

The Reason for the Season

It was just a few short years ago during the Christmas season, that a group calling themselves the American Atheists began placing messages on billboards in strategic places around the country. One such billboard in New York City featured a shadowy picture of what clearly was supposed to represent the Wise Men on their camels as they made their way to Jerusalem to inquire where the king of the Jews was to be born. Above the picture in large letters are the words, “You KNOW it’s a Myth.” Underneath those words the subtitle read, “This Season Celebrate REASON.”

The messages that were put out by this group are nothing more than a re-visiting of the teaching of the 18th century Enlightenment that took place in Europe and America. The Enlightenment sought to help willing ‘converts’ break free from the rule of anything that spoke of the Divine and to encourage the belief that human reason is the complete authority for our lives. The Enlightenment was called by some, “The age of reason.” Some of our most well-known founding American fathers, including Benjamin Franklin, James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, followed many of the teachings of the Enlightenment. Jefferson believed that Jesus was a good man and a moral teacher but not the incarnate Son of God. It is said of him that he actually took a razor to his Bible cutting out any reference to—among other things—the deity of Jesus, miracles, and even the Resurrection. Enlightenment rationalists believed that the only source of true knowledge is innate human reason. They taught that if we’re to understand anything that matters about ourselves, God or our world, it will be learned only through the natural processes of human discovery aided by science or ‘natural philosophy.’ Do we really believe that our innate human reason can guide us to absolute truth about God and this world? Christians believe that we need the Bible to teach the truth of why this world is as it is as well as teaching us the remedy for the sin of mankind. There may be no better starting point in scripture to teach the realities of creation and redemption than the gospel of John.

The prologue to the gospel of John (1:1-18) contains what many believe is the greatest statement ever written about the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The eternal Word and agent of creation (1:1-3), ‘became flesh and dwelt among us’ (1:14). What does this really mean and why does it matter? The Bible teaches that mankind—created in the image of God—sinned in the Garden of Eden. Because it was man who sinned, the penalty of sin must be borne by man. But there’s more: No one but a perfect man could ever bear the judicial penalty of man’s sin. If Jesus were merely a man, born in sin as all people are since the Fall of Adam, he would not have been able to pay for his own sins and certainly not for the sins of others. But Jesus, ‘being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary,’ the eternal, sinless Son of God left the glories of heaven and came to this sin-cursed Earth and took on human flesh to suffer and later to die for all those who would ever turn to him in faith. This is what the Christmas story is really about. Pastor and author, Dr. Sinclair Ferguson writes, “The truth is, Christmas is not coming. It has come. The Word already has been made flesh. He already has

lived, bled, died, and risen again for us. Now all that remains is to receive him. For Jesus Christ himself is the meaning of Christmas.”

Our tradition of giving gifts on Christmas Day should remind us of the greatest gift ever given, Jesus Christ. He is rightly called ‘the greatest gift’ because he met our greatest need. Mankind is born in sin and therefore separated from God. It is only in Jesus Christ—the God-man—that we can have all our sins forgiven and be reconciled to God. Jesus Christ is the reason for the season.

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