

Merry Christmas: The Worldview of Incarnation



Cover Story

C.S. Lewis described the impact of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ in *Miracles*: “If the thing happened, it was the central event in the history of the Earth — the very thing the whole story has been about.”¹

In a time when shopping has replaced Advent celebration as the primary way of preparing our hearts for Christmas, it's up to Christians to be the reminding voices that this one great truth — God became flesh and dwelled among us, and we beheld his glory — is the greatest truth to shine into the universe. All cultures — ours included

— stand in its overarching shadow.

Old Testament heroes seemed to understand that the stories of their lives were but precursors to history's truly great event, the climactic coming of the Messiah. Abraham, Noah, Moses, David, and others knew they weren't the key players, but they lived as if their lives were cosmic arrows pointing to the One around whom all of history revolved. Faith for these Old Testament characters was expressed in their expectant but active waiting.

Now millennia later, in the midst of another frenzied Christmas season, our faith is also expressed in expectant

but active waiting. Christ is coming again, this time to right all wrongs. We wait, however, in light of the powerful implications Christ's Incarnation has for us living in the here and now. What we celebrate each year at Christmas is foundational to the Christian worldview.

The Incarnation Undercuts Gnosticism

Among the early heresies denied by the Christian church was Gnosticism, the idea that there is a deep chasm between physical reality and mystical knowledge. Gnostics treat the physical as unimportant, corrupt, and unworthy of our attention. “Simply put, spirit is good and desirable; matter is evil and detestable,” Summit speaker Doug Groothuis has written.²

Gnosticism corrupts society in a number of ways. First, it trivializes physical labor as less important than “spiritual activities.” Second, it reinforces a class hierarchy, where those who must engage in work thought to be menial are considered less valuable than those who by wealth or status may escape from physical labor. Where Gnosticism flourished, slavery went unchallenged. Third, and a point of information that may help us understand our own society, gnostic societies historically devolved into sexual debauchery as a means of acquiring “special knowledge.”

The Incarnation immediately disposes of Gnosticism or any hint of it. As the apostle John reminds us, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as

from the president's desk

a word from dr. jeff myers



“Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a son, and they shall say for His name, ‘God with us.’”

— Isaiah 7:14

Here’s my two-fold theory for why atheists and “free thinkers” are at war with Christmas. First, they can’t stand the public celebration of the virgin birth. Secularists see Christmas as an annual assault on the shrine of non-belief they have labored all year to build. They see themselves as noble defenders of all that is good, which is why they don’t mind stealing the holiday from the 87 percent of Americans who like it.

The word “secular” comes from the Latin word *saeculum* which means “worldly” or “of this age.” Objections to the virgin birth are rooted in secularists’ promiscuous embrace of a “supercessionist” view of history: we are so much smarter and better now that we owe the past nothing but contempt. The Temple of Secularism represents enlightenment and boldness; the Second Temple Age in which Jesus was born represents superstition and fear.

Why would secularists believe this? Because their holiday drink of choice is the David Hume Kool-Aid:

miracles, by definition, are a violation of the natural order. The natural order cannot be violated. Therefore, miracles don’t happen. (Notice that they do not prove that miracles do not occur — they simply posit that their own experience — “We’ve never seen miracles ourselves” — trumps all. That’s supercessionism)

The world in Jesus’ time was different. As Charles Taylor phrases it, “The exceptionless order was still a thing of the future.”¹ It wasn’t that the Hebrews refused belief in a natural order of things, it is that they understood much better than we do that miracles, while rare, are not impossible.

In fact, through study of the Torah, Hebrews had tuned their senses to anticipate a savior. Little did they know that Jesus would be a savior for all the world. It is no small thing that the angel instructed Mary to name her child Jesus, a Hebrew name that means “Savior,” Σωτήρ in Greek — the global language of Jesus’ day.² In *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell outlines sixty-one categories of Messianic prophesy from the Old Testament that were specifically fulfilled only in the birth, life, and death of Jesus.

But the greatest offense for secularists is that the miracle of the virgin birth means that their nefarious schemes will never overtake God’s plan for redemption. As Isaac Watts wrote in the oft-overlooked third verse of “Joy to the World”:

“**No more let sin and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.**”

At Summit we are calling a whole generation of young people to godly, courageous, redemptive leadership. Life and liberty — not to mention basic common sense — are under severe attack. We desperately need champions who love God with their all and will serve as Christ’s ambassadors in this evil age. Thank you for standing with us in 2012. We eagerly anticipate what God will do in 2013.

Merry Christmas!

Notes

1. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), p. 41.
2. Justin Martyr. (1885). *The First Apology of Justin*. In A. Roberts, J. Donaldson & A. C. Coxe (Eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume I: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (A. Roberts, J. Donaldson & A. C. Coxe, Ed.) (174). Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company.

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Dr. Jeff Myers

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“When certain arenas of culture are considered ‘unspiritual,’ Christians fail in their call to influence the entire world for Christ.”

of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14-15). The fact that Jesus entered the world physically dissolves any false, dualistic dichotomy between physical and mystical. Christ came in a physical birth, lived a physical existence, suffered a physical death, and was raised in a physical resurrection.

Unfortunately, Gnostic tendencies are creeping back into some corners of the Church. When certain arenas of culture are considered “unspiritual,” Christians fail in their call to influence the entire world for Christ. Entire swaths of culture — especially politics, media, and the arts — are considered to be “secular” and thus unworthy of Christian influence.

The Incarnation Repudiates Fatalism

Another all-too-common attitude brooding amidst the chaos of present-day culture is a dark fatalism that tugs at the corner of our minds: “The world is going to hell in a hand basket — we’d better hunker down.” But in difficult times, Christians have inspired by Advent and Christmas, embraced a hopeful anticipation. In the Incarnation, God kept his promise to enter his fallen creation in the flesh to defeat sin and death. By understanding the significance of Christ’s first coming, we may eagerly await his second coming when that redemption becomes finally and fully realized. So many of our most-

beloved Christmas carols affirm this anticipation, especially in the latter verses that often go unsung.

For example, as Dr. Jeff Myers points out in his president’s column (see page 2), the little-known third verse of “Joy to the World” speaks of the breadth and depth of Christ’s redemptive work.

The anticipatory hope of Israel is reflected in another popular hymn, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.” Note the extent of what is expected:

**“O come, Thou Day-Spring, come
and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of
night
And death’s dark shadows put to
flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel,
Shall come to thee, O Israel.”**

Luke’s narrative reflects this same anticipation and hope in the songs of Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, and Simeon. For these Israelites, the coming of Messiah did not mean flight from the world. It meant that God was keeping his promise to vanquish the enemies of Israel, especially the enemies of death and fear.

Their songs and many of our hymns express the essential meaning of Christ’s coming: in Him, God is reconciling all things to himself (2 Corinthians 5). We may despair

over cultural circumstances, but the fact of Christ’s coming can never be altered. Therefore we are people of hope (1 Peter 3). The fatalism implicit in worldviews like nihilism and postmodernism is not part of Christianity. As Chuck Colson would often say, to despair in light of the reality of Christ is a sin!

The Incarnation Dispels Utopianism

And yet this great hope is not in ourselves. False worldviews like Marxism-Leninism are doomed for many reasons, but one of the clearest is because they assume humans can fix this broken world. They assume that inherent human righteousness and ingenuity will triumph.

If nothing else, Christ’s coming shows us that in the face of sin and evil, we are powerless on our own. “There is no one righteous,” the author of Ecclesiastes wrote. Our only hope was that God would come to our rescue, waging war on the brokenness that enveloped the individual and the world. And that’s what happened. The songs of Zechariah and Mary in Luke 1 showcase the fact that Christ’s Incarnation is an act of mercy, grace, and justice on God’s part. “He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever,” Mary exclaimed as she carried Christ in her womb (Luke 1:54-55).

Likewise, Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, understood that God — not man — was acting to redeem the world: “. . . for [God] has

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visited and redeemed his people and raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David” (Luke 1:68-69).

What’s more, whereas our natural inclination is to think that the accumulation of power and know-how can fix the world’s problems, God used the meekest of examples to herald Christ’s first coming: a helpless baby, born amongst animals, visited by shepherds — the outcasts of society. This flies in the face of humanistic worldviews that say by example that the accumulation of power is always the solution. God used the seemingly smallest things to bring about the greatest redemption.

Applying a Biblical Worldview of Christmas

Do we readily see the implications of Christ’s Incarnation when we celebrate Christmas each year? Should we re-examine how we look at Christmas? If so, what can we do to better focus on the deep, robust ways the Incarnation changed all of creation?

• **Work ‘Far as the Curse is Found.’** Because all of life matters to God, the Church should be working in all spheres of culture. We often talk about being involved in the most public spheres, but we should remember to operate in light of Christ’s coming in our smaller spheres in our families, our churches, and our neighborhoods, Joseph’s example in the Christmas story is often overlooked. In his culture, Joseph had every right to scorn Mary — pregnant and betrothed. But he exercised prudence and love in the sphere he was responsible for. Joseph didn’t embarrass Mary. He didn’t

ostracize her. He remained faithful to his call as a husband, as Mary remained faithful to her call to bear her son.

• **Sing the Whole Hymn.** Instead of just singing the radio version of many of your favorite Advent hymns, print off the lyrics and go over them with your family.

• **Care for Others.** As bearers of the *imago dei*, we have a responsibility to care for one another. Whether through ministries like Angel Tree or Operation Christmas Child, or watching for needs that arise in your neighborhood or church, be on the lookout for ways to spread the gift given to us at Christmas. Involving children in charity not only helps them to avoid the traps of consumerism, it teaches them that the most effective charity is local and not from government.

• **Remember the Whole Nativity.** The story of the Incarnation isn’t found only in Matthew and Luke; it’s told in all of Scripture. In particular, be sure to read Genesis 3, Isaiah 9, and John 1 in addition to the traditional Christmas story texts in Matthew and Luke.

Notes

1. C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), p. 174.
2. “Gnosticism and the Gnostic Jesus,” Douglas Groothuis, Christian Research Institute, <http://www.equip.org/articles/gnosticism-and-the-gnostic-jesus/>

Summit News & Notes

» Summit is looking for a registered nurse to work at the 2013 Tennessee Student Worldview Conference, July 7-20, at Bryan College in Dayton, Tennessee. If you or someone you know is interested, contact Summit Tennessee Program Director Allison Tirjan at allison@summit.org or at 719.685.2877.

» Summit is beginning a major update of David Nobel’s landmark worldview curriculum *Understanding the Times*. To keep up with the project, follow Dr. Jeff Myers’ blog “The President’s Desk” at www.summit.org.

» Did you know you can receive regular updates and resources from Summit, including *The Journal*, via email? To sign up for Summit’s email updates, send an email to Summit Communications Manager Michael Reneau at michael@summit.org.

a look at our world

news and commentary



Editor's Note: Our President Emeritus, Dr. David Noebel, helps us with research by sending 20-30 pages of clippings of each month's news. To see the complete list of Doc's clippings, go to www.summit.org/resources/the-journal/, open the PDF, and scroll to page 9, or call us at 866.786.6483.

Media

The unabated moral confusion flowing through the media is stunning. It's so bad, you can't look away. But we should try.

With a few exceptions, the major TV networks are a torrential sewer of left-wing propaganda and smutty sitcoms. Print and online media are more diversified, but *The New York Times* has so many certifiables writing for it that I can't even decide which one to quote. Elsewhere, columnists like the *Miami Herald's* Leonard Pitts Jr. spin out nuggets like, "Racial animus is an element of tea party ideology, but not its entirety." Why, thanks for that caveat, Mr. Pitts.

The Washington Post's Courtland Milloy, after watching the Iowa caucuses on TV in January, complained bitterly that "nearly everybody was white." Imagine that shoe on the other foot.

Because I live and work in the Washington area, I'll narrow this litany of lunacy down to *The Washington Post*, which rarely disappoints.

Some of the weirdest stuff is on the opinion page, such as the May 26 editorial "Make us pay more: A higher gasoline tax would be good for the country." Don't make me have to explain why that's not a good idea.

E. J. Dionne Jr.'s June 11 column, "Government is the solution," turns "Ronald Reagan's declaration on its head," and blames "conservatives" for blocking more federal spending that could "heal the economy." Can someone please send Mr. Dionne to Greece for a few days?

Then there are the "5 Myths About" columns on Sundays. At their best, they correct common misconceptions, but they also serve up howlers.

On May 27, in Stephanie Coontz's "5 Myths about Marriage," No. 3 was: "Divorce is harmful for women and children." Pay no attention to the social wreckage around you, folks. Myth No. 5 was "Married couples are the building blocks of community life." Perhaps Ms. Coontz might stroll around some urban hellholes where marriage has disappeared. If she survives, she could report on how well everyone is faring.

In "5 Myths about breast-feeding," on June 3, No. 1 is, "Breast feeding is natural." Orit Avishai begins the piece in Clintonesque fashion: "It depends on how you define 'natural.'"

Over in *Style*, columnist Anna Holmes recounted her joy when a friend confessed to having a "torrid affair with a male colleague for years.

... While I tsk-tsked audibly and threw her a disapproving look, inside I cheered. ... I felt a perverse sort of triumph in her betrayal, a celebration that [she] was boldly asserting control over her sexual and emotional desires."

The richest source of lunacy, hands down, is Saturday's "On Faith" page, edited by former *Style* columnist and famous person Sally Quinn.

The page's regular columnist is Lisa Miller, a fountainhead of New Age musings wrapped in Christian garb. Here are a few:

"A very wise Trappist monk once

told me that unless everyone gets to heaven, no one will." Sounds more like a wiseguy dispensing cheap grace.

"As I pointed out in a 2008 *Newsweek* article, 'The Religious Case for Gay Marriage,' the Bible offers no examples of what might be called 'the traditional family.'" As the cowardly lion might say, "Not Noah, Not Nobody!"

"Powerful, vocal Roman Catholics have been much in the news of late, mostly for their hard-line positions on abortion and birth control,

"The unabated moral confusion flowing through the media is stunning. It's so bad, you can't look away. But we should try."

Robert Knight

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a look at our world

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and their self-serving rhetoric on the subject of religious rights in the health-care debate.” How selfish of the church to want the government’s boot off its neck.

“In her book *The Origin of Satan*, Elaine Pagels shows how from the very beginning, Christians have used the devil to demonize people who were unlike them — ‘first Jews,’ she writes, ‘then pagans, and later dissident Christians called heretics.’ To extrapolate from Pagels, gays can be seen as modernity’s Jews and heretics.” Guess it’s not too late to round up the Christians and rev up the lions.

“Is the Right Rev. Mariann Budde the woman to save the Episcopal Church? On meeting her, you’d hope so. ... She is unapologetically liberal, and the way she answers hot-button questions — ‘I’m in favor of gay marriage, always have been. At this point it’s a no-brainer’ — is bracing ... ” Well, she’s at least half right.

Virtually every week, the “On Faith” page is a train wreck. Writing last New Year’s Eve about the Egyptian police’s exposure of a female demonstrator’s blue bra, Ms. Quinn proclaimed, “That blue bra, to me, was the ultimate symbol of women’s power, the one thing that threatens men above all.” She told all women to get one.

My first thought was that Ms. Quinn’s husband, former *Post* Executive Editor Ben Bradlee, had better get her one for her birthday if he knows what’s good for him. In the same column, she plugged a book that “argues that Mary Magdalene may well have been Jesus Christ’s lover, life compan-

ion, ‘soulmate,’ and first among the apostles ... If only Mary Magdalene had had the blue bra.”

The next week, Ms. Quinn continued her rhapsody in blue: “The blue bra, for me, has become almost like a talisman or amulet. It keeps away bad feelings. It makes me feel lucky and protected.”

Remember, this is the same person whose “On Faith” page regularly portrays biblical Christianity as retrograde superstition.

On March 3, Ms. Quinn splashed across the top of the page Lisa Miller’s tirade against GOP candidates. Noting that Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum, Michele Bachmann and Ron Paul have large families, Ms. Miller wrote, “[T]he smug fecundity of the Republican field this primary season has me worried. ... [T]he romantic idealization of biblically abundant families is a retrograde dream.”

A small-family mother herself, she pulled back at the end: “I am the first person to say children are a miracle, a blessing, a gift from God.”

Right. So, which of these candidates’ children is a curse? Inquiring readers want to know.

— Robert Knight
The Washington Times
June 25, 2012, p. 35

Religious Liberty

California Gov. Jerry Brown has signed the first law banning therapy intended to discourage homosexual desires in minors. The law, promoted by gay advocacy groups and sponsored by state Sen. Ted Lieu, lets authorities fine or revoke the licenses

of counselors who use what Brown contends are “non-scientific ‘therapies’ that have driven young people to depression and suicide.”

Lieu calls the banned practice “psychological child abuse.” He contends that counseling against homosexuality damages children and the state’s compelling interest to stop the practice trumps objections that the law violates constitutional rights. Lieu compares the measure to the state limiting parents’ rights to allow their children to smoke or consume alcohol.

Christian and family-rights groups oppose the measure as a violation of free speech, religious liberty, and the rights of families. Brad Dacus, president of the Pacific Justice Institute, which has filed suit over the ban, says the law is “outrageously unconstitutional,” noting it “makes no exceptions for young victims of sexual abuse who are plagued with unwanted same-sex attraction, nor does it respect the consciences of mental health professionals who work in a church.”

The Christian legal group Liberty Counsel has also sued the state on behalf of two anonymous California teenagers currently in counseling to help them overcome “unwanted same-sex sexual attractions.” Mat Staver, chairman of Liberty Counsel, argues that the law places the state between counselors and their clients, forcing counselors “to overrule the will of their clients who choose to prioritize their religious moral values” above homosexual attraction.

— *WORLD Magazine*
November 3, 2012, p. 100

summit spotlight

a look into the lives of summit alumni

Baker Pairs Entrepreneurial Spirit with Deep Meaning

Joe Baker began honing his pro-life apologetics skills as a fourth-grader wanting to buy a bike. If he could raise the most money for a local pregnancy center by soliciting donations, he'd win a gift certificate to a local bike shop. "Literally, every day I'd go door to door," he said. When Baker encountered pro-choice folks on his rounds, he found himself having to argue the pro-life case. "I learned the arguments for pro-life as a fourth-grader to get this bike," he said. "While doing that is where my convictions began to form and I became adamantly pro-life. It made me pro-life."

Now 30 years old, his feet-to-the-fire training is paying dividends. Baker helped found Save the Storks, a pro-life organization aiming to convince mothers considering abortion to save their babies. Baker's pro-life zeal is a perfect match with his entrepreneurial spirit: he's also created an organization using cupcakes to argue the pro-life cause, runs a for-profit company selling intellectually provocative t-shirts to teens, and runs a precious metals investment company to finance his nonprofit work.

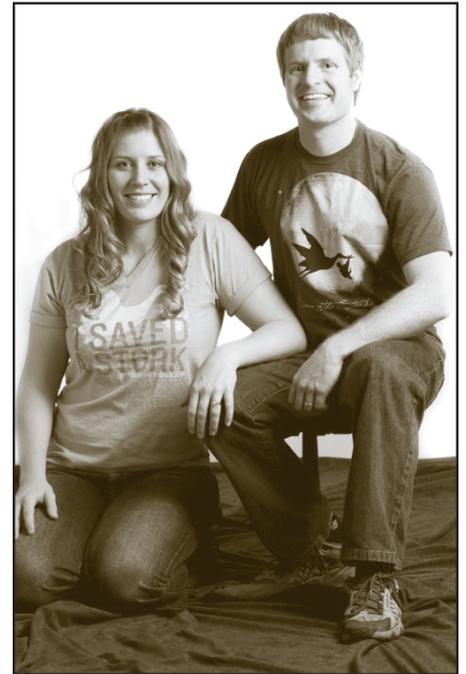
Baker, who has been living an itinerant lifestyle with his wife since their wedding in 2011, credits his years as student and staffer at Summit for opening his eyes to careful intentionality in how he spends his time and resources. "Hearing from so many profound and powerful lives made me want to live with the same sense of intentionality and meaning," Baker said. "[The speak-

ers I heard were] living their lives and making a tremendous impact."

Save the Storks is Baker's biggest current project. Pro-life activists have found the one thing that consistently convinces abortion-minded women to keep their babies is having an ultrasound. But many are unwilling to go to the trouble of cancelling their clinic appointment and scheduling an ultrasound at a cross-town location. Save the Stork's solution was to outfit a bus with the latest ultrasound equipment, hire a nurse, and park outside an abortion clinic.

After one Stork Bus toured the country in 2011, Save the Storks then contracted with the Downtown Pregnancy Center in Dallas, Texas, which will permanently operate the bus around local abortion clinics. Baker said he plans in 2013 to release at least two more Stork Buses to pregnancy centers, with an eventual goal of having a bus in every major U.S. city. "[Pregnancy center workers] are the ones who make them work," Baker explained. "It's their vehicle, but we train them how to do it. You wouldn't really be able to care for a woman's needs if you're traveling all over the country."

Save the Storks and Cupcakes for Life — an organization training pro-life advocates in using cupcake giveaways to spark dialogue about abortion in local communities — are fueled by Baker's business in precious metals, which he began trading while in college. A mentor advised him on finances, which led to the business



Joe and Ann Baker

that now allows Baker and his wife to devote 90 percent of their time to nonprofit work.

"My wife and I are capable of building something that could make a lot of money," he said. "Our desire, though, is really just to build the things we want to, like Save the Storks."

Baker admitted he has many more ideas for future projects, but knows he needs to develop and sustain his current works before he moves on. He credits Summit with teaching him how to think well on doing meaningful work: "Summit really set my trajectory. I don't know where I would have ended up without Summit. I probably would have ended up doing some kind of different business, not really interested in living with such intentionality and meaning."



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**INSIDE: How the Incarnation speaks
to what we faced in 2012.**

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learn to think **critically.**
understand the **truth.**
learn to think **biblically.**

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The Journal is the monthly publication of American Christian College (dba Summit Ministries), a non-profit, educational, religious corporation operating under the laws of the states of Oklahoma and Colorado.

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