

New Life

Responses to Christmas • Message 5

Bryan Jones

December 23 and 24, 2024

A. Introduction

Today, I want to talk about different responses to Christmas.

I'll never forget the day Steph and I found out we were having twins... we went to the doctor to get the ultrasound. We were excited to figure out if we were having a boy or a girl... and when we got there, they took us back and they went through the whole process. They got out the machine, and they started searching for a heartbeat... and, at first, I was a little bit troubled because the lady's eyes got big. And at first, I was concerned, and then she said *I've some shocking news for you...* She turned the screen towards us and said *you are having twins...* I was overjoyed... I thought *this is great! It's 2 for the price of one.* I love Costco, and everything comes in bulk, so twins are kind of like birth brought to you by Costco... seriously, I was excited. I had wanted three kids, but we were planning on stopping after this... and so I'm overjoyed... and then, all of a sudden, Steph starts crying... and I'm thinking *what's going on*, and then she says to me... *there is no way you can do this...* not there is no way I, or we, just *there is no way you can do that...* isn't that awesome... even my own wife doesn't believe in my abilities. So, she has been single parenting ever since... but the lady there, when she heard that, she started laughing...

I tell you this to say 3 people see the same thing, and 3 people have different responses. One is laughing, one is crying, one is overjoyed.

The truth is people see the same thing all the time and have different responses. You can see a movie, a piece of art, a show, and have different experiences.

There are people that when we talk about the Christmas story, all of us will hear the same story, but there will be different responses...

This is true not just now, but it was also true the first Christmas when Jesus was born. My hope is that whatever posture or response you've come in with, you will leave treasuring and overjoyed at the Christmas story...

B. Responses to Christmas

1. A **SKEPTICAL** response.

(Matthew 1:18-19)

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

Matthew 1:18-19 (NLT)

So, Joseph, when he hears the Christmas story... guess what? He is skeptical... so much so that he's like *a virgin birth? This can't be... I'm out...* so he's planning on leaving Mary because he just can't believe this would be true.

Some people hear the story of Jesus, and they are skeptical:

- How in the world does God become a man? And how in the world is there a virgin birth?
- And why in the world was a God born in a stable? Wouldn't He have a way better birthplace?
- Why is Jesus' birth only announced to some shepherds in the field? Shouldn't that be front-page news... shouldn't it be sent throughout the nations?
- Then, after Jesus' birth, he lived in complete obscurity for the first 30 years of His life. No one really knew who He was or what His purpose was.
- Then, one day, He comes out and is baptized and preaching and claiming to be the son of God.
- He spent much of His life preaching in obscure places off the map, places like Columbia, South Carolina...
- He performed many miracles, but for some reason, He died on a cross. Isn't it absurd to think the Son of God could die?
- Then somehow, He rose and conquered the grave 3 days later...

Doesn't this seem a little absurd? And today, if you surrender your heart to Him, then He will come and transform your life, and the Holy Spirit will live inside of you...

For some people, the Christmas story is a great story... but that's all it is.... A story... so they have a skeptical response... to news like Joseph.

One of the reasons I believe the Bible is true... who would make up a story like this? And if it was made up, the people who were supposed eyewitnesses would have broken at some point and told the truth. False stories have a way of coming out...

Also, isn't it interesting that for almost 2,000 years, we had the term B.C., which stands for Before Christ... in the 1700s, some people started using BCE (Before Common Era), but it really didn't become popular until the 20th century... for almost 2 thousand years people used a calendar in reference to this baby named Jesus...

The facts of the story might be crazy or absurd to certain people... but let's ask it another way... is what the story is about absurd? It's what it teaches crazy?

So many people spend time asking how... that they never ask why.

God is the Holy God. God made us in His image, to have fellowship with Him. ... We ourselves have made a muddle of our lives. More than that, we have done it in an arrogant, willful rebellion against God. We have turned our faces from Him. We have shaken our fists at Him. Why should God come to earth to save a race like that?

James Boice

Let's be honest. Love does strange things... if you're married or dating a person... look at them... isn't it true that in every marriage, there is a couple who is married out of their league... and I will let you decide who it is...but people say *it's a blessing we are together...* and I say to you, *it's not a blessing, it's a divine intervention...*

As crazy as relationships are, there is one that has never made sense to me... our relationship with God.... (pause)

Part 2

Why should God, the infinite God of the universe, take to Himself the form of a helpless baby in the womb of mother, be born in the pain of childbirth, be laid in a stable, grow up, and be nailed to a cross and die an excruciating death? Why should God do that for us? Isn't that absurd? The answer is because God did it because He loves us!

James Boice

I can't explain everything away, but I can explain one thing to the skeptic today: the reason He came was love...

Think about it... If you do believe God created the universe, creating a Y chromosome in someone would be child's play for Him.

2. A **HOSTILE** response.

(Matthew 2:13; 8:1-3; C/R: Matthew 2:3-5)

When a king named Herod heard about the birth of Jesus, his response was one of hostility. He was threatened by Jesus...

After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the Child and His mother," the angel said. "Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the Child to kill Him."

Matthew 2:13 (NLT)

Herod's response was one of hostility, anger and bitterness. He didn't see God as good... he didn't see this story as good...

Perhaps there is someone in this room or watching online that might be questioning the goodness of God.

You hear about the love of God from me, but you have some circumstance in your life... and you wonder *why did God allow that to happen? Why me?*

Why the loss of a loved one at an early age?

Why all the hardship you face?

Why all the evil in the world?

Maybe you've been hurt by a church, and so even coming here has you a bit guarded.

So, you have almost a hostility towards this Christmas story, to the goodness of God.

Us "flesh "	Jesus	God "Spirit"
----------------	-------	-----------------

- Us – We have sinned... and as one pastor said, we aren't mistakers in need of a life coach, we are sinners in need of savior. The problem is we can't pay back our debt.
- The other problem is God is spirit, so He can't die for our sins.
- So, what's the solution? Jesus. Fully God and man.

Jesus didn't become a baby because he wanted to. He did it because He wanted you to be a part of the family...

And as He came to this earth, let me remind you of some of the things He experienced.

Jesus:

- Misunderstood by countless people
- Rejected by the people He came to love
- Constantly lied to
- Betrayed by those closest to Him
- Beaten over and over
- Mocked by the people He came to save
- Exhausted by the troubles of life
- Fatigued from
- Lonely and often alone

- Hurt by family and friends
- Wrongfully accused
- Hated and gossiped about.

One of the things that struck me about Jesus... is that when He performed miracles, He would often touch people.

Large crowds followed Jesus as He came down the mountainside. Suddenly, a man with leprosy approached Him and knelt before Him. "Lord," the man said, "if You are willing, You can heal me and make me clean." Jesus reached out and touched him. "I am willing," He said. "Be healed!" And instantly the leprosy disappeared.

Matthew 8:1-3 (NLT)

Listen, I'm not a physical touch person, and I'm leery of telling thousands of you this weekend because some of you will misuse this truth! I was at a staff offsite last year. And someone shared something... and the host said *Bryan, would you get up to hug him to show him that he's loved...* and I said *no way... he's on his own...* but I did it and I'm still working through that moment... But perhaps because of that, I noticed something in the story...

Jesus didn't need to touch this person. He could have simply said *Be healed...* why reach out and touch that person?

It's almost like Jesus' way of saying... I see the hurt and pain... I see what you are carrying. I know you feel alone, I know you are overwhelmed... but I'm here. I am with you.

Do you know what the most central promise in the Bible is? I am with you... If you are hurting... Tonight, God is reaching out to you, saying *I am here. I am with you...*

If we misunderstand, we miss the goodness of God. The truth is, God doesn't always fix everything... but He does promise to walk with you...

I'm not going to spend a whole lot of time, but I must say there is another category of those in the Christmas story ... and that's those who are indifferent... they hear the story, and they don't really do much with it.

King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?" "In Bethlehem in Judea," they said, "for this is what the prophet wrote:"

Matthew 2:3-5 (NLT)

The religious people, the priests, are the ones who are indifferent. They knew the prophecies. They said it right then... but they did nothing with it... they were indifferent.

And sometimes, it's those who grow up around the Christmas story... those who know the verses and have heard the stories, the church people who can become indifferent.

Maybe you are here and would call yourself a Christian, but you are so consumed with gifts and activities, you're here right now. You would call yourself a Christian, but your heart and mind and soul aren't here... it's on something else... listen, no judgement... I get so sucked into Christmas... I love Christmas... I actually bought a 15-foot Christmas tree... and I'm getting so sucked into decorating and Christmas stuff... that when people started talking about Jesus and Christmas Eve, for a while, my spirit was more stirred by the decorations than Jesus.

You know who God is... Find some fire... Ask God to awaken you to His love. Don't take Jesus for granted this Christmas season...

3. An OVERJOYED response.

(Luke 1:46-55)

Be like Mary... Respond like Mary.

Mary responded, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For He took notice of His lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One is holy, and He has done great things for me. He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear Him. His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands. He has helped His servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. For He made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and His children forever."

Luke 1:46-55 (NLT)

I love this... notice her response... She worshipped, she responded to God.

Because she saw Him as a Savior... she was overjoyed because she saw him as Savior...

Christianity is different from all other religions...

Other Religions
Do
Works
Fear

Christianity
Done
Grace
Joy

Mary sees what no one else had seen...