

## ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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### ***Christmas 2017: Where Is God?***

In this Postmodern, Post-Christian age where a secular skepticism reigns supreme, one often hears the question, where is God; if He exists, why doesn't He show Himself? Or, where is God in the carnage of the civil wars in Syria and Yemen? Where is God in the devastation of the summer hurricanes that ravaged the Caribbean, Texas and Florida? Where is God in the death of a relative or a close friend? Where is God in that universal equalizer of all humanity—death? Where was God in that backwater town 2,000 years ago where a poor, pregnant woman was denied lodging, in the smell of hay and manure, in the pain of childbirth, in the escape to Egypt?

For Christians, Christmas is about Incarnation—the Creator stooping to enter His creation. The Incarnation challenges the proposition that this is a purely physical and purposeless universe, inhabited by cosmic accidents whose eternal value is doubtful. It also shatters myths about God: He is not distant and unreachable; He is not uncaring and unconcerned; He is not unmerciful and arbitrary. It is about God revealing Himself in Jesus as the living, compassionate, merciful, gracious Savior; the Creator is now forever identified with the creature. The Incarnation declares that God cares. As pastor and theologian Tim Keller affirms, “He is so committed to our ultimate happiness that he was willing to plunge into the greatest depths of suffering himself.” For that reason, Christians always connect Christmas with Easter, for the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus afforded the path to redemption.

The Incarnation also dignifies the common, the everyday. Jesus was a child who needed care, a carpenter who worked with His hands, a preacher who associated with the “least of these.” The Gospels demonstrate that He spent most of His time with the poor, the forsaken, the powerless and the “unclean.” The Incarnation likewise validates the importance of relationships: Jesus called His followers “friends” and He laughed, mourned and celebrated with them. Finally, the Incarnation demonstrates the dignity, value and worth of every human being, for Jesus took on flesh, entered our world and shared our experiences.

This history-altering event—what C.S. Lewis calls “the Grand Miracle” of Christianity—makes our secular world uncomfortable. It prefers Jesus in a crèche, warm and cuddly, surrounded by animals with a pulsating star overhead. But the message of Christianity is that He won't stay in those swaddling clothes in that manger, any more than He would stay in a tomb wrapped in a shroud. The risen Christ dispels the darkness of humanity and offers them hope: No other major religion has a founder who is God or one who dies so others may live. The vital center of Christianity is that I did not enter God's world; in shocking humility, He entered mine—and that is an eternally significant truth. No wonder that a choir of innumerable angels broke out in

rapturous, spontaneous song that Christmas morning, frightening a few shepherds but shaking the entire universe.

For this secular culture, Christmas challenges us to consider that there is something transcendent, eternal and greater than us. It answers the question, where is God? Christmas is about the Lord of two worlds—the material and the spiritual—descending to live, for a season, by the rules of the one, so that He could resolve its dysfunction, disharmony and discord. The Puritan theologian Stephen Charnock answers the skeptical secularist of 2017: “That God upon a throne should be an infant in a cradle; the thundering Creator be a weeping babe and a suffering man, are such expressions of mighty power, as well as condescending love, that they astonish men upon earth and angels in heaven.”