



*“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:17)*

He did not come to judge the world,  
He did not come to blame.  
He did not only come to seek,  
It was to save he came.  
And when we call him saviour  
We call him by his name.

One of the traits of the modern world that most annoys me is how people are always out to blame someone else. If something goes wrong, we have to find someone to blame. It is not to say that we shouldn't search for reasons for something going wrong, but the trend these days seems to me to be that the aim is, as The Message put John 3:17, to point an accusing finger.

As we celebrate Christmas this month, let us remember that God didn't send Jesus into the world to blame it, to condemn it, to point that accusing finger. No, it was to save that Jesus came.

If we call ourselves Christians, we know that we have been saved from sins and wrongdoings, many of which we would rather weren't made public.

As Christians, I believe that we should emulate Christ by seeking to save others, not just in the sense of bringing non-believing lost sheep to the Shepherd, though that, of course, is important, but also by doing our best in our every day lives to find solutions to problems, perhaps admitting our own involvement. Blame does not resolve anything. Yes, some people are guilty of doing wrong things but mistakes do happen in this fallen world. It is so much more positive and constructive to seek to save the person and the situation than to triumphantly (and arrogantly) show someone to be in the wrong (and consequently a lesser person than we are).

Paul describes Jesus's incarnation by telling us that he, Jesus, made himself nothing...humbled himself. Blame is linked to pride. Let us thank God for the humility of Jesus and pray that we may demonstrate the same characteristic.

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### Holidays

*[This was written for the UK holiday season in August. In the southern hemisphere, it might be more appropriate at this time of year. Whenever or wherever you are reading it, I think it makes a very relevant point.]*

This season of holidays got me wondering – does God ever take a break? On the one hand the Bible reminds us that one of the reasons we can trust in God's saving power is because the one who watches over us “will neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:4). On Mount Carmel Elijah taunts the prophets of Baal when their cries are not answered, suggesting that Baal was perhaps “deep in thought, busy, or traveling. Maybe his is sleeping and must be awakened.” (1 Kings 18:27).

On the other hand, one of the things that marked out Israel from the nations around

them was resting on the Sabbath, a practice commanded by the God who himself rested on the seventh day of creation. Not only that, God gave Israel different festivals (see Numbers 28 & 29) at which they were to gather, put aside regular work, and celebrate all that God had done for them.

So maybe this holiday season we can honour God both by resting, but also by continuing to worship as we reflect on all that God has done over the past year.

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### Mary

As we head towards Advent (it actually begins/began on 30 November this year), this is a good time of the year to spare some thoughts towards Mary, the mother of Jesus. There are very few references to her in the Bible, but somehow this makes us want to know as much about her as we can. It is only in Luke's Gospel that we read the full story of the appearance of Gabriel with his astonishing declaration (Luke 1:26 - 56). It is Luke the Physician with his interest in people who provides us with the details that we treasure.

Mary's obedience in accepting her destiny has always been emphasised, but one wonders how she felt during the moments beforehand. She was likely to have been quite young, so when Gabriel addressed her as someone 'favoured by God' it is not surprising that she was 'greatly troubled' and had to be reassured with the words "Do not be afraid ..." Then to be told that she, a virgin, would conceive God's Son whose kingdom will be eternal... must have been overwhelming. One feels that the information then given her about Elizabeth's unexpected pregnancy was intended to illustrate how 'with God nothing will be impossible.' Mary's three month stay with Elizabeth would

shield her from the immediate gossip of neighbours and must have been a help to them both.

The birth; the glory seen by the shepherds and their visit to view the child and verify what they had been told are all included in Luke's intuitive sentence (ch.2:19) 'But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart' and the same words are used {ch.2:51} after the descriptions of the presentation of the child in Jerusalem, with the special words used by Simeon and by Anna at sight of the child, and the incident when the twelve year old Jesus was found in his 'Fathers house' sitting among the teachers 'listening to them and asking them questions.'

Some readers find the verse offensive where Jesus does not rush to see his mother and family waiting to see him, but says "who are my mother and brothers?" (ch. 8: 19-21, also in Mark 3: 31-35). It has always seemed to me that he simply used that event to emphasise his message. I feel sure his mother understood him well. I love the confidence with which she went to him at the marriage feast to let him know that the wine was finished (John 2: 3-5) and then in spite of his reluctance, saying to the servants "Do whatever he tells you."

The prophetic words said to Mary by Simeon (Luke 2: 35) "a sword will pierce through your own soul also" must indeed have been recalled by her as she stood near the Cross (John 19: 25). And after his Ascension, she was one of the group of followers who waited, praying, for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). That is the last reference to Mary the quiet, unassuming presence behind our Lord. To sum up, I end with part of a quotation from The Oxford Dictionary of Saints': 'The unique privilege of being the mother of one who was, according to Christian belief both God and Man is at the heart of the special honour paid to Mary ...'

Jenny Lay  
From the Borrowdale Bell

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## **A Christmas blessing**

May the joy of the angels  
The eagerness of the shepherds  
The perseverance of the wise men  
The obedience of Joseph and Mary  
And the peace of the Christ child be yours this Christmas

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## **The shepherds watched their flocks by night**

We are not sure when Jesus was actually born, not that it really matters.

A popular argument against Christ being born in December asserts that shepherds would not have their flocks out past October in Palestine during Jesus' time. Therefore there weren't any shepherds out in December. Therefore the Christmas story is just a myth or a made up story.

Alfred Edersheim, one of the foremost scholars on ancient Jewish culture and sacred writings. claims there were shepherds at a place called Migdal Eder, near Bethlehem who were commissioned by the Jewish priests to keep temple flocks in a specific pastureland ALL the year-round. Their demanding duties prevented them from participating in religious observances.

Taking as his source the Mishnah, the book of the Jewish oral traditions, Edershiem writes that specific passages "lead us to infer that these flocks lay out all the year round." One thing is sure, the bible is proved to be true once again.

Now you know! Maybe it was December? However the most likely reason for December was the midwinter pagan festivals in Europe. Christian missionaries had a habit of taking over festivals and injecting the Christian faith into them.

The Shepherds who watched them could not worship and learn about God at the temple, so maybe that's why God chose them to be the first ones to see His newborn lambs, everyone else was too busy 'worshipping' God!

Graeme Skinner

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### **An international faith**

Christmas again! For the two thousand-and-twenty-fifth time! Kings rise and fall, and nations come and go, but Christ remains. Mind you, he is the everlasting Father (Isaiah 9:6)

The arrival of the son of God changed this world forever. Take, for example, our calendar. Ever since Jesus came, history has been measured in terms of his birth. Jesus preached a sermon on a mountainside, and before long the entire system on which social ethics was based changed forever. And remarkably, not too long after his crucifixion, the Jewish nation abandoned its practice (as old as the nation itself) of sacrificial worship – the Lamb of God had made the offering that would end all others!

In the divine economy *grace* replaced *works* as the gateway to acceptance by God, and sanctuaries built with bricks and mortar give way to temples made of living stones. These momentous happenings and many more were the result of the birth one man. One *man*? No, much more than a man! We call the event the *incarnation* – the coming into this world of God himself, clothed in human flesh.

Yet, we err if we only see the incarnation as a once off event that took place over two thousand years ago. He became Immanuel, ‘God *with us*’

– and has been ever since. And more than that, the eternal Son was born that he might give birth to *many* sons – sons and daughters born of the Spirit of God. Christianity is ‘incarnational’ in its very essence, for each time someone turns to God through faith in Jesus Christ, the incarnation continues.

Roger Witter  
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## **Knee Polishing**

Let God speak to us again as we pray inspired by the familiar yet invariably important events of the Christmas story.

Sunday: the annunciation – let us listen out for God speaking to us. May we, like Mary, say, I am the Lord’s servant

Monday: the Magi – may we like these wise men be willing to spend time, energy and wealth on the King of Kings

Tuesday: the shepherds – may we too hurry off to see Jesus and spread the word concerning him

Wednesday: Herod – pray that we may not reject Jesus as King but welcome him into our lives

Thursday: Joseph – are we willing to obey God even when it may seem difficult to understand

Friday: Simeon – are we moved by the spirit to go to God’s house to meet Him there?

Saturday: the innkeeper – do we have too much going on to meet with God and to give him our best?

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## **GRANNY**

Johnny praying in a loud voice before his birthday: “Dear God, I pray that I will get a new bicycle for Christmas.”

His brother: “What are you shouting for? God isn’t deaf.”

Johnny: “I know, I know, but Granny is.”

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