

The true joy of Christmas comes when we recognize the purpose in the birth of Jesus. The angel's words to Joseph in Matthew 1:21 give us one essential purpose: Mary "will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins". Jesus was God who became man in order to save his people from their sins. We celebrate Christmas because a Savior from our sin was born.

I. Sin – our condition

1. *Joseph's "picture" (understanding) the people's condition:* The primary sin of the people of Israel was spiritual unfaithfulness. Joseph himself was descended from David but his line was cursed by God, that no offspring would sit on the throne. But there was a bigger picture than Israel. God's people included more than just Israel (cf. John 10:16) and it was the condition of all God's people that needed attention.
2. *The big "sin" picture:* Sin is bigger than Israel's covenant failures. It is any missing of God's perfect standard (Matt 1:21; cf. Rom 3:23). It is a failure to act right with God or to keep a "straight" path (the sense of "transgression" and "iniquity" in Isaiah 53:5). It is going our own way rather than God's (Isaiah 53:6). This is the condition of all people, Jew and Gentile alike (Romans 3:23), from the moment of conception (Psalm 51:5).
3. *Our picture:* This therefore is our picture as well. We need to name our rebellion for what it is. Then we will better understand our celebration of Christmas, that God became man because of sin.

II. Save – our need

The word "save" points to the consequences of sin and our need.

1. *An incomplete understanding of need:* Jews in the first century were looking for "salvation" from Roman oppression, sickness, and material lack. These were not wrong, but dangerously lacking the most significant and essential need, salvation through the forgiveness of sin (cf. Luke 1:77).
2. *Understanding the essential need (Isaiah 53):* the need to be saved from sin is highlighted in Isaiah 53. Sin removed peace, demands punishment, causes guilt, requires intercession. (See especially verses 5, 8, 10, 12.)
3. *Understanding our need, salvation from sin:* This is our need as well and an essential part of the Christmas story. Sinners needing saving is the backdrop which makes it joyous news that God became man to save sinners.

III. Savior: Jesus – our solution

The joy of Christmas arises from the fact that God responded to the need in providing the Savior. We do not merely celebrate a birth, we celebrate the birth of a Savior.

1. *A Savior as proclaimed throughout the Christmas story:* It is in His name, "Jehovah saves" and in the message (cf. Luke 1:69; 2:11, 30).
2. *A Savior made possible by the person of Jesus:* He fulfilled the promises to Abraham and David (cf. Matthew 1:1–17). He was fully God (Immanuel), and fully man but without sin.
3. *A Savior as foretold by Isaiah:* He paid the price for our sins (53:4, 5, 6, 8, 12) yet without sin (53:9).

Jesus, the Messiah, was God become man, to be the Savior, saving His people from their sin.

Your Christmas joy will be greatest, when you celebrate the birth of a Savior. It means knowing that we are sinners, needing salvation from our sin, and receiving Jesus as God's divine solution. It is the purpose of the birth of Jesus that is our reason for joy: He saves His people from their sin.

For further reflection and discussion:

- What in your Christmas celebrations expresses your thanks for forgiveness of sin through Jesus?
- Which Christmas songs remind us of this truth?
- How much of your Christmas or Advent celebrations include reflection on the purpose(s) of the birth of Jesus?
- How can you better incorporate reflection on the full meaning of Christmas into your celebrations?