



WHY ARE WE
celebrating Christmas?

ROGER CARSWELL

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Never in history has the birth of a baby made such an impact. Over two thousand years since He was laid in a manger in Bethlehem, the world still stops and celebrates the moment. We may remember the lives of others but celebrate their birth? That honour is Jesus' alone.

December 2020 was the 250th anniversary of the birth of Beethoven. The Royal Mail issued no stamps to honour him, though we appreciate all he gifted to humanity. And yet millions of stamps were issued in different countries of the world to depict the birth

of Jesus. What is so different about Him? Why do millions of people trust and serve Him? What makes His followers give their time and money, even their lives, to reach out in compassion and care to people across the world whose needs are greater than their own? And why do so many governments across the world still persecute people who simply trust and worship Jesus?

What is it about Jesus that we celebrate His birth every year?



The man of history



At the start of the Bible's New Testament, Jesus bursts onto the scene. Matthew's Gospel begins with Jesus' ancestry. It goes back through King David to Abraham. The list of names may appear boring, but it shows that Jesus is a man of history. He is a real character. He is not some fictional hero, but his line could be traced through generations. Luke's Gospel follows his genealogy from Mary right back to Adam. Jesus lived! But then millions have lived and died and been forgotten. However, the Gospel of Matthew quickly introduces reasons why Jesus' birth is so significant, and it is startling.

The man of mystery



We are told that Mary was “found with child” before there had been any sexual union between her and Joseph. They were committed to each other but were not married yet. As the Bible puts it “before they came together,” she was pregnant. Mary herself questioned, “How will this be ... since I am a virgin?”¹ Joseph was puzzled and feared the worst about the young girl he loved. He did not want to publicly disgrace Mary and had in mind to break off the relationship.

Fascinatingly, the Bible is full of prophecies. Isaiah was a prophet who served in the royal household of his day. Around 700 years before the birth of Jesus, he spoke about the

¹ Luke 1:34

virgin mother giving birth: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel.” Strange as it was, God had clearly said that this would happen.



To reassure both Mary and Joseph, angels were sent to them in dreams. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph saying, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is God Himself at work in the world both then and now. Jesus was conceived of deity and humanity. We read at the end of Matthew 1 that Joseph had no union with Mary until after she gave birth to Jesus.