a king (hence the gold) who would die for us (hence the myrrh) as a sacrifice (hence the frankincense).
Jesus

“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” – John 14:2-6

Many years later, as an adult, Jesus promised a place in God’s house (or, a place in His family) to everyone who trusts Him. That means we can live with God forever! After we die, Jesus will “receive [us]”. He is the only one who can give us a new life with God. How?

By taking our place and receiving God’s punishment on our behalf. Jesus said the words above just before He was illegally arrested and executed. Jesus died on the cross as our sacrifice, willingly paying for our rejection of God. He took on God’s anger so that we don’t have to. This is how far God will go to make us His family and to free us from the guilt of all the things we have done wrong.

This was God’s plan all along. God loves us so much, that He gave up His Son in order to clear our names of any guilt or wrongdoing.
The Criminal

Then [one of the criminals] said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”

And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise.”

When Jesus was executed on the cross, there were criminals also being crucified next to Him. One of them, knowing he was helpless and about to die, cried out to Jesus, “remember me when you come into Your kingdom”. The criminal knew Jesus was the King of a lasting, unbreakable kingdom.

He also knew he had no way of getting there on his own.

Jesus told the criminal he would be with Him in God’s kingdom that day, as soon as he had breathed his last. If you think you are too bad to be accepted by God, or you’ve left it too late to trust Jesus with your life, then think again! If even this criminal, who was being executed for his crimes, could be saved by Jesus, then so can you. When he cried out to Jesus for help, he received new life—and a whole new family. This is God’s promise to us: when we trust Jesus, we belong to a new family—God’s family—in His kingdom. So after he died, the criminal joined Jesus in this “paradise”. 
Thomas

Now Thomas ... was not with them when Jesus came ... So he said to them, “Unless I see [Jesus], I will not believe.”

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” ... And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” —John 20:24-28

How do we know Jesus’ death paid for our rejection of God? Just as His time on earth started with an impossibility (the virgin birth), so too it ended with one: Jesus came back from the dead! He beat death itself. This is the proof that Jesus has paid our penalty in full and can offer us a new life with God.

Thomas, one of Jesus’ followers, couldn’t believe Jesus was alive. But then, when he saw Him, Thomas called Jesus “My Lord and my God!” God wanted Thomas in His family. He understood Thomas’ doubts and questions, and went to great lengths to convince him to trust Jesus.

Jesus appeared to hundreds of others after He came back from the dead. These witnesses were resolute in their trust of Jesus, even when they were threatened and killed for it, knowing that being in God’s family is more important than anything else.
You

As you can see from God’s meetings with these people, He wants to make us His family again, even though we deserve His punishment for ignoring Him. His invitation is clear: enemies can become friends, and friends can become family, now and forever. That is worth celebrating this Christmas, and worth telling all of our own friends and families about.

The decision to receive God’s gift of new life with Jesus is up to you. If you want to think more about what Jesus has done for you and what it means to give your life to Him, then Our Daily Bread Ministries is here to help! We have lots of online resources, Bible reading notes, short booklets, DVDs and CDs to help you think further about who Jesus is, and what difference He makes.

Please visit us at ourdailybread.org/locations/united-kingdom to see everything we have available. Also, you can find out more about the Christmas story by reading What Is Christmas All About?

All our resources are free. Please just email us at europe@odb.org (with your name and address) to request your copy!
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