

Road to Bethlehem

As a child growing up I used to enjoy the series of movies made famous by Bob Hope, Bing Crosby and Dorothy Lamour – *The Road to...* which had elements of adventure, comedy, romance and music – all very light hearted and “tongue in cheek”.

In only a very short while the world will be celebrating Christmas. For some it will be a holy celebratory occasion and for others a time to get together without any thought what-so-ever as to its meaning and to others a time of condemnation.

Christmas today is a paradox – a day that has been set aside to celebrate the birth of Christ; a period when the Christian world should unite in celebration instead we witness so many differing belief system that are juxtaposed against each other resulting in judgemental outcomes that demean the very reason Christ’s birth is celebrated.

The biggest roadblock to the many “Christian” detractors of Christmas is the date set aside for when Jesus was born and its perceived association with paganism. Conceded, Jesus was not born on Christmas Day and in all probability was born during the northern hemisphere Autumn Festival Season¹. Having said that, Scripture does not provide us with Christ’s actual birth date nor does Scripture forbid us to set a day aside to celebrate. To the contrary, Jesus birth was to be a day that would...*cause great joy for all the people...*²

Just as the *Road* series were laced with adventure and intrigue so too is the Road to Bethlehem filled with stories that would make a Hollywood producer drool with envy. We have murder, prostitution, adultery, incest and Immaculate Conception just to name some to help enliven our journey along the Road to Bethlehem. However, like every good story, it has its arch villain, and Scripture reveals the ultimate villain in Satan the devil and his attempts to thwart the birth of Jesus Christ.



We are all familiar with the expression “opening a can of worms” which originated in Nth America in the 1950’s when fishermen would buy cans of worms containing live worms. The problem: once the can was opened the worms would escape creating a problem for the fisherman: thus the phrase *opening a can of worms*.

Scripture reveals that God took Adam and placed him in the Garden commanding him he could eat from every tree but from the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.*³

¹ Deuteronomy 16: 13-15

² Luke 2: 10

³ Genesis 2: 15-17

All is going well until Satan cleverly disguised as a serpent deceives Eve into eating of the forbidden fruit. Adam too is seduced by his own rebellion and self-centeredness; takes the fruit from Eve and eats it. It was at that moment in time that the *can of worms* was opened. Mankind since has forever been trying to put the worms back into the can.



Adam's sin has resulted in a Humpty Dumpty situation . The bad news: Adam's sin was punishable by death (*..for when you eat of it you **will surely die***). Paul in Romans 6: 23 confirms this by stating that the wages of sin is death. Adam and Eve sinned (and mankind has done so continually) therefore all mankind was given a death sentence.

Enter the reason why we should celebrate the birth of Christ...*An angel said to Joseph, "Mary will bear a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He **will save His people from their sins*** (Emphasis mine)."⁴

The foundation of Jesus' birth is replete throughout Scripture and His birth should be a celebratory occasion. We read of Jesus' birth first being prophesied in the third chapter of Genesis and Isaiah⁵ expounds upon that by revealing to us that a virgin will give birth to a son and He will be called Immanuel. The prophet continues by stating that the government will be *upon His shoulders...and He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace and of the greatness of His government and peace there will be no end.*

So why is Jesus' birth so important? The writer of Hebrew's makes the point because of our humanity i.e. our *flesh and blood*; Jesus likewise had to share in that humanity so that through His death, the one who holds the power of death (Satan) might be destroyed.⁶ Jesus, who was without sin, was to become the atoning sacrifice for all of mankind's sin – God's wrath through the death of Jesus on the cross was thus appeased.

On the day Jesus was born an angel appeared to the shepherds living out in the fields with the message of... *good news that will cause **great joy for all people**. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord...Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests* (emphasis mine)."⁷

⁴ Matthew 1: 21 NRSV

⁵ Isaiah 7: 14 and 9: 6-7

⁶ Hebrews 2: 14-18

⁷ Luke 2: 1-20

Mankind was created so that we might worship God. Jesus had to be born so that He could die and we might live.

Jesus Christ is eternal and the life that He brings is not that of men but of God. Prior to Christ coming, this **Life** (eternal life) did not exist – the abundant life that Jesus speaks of, cannot be fathomed by peoples of the world today – certainly not without help – God’s help.

Celebrating the birth of our Saviour is right and proper notwithstanding the day. The day we celebrate is irrelevant; what is important is the how and why. God will never reject our sincere praises, thankfulness and worship of Him.

This Christmas I intend to introduce a celebratory evening meal of *Thanksgiving* to reflect on the occasion why Jesus had to be born and the ultimate sacrifice He made so that we may live.