

PARACLETE

ADVOCATING FOR THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

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A CHRISTMAS GIFT JUST FOR YOU

By Dr. Don Bierle, *FaithSearch* President

Why do we celebrate Christmas with gift giving? Because the truth about Christmas is about life, now and forever – “...and they shall call His name *Immanuel*” which translated means, “*God with us*” – a precious Life indeed!

Part of appreciating a gift is to look at the care taken to wrap it. In this issue of the *Paraclete*, I point out some of the meticulous care of God’s first century wrappings – evidence that authenticates the gift inside.

Jesus is more like the gift of a great fitting pair of gloves than an ornament to admire. You have to “wear Him” to fully appreciate how valuable He is. That’s why Jesus Himself said, “*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly*”

(John 10:10). “Putting on” this heaven-sent gift of Christmas enables us to live life right now to the fullest.

The problem with most Christmas gifts, though, is that they don’t last. We don’t either! The gift of life Jesus offers, comes with a guarantee: recipients are promised an eternity with God, beginning now, and continuing after death into eternity.



The gift of Jesus is about **love and hope**: “...*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*” (John 3:16).

Typically, on Christmas eve or Christmas day a gift under the tree marked with your name becomes yours. When that gift is distributed, you remove the wrappings and discover its contents are thoughtfully just right for you.

Likewise, I invite you to remove the enticing commercial wrappings surrounding Christmas as it is packaged today. You will discover **God’s gift of His Son**. This Christmas gift also has your name on it. Today you can discover the forgiveness and joy which the gift of Jesus can bring to your heart. You’ll find

He’s just your size! The Bible says that “*as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God*” (John 1:12).

As a child of God you are given new life: “*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation...*” (2 Corinthians 5:17). As a child of God you are also forgiven and set free from bondage to sin and death: “*If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free...If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed*” (John 8:31-32, 36).

What a life-changing gift Jesus is to us! I invite you to use this prayer to open your heart to Him if you have never experienced His love and forgiveness:

The Bible says, “*The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 6:23b).

The Bible also says, “*all have sinned*” (Romans 3:23) and “*the wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23a).



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Did You Know?

Christmas Choice: Innkeeper or Shepherd?

Christmas was so close to the innkeeper in Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph came to his city, they stood on his doorstep, possibly even in front of his desk. Yet we deduce his preoccupation with business kept him from recognizing the Christ of Christmas. The innkeeper had no time and no room for Jesus.

The shepherds were different. Upon hearing the “*good news of great joy*” and that “*there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord*” – they hurried into Bethlehem to meet Him. They took time for Jesus. More than that, the shepherds made room for Jesus in their hearts and “*spread the Word concerning...this child*” (Luke 2:10-11, 17).

More than 2,000 years have passed since then. “Wise men” still seek Him; “innkeepers” still miss Him, caught up in the busyness of the season; and “shepherds” still find Him. Those who find Jesus discover something more precious than wise men’s gifts. They experience forgiveness and the gift of eternal life (John 1:29; 3:16).

A Christmas Prayer: “*Dear God, I want to be a shepherd and come to Jesus. Forgive me for having no time and no room for Him. You are welcome in my heart now. Begin to change my life for good. Thank you for making room for me in your Kingdom. Amen.*”



Although the innkeeper is not mentioned in the Bible, **somebody** must have said, “No room.” “*And she ...laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn*” (Luke 2:7). The *Nativity*, by Gustave Doré, 1891 (public domain).


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A CHRISTMAS GIFT JUST FOR YOU

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Dear God,

I want to unwrap the truth about Christmas and experience the abundant life which Jesus came to give. I acknowledge that my sin has separated me from You. I now turn from that sin and by faith accept Jesus Christ as my Savior. Thank you for the gift that lasts – life forever with you in heaven. Until then please give me the courage and strength now as a disciple to let Your Word guide my life. Amen. 



sand years of the time of writing. This allows for the accumulation of copying errors. Again, consider that some New Testament manuscripts are **within twenty-five years** of the original composition; **all are within 100 years** of authorship.


The integrity of the eyewitness Gospel records of Jesus is head and shoulders above all other ancient writings.

Archaeological discoveries often confirm the historical reliability of people, places, and events mentioned in the writings. **No other writing is even close to the historical confirmation of the New Testament.** Evidence for people (e.g. Caiaphas, Pontius Pilate), places (e.g. Capernaum Synagogue, Peter's home, pools of Bethesda and Siloam), and events (crucifixion with nails) have verified the truthfulness of New Testament history.



Evidence from archaeology: Although skeptics dismissed the use of nails for crucifixion in Jesus' time, an excavation in Jerusalem discovered the ankle and foot bones (with embedded nail) of a crucifixion victim, dated close to the time of Jesus' death.

The Gospel records of Jesus have the greatest integrity and are the most historically reliable writings of antiquity, bar none.

The transmission to us over the centuries has been so good that when we read about Jesus in our Bible today, we can be assured we are reading what the eyewitness apostles saw, heard, and wrote in the first century! 

What Are the Odds?

It has been stated that there are at least 456 Old Testament prophecies which pertain to a future person. For example, this person would be **born in Bethlehem** of a virgin; would be **betrayed for thirty pieces of silver** by a friend; **crucified among criminals**;


hands and feet would be pierced; **none of his bones would be broken**; and he would be **resurrected from the dead**. The Old Testament prophecies were clearly focused on Jesus for only He fulfilled these and the hundreds of criteria.

How do skeptics respond? First, they erroneously claim the prophecies must have been written *after* the time of Jesus, and therefore, fulfill themselves. However, **the Septuagint** (Greek translation of the Old Testament) was translated **250 years before the birth of Jesus** and these same prophecies are included there. Furthermore, the recently-discovered **Dead Sea Scrolls**, which date **150-200 years before Jesus** lived, also include the prophecies.

Second, the most common objection is that the fulfillment was coincidence or chance. Science and mathematics professor Peter Stoner has estimated a reasonable probability that one man might have coincidentally fulfilled **just 8 of these 456 prophecies is one chance in 10¹⁷**. How can we understand that?



Take 10¹⁷ silver dollars, which would cover the entire state of Texas two feet deep. Mark one and stir the whole mass thoroughly. Blindfold a man, and send him throughout Texas, instructing him to pick up only one silver dollar, and hope that one coin would be the marked one. **This is the same chance the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man.** (Peter W. Stoner, *Science Speaks*, Moody Press, p. 107.)


These odds don't account for the other 448 prophecies, also fulfilled in the person of Jesus! 

Did You Know?

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Wisdom from the Mouth of a Child

The week before Christmas was hectic. Dad and mom were frantic, and nerves reached the breaking point more than once. The little daughter seemed to be in the way wherever she went.

Finally, she was hurried up to bed and as she knelt to pray, the feverish excitement evidently mixed her up and she said, **"Jesus, forgive us our Christmases, as we forgive those who Christmas against us!"** 



Are the Bible Records of Jesus True?

The basis for trusting the Gospel records about Jesus is twofold: 1) Do the records have integrity? and 2) Are they actual history?

Ancient writings with the **earliest and greatest number** of hand-written manuscripts have the greatest integrity. Most ancient works have fewer than 100 manuscripts, a scant few have several hundred. The New Testament, in stark contrast, has **over 24,000**.

Most documents from antiquity have *no manuscripts within even one thou-*

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