

Dear Friends,

This week, I was walking with my grandson in his local neighbourhood when I saw the front yard of a house that had already been adorned with Christmas decorations. It stood out and obviously made an impression on me. And it was extremely impressive! The focus of the decorations was a nativity scene.

Yes, friends, Christmas is coming. It was refreshing to see Christmas decorations in the front of a property instead of the ghoulish Halloween scenes on display in many a residence in our local area. That the decorations centred on the birth of Jesus Christ, the real purpose of Christmas, made it all the more satisfying.

I had already begun to think about Christmas before seeing that nativity scene. At church, we are planning community carols for Saturday 12 December. We are again participating in Jericho Road's campaign, Packed for Love, by donating soup cans for Christmas hampers for needy persons in the wider community. We are also planning the Christmas Day service when people who don't usually attend a church, drop in. These events, activities and services provide our church and us as Christians with great opportunities to share Christ and his love with others so that they too, worship him as Lord.

But it wasn't simply Christmas-related church events and activities that I was thinking of when the birth of our Lord came to mind. It was studying Ruth chapter 2, the Bible passage Kevin preached from last Sunday.

The passage ends with new information about Boaz. We were informed at the very start of the chapter that Boaz was a relative of Elimelech, Naomi's husband. Throughout the passage, he shows extraordinary kindness to Ruth. Naomi interprets Boaz's actions as being directly at not only Ruth, but to Naomi and her deceased husband and sons (2:20). She then offers new intel about Boaz: "That man is our close relative; he is one of our guardian redeemers" (2:21).

That prompted me to write this question in the bible study booklet for growth groups on Ruth 2:

> *Turns out Boaz is not only a relative of Elimelech. He is a guardian-redeemer ('goel'). Such a relative was obligated to preserve the family name and property of a dead relative. Similarly, our only hope for salvation is rests in a relative. Read Hebrews 2:10-18. Then reflect on why Jesus had to become a relative to us in order to save us.*

What is most stunning about Christmas is that God becomes a human being in Jesus Christ. That begs the question: Why did God become a human person? Hebrews 2 answers that very question. To be brief, I will quote two main statements from the passage.

The first is in Heb 2:11: "Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters." The eternal Son, who is very God himself together with the Father and the Spirit, is our close relative. To make us holy, and so, acceptable to God, Jesus became one of us. He is our older brother.

The second is in Heb 2:14-15,17: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death …For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people."

Jesus became a human person because only humans are obligated to pay the penalty for their sin against God. But only One who is God is capable of paying that debt.

So, we cannot understand Christmas apart from Easter. The story that begins with a cradle at Bethlehem ends on a cross at Calvary. That is why Jesus became a man – to pay the price that we deserved to pay for our sin, and to bring us back into right relationship with God. The Bible describes that as true love:

> *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sin (1 John 4:10).*

God Bless,
Mark Adams