

Christmas: Stress, visitors and presents!

Christmas – a lot of stress!

A recent survey of 500 youth about Christmas found that Christmas and New Year is a time of increased depression, loneliness and family tension. One-third of the youth interviewed said Christmas made them feel worse than usual. One in five said they would be relieved if the holiday was cancelled. Most said their negative feelings were from tensions between family members and financial pressures.

Christmas for many people is often a very sad and negative time of year with depression and stress... just like the first Christmas!

Matthew 1:18 – “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about...”

Matthew tells us how Mary and Joseph were pledged to be married. They were engaged. Not sleeping together. Yet Mary is pregnant! And so the first Christmas stress begins! The virgin fiancée is pregnant! Joseph is suspicious, and the wedding is looking a bit uncertain! Family tensions and stress!

Then an angel appears! Don't be afraid, Joseph. Mary's pregnant with the son of God by the Holy Spirit. And his name will be Jesus, (which means God saves) because he will save people from their sins. So I imagine Joseph and Mary are both very relieved at this news – finally they don't have to worry about thinking of a name for the baby! All they need to worry about now is giving birth to God's son and explaining all this to their friends and family...that this son is the saviour of the world!

Christmas – a lot of visitors!

So after the stressful news of the unexpected baby, who is the saviour of the world, Jesus is born and the visitors start turning up! Which can also sometimes be a bit stressful...?

III – Have you ever visited a new born baby in hospital? When our first son Flynn was born, we had 80 visitors come to the hospital in 3 days! And nearly every visitor did the same thing. They came in quietly, said congratulations, gave us a small gift, looked at the baby and made strange noises, then left.

Matthew tells us about a couple of visitors – the Magi from the east, who followed a star and came to worship Jesus.

The Magi, or wise men, are wealthy astrologers probably from the area of Persia. We don't know how many there were, although we often think there were 3 because there were 3 gifts. But there may have been 2 or 10. We don't know. But what Matthew tells us is that they followed a star, from a long way away, to see a King and worship him. So they're not your usual baby visitors. It doesn't matter how cute a baby is – most babies don't get worshipped!

Christmas – a lot of gifts!

Then came the Christmas gifts. But the Magi's gifts were not the sort of gifts people usually bring a baby. This was a baby they came to worship as King. And they brought gifts fit for a King – expensive gifts – gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gifts associated with royalty throughout the Bible (Psalm 72:15, Isaiah 60:6, Psalm 45:8, Song 3:6). Can you imagine that this Christmas? You open up a little box wrapped up with Christmas paper and ribbon. And inside is this little bar of gold worth about \$10,000...! They were not the usual Christmas gifts.

III – In President Obama’s first year as President, Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah gave him gifts valued at over \$300,000. It was the most expensive gift given by one ruler to another in recent times.

III – In the Old Testament, when the Queen of Sheba visited King Solomon (in 1 Kings 10:10), she gave him 4.5 tonnes of gold as well as the largest amount of spices that anyone had ever given.

And Matthew tells us that the Magi brought gifts fit for a King. Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh.

So on the first Christmas, you can imagine the stress for Joseph and Mary. A virgin birth out of wedlock, a son who is the savior of the world, visitors coming from all over bringing expensive gifts and worshipping their baby. It’s a story we may have heard 100 times already. The classic Christmas story full of stress, visitors and presents.

But every Christmas, we really want to be able to remember and be amazed by the Christmas story. We don’t want it to become boring or outdated. We want it to be relevant for us. Sadly, for many today, Christmas is often about a lot of stress, and visitors and parties and presents. But where does the birth of Jesus fit in? How can we have a meaningful Christmas? How can we avoid the distractions of stress and visitors and presents and celebrate Christmas in a real way?

Verse 21: “She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Christmas is about...

Christmas is about our sin. Christmas is about God saving us from our sin. Christmas is about us needing help. We often think at Christmas about Mary, or Joseph, or the wise men or shepherds, or we’re overtaken by our stress, our visitors, our presents... but Christmas is actually about our sin. My sin. Your sin. The sin of the world. Christmas is often a time where we think about others. But we really need to think about ourselves too. To think about our sin. And to think about our need for help.

Many of you know I just returned from Tanzania in Africa a few weeks ago with a team of ministers from Sydney. And we saw a lot of poverty everywhere we went. People who sometimes didn’t even eat a meal a day. People without medical help, without education, without fresh water. People who were suffering so much. 9 people living in a small mud brick room. Sharing 1 bed. Suffering with Malaria and AIDS and all sorts of illnesses and diseases. And it strikes you how broken our world is. How unfair life can be. How your future can depend so much on which country you were born in. How unbalanced our world is when 10% of people own 90% of the world’s resources.

We all need help

First it struck me how much help they need. Then it struck me how much help WE need! That we have so much wealth while so many suffer so much each day. At first I thought how poor and broken these people were. But then I realised how poor and broken I am. How much help I need. How much help humanity needs.

And I share that with you because this is Christmas, and as we read this story again, we see even the richest men coming to Jesus and kneeling down to worship him. Bowing before this baby and worshipping him as King. Christmas is a time that calls all of us, rich and poor, to kneel at the feet of the king and recognise our brokenness. In our world, there is such a divide between rich and poor, the haves and the have nots. But Christmas is a time that reminds us **we’re all the same**. We’re all broken and we all need rescuing. And the baby, the king Jesus, is the one who can save us.

Today, you may be poor or rich. You may be happy and life is good and everything's together. Or you may be a broken person, life is falling apart and it's never been tougher. You may be surrounded by friends and family or you may be feeling alone. You may be in good health or you may be dying. But the message of Christmas says this:

We all need to kneel at the feet of the same King. Because we all need rescuing. And that can be a struggle.

If things are good for you, then it can be hard to recognise that you need help. It can be difficult to acknowledge that you need to depend on Jesus as King and put him first above everything else. When you have everything, it can be hard to depend on God because we can depend so much on ourselves.

And it can be difficult when life is hard too. Because when life falls apart, it can be hard to believe that God cares about you so much that he would send his son into the world for you. When you have nothing, it's hard to believe that you're important to God.

But that is Christmas. We all need help. We all need rescuing. And we're all important to God. What's important is not the expensive gifts we bring, but the fact that we come to him and kneel before him and worship him.

Let's worship him now with our next song: and let's worship him as people who are, in our hearts, kneeling before him as King.