

THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
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Christmas 2019

WHO WAS JESUS?

To speak of Jesus' birth is to speak of who He is. The Apostles' Creed confesses that Jesus was "*conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.*" Jesus was not conceived the natural way but through the action of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Jesus is human because He was born of the Virgin Mary. He is God because He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus calls God "Father." Jesus is true man and true God because that was the only way God could accomplish His work of salvation.

In Jesus Christ, God put on "skin." Jesus is fully God, and He is fully man in the way God intended man to be: without sin and in full communion with God Himself.

John 1:14 says, "*The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father's only Son – He is full of grace and truth.*" Jesus Christ, who came from the Father, lived among us to do the saving work of God for a world destroyed by sin.

Why did Jesus have to be man? That is the only way He could take our place.

We have not been obedient to God, but Jesus was perfectly obedient to God. Jesus was not guilty of any sin of thought, word, or deed. If He had committed a sin, He would no longer be the Saviour because He would need to deal with His own sin.

He is the ultimate substitute through all that He did.

Did Jesus face real temptations like we do? Was He tempted to not love God with His whole heart, to curse God, to hate His enemies, or to lust? The answer is a resounding "Yes!" We find great comfort in Hebrews 4:15: "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*" Jesus; our

Saviour, is also our High Priest, and He does understand the spiritual struggles that we face on a daily basis. Because God became flesh in Jesus, we can be confident that He intimately knows our weaknesses and our problems.

That God would really become man and take on human flesh and blood has been a matter of debate since New Testament times. In fact, early in the history of the Church, people said, "The flesh is bad and the spirit is good." They did not believe that God would become man and take on flesh and blood. This heresy that has haunted the Church since ancient times is called "Gnosticism." The New Testament is quite clear that God did indeed take on a body in Christ as a fulfillment of the plan of salvation, and this is what we remember and celebrate not only at Christmas time, but all through the year!

From the Pastor:

As 2019 quickly comes to a close, we begin to focus our attention on the New Year. Yes, we have to get through the Christmas period first, but soon Christmas will be behind us, and we shall begin to prepare for what's ahead. Times waits for no man! But no matter the time, we must look back and see all the times our Lord has blessed us this past year, and trust that He will continue to do so in the future. Even though the drought is devastating, and we continue to look skyward for some clouds to build up, yet we must still acknowledge that we are a blessed people, and so we give thanks.

I think this drought has really ramped up ever since our nation voted to recognise single-sex marriage. Around the same time further discussions were being held by our state politicians regarding abortion. Put these two abominations together, and we cannot blame God for not sending any rain! Much the same thing is recorded in Jeremiah 13-14. The people had turned from the Lord, and He had little hope that they would repent. Their persistent refusal to listen to Him had hardened their hearts. They had become so practiced in their sinning, so used to it, that they would find change difficult. They had closed themselves to the Spirit of God. Such is the power of sinful habit; its grip can chain us to our eternal loss. So the LORD sent a devastating drought upon the land. More than once in the past, the Lord had sent droughts

to call his people to repentance. The most famous of these was the three-and-a-half-year drought at the time of wicked King Ahab (1 Kings 17, 18).

The effects of this latest drought were devastating. It had driven the citizens, even the country's leaders, to desperation. They could find no water, even in their secret cisterns. All water reserves had been exhausted. If even the powerful were helpless, we can only imagine its effect upon the small and weak. It shattered the most tender of relationships: even the doe in the field deserted her newborn fawn. The desperate search for water during the drought had turned one person against the other. The toughest were growing faint. The untameable wild donkeys were staggering. But had the people of Judah gotten the message?

Jeremiah's response to the ravaging drought was to pray to the LORD. He confessed the guilt of his people, offering no apologies. His prayer was very similar to that of Daniel (Daniel 9). Nothing in this people deserved anything good from the LORD.

The prophet appealed once more to the very character of the LORD. Jeremiah prayed to Him because of the kind of God He is, a saving God. Because of the covenant the Lord had made with this nation and the unflinching faithfulness that lay behind that covenant, the prophet appealed to the Lord to save. The Lord had the power to save. He was not some fiction, some figment of human minds. No, He is the almighty Creator and Preserver of heaven and earth.

We must do so today. We must continually pray to the Lord, asking Him not to hold our sin against us. We must also continue to warn people that if they too do not repent, then they can expect no favours from the Lord. Imagine how much better our society would be if people would trust in Him!

Yes, it will rain again, but there is no doubt that the Lord can and does use droughts and other means (fire, flood etc.) in order to make people repent and turn to Him. He is our Creator and Redeemer, and will always hear our cries for mercy, so let us never give up praying to Him, but take all our cares and doubts to Him in prayer.

By now, everyone should have a copy the revised *Statement of Faith*. If you require a copy, please ask pastor for one. The revised edition of the *AELC Rules* has now also been printed and distributed. If you haven't received a copy, again, please ask pastor for one.

Inside this magazine is the latest calendar of services for the next 6 months. However, please follow the service times printed in the weekly bulletins, as some changes do occur.

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GENEALOGY OF JESUS: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Both Matthew and Luke record the genealogy of Jesus. Why was this so important?

However, when God had removed him, He raised David up as their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David, the son of Jesse, to be a man after My own heart, who will do everything that I want him to do.' From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as He had promised (Acts 13:22–23).

In our modern culture, many families have little sense of heritage. We may have some family traditions, but most Australians don't even know the names of their great, great grandparents or care where they lived, what they did, etc. Modern genealogy is primarily reserved for hobbyists. In contrast, genealogies were a deeply integral part of Jewish society at the time of Jesus. Land was inherited based on family lines, and those who could not prove their ancestry in Israel were considered outsiders.

Because of this difference, modern readers usually skip right over the genealogies in Scripture. Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:21-38 may not be fascinating reading, but don't disregard them. God had reasons for inspiring every part of the Bible - even the genealogy of Jesus.

Imagine accurately tracing your ancestry back 4,000 years. As incredible as it sounds, the biblical lineage of Jesus does just that. His genealogy is recorded all the way back to the first man, Adam. This is not an insignificant detail; it is a crucial fulfillment of prophecy. Adam's sin brought judgment and death into

the world, but a Saviour was promised - the Seed of the woman who would strike the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). Jesus Christ is the “Last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45), the promised Seed of the woman, which Paul summarised: *“Therefore, as through one man’s transgression judgment came to all people, resulting in condemnation, so also, through One Man’s righteous act, the free gift came to all people, resulting in justification, which brings life”* (Romans 5:18).

Jesus is the Saviour who was promised throughout history. The genealogy of Jesus in Matthew and in Luke show him as the descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and eventually David - men to whom these prophecies were made. God promised Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his offspring, which was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:7-9,16).

By reading these genealogies, we also see that Jesus was a direct descendent of King David. Jesus' genealogy is also a fulfillment of many Old Testament promises, which Acts 13:22-23 demonstrates. The promised Messiah would be the descendant of David (2 Samuel 7:12-14) and would one day rule on David’s throne (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Jesus Christ has fulfilled these and will eventually fulfill every messianic prophecy in Scripture. He is the promised Messiah - the descendant of Abraham and David, our Saviour - who has given His life to redeem us from our sins.

Praise God for His faithfulness in fulfilling all His promises!

“Look! The virgin will become pregnant and have a son, and they will name Him ‘Immanuel’” (which is translated, “God-With-Us”). (Matthew 1:23)

We usually think of Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us, at Christmas time. After all, Christ’s birth was when Isaiah’s promise of Emmanuel was fulfilled (Matthew 1:22–23). But Jesus is Emmanuel all the time. God is not distant or far off, as so many religions teach. He is right here - He is “with us.” What a joyous and comforting thought!



CHRIST the SAVIOUR is BORN

by Pastor Karl Clevon Davies

No one knows for sure just exactly when our Lord Jesus Christ was born in the City of David, and it probably occurred anywhere between 4 and 5 B.C., due to an error in circulation when the Roman Empire switched to a Christian calendar. Many of the customs which so strongly associate with Christmas celebration have, in and of themselves, little to do with what really happened 2000 or so years ago. Culture, tradition and popular law have developed so over the years, that it is often difficult to pick out a truly Christian message from “Christmas” festivities and celebrations.

One occasionally reads literature from cultic groups that not only call attention to that fact, but also that many of our customs are of pagan origin. It is hard to argue with that.

But at the same time, it must be said that we must celebrate the coming of God’s Son into the world, and it might just as well be December 25, as any other date. And even though many of our decorations could well be used to celebrate something else, we use them to proclaim to the world that something very special took place two millennia ago that affects our lives very deeply right now. The Son of God was born of a humble virgin and laid to rest in a manger – that is an animal feed box.

Now the Bible says nothing about “ox and ass” or any other animals for that matter “before Him” bowing. Neither is there any evidence that the wise men

were three in number, or that they were kings (by the time they actually visited Jesus, He and His parents were living in a house (Matt.2:11)). It seems unlikely that our Lord was born on December 25. Many Bible scholars have conjectured that Jesus was born in the spring – when shepherds are usually watching their flocks because it is lambing season. These are additions and speculations that may or may not have been. But the fanciful words of our Christmas carols, even though not always historically accurate, proclaim this great truth: Jesus, the son of Mary, is “very God of very God.” The angels of God, people, kings and even the animals and all of creation owe Him homage and obedience.

He is the one who humbles Himself to accomplish with great might what none of us could. In His humility is the power of God to destroy the power of the Evil One, and to win for us everlasting salvation. In His suffering and death, comes the victory that wins us life and eternal joy. The Child whose humble throne was once an animal feed box, now sits at the right hand of the Father.

Yes, the trappings, the culture, the lore often have become more important than the Gospel story itself, and that is truly sad. It is sometimes hard to find Christ in all the clutter.

But on the other side, get out your decorations and proclaim to the world that something terribly important has happened. Our Saviour has come to dwell among us, to bring us salvation. There is no reason to be quiet about it.

Christ the Saviour is born!



Epiphany

Epiphany is one of the oldest festivals of the Church and occurs on the 6th of January, twelve days after Christmas. The word means ‘appearing or manifestation’, and the festival reminds us of the manifestation of the Christ-child to the wise men who came from a distant heathen country to Judea to worship the Saviour, whose birth God made known to them by a wonderful star.

These wise men of the East were Gentiles, or heathen, and the story of their coming to Jesus shows that the Saviour born at Bethlehem is the Saviour, not only of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles. He came to save all. *“God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...”* The angel that brought the news of the Saviour’s birth said, *“Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”* The aged Simeon calls the infant Saviour *“a light to the Gentiles.”*

Epiphany is therefore the missionary festival of the Church. It should impress on our minds the blessed truth that *“the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek,”* (Rom. 1:16). The missionary command is *“Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.”* This is the duty of the Church, to make known the salvation of Jesus Christ. If it is not the Church’s duty, then whose is it? May the Epiphany season stir our hearts to increased missionary effort also in our own work.

The wise men of the East that came to worship the Saviour not only gave the offering of their lips, they also presented to Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. In like manner we, too, give of our substance to the King of kings by giving it for the upbuilding of His kingdom. Giving should be a part of our worship. How can we really love Him if we are not willing to give, that His kingdom may be extended? How can we be His disciples if we have the ability to help spread His Gospel, but are too stingy to do it?

May the grace of the Christ-child, who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich, fill our hearts with love to Him and His kingdom and make us cheerful givers toward His mission work!