

Christmas: What Is It?

Each year we as Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas, but what is it that we really celebrate? Is it about getting all kinds of cool stuff, or is there something more to it?



Giving

There is a huge pressure to give bigger and better presents.

Giving is good! The word “give” is in the NIV New Testament 300 times! But what is “giving” when we talk about Christmas?

Mark 10: 21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and *give to the poor*, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me

From this we can gather that perhaps an important aspect of giving is love (another important word! Right?).

Love

John 3:16 "For *God so loved the world* that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life

This should pretty much tell us some important things about the true “Christmas”.

Why do you think God would give us His Son?
Why do we enjoy giving to those we love?

What Really Happened at Christmas?

Was it a simple birth of a man? History records the time of Christ as the single greatest event of all time. The birth of Christ changed the entire course that history would take. Even the Roman empire, huge, powerful and evil as it was couldn't escape Christ. Isn't this an odd thing since the Romans were the ones who hammered the nails into His cross?

What about the three wise men. They were neither Christian nor Jewish, yet they knew something special had happened and venerated Christ.

How could this be?

Fulfillment of the Prophecies of All Time



The birth and life of Christ fulfilled every Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah. Here are just a few of those prophecies and how they were fulfilled in the New Testament.

Its important to think about this when we think of Christmas, as it tells us that Christ wasn't simply born as a man, but as part of a promise that God made to us through His prophets.

Something to consider is that the things these prophets said about Christ were hundreds of years before his coming, and that the prophets didn't know each other! It is fair to say that when they wrote of him, they may not have even known that some of what they wrote was actually about Jesus.

How could all these unrelated things be brought into fulfillment at one time and in one person? This is a mystery of the Bible that we as Christians understand, yet the most schooled historians can neither understand nor refute!

Here are just a few of those prophecies and how they were fulfilled in the New Testament.

Old Testament	What Was Predicted?	Fulfillment
<p>Micah 5:2 But you, O Bethlehem Eph'rathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.</p>	<p>Place of Birth</p>	<p>Matthew 2:1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem</p>
<p>Hosea 11:1 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.</p>	<p>Jesus' Family Fleeing to Egypt</p>	<p>Matthew 2:14 And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt,</p>
<p>Psalms 22:16 Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.</p>	<p>Hands and Feet Pierced</p>	<p>John 20:27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing."</p>

December

Saint Johns' Sunday School: 6-7-8 Grade

God's Promise

As the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, Christ established a new relationship between man and God. The old laws were replaced with the "new covenant"

Acts 3:25 And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers.

Luke 22:20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

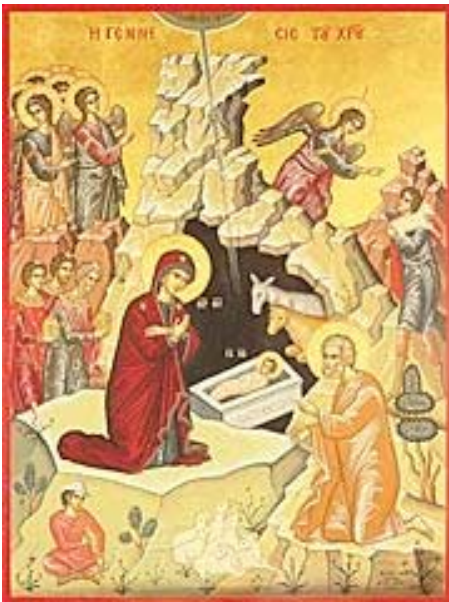
A covenant is a very special promise. In the Old Testament, God gave his laws so that man would know how to live. Through the birth of Christ, a new covenant was started that emphasized love over the strict laws of the old covenant.

Jesus Christ was born in human form and grew up just like you.

How would you imagine his life to be the same as yours?
How might it have been different?

What does any of this have to do with a department store "Santa"?

How to Invite Christ to His Own Birthday!



As Orthodox Christians, we have the Advent fast for the forty days preceding Christmas.

Why would we do that? Why deny ourselves all the neat parties, snacks, drinks and luxuries?

The answer has to do with preparing our minds for to accept the truth of Christmas. Jesus came to free us from slavery to sin, yet in celebration of that gift we could wind up becoming more addicted to drinking and eating. This would be as though we were turning our back on the truth of Christmas; that Christ came to deliver and save us.

Advent and the time before Christmas can be used both joyfully and with respect to the One whose birth we celebrate. Imagine your own birthday party if everyone who was invited walked right by you to the food table! How would you feel about that?

Lets take some time to be sure and invite Jesus to **HIS** birthday!