



CHRISTMAS PREPARATION

As if without warning it was upon us. At midnight on 30th November every year the calendar rolls around to the 1st December, the madness begins! Why are the first 24 days of December so crazy? Some shops have special opening times until midnight; going to get some groceries becomes a stressful event due to the crowds and traffic. What is it all about and what drives people to behave this way? In one word, preparation.

From the 1st December or even before, people are preparing for Christmas Day. A day when families and friends will come together, a day when we show our love for one another by exchanging gifts, a day when we as Christians remember how our Lord and Saviour humbled himself and came down to earth in human form to dwell among the nations. This was predicted in Isaiah 7:14 – “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

As we think of Christ who came to earth to save His people from their sins, I want to focus on preparation. I don't mean ordering a turkey or buying gifts! I want to focus on the preparation for the first Advent. In scripture we can see that long before Christ was born, God had been preparing for that very day. In fact when we read through the Old Testament, every event is leading up to His miraculous virgin birth.

Back in Genesis in chapter 3 after the Fall, God tells us that He will send a Saviour from the offspring of the woman.

All through the Old Testament, we can see how God was preparing for when Christ would come to earth with the sole purpose to redeem His people.

God had spoken many times, through the prophets, the promises surrounding the coming of Christ. He was going to be born in Bethlehem of Judea, He would be born of a virgin and His name would be Immanuel, meaning God with us. One prophecy in Isaiah 40:3 speaks of someone who was going to 'prepare the way of the Lord'. In the New Testament in Mark 1:1-8 this prophecy is fulfilled, John the Baptist is preparing the way for Christ's ministry on earth. John spoke of repentance for forgiveness of sins.

All these things happened thousands of years ago, so how does this affect us today? If you are saved, you should be looking ahead to the second coming of

Christ, you should be preparing for the return of our Saviour. Each day the Christian should continue to become more Christ-like. We should show in our walk that there is something different about us in the way we react to the stress of the Christmas rush or the driver who cuts us up in the rush.

What if you are not saved, surely Christ's second coming doesn't have an impact on you? Sadly this is not true. The Bible says that we have all sinned, none of us are perfect and we fall short of God's glory – His standards. But when Jesus returns at His second coming, He is coming as Judge. He will judge each according to their works. The bad news is that none of us can do anything about our sinful state. We can't work hard at being good to gain God's favour. Only Christ can atone for our sin, only Christ has led a sinless and perfect life. He died on a cross to save those who hated Him.

This December as you prepare for Christmas and maybe even celebrate the birth of Christ, I wonder if you have prepared for Christ's second coming or the possibility of entering into eternity without Him? If not, you need to trust Him as your Saviour and Lord of your life. The Bible says that you need to repent and turn away from your sins, and at the same time turn to Christ for forgiveness.

This Christmas, the greatest gift that you could receive is that of eternal life, the 'free' gift of salvation ... that 'cost' Christ His life. This Christmas turn to Christ, not for His birth, but what He achieved through His death and resurrection.

