

## ***“IMAGINE: what if Jesus was never born?”***

*“The Glory of God is man fully alive”* (St. Irenaeus)

*“I have come that they may have life, and have life in abundance”* (Jesus, John 10:10)

### ***Good Riddance to Religious Rubbish***

Have we left Jesus out of Christmas? At a time when we should celebrate the light of the world entering the human stage, why is our culture suffering a spiritual blackout?

Perhaps Jesus *is* best forgotten?

*“As well as being a menace to civilization, religion has become a threat to human survival. Religion poisons everything.”* (Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great*)

The Inquisitions, Crusades, Witch-hunts ... we need reminding: we’re saved not because we’re better than others, but because we’ve recognized our brokenness—we *need* saving. For our grievous historical sins, *we were wrong. Sorry.*

And yet . . . have we ignored the tremendous impact of Jesus *for good* in a world gone wrong? Imagine there’s no religion. No, further, imagine Jesus didn’t just drift off into obscurity ... imagine if Jesus literally drifted out of existence. *What if Jesus was never born? What would our world be like if that manger in Bethlehem had remained empty?*

### ***What would a World without Jesus Look Like?***

Perhaps it’s easier to answer what a Jesus-less world would look like if we got a clear picture of Jesus’ legacy in this world—in his life, in history, and even today. And this influence is far reaching, for Jesus’ life “has been not only the highest pattern of virtue, but the strongest incentive to its practice” (noted historian and skeptic, William Lecky).

### ***What is Jesus’ Legacy?***<sup>1</sup>

#### ***(1) INCARNATION: A New Way to Live***

*Incarnation* (in’kär-nā’shŭn) *n.* To put on flesh. Embodiment. God clothed in matter.

Our world today: *Groaning* ... all creation, all cultures, every person (Romans 8:22-23)

The world’s two ways:

#1: The *Materialist*: all is matter, so what *is* is right. Thus, matter is meaningless.

#2: The *Mystic*: meditation reveals that matter doesn’t matter—it’s an illusion.

So, meaningless, or immaterial—take your pick: chance and fate, or escape?

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<sup>1</sup> For full notes on each point, see <http://logos.kbc.org.au/blog/what-if-jesus-had-never-been-born/>.

*God's radical solution: matter has meaning and matter is real. God took on flesh.*  
John 1:1-4, 14 ... "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" ...  
Good News to a Groaning Planet ... Our Hope of Redemption.

God's "very good" still stands, even over fallen creation:  
"God so loved *the cosmos* . . ." (John 3:16)

Practically, what has the legacy of **Christ's incarnation** meant for this world?

- The rise of science to fulfil our creation mandate (Gen 1:26-31; 2: 15; Ps 111:2)
- The sharing of this good news and hope through all creation (Mark 16:15)
- A holistic vision uniting physical and spiritual (the materialist and the mystic) that signals freedom for all people, especially the oppressed (Lev 25; Lk 4:18f.)
- A mandate to humbly enter in to all cultures, through translation work, hospitals and health care, education, and creation care, helping heal a hurting world
- Dr. Paul Brand, *Ten Fingers for God* ... good news, especially if you're a "Leper"

## **(2) HUMILITY: A New Way to Lead**

Jesus is running for President, but as a new type of commander-in-chief (Mark 10:42-45).  
If you were the King of Kings, how would you stage manage your world entrance?

Luke 1-2 *today*, according to Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*:

*"An unwed mother, homeless, was forced to look for shelter while travelling to meet the heavy taxation demands of a colonial government. She lived in a land recovering from violent civil wars and still in turmoil – a situation much like that in modern Bosnia, Rwanda, or Somalia."*

*What kind of King is this?* Armed with a basin and towel, a crucifix for a call sign?

*What kind of Kingdom is this?* A weedy bush offering shelter to undesirable fowls?

*What kind of Leader is this?* Down is up, die to live, serve to rule (Php 2:5-9; Jn 12:24)

Practically, what has the legacy of **Christ's humility** meant for this world?

- Servant leadership with a preference for the poor (1 Cor 1:18-31; 2 Cor 8:9)
- Mahatma Gandhi's and Martin Luther King Jr.'s courageous non-resistance
- Desmond Tutu's Truth and Reconciliation Committee
- Francis of Assisi's humility as "court jester for the King of Paradise"
- Income Generation Projects among the world's "bottom billion"

## **(3) IMMANUEL: A New Way to Relate**

*"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel – which means God with us."* (Matthew 1:22-23 quoting Isaiah 7:14)

- In this one name, Immanuel, is everything humankind needs and the entire plan of God's salvation.
- Jesus' birth has completely changed how people relate to God.
- Jesus used a word of great intimacy to call God his 'Abba' (father).
- Jesus showed the world God wants us to know him intimately and it is from this intimacy of knowing the father's love, knowing personally the heartbeat of God, that we begin to truly see Christ with us.

*"For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*  
(Matthew 18:20)

- That is why we can see revival, the presence, power, and move of God in the smallest of house churches in China or the biggest western churches.
- At the heart of Christ was love. His love compelled him to action.
- It is the love and compassion of Christ that has transformed the world through Christian's as they bring Jesus' 'love in action'.

#### ***(4) COMPASSION: A New Way to Love***

*And Jesus was moved with compassion... (Mark 1:41)*

- If Jesus' had never been born, the world would be a less compassionate place.
- The gospels record fourteen occasions where He was "moved" with compassion and even other times of him weeping. He cared for the no-bodies.
- He didn't shy away from interacting with lepers, or prostitutes, or a woman who was 'unclean' because she'd been bleeding for twelve years. In the Jewish culture of Jesus' day, touching a ceremonially and hygienically unclean person was unthinkable.
- The early church knew and followed Jesus' model. Christianity brought a new culture capable of making life in Roman cities more tolerable.
- Today there are countless examples of godly people following the model of Jesus to bring compassion and love to a needy world.

*"Removing Christian evangelism from the African equation may leave the continent at the mercy of a malign fusion of Nike, the witch doctor, the mobile phone, and the machete."*  
(From Matthew Parris' article, "As an Atheist I truly believe Africa needs God")

#### ***(5) IDENTITY: A New Way to Be Human***

*"'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind' - this is the great and foremost commandment, and there is a second like it, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. The whole Law and Prophets hang on these two commands."* (Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:28-34).

- If Jesus had never been born the world would look so immensely different because Jesus valued and validated the individual. An incredible example of the church following Jesus' example is its opposition to slavery.
- Of all the world religions, only in Christianity did the idea develop that slavery was sinful and must be abolished.
- It is also clear that Jesus did not 'go with the flow' of the culture of his day in how he interacted with women. Jesus treated women equally valuable children of God.
- One of the fascinating reasons Christianity spread so quickly in its first two hundred years was because it treated people and particularly women better than pagan religions. Early Christianity held huge appeal for women in the Roman Empire because within the Christian culture they enjoyed equal status with men.

### ***How Will You Respond to Jesus' Legacy?***

What would a world without Jesus be like? A darker place than we can imagine. Trying to picture a world where Jesus was never born is ultimately inconceivable because Christianity has so indelibly imprinted the last two thousand years of world history. Today many critics accuse the church of being a force for evil in the world. The church and Christians *have* made mistakes—and sometimes terrible ones. *But on the whole, Jesus' birth and the lives of his Christian followers have been an immense force for good.*

The heart of the Christmas message is that Jesus came not just to provide a future hope of paradise after we die, but also a present hope for the here and now. He wants to see this world restored, and he invites us to be co-workers in his Kingdom mission.

*"Only one life will soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last"*

### ***Discussion Questions***

- (1) Why has religion in general, and Christianity in particular, got such a bad name today? Is it justified? And what can we learn from this?
- (2) As a group, brainstorm and discuss all the ways—great and small, good and bad—that the world would be different if Jesus was never born.
- (3) From the five key legacies of Christ, what was your general impression? What was new to you? Which story impacted you the most? And did you disagree on any point?
- (4) Work back through the five points and discuss: a) how well does the church live this legacy *today*; and b) how well do I, *personally*, live this legacy? What would it take for the church, and me as an individual Christian, to look more like the Christ?
- (5) Have you responded to Jesus' legacy? Spend some time considering how you might, in God's strength, live this legacy, incarnated in your particular context. Then, as a group, commit these plans to God and ask for His empowerment.
- (6) Take the time to ask your friends their opinion: *"How would the world look if Jesus was never born?"* Then, track down one of the following "recommended reading" books from the message manuscript (<http://logos.kbc.org.au/blog/what-if-jesus-had-never-been-born/>) and flesh out the details that might help people this Christmas to clearly see the amazing legacy of Jesus as Light of the World.