

THE GREATEST GIFT: THE BIG DAY

The other day, I was reading an article about how sports teams have athletes travel on Christmas day. So they made an announcement, “Don’t miss Christmas.” That phrase just caught my mind. *Don’t miss Christmas*. One of the players said, “*No game is worth missing Christmas for.*”

Even though Christmas is the most advertised and commercialized holiday in the world, it even gets an entire month and likely the most celebrated holiday. You’d think it’d be hard to miss Christmas with the decorations and lights, Christmas parties, cards and music, gifts and shopping, Christmas specials on TV and on and on. Not to mention all of the Christmas commercials.

Is it even possible to miss Christmas? The answer is yes.

You can miss Christmas for the same reasons people missed the 1st Christmas.

Let’s look at the three most common reasons people have Christmas all around and still miss it.

Then, we will look at how not to miss Christmas. Three reasons why people miss Christmas are found in the first Christmas story.

• **Busyness (The Innkeeper)**

Busyness is one reason we miss Christmas. It was the innkeeper’s mistake that first Christmas. You know the story; the last week of her pregnancy Mary and Joseph have to take a 4 day walk to their hometown of Bethlehem from Nazareth because of a census for taxation with the Roman government.

They get to Bethlehem; Mary goes into labor and Joseph tries to check her into a local Hotel. The innkeeper says, “Sorry, no vacancies. There’s no room in the inn.”

Luke 2:7 explains: “*So Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, [what’s a manger? A manger is a feed trough or wooden box you put grain in for cows, donkeys or other livestock. When Mary laid her baby in a manger, it’s nothing fancy; it’s a feed box for cows. It’s humble.*

Meanwhile, from the innkeeper’s perspective, these are good times, business is booming. Hotels don’t want empty rooms at night. He’s thinking, “Business is good. There is a census and those people who moved away are traveling back and they’re looking for a place to stay. And he’s booked, that’s good news.

But he’s too busy for a pregnant lady and a baby on the way, but he has no idea who he is snubbing.

The point is this: The busyness of his Inn caused him to miss an opportunity of a lifetime. The Son of God was going to be born in his inn. Can you imagine the PR of that? You could put up a sign: Son of God born here! And your inn would be sold out for the rest of your life. But he missed it because he was busy.

Are you too busy to make room for Jesus this Christmas? I'm not talking about your house. I'm talking about your thoughts, your time, your budget, your plans. Are you so busy with everything else... you don't have any room for Jesus in your life, in your heart, in your mind. If not, you miss meeting God.

2. FAMILIARITY (The Religious Leaders)

You're so familiar with Christmas, you're not inspired anymore. You heard it all and know about Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus. You know - been there, done that.

- **Christmas lost the awe and excitement, and your attitude is “Ho, hum!”**

You miss the beauty... because you *think* you understand it. You see it, but don't do anything about it. **This mistake of familiarity**, was the mistake of other of the **religious leaders** at the first Christmas.

- **God came to earth in human form, the religious people knew it, but** not a priest, scribe, or theologian came. Why? They were so familiar with the story.

But, the Bible tells us wise men from the Far East saw the star, looked up the prophecies and knew the Savior was to be born in Israel, but didn't know where.

- We don't know who the wise men were or where they were from. But they were scholars and saw something unusual – a star, so they checked it out.”
- So they arrive in Jerusalem, and asked for a meeting with King Herod. Herod meets them because they're famous kings too. When Herod meets with them; they ask, “Where is the Messiah, going to be born?” But **Herod has not idea what the Wise Men were talking about**. So he called in the Jewish religious leaders and scholars and asked, “Who is this king of the Jews, where and when is he going to be born?”
- **The religious scholars knew who he was talking about. They had been discussing and debating it for hundreds of years... they knew what was going on.** The Bible says it like this in Matthew 2: *“King Herod called a meeting of all the leading priests and teachers of the law and asked them where the Christ would be born. They answered, ‘In the town of Bethlehem in Judea. The prophet (Micah) wrote about this in the Scriptures.’”*

Notice some interesting things about that passage.

- **A lot of people in Israel knew this was going to happen.** They've been waiting for hundreds of years and knew from the book of Micah 5:4 that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. **They knew it, but they did nothing.**

- **Think about it:** *an unusual star in the sky, foreign dignitaries show up and get a private meeting with the king, then the king calls in his scholars.* You'd figure something is going on here. Yet no one cared enough to go to Bethlehem and check it out. **The lack of curiosity is stunning.**

This can happen to you – you go to church all your life, study the Bible, hear the Christmas story for years, and miss it, because you feel, “I’ve seen it all.”

- **But Jesus is not about religion, He’s about a relationship.** In fact, Jesus **said you don’t need religious rules, rituals and restrictions to know Him.** What you need is a relationship and friendship with Emmanuel, God with us.

Sound familiar? We have so many traditions around Christmas... and they keep adding on. There’s Santa Claus and Rudolph the red nosed reindeer, there’s Elf on the Shelf. They keep adding new traditions, but **few people talk about the reason for the season - why God came to earth.**

- **So... what’s the big deal? What difference could it make in your life? If you don’t know the answer, then you’re no better than these religious leaders 2000 years ago** who wouldn’t walk five miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to check it out.
- **The big deal is that** God wants to have a relationship with you and you can have a relationship with God. **If you miss that... you missed Christmas...** even if you put up all your Christmas lights - you’re still in the dark.
- The Apostle Paul explained it in Ephesians 4:18, “*Their minds are in the dark, and they are stubborn so they have missed out on the life that comes from God.*” **Why? They were familiar and indifferent to Christmas.**

3. FEAR (King Herod)

Fear causes you to miss the meaning of Christmas too. Yes, people are afraid of Christmas! That’s why they fight Christmas and nativity scenes, they file lawsuits against it, they’re afraid of the message of Christmas. That’s King Herod’s problem.

- Herod was the king of Judia, but actually a Roman citizen of Arab decent – **he wasn’t Jewish.** He conquered Jerusalem and appointed himself king, and the Jews hated him. But he called himself King of the Jews and was used by the Romans to control the Jewish people.
- But Herod was paranoid and afraid of *anyone* who threatened his reign as King of the Jews. Anybody Herod thought might overthrow him; he had killed.
- **Then the wise men show up and ask, “Where is this baby born to be king of the Jews?”** Herod goes ballistic and decided to find and kill this baby.

- So, to take out competition, Herod ordered all baby boys born in Bethlehem under two years murdered. Why? He was afraid of Christmas, a baby born.

You may not have that kind of fear. But I know a lot of people who are **afraid to get to know God**. They have 3 basic fears, **if I open up my life to Jesus:**

- I will lose my freedom and I can't do all the things I want to do.
- I will lose my fun; I won't get to do anything fun anymore.
- I will become a fanatic; I will walk around and act like a religious nut.

BUT - when you let Jesus into your life, he doesn't make you more religious. He makes you more human. An early Christian theologian named Irenaeus said "The glory of God is a human being fully alive." You're not living, you're only existing, if you're not connected to God.

- **The bottom line: you were made by God and for God.** You can **try** to find life in making money, having fun, or a great golf game. You can try to fill that emptiness only God can fill - but it won't work. **WHY?** Because you were made **by God and for God**, and without God, life won't make sense.

So God says "I want to free you of your fear." Bottom line about Herod's greatest fear, "I don't want anybody to be in control except me."

- **And that's why a lot of people fear God, because - they want to be God.** I want to run my own life – pride. I want to call my own shots and be my own god. **It's the Herod mentality.** I'm not going to let anybody else be king in my life. Not even God who made me. The Bible says in 1 Timothy 6, "*Some people have missed the most important thing in life – they don't know God!*"

So how do I NOT miss Christmas?

If busyness, familiarity and fear keep me from knowing Christ and understanding the true meaning of Christmas... **how do I NOT miss Christmas?**

Remember when you were a kid, they taught you safety rules. That formula of Stop, Look, and Listen. It's the key to not missing the true meaning of Christmas. **You've got to stop, look, and you've got to listen. Let's look at them:**

- **STOP filling life with less important things.**

Don't let busyness keep you from knowing God. Psalm 39, "*All man's busy rushing ends in nothing. He heaps up riches for someone else to spend.*" **Would you agree? You can be so busy making a living, you forget to make a life?**

Busyness can fill your schedule and fracture your family.

The tragedy - most people are too busy for God.

The antidote is to stop running and slow down. That's the 1st way to know the meaning of Christmas. STOP.

God said in Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God." Have you ever wondered why God told the shepherds that he's coming to earth in human form?

- In Jewish culture 2,000 years ago sheep herders or shepherds were the lowest rung on the status ladder. They were considered worthless people.
- **But God tells them first!** The shepherds were social outcasts, people on the fringe, and nobody wanted to associate with them. But God told them first.

Why does God tell the shepherds before he told anybody else?

- One of the reasons was they weren't busy.
- God always speaks to those who are willing to listen.
- **Stop filling your life with less important things, stop and listen for God!**
- **LOOK**

Look carefully at **why** Jesus came. Look at **who** Jesus was, **what** did he say and claim? **Why** does Jesus matter? **What** difference does He make in my life today? That's the one good thing Herod told the wise men, Matthew 2:8, "*Go and make a careful search for the child.*" **Why were the wise men wise?** They checked it out.

If God is God, then obviously God has a place in my life, and I need to choose Jesus, invite Him in to be my Savior. The Bible says "For unto you is born a Savior." If you didn't need a Savior, God wouldn't have wasted time sending one.

There's no way you're getting into heaven on your own. Not by doing enough good works, or being good enough. **IF we could get to heaven by just being nice people Jesus coming as the Savior would have been unnecessary.** Jesus dying on the cross would have been a waste of time. "*For unto you is born a Savior who is Christ the Lord.*" You need a Savior.

So the response to Jesus is to say, "God, You're right, I am not perfect and am flawed. I need a Savior. So I come to you God, here I am." That's why Jeremiah 29:13 says. "*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*"

• LISTEN

Listen to the good news of Christmas, don't be afraid of it. Why would anybody be afraid of good news? The Bible says Christmas was, "*I bring you good news of great joy.*" Why would anybody be afraid of that?

Luke 2 says, "*The angel said, 'Fear not; I bring you good news of great joy!* [Notice he doesn't say I bring you bad news of great misery. A lot of people think if I give my life to

Christ I'm going to be miserable. But you're not living until you're connected to the Creator who made you. Good news of great joy...] ...*a Savior has been born for you - he is Christ the Lord!*"

So, which of these three things could cause you to miss Christmas?

- Busyness? I'm too busy with work and my schedule.
- Familiarity? You do all the Christmas stuff and still miss the meaning.
- Fear? Are you like Herod and want to be king. That's not a wise way to live. Because all it's going to cause is problems, pain. How's that going for you, by the way - you being your own god? Are all your problems solved? If you're God, all your problems are solved, right? If not...

Prayer:

As we close I'm going to pray a Christmas prayer and I invite you to pray this prayer with me. It isn't about the words – it's about the attitude of your heart. There's one attitude you must have - humility. It's to say, God, I believe that you are God and I'm not. And I need a Savior. I cannot save myself. I cannot know my own purpose. So I need you as a Savior. For my past to be forgiven, my purpose for living, my home in heaven.

In your mind pray "God, I don't understand it all, but I want to be totally honest with you. I allowed busyness to keep me from knowing you. I allowed familiarity with things to keep me from knowing you. And allowed even fear to keep me from knowing you. But I thank you that you love me in spite of all my faults and my failures. So this Christmas as much as I know how, Jesus Christ, I open up my life to you. I don't understand it all and I've got doubts and questions. But I want to be a friend of God and I need a Savior. I realize that if I didn't need one you wouldn't have sent one at Christmas. You said a Savior has been born for me so I accept Jesus Christ as my Savior. I want to learn to love him and trust him the rest of my life. And I humbly make this request. In your name. Amen."