

The Dark Heart Of Christmas

Christmas is a unique time of year.

Traditionally, it's seen as a season of joy, hope, celebration, and family—a chance for many to unwind and find rest as the year draws to a close.

Yet, for others, the story is different. Christmas can be a lonely and isolating season, marked by fractured relationships, the pain of missing loved ones, or financial pressures that overshadow the festivities. It can feel less like a time of rest and more like a whirlwind of exhaustion and unmet expectations.

For many, Christmas is a complex mix of emotions—hopeful yet heavy, joyful yet sorrowful, warm and welcoming but also marked by loneliness and discouragement. It's a time that holds both the brightest lights and the deepest shadows, depending on where one stands.

It seems to me that all these emotions are deeply rooted in the true Christmas story—a story far removed from the sanitised, child-friendly version we often share. Yes, Christmas is a time of hope and celebration as we mark the birth of Jesus Christ. But it's also a season for introspection and solemnity as we reflect on why Jesus came and the profound purpose of His arrival.

Christians are often accused of being overly focused on [sin](#)—and it's true that we sometimes tend to emphasise sin more than the grace that forgives those sins. But sin, and humanity's separation from God, are central to the Christmas story.

Without sin, there would be no need for redemption or reconciliation with God. Without sin, there would have been no need for Jesus Christ to come “to save his people” (Matthew

1:21). Without sin, Jesus would not have had to die. At the heart of the Christmas narrative lies a profound hopelessness—a darkness that calls us to pause and reflect.

Jesus | The Hope Of The World

Before there was a baby in a manger, there was a crisis in a garden—a catastrophic severing of humanity’s relationship with God. It was a moment that cast a long shadow of darkness over the world and which set the scene for the arrival, many centuries later, of a Saviour. Jesus came as the light that would pierce the darkness, bringing hope and redemption to a world in desperate need of reconciliation with God.

One of my favourite chapters in the Bible is the opening of the Gospel of John. John begins his account of Jesus Christ’s origins with words that echo the first chapter of Genesis. He reflects on the darkness present in the beginning—a world without form and void—and reveals how light entered that darkness. That light, John tells us, is Jesus, through whom God’s unfailing love and faithfulness has come to humanity. It is through him alone that God has been fully revealed to us.

“Comfort, comfort my people,” the prophet Isaiah would write, “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone and her sins are pardoned. Yes, the LORD has punished her twice over for all her sins.” Listen! It’s the voice of someone shouting, “Clear the way through the wilderness for the LORD! Make a straight highway through the wasteland for our God! Fill in the valleys, and level the mountains and hills. Straighten the curves, and smooth out the rough places. Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. The LORD has spoken!” | Isaiah 40:1-3

It’s Definitely Good News

“Keep it positive,” my daughter urged when I mentioned I was writing about the deeper, darker side of Christmas. “Not

everything has to be a negative.” And I do understand her point. Christmas, with its twinkling lights, joyful songs, and festive feasts, is a season meant for happiness and celebration.

Do we really want to turn our thoughts to more solemn, existential realities? Do children really need to understand *why* Jesus came into the world? Some might say it feels like ‘raining on the parade’ or being a bit of a party pooper during such a joyful season.

But I think the answer should be yes.

Reflecting on the deeper meaning of Christmas doesn’t take away from the celebration—it adds depth and significance. The joy and festivities are wonderful, but they become even more meaningful when we understand the “why” behind them: Jesus came into the world because of God’s immense love, to bring light into darkness and offer hope and reconciliation. Christmas is definitely *good news*, but its true significance shines brightest when we understand just how broken things were before it.

For children, this truth doesn’t need to feel heavy or complex. Instead, it can be shared as a simple, hope-filled message—that Jesus is the ultimate gift, given to bring peace, love, and joy to the world. Far from lessening the joy of the season, this understanding can make Christmas even more special.

God-With-Us

Christmas celebrates the gift of grace found in Jesus, a gift that came at a great cost. While the festivities—lights, songs, and feasts—bring joy, they are merely the wrappings around this profound truth: Jesus Christ is the ultimate gift, the hope of the world, fulfilling God’s mission to redeem humanity.

John tells us that the light that was in the beginning, the Word Himself, would step in the very creation He had made in order to save and redeem it. In his human body, the war against sin and death would be waged and won.

His name would be Emmanuel, that is, *God-With-Us*, and he would save us from our sins.

*“What gift of grace is Jesus, my Redeemer,
There is no more for Heaven now to give,
He is my joy, my righteousness, and freedom,
My steadfast love, my deep and boundless peace” | City Alight*

As we celebrate Christmas, we can embrace both the joy and the meaning of the season. The twinkling lights, festive songs, and shared meals remind us of the happiness this time of year brings. But it’s also an opportunity to reflect on the deeper story—the arrival of Jesus, the true light of the world, who stepped into our darkness to bring grace, redemption, and reconciliation.

At its heart, the Christmas story contains both joy and sorrow, loss and restoration, light and darkness. Christmas is about this extraordinary gift—freely given—and a hope that continues to shine brightly today.

The Incarnation Of The Word

In the beginning, the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God.

What The Church Is (And What She Isn't)

I really love talking about church.

Not, as in, *my church* or *your church*.

Not, as in, *what flavour of church*, in a denominational sort of way.

And not, as in, *which kind of church*; *mega church*, *home church*, *missional church*, or *cell-group church* (and, oh boy, I wish whoever had come up with that last descriptor had really given it a bit more thought...).

I love talking about church, as in, *The Church*. The bride of the lamb, the woman of valour formed from the saviour's side, the universal, time-transcending, death-defying reality, made up of many individual and diverse parts but united together as one organic, institutional identity.

There is nothing quite like her in all the world.

She is more powerful than the world's greatest empires, having outlasted and outlived them all. While earthly rulers have come and gone, long departed into dust, she remains still.

She is more transformational than alchemy, the almost-magical science of transmutation; changing one substance or organism into something else entirely. For it's within her very body that weak and decaying humans, desperately indentured to sin, are rescued, released, and restored to become children of God who will themselves transcend even death itself.

She is *not of this world*, for there is no rational, natural

explanation for her existence. She is the tangible and visible evidence of an untouchable and invisible God who is Sovereign over all, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It is His Spirit that gave her birth, His Spirit that sustains her, His Spirit that saves, seals, and sanctifies her.

She is both a witness and an invitation, a light piercing through the darkness of this cosmos showing who God is, what He's done, and what He's doing still. She is God's hands and feet, His eyes and His heart, His sacrificial love, and His call to radical repentance and salvation to those around her. She is the community of His people, the kingdom *now-but-not-yet*, an unfulfilled but certain promise of everything that is yet to come.

She is magnificent and yet flawed, a constant work-in-progress as she is shaped into the complete image of the Christ, the one who was God-With-Us. She will be, at the end of days, the light that the nations of the world will walk in, the place where the kings of the earth will bring their splendour; adorned with the glory of God and shimmering like the rarest, most precious jewel ever seen.

This is who she is: a gospel-shaped, gospel-saturated, and gospel-sending living and breathing organic reality.

She Isn't Perfect

What the church isn't is a community made up of people who have everything sorted and who are no longer troubled by sin, disease, death, or disaster. In reality, Jesus brings real people, deeply flawed and very different from one another in life together, into relationship, into the messy, untidy reality that is the church, *not because they are worthy, but because Jesus died for them and that is enough.*

It's Jesus who is building his church and he builds it through imperfect people who are being made perfect in *his*

righteousness and through *his* strength. Regular, average humans like you and I are made more than conquerors, because of Jesus.

We still struggle with the impact of sin in our world, and in our own lives. We are acutely aware of God's original intention for His creation and how far from that this world really is. We long, with all of creation, to see humanity released from the grip of disease and death, to see creation restored, to see the peoples of the world living in peace and harmony with one another.

And yet, despite the flaws in ourselves and the failures all around us, the imperfect church is the hope of the world. She is the living reality that God has been and is still working to make all things new.

Long ago, God intended to use the church as an example of His incredible wealth and grace towards humanity and His intention and plan to bring everything together under Christ, for His own glory. She is imperfect and yet magnificent because the living God is the source of her existence and empowerment.

Sometimes it's hard to know how to hold these two realities in tension; that beautiful and incredible collective that Jesus is building, alongside the dark reality that the church has often been a deeply flawed, sinful, and unhealthy institution.

But one thing we know for sure, she belongs to Jesus, He has loved her and redeemed her, and will make her perfect and all glorious at the end of time.

She Is Diverse And Yet United

The Church is made up of those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. The apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans makes this clear. *"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

This reality cuts across cultural, economic, gender, and racial divides and it caused no small stir in the early years of the church, as it continues to do today.

Initially planted in the soil of Jerusalem, the gospel message soon spread rapidly beyond Israel; throughout Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the Mediterranean world. In as little as just over 10 years after Jesus' resurrection, Christianity had already reached as far as Rome itself. As Jesus had promised, his followers were to be his witnesses, even to the ends of the earth. Yet the gospel call often demanded radical upheaval in the lives of those who accepted it.

In a world of slaves and masters, the Church soon learned that God's rule of love transcended any man-made law and that in Jesus, both slave and master were equal and were to consider one another as family.

Culturally disparate groups like Jews and Gentiles learned they were not so different after all, that the same God was the source of life for them both, and that both were intended to share equally in the riches inherited as God's children. They, too, were to think of each other as family, children of the same father, equally loved and precious.

Men and women, long considered to exist within a tiered hierarchal structure learned that, in fact, they were two equal halves of an incredible whole, created and intended to work alongside each other in the mission and purpose of God. The long and complex history of patriarchy was subverted by Jesus' redemptive message and restorative ministry, particularly good news for many women.

All those united *with* Christ are also united *in* and *by* Christ, putting on this radical new identity like a new set of clothes. Their differences – and there were many – were brought under the authority of Christ. Each person found equal and common ground in Jesus, and in the reality that they all

shared in one Spirit, God's guarantee of their future inheritance.

She's Exclusive And Yet Inclusive

Here's a startling reality: the church isn't made up of *good people*, people who *do good things*, people who think Christianity is *morally helpful*, or even people who *happily affirm* the historical Jesus.

The church is made up of those *who have put their faith in Jesus for salvation and who confess that he is Lord and Christ*. Quite simply, if you aren't following Jesus the King then you aren't one of Jesus' followers.

The church exists *because of* Jesus and *for* Jesus. Each person who calls themselves a Christian acknowledges they have been saved out of the dominion of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. They have placed their lives under the authority of Jesus as Lord and King.

Church people are therefore kingdom people, living in a fellowship under King Jesus, with lives that "*are literally connected to things before the creation of the world and extending far into eternity*"(Matter Of The Heart). The church is the tangible evidence of the reality of the kingdom of God.

But five Christians getting together for a BBQ, or two Christian mates out catching some waves together is not a church. Although they're all individual Christians, and, collectively, a group of Christians, they're not 'church' simply by virtue of their getting together in a social capacity.

The church *exists for a specific purpose* and the *church gathers (in local expressions) for a specific purpose*.

Christians regularly gather in groups, in all sorts of places,

all around the world to affirm and oversee one another's membership in Jesus Christ and His kingdom. They fly the banner of Jesus, so to speak, and affirm those who are baptised in his name, through gospel ordinances (baptism and breaking of bread) and gospel practices (disciplining, worshipping, serving, praying, and hospitality).

This is the definition of a local church, an expression of the one, universal church and, in this way, the church is unapologetically exclusive by nature. The church is only made up of Christians.

And yet she's also inclusive in character, or at least ought to be. The good news of Jesus Christ and his kingdom is offered to anyone, no matter their race, gender, status, or situation. There is no sin too great that would bar someone from accepting God's grace and there is no degree of goodness that means a person isn't in need of that same grace.

Before God, we are all in the same miserable situation, dead in our sins, and yet, through Christ, we are all offered the wonder of forgiveness and the hope of more to come; life and life in abundance.

God sent His son as saviour for all the world, not just some people. Not just the people we get along with it, the people whose company we enjoy, or the people who make us feel good. The undeserved gift of grace is offered to all, even our annoying neighbour, intolerant boss, or the shady local car mechanic.

The church hasn't always done a great job of being welcoming to the outsider, of making it comfortable for the skeptical seeker to venture through the doors, of listening to the questions, doubts, or struggles of those wrestling with their faith in belief or in practice. She has oftentimes laid on people burdens too heavy to bear with little tolerance for those of modest faith, who may need much encouragement and

discipling along the way.

She has sometimes portrayed the Christian journey as something of a sprint to glory, rather than a long endurance in the same direction with many failures along the way.

Yet her character should reflect the character of God; not willing that any should perish and desiring that all would have the opportunity to hear the message of salvation. She is the space where people can meet with God, where they can grow in faith, where they can fail and find forgiveness, often many times over, and where they can learn to love one another, despite their differences, because of the love they have received in Jesus.

The church is exclusive by nature but should be inclusive in character; diligent in preaching the desperate state of humanity and our need for Jesus, but abundant in grace and kindness, ready to welcome the repentant sinner home.

I Love The Church

I love the church. I love talking about her and thinking about her, and I love being a part of her.

I love her history, in all its grandeur and with all its flaws, but I particularly marvel at her miraculous beginning. From betrayal, death, and seeming hopelessness sprang life and hope, and endless joy.

Over twenty centuries ago, in the still darkness of a garden tomb, the Son of God took his first resurrection breath and, at that moment, his church was born, ignited by the Spirit and destined to last for all eternity. She is imperfect and yet magnificent, flawed and yet more beautiful as each day passes; the visible reality of an unfulfilled but certain promise of everything that is yet to come.

There is nothing quite like her in all the world.

Ruth: The Inconsequential Outsider

The Weft And Warp Of Scripture

The word of God is like a vast tapestry, its main theme interwoven with many sub-plots and side stories that run like golden threads through an intricate design. Each of these threads complements the complete telling of [God's story](#) and narrates again and again to us the way in which God views our world and us, the people who inhabit it.

The story of Ruth, a seemingly inconsequential outsider, is one of these golden threads. At face value, it appears to be a brief narrative concerning an unimportant family, living in a [small and insignificant rural village*](#). It hardly seems a grand stage on which the compelling drama of God's purpose is to be acted out.

The story is placed within the time period known as "The Judges" (thought to be around 1220 – 1050 B.C.), when heroes like Samson the Mighty and Ehud the Brave lived- impressive and inspiring characters, who took centre stage in the dramas that unfolded around them.

The story of Ruth seems, at first glance, a strange and somewhat ordinary inclusion in the rather extraordinary cast that surrounds it. And yet, when we consider each part of this remarkable story, we understand that we are being told something very important about God and about ourselves. We

learn that God sees into our hearts (1 Samuel 16:7). He is more interested in what we can become, than in who we are right now, and that our very ordinariness is what God sees and works with to bring us to an extraordinary place.

In fact, God often does some of His best work with the most unlikely people, as the story of Ruth proves.

Who Was Ruth?

Ruth was, by definition, an outsider. She was not an Israelite but a native of the country of [Moab](#), a mountainous tract of land now in modern Jordan. She had married an Israelite man who was living in Moab with his family; his parents and his brother. The family had relocated due to a famine that had occurred in their homeland and in chapter 1 of the story, Ruth and her husband had been married for 10 years before he, and his brother, both fell ill and died.

It seems tragedy had already befallen the family previously, with the death of Elimelech, Ruth's father-in-law, very soon after the family's relocation. The death of the sons now left Ruth, her sister-in-law, Orpah, and Naomi, her mother-in-law, as widows, in probably very bleak circumstances.

Ruth was, of all people, an unlikely heroine. Not only was she a woman, in a time when women were of minor importance, but she was also now a widow. Finally, she was poor and foreign and would have been considered an outsider to any true-born Israelite.

Ruth's Story

Ruth may have been poor in position but she was rich in love and faith. When Naomi, her mother-in-law, made the decision to return to her homeland of Israel, Ruth did not hesitate to follow her. She left all that was familiar, everything that she was culturally connected to, and, much like [faithful](#)

[Abraham](#) before her, she “*went out, not knowing where she was going...*” (Hebrews 11:8).

She heard the call of God and she followed, with an implicit faith and unswerving devotion. She trusted the journey and embraced the destination, even though she hadn't yet seen it. This is the definition of faith (Hebrews 11:1-3). Faith is what distinguishes her character and faith is what motivated her choices, which become more and more evident to us as we discover her story.

The story is short in its telling and it's well worth pausing here and [reading it quickly for yourself](#).

Like every great story, it contains all the important elements of interest; drama, grief, desolation, decision, redemption, and resolution. As a stand-alone story, it would be successful in its own right. Yet it is the conclusion to the story that makes us really sit up and take notice. This is where we realise that nothing is an afterthought to God, nobody is *actually* inconsequential and His plan is purposeful and far-reaching.

He has a definitive purpose and plan and every single person can play their part. There is a place for all of us in God's story, if we choose it.

Ruth made the choice and decision to follow Naomi, to become part of God's plan. Yet even she couldn't have realised the extent to which God would involve her. The epilogue of the story contains an unbelievable twist, a beautiful thread that we almost have to read twice to believe.

Ruth's Defining Legacy

Ruth found a home, belonging, and happiness in Israel and went on to marry Boaz, a wealthy and respected landowner. She was accepted completely into the family of [Abraham](#), father of the Israelite people.

She also became the mother to a little boy called Obed (Ruth 4:16). Obed was the father of Jesse and Jesse, in time, became the father of David, one of the greatest kings in Israel's history. David would become famous, not only for his skill with the harp and his compassionate love for and protection of his sheep as a shepherd boy but also for his courage and bravery in fighting against the enemy Goliath, his stirring example as a brilliant military leader and king, and his complete trust and faith in God.

Most breathtaking of all, King David became an ancestor of Jesus Christ, God's own Son! This makes Ruth an incredibly significant and vital part of God's plan of salvation for the world.

God's methods often [confound and confuse us](#). He doesn't always choose who we would expect or work in the way we would like. He sees all, from the beginning to the end (Isaiah 46:10), while we can only see a small portion of now. His purpose is perfectly orchestrated and remarkably interwoven in ways that amaze us.

In the story of Ruth, an inconsequential outsider, we see that God gets involved in the lives of all kinds of men and women, bringing about His purpose. We can take confidence and have faith that He can and will work in our lives, in the same way, and that we too can become part of [His story](#), if we choose it.

*** Here's another plot twist for those of you who love a good story! Wondering about that "small and insignificant rural village", found at the beginning of this tale? That village is none other than the little town of Bethlehem, where, many years from Ruth's time, a small baby [would be born](#), in humble circumstances, and would be laid, sleeping, in a manger; [Jesus](#)**

[– the hope of the world!](#)

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Jesus, The Hope Of The World

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

“Behold, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Emmanuel” (which means, “God with us”) | Matthew 1:23, BRB

Scripture tells of a crowded family home in a bustling ancestral town, set at the southern end of the Judean hills. Filled to the brim already, perhaps with relatives from both near and far, there was [no room in the guest quarters](#) for the additional arrival of a heavily pregnant Mary, accompanied by her fiancée Joseph.

Exhausted from the arduous travel to Bethlehem, necessitated by the tax decree from Cæsar Augustus (Luke 2:1), Mary and Joseph found space in the ground floor family room with Joseph’s extended family; a comfortable, homely room filled with hollows of straw, and where the animals also slept and fed.

Surrounded by family, and labouring in a crowded, warm, Israeli home like many other women before her, Mary gave birth to her first child, a son. His name was to be ‘Jesus’ (meaning ‘Yahweh will save’) and he was born to ‘save his people from their sins’ (Matthew 1:21).

“A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, for yonder

breaks a new and glorious morn..." | O Holy Night

The Necessity Of Jesus' Humanity

It was an important and necessary reality that Jesus [shared in our humanity](#); a connection which he derived from his mother, Mary.

Jesus' redemptive work on behalf of humanity was deeply connected to his own humanity. His ability to sympathise with us and to reconcile on our behalf springs from a complete understanding of what it is like to be human; with all our doubts, fears, temptations, and failures. He understood humans *because he was human*.

The story of his birth impresses upon us just how similar he was to us in every way, even to the unremarkable ordinariness of his birth.

Like countless babies before him, he was born surrounded by noise and bustle, sweat, blood, and tears. Relatives would have crowded around to proudly admire (what was assumed to be) Joseph's firstborn son. Mary would have comforted the newborn's hungry cries by pressing him closely to her breast. His arrival was, on one hand, a thoroughly human affair, recognisable the world over.

"There are three creation stories of the creation of humanity in the Bible. The first is that humanity is made in the image and likeness of God. The second is that a human is formed from the dust of the earth and the woman is taken from man: she is flesh of his flesh. The third is that humanity is reborn through a saviour; who is born of a woman, and he is flesh of her flesh...Jesus is made of her, not just in her. He is made from her and not just through her. How else could Jesus be connected to the line of David [King of Israel] through Mary unless the baby was truly hers, albeit born of the Spirit. This physical connection to Mary is the basis of

the story of salvation, the proof that our own flesh, our souls and bodies, can be redeemed and cleansed and resurrected.” | Lucy Peppiatt

Yet, despite the seemingly unremarkable circumstances of his birth, God was, in fact, doing something completely remarkable and unique in and through this child. This newborn babe was the Word-Made-Flesh, God-With-Us, and his birth was an event that would change the course of human history forever.

The Darkness Of The Human Heart

When God originally created this world and the humans that inhabit it, He did so with purpose and intentionality. He wanted humanity to choose to [‘walk with Him’](#), to want to be like Him, and to partner with Him in His glorious mission to fill the earth with His glory.

Yet much of the Bible is a repetitive narrative of human failure, telling over and over again of the inability of humans to live as the perfect image-bearers that God had intended.

Disobedience of God’s directive in the very beginning and the first act of sin in the world brought about its awful consequence for humanity; a sentence of death, and being sent from God’s presence in shame and disappointment. Instead of beauty, the first humans received a crown of ashes and instead of joy, they experienced loss and mourning.

Not only this, the spiritual heart of humanity became darkened and sick, in desperate need of healing and regeneration. Humanity died that day – not physically or immediately, but spiritually. Our union with God was severed and we became separated from God’s presence. Seeking our own will at the expense of God’s glory, we were incapable of living the glorious life He had intended for us. And, just as we have inherited physical life from our parents, so too we have

inherited spiritual death.

“Made for spirituality, we wallow in introspection. Made for joy, we settle for pleasure. Made for justice, we clamour for vengeance. Made for relationship, we insist on our own way. Made for beauty, we are satisfied with sentiment.” | N T Wright

Every human who is born comes into the world physically alive but spiritually dead. Without our spiritual connection with God, we are nothing more than ‘dead men walking’, living in darkness and far from the eternal life God intended for us.

*“And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t.”
Romans 7:18, NLT*

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9, ESV

“This is an evil in everything that is done under the sun: There is one fate for everyone. Furthermore, the hearts of men are full of evil and madness while they are alive, and afterward they join the dead.” Ecclesiastes 9:3, BSB

“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.” Galatian 5:17, ESV

The Necessity Of Jesus’ Divinity

But God, in His infinite love, did not leave anything to chance in His plan of saving and redeeming humanity.

Despite human failure and many, many detours [in this story](#),

God has declared that His purpose will not be thwarted. He will accomplish what He intended for His creation, even to His own personal cost, as it turns out.

“I declare the end from the beginning and ancient times from what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and all My good pleasure I will accomplish.’” | Isaiah 46:10, ESV

Jesus was born to ‘save his people from their sins’; to break the power of death and to reconcile all of humanity back to God. Yet no ‘ordinary human’ could possibly have achieved this remarkable feat.

The child of both a human father and a human mother would have resulted in the kind of human we see around us every day and indeed within our own selves – a person who is subject to the ravaging effects of sin and governed by a heart that is, in its deepest recesses, at enmity with God. This kind of human couldn’t possibly have overcome sin or lived, without fault, as God’s perfect image-bearer. Nor could this kind of human have defeated the power of death by virtue of living a sinless life, perfectly obeying God’s moral law.

Jesus was human, born of a human mother. However, prophecies that spoke of the coming saviour made it clear that he was to be born of a virgin, with no human father involved in his conception (Isaiah 7:14). Instead, the Holy Spirit moved and, in the same way that creation sprang into being at God’s command (Genesis 1), so too it was the animating force for the conception of God’s Son. “God said” and it was so!

“The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent His own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body, God declared an end to sin’s control over us by giving His Son as a sacrifice for our sins.” | Romans 8:3, NLT

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil.” | Hebrews 2:14, NIV

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” | John 1:14 NIV

John, the author of the fourth gospel account in the New Testament, deliberately parallels the Genesis account when beginning his record of this pivotal and distinctly unique moment in human history; the arrival of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God.

He tells us that ‘in the beginning was the Word (*logos*), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (John 1:1). The use of the Greek word *logos* here is frustratingly difficult to adequately convey in English by a single word. Literally meaning “I say”, it’s not used for ‘a word’ in the grammatical sense; the term *lexis* (λέξις, *léxis*) would have been used in that instance. However, both *logos* and *lexis* derive from the same verb *légō* (λέγω), meaning “(I) count, tell, say, speak”.

That ‘Word’, and all that is contained by the expression, became flesh and ‘dwelt among us’. He was ‘God-With-Us’; anyone who saw him saw all the radiance of God’s glory; the exact representation of His being and the imprint of His nature (Hebrews 1:3, John 14:10-11).

Paul the Apostle tells us that Jesus, who was in the very nature of God, emptied himself and took the form of a servant, made in the likeness of humans that sin (Philippians 2:6-7). He became the representative of us all and in his human body, the war against sin and death would be waged and won.

A New Creation In Jesus

All of human history had been leading up to this moment, when creation would be reconciled and redeemed back to God and to the purpose for which it had been created. Through his human descent, Jesus was connected to us all, right back to the garden of Eden; and what was done by one man (Adam) to the detriment of us all, would be reversed in another, 'the second Adam', who was to be a life-giving Spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45).

Other places in scripture, particularly the writings of Paul the Apostle, affirm that the revelation of God's original plan of creation, the redeeming, recreating, and re-ordering of all things, together with the reconciliation of creation to its Creator, all find their true and most meaningful significance in Jesus Christ, the Word-Made-Flesh (Ephesians 1:3-10; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3; Romans 16:25-26; 1 Corinthians 8:6). The invisible God was now revealing Himself visibly through His Word-Made-Flesh, in whose hands the world and all that is therein, has been placed. (John 3:35; Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:20).

In Jesus Christ, we find the reasons for truth and life. In him, we find the source of life and the light of humanity, the light that shines in the darkest places of the human heart, bringing peace to the chaos and creating order and beauty again (John 1:4, 2 Corinthians 4:6).

In the unique person of Jesus, God was doing a completely new thing; bringing about a new creation and restoring again the hearts of humanity to a whole relationship with Him (Isaiah 43:19, 2 Corinthians 5:17).

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." | 2 Corinthians 4:6, NKJV

Focusing On The Miracle

Jesus was both the son of a human mother and the son of a divine Father; the human and the divine embodied within the one individual. He was born specifically and uniquely, after centuries of human failure, that, in him, the Creator might redeem His creation. He was the “Word-Made-Flesh” – the ‘one and only of his kind’, a man, *but not merely a man* and in him, ‘the entire fullness (completeness) of God’s nature dwells bodily’ (Colossians 2:9).

Theologians have deliberated about this seemingly impossible reality for centuries. As early as 300 hundred years after Jesus’ birth, a council of Christian bishops convened in the city of Nicaea (now known as the town of İznik, in modern-day Turkey) to decide on the longstanding theological debate regarding the nature of Jesus and his relationship to God.

Settlement of the debate was affected by the creation of the Nicene Creed, a statement of beliefs now widely used in Christian liturgy. With the creation of the creed, a precedent was established for subsequent local and regional councils of Bishops to create statements of belief and canons of doctrinal orthodoxy. The intention was to define unity of beliefs for the whole of Christendom.

And yet, the arguments still rage today. Dialogue tends to grapple with the **how** (and the answer to this is perhaps well outside our paygrade), focusing on the need to fully explain and document *in what way* the person of Jesus was the Word-Made-Flesh. Quite often, the miraculous reality is lost in the foray of dogmatic contention.

What is often also lost is an acknowledgment and rejoicing in the **why** – that only the Word-Made-Flesh could truly and completely redeem humanity. Only God stepping personally into the drama and chaos of humanity through the sending of His Son could solve the dilemma of sin and death that we all share in.

And this miracle of redemption and rescue was achieved through God's only Son, both human and divine.

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us. (1 John 1:1–2) and God was manifest (appeared) in the flesh." (1 Timothy 3:16)

"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news, lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and His arm rules for Him;" | Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-10, ESV

Nature + Nurture

Who we are as individuals is derived from both genetic predisposition ('nature') and environmental factors ('nurture')

The reference to 'nature' is the idea that human behaviour can be considered to be the result of 'pre-wiring'; information or characteristics that are determined by our genes. These biological factors influence our predisposition to certain

traits and behaviours and are determined at a gene level, over which we have no personal ability to control.

The reference to 'nurture' relates to the idea that the environment a person is exposed to, either prenatally or during a person's life, will influence and affect the development and psychology of an individual, and therefore their resulting behaviours and traits.

Studies conducted in the twentieth century on twins who had been separated at birth concluded that human behavioural development is affected by both nature and nurture – both an individual's natural disposition and the environment in which they are raised.

When we consider the impact of this in relation to Jesus, both son of man and son of God, at once human and divine, we understand certain passages of scripture in a new light and are amazed at the mastery of God in relation to the remarkable reality of His son.

Firstly, the genealogy of Jesus is important. It's one of the first things that the gospel of Luke makes known – that is, the genetic origins of the one who is to be called the Christ.

He is born to a young woman descended from the family of the great King David, a woman favoured of the Lord and deeply devout and spiritual in her faith (Luke 1:28, 47-55). Joseph, the man who would become his earthly adoptive father, was also 'a good man', honourable, faithful, and generous-hearted (Matthew 1:18-19). Joseph was not willing to put Mary through public disgrace, despite the initial assumption of scandal that surrounded her pregnancy.

Yet Jesus is also born in Bethlehem, an [insignificant village in Judah](#) (Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:6) to a poor family who could only offer the most inexpensive of offerings at his birth (Luke 2:24, Leviticus 12:8)

There was nothing in his circumstances that any human could boast in and he certainly wasn't born into the privilege, wealth, or status that we might normally associate with royalty.

Everything about his arrival was so counter-cultural to expectation that it's no wonder he was overlooked and discounted by even his own peers and fellow countrymen. By all accounts, he was nothing special – the son of a country carpenter – if even his actual son, as the whispers rumoured a different story – and, in this way, he represents every single one of us.

In his humanity, he felt everything that we feel, our stresses, fears, struggles, heartbreaks. He understood what it was like to be poor, rejected, and marginalised. He understood oppression and abuse of power. Yet he also understood the joy of our humanity; love, family, celebration, hope. He appeared to be completely ordinary and in his complete human ordinariness, he could not have represented us better (Isaiah 53:2).

Yet despite outward appearances, he was anything but ordinary. In nature, his heart belonged to His Father (John 6:38, John 4:34) and his mission was to do his Father's will, accomplishing the work that He had given him to do (John 6:38). In him, God was glorified and in him *'mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other'* (Psalm 85:10-11).

"This Good News is about His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. In his human nature, he was a descendant of David. In his spiritual holy nature, he was declared the Son of God. This was shown in a powerful way when he came back to life." | Romans 1:3-5 (GW)

In Jesus, we see everything that God is.

Scripture could not be any clearer that the victory over sin and death was going to be God's, accomplished through the sending of His Son. Sent in the likeness of all of humanity, but in whom dwelt all the fullness of God, only the uniquely special Son of God would be able to overcome and defeat our greatest enemy.

There is a world of meaning in what it was to be "the Son of God", 'begotten not created', 'spiritual, not earthly'. Jesus was enough like us in the ways that mattered to defeat sin and overcome death on our behalf but also enough **not** like us that a victory could and would be won, and that this victory would be God's, not ours.

With the arrival of Jesus, the Word-Made-Flesh, God-With-Us, we are being invited to think about all that 'God' is in new and breathtaking ways. We are challenged to comprehend the reality that all the goodness and love and compassion and righteousness and truth and mercy that God is took up residence amongst us. Jesus confirmed that those who had 'seen him, had seen the Father' and that 'I and my Father are one'. He was everything that is God, expressed in human form. God had arrived, in the person of His Son (Isaiah 40:4, Mark 1:3).

Theology | Faith Seeking Understanding

This article is obviously referencing core biblical theology in relation to salvation, redemption, the nature of Jesus, and the truth of God and who He is. However, we should avoid the temptation to merely get 'stuck' in a particular doctrinal position or viewpoint on the subject. To do so is to ignore the reality that not everything that is true can be fully explained, and that the goal of theology is not to *acquire knowledge*, for its own sake, but to *gain understanding* that not only informs but transforms our faith.

The word 'theology' literally means 'thinking about God'. One classic definition of theology was given by St Anselm. He

called it 'faith seeking understanding' and for many this is the true function of Christian theology." | Paul Badham

Our theology – what we think about God – is important. How can we begin to know and understand ourselves and our place in this expansive creation if we have no sense of the One who made us and the purpose for which we've been made?

However, a robust and living theology will spring from understanding and experiencing who God is and what He has done for us, in Jesus, not simply by giving agreement to a statement or creed of 'theological beliefs'.

By affirming the biblical narrative, that we are saved by [grace](#) through faith alone, we begin a journey towards a deeper understanding of who God is, which only grows as our Christian life progresses. Our theology is, perhaps then, best described as an expedition of discovery, rather than a destination at which we arrive. We discern more and more about the heart and mind of the Creator as our life progresses. This *knowing and experiencing* – this walking with God – renews us day by day to become more like the crucified Lord we follow.

Jesus was the exact representation of God and the very imprint of His nature (Hebrews 1:3, John 14:10-11), the Word-Made-Flesh who took up residence amongst us (John 1:1-14).

To know God is to know Jesus, whom He sent (John 17:3), and, therefore, the true starting point of our theology as Christians is looking to Jesus and, fundamentally, to God, in Jesus, crucified. It is in this that we see the extent to which God was prepared to go in order to rescue and redeem us and why Jesus, and Jesus alone, truly human and truly divine, was the hope of the world.

In your pursuit of knowledge, don't lose sight of this miracle.

“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” | Colossians 1: 15, ESV

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His nature, upholding all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” | Hebrews 1:3, ESV

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.” | 2 Peter 1:3, NIV

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