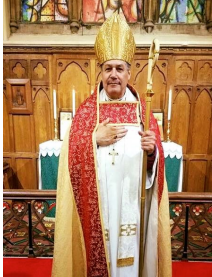




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And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

It was a simple scene that first Christmas – a small cave for shelter, a young couple far from home, and nothing but a feeding trough in which to put the Christ Child. Far above this humble setting was Herod's palace atop the hill overlooking Bethlehem. The King of kings was about to be born into the world He created; but the sometime king of Israel in his palace would take no notice – until he felt a threat to his earthly throne.

God had promised to send the Messiah, the Christ, the Saviour, who would redeem His people. He could have easily burst on the scene as a fully-grown man, a warrior king, the upholder of justice and fixer of wrong, like one of our modern day 'superheroes'. In fact, this was what many people then, and even now, were looking for, but it wasn't how God did it – it was not part of His divine plan of salvation.

Instead, the Saviour arrived in the stillness of night; revealed to a waiting world in the arms of a young mother in an obscure part of the Roman Empire. He was, as one Christian author put it, "a very small package, wrapped in rags, given from the heart of God. The perfect gift."

God gave the first gift of Christmas – His only Son – so that the world and the people He created would know of His love. So that we, in all our brokenness, our hopes and fears, our sins and failures, could know lasting forgiveness, peace of mind, hope for the soul.

Christmas is the ultimate example of how God works His will. He took the most significant event in human history, the birth of His divine Son, and clothed it in rags set amidst a simple stable in a small faraway town. God revealed the importance of this birth not by outward pomp, not by dazzle and glitz, but by the announcement of the good news of His eternal Word to simple shepherds in the dark night of a countryside. An event which would forever change the story of humanity and the history of our salvation.

On that solitary night in Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph had made their way to the birthplace of David, from whose lineage the Saviour was to be born. They had travelled in obedience to Caesar's decree; yet fulfilling God's holy will. Into this world, into this reality, into the life and struggle of ordinary men and women, came Jesus – God's perfect gift.

Christmas is not just an historical event recorded for us in the stories of the Gospel; nor in the pretty pictures and songs of the Season. Christmas is the celebration of the union of God with man for the redemption of the world. And therein is the truth of this Holy Day – that the eternal Word of God, born in a manger, born in time yet present from all eternity, is Lord of heaven and earth, the Righteousness Judge, the Son of man, the everlasting Prince of Peace, our Saviour and Redeemer.

May I extend to you all my prayer for a blessed and joyous Christmas, as we welcome our Saviour King once more into our homes and our hearts.

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