

God's Purposes for the Incarnation

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At this time of year, you will likely see representations of the baby Jesus in Christmas cards, church dramas, and manger displays. What goes through your mind when you see the Lord portrayed as a newborn? Most Christians are aware that God “... **became flesh, and dwelt among us**” (**John 1:14**). Some even recognize the close connection between Christmas and Easter—that Christ came to die for the sins of mankind and accomplish our salvation.

As wonderful as that purpose is, however, it was not God's sole objective in sending His Son to earth. Exploring the Father's reasons for Christ's arrival is important, because the greater our understanding, the more we will recognize and sense His unlimited love for us. So let's look at four purposes God had for the Incarnation.

Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets

The apostle Paul explained that we are “**not justified by works of the Law, but through faith in Christ Jesus**”—the Law is actually a “**tutor**” leading us to saving faith. (**Galatians 2:16; Galatians 3:24**) By revealing what constitutes “**transgression**” in God's eyes, the Law brings us to the realization that we are, in fact, sinners. So in **Matthew 5:17**, when Jesus said, “**Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill,**” what did He mean?

The first way Christ fulfilled the Law was by personal obedience to it. The “**Law**” of the Old Testament involved more than the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Altogether, God handed down 613 moral, ceremonial, and civic requirements before the Hebrew people reached the Promised Land. Jesus was born under this code, and He kept the entire body of legislation in all of its fine points so that He could redeem mankind and bring us into God's family. (**Galatians 4:4-5**) In fact, Jesus oftentimes took His interpretation even beyond the rabbis' understanding of a commandment. (**Matthew 5:21-48**) Though the religious leaders often accused Him of breaking the Law, He was flawless in obeying every mandate given by His Father.

The heavenly Father values our faith (Genesis 15:6; Hebrews 11:6), and for us to believe, He must accomplish everything He has promised and predicted. So another way our Savior fulfilled Scripture is by being and doing exactly what the Father, through prophecy, told us to expect. The prophets had much to say about the coming Messiah—for example, that He would be born of a virgin (**Isaiah 7:14**) in the town of Bethlehem (**Micah 5:2**). His life on earth proved that every single scriptural messianic prediction was true. And since each foretold detail of the First Coming was carried out literally, we know the prophecies that are still future will likewise occur with 100 percent accuracy.

A third way Jesus fulfilled the Law was by dying on the Cross. He was the completion and final offering of the sacrificial system set up in the Old Testament; John the Baptist rightly identified Him as **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29)**. According to **Romans 6:23**, **“The wages of sin is death.”** Since no one is sinless (**Isaiah 53:6**), we all owe a debt for our transgressions. And God’s justice demands payment for such debt, so if Jesus Christ had not come to take care of our penalty, we would have had to pay it ourselves. However, God’s love for us prompted the solution—He **“gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16)**. **Deuteronomy 17:1** tells us something else about God’s sacrificial system: anything less than a perfect offering is unacceptable. Jesus Christ came as the suffering servant to take your place and mine. Since no one else ever fully kept the Law, He alone was qualified to lay down His life for us.

The fourth way Jesus fulfilled the Law is probably the most familiar to Christians. He came to enlarge upon the Law, bringing fuller understanding than even the religious leadership had. For example, **“Thou shalt not commit adultery”** was understood as referring to the act, but Jesus amplified the meaning to include even lustful thoughts. In this way, He elaborated upon the Law and brought its meaning to completion. So, the night the Lord Jesus Christ was born, more happened than simply the birth of a child. His arrival meant the fulfillment of the Law as well as clarification of the guidelines by which we are to live. But that was not the only reason He came.

Jesus came to reveal the Father.

Moses and the Prophets introduced God as the Transcendent One, the Creator. But it isn’t until the New Testament that we grasp His desire for intimate relationship with His people. To understand this, we must realize revelation is progressive. That is, God began to reveal His nature to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. From there, we find an unveiling of His characteristics through His dealings with man—He was the Provider, Protector, Almighty, Eternal One, Master, and Lord; He also showed Himself to be the God of justice and wrath. So the people of the Old Testament had a somewhat scattered view of Him.

Although the patriarchs did refer to God as their **“Father,”** the Israelites primarily understood they had a covenant relationship with Him rather than a parent-child connection. Of all the people mentioned in the Old Testament, David probably came the closest to sensing the personal nature of a relationship with God, but the fullest picture would come centuries later, with the arrival of God’s Son.

Today we understand the relationship more completely because Jesus revealed a whole different perspective. He instructed the people to pray in this way: **“Our Father who is in heaven . . .” (Matthew 6:9, emphasis added)** But Jesus did more than just *tell* us about the Father; He *showed* us. **Colossians 1:15** says, **“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”** In other words, the Lord Jesus is the full likeness and reflection of God the Father; Christ is God walking in human flesh.

It was very important to God for His children to understand who He is and what He is like. He wants us to know that He is not merely a God of holiness, wrath, and justice, but that He is also loving, kind, and merciful—and always present to hear and respond to our cries for help. (**Psalm 17:6; Psalm 46:1**) That is why He sent His Son to us—Jesus Christ came to reveal the Father’s true nature. (**John 14:9**). As **Hebrews 1:3** explains, Jesus “**is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature.**” So, if you want an accurate picture of God, look at Jesus—it is impossible to know the Father apart from the Son. (**John 14:6**)

Jesus came to testify to the truth.

At His interrogation by Pilate, Jesus said, “**For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth**” (**John 18:37**). And the truth is that man without Christ is lost, which simply means that by choosing disobedience to Scripture, a person is separated from God. Our sinful condition leaves us helpless and hopeless apart from the Savior. But the Bible tells us that we were “**reconciled to God through the death of His Son**” (**Romans 5:10**).

In other words, God, seeing humanity’s wretched condition, knew that man would never try to take hold of Him. So instead, He reached down in love and restored the relationship between Himself and sinful man. Reconciliation is God taking the initiative to reach out to the undeserving with forgiveness, cleansing, and adoption into His family. For this reason, Christmas is God’s marvelous, eternal provision for mankind—the means by which every one of us can have a personal relationship with our Creator and be freed from bondage to sin. But God’s blessings through the Incarnation do not stop even here.

Jesus came to give abundant life.

To the mind of God, it is not enough that we should receive forgiveness of sin and thereby just look *forward* to eternal life; He wants us to have abundant life right here, right now. (**John 10:10**) The apostle Paul expressed it this way: “**Christ, who is our life**” (**Colossians 3:4**), meaning that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to indwell every Christian and live out the life of Christ through believers. (**John 14:17; John 15:26**)

What’s more, this Christ who has become our life is also indwelt by the Father—this means that the fullness of the Godhead indwells every single believer! (**John 14:10; Colossians 2:9**) We cannot access this supernatural, abundant existence on our own. The only way to have divine power and life flowing through us is by abiding in Christ. (**John 15:5**)

Do you have life at its best?

The message of Christmas is that the eternal Son of God came to dwell among men and also, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, to live within each believer in every age. Let me ask you: If you already belong to Jesus, are you choosing to abide in Him daily,

allowing Him to live and minister through you? And if you haven't yet received Christ as your Savior, what better time than Christmas? Let Him do for you personally what He came at Christmas to do for us all—and start enjoying the abundant life today.