



The First Christmas: In the Fullness of Time

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son ... that we might receive the adoption as sons. —Galatians 4:3-5

One of the marvelous and amazing things about the Christmas story is God's incredible timing for the incarnation of His Son. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see God's hand directing global events toward the birth of His Son, the Messiah.

In the centuries leading up to the first Christmas, there were significant developments during what is known as the intertestamental period (marked from the closing of the Old Testament canon some 400 years before the birth of Jesus, with Malachi's prophesy of a coming Messiah). These developments set the stage for Christ's coming.

God's People

The Jews at the time of Christ were oppressed under Roman rule, as they had been under the Babylonians and the Media-Persians and the Greeks. The prophet Daniel's interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 2:38-45) should have alerted them that **Messiah's arrival was imminent** during this fourth occupying Kingdom.

Through persecution, the Jews' antici-

pation of the promised Messiah undoubtedly intensified. The persecution also scattered the Jews. Wherever they went, they built synagogues where Scripture was taught. By their zeal to proselytize the Gentiles, they awakened in them a like awareness and expectation of the Messiah. When Jesus' disciples went out preaching the Gospel, they found a prepared place in nearly every city (the synagogue) and a prepared bridge between Jew and Gentile (the Gentile proselytes and God-fearers).

Common Culture

The conquering Greeks, under Alexander the Great and his successors, brought their culture to the entire world. **The Greek language remained the language of the world even after Rome came into power.** The Old Testament had been translated into Greek; the New Testament was to be written in Greek. Both could be read throughout the first century world because of this common language. Try to imagine any other time in world history when cross-cultural missions and translation of the text would not be necessary!

Roman Rule and Roads

The Romans, on the other hand, united the world politically. It was one of the few times in history when the planet was at peace. Fine Roman roads marked with milestones spanned the empire. **There were few physical or political barriers to prevent first century missionaries from traveling to spread the Good News of Christ.**

Darkness and Despair

There was also a sense of growing disillusionment in the society into which Jesus came. What is true today was true then: the kingdoms of this world can never satisfy man's deeper longings for ultimate reality. Furthermore, there was a growing loss of confidence in the constantly expanding list of Greco-Roman gods and old-line religions. **Then as today, hearts were broken and hungry, and could find no satisfaction—though they tried all that Rome could offer.**

There was a growing sense among some that God was finally going to act—must act. These peered through the darkness, hoping against hope for the coming of a new day. Even the Jewish leaders couldn't bear to wait any longer. They pressed Jesus, asking, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly" (John 10:22-24).

All these factors came together: there was anticipation and need; there was a common culture and language; there was a system of roads and a universal peace in the known world. **The world was prepared for the word about the living Word to be spread abroad.** Into this world, He was born.

James S. Stewart (1896-1990), who was a gifted Scottish preacher, author and teacher, was named "the best preacher of the twentieth century" in 1999 by *Preaching Magazine*. In

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his book *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ*, Stewart summarized the setting into which Jesus came: "Search the pages of history up and down, and in all the tale of the centuries **you will not find any generation in which Christ could better have come than just the generation in which he did come.**"

Even as God Himself came to earth in "the fullness of time," those who carry His Gospel to this generation look forward to another appointed time. We are charged, along with Timothy by the apostle Paul, to "keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time" (1 Timothy 6:13-15).

Yes, there is another "fullness of time" to which we look forward: His return in glory. **This Christmas, may we all be faithful to celebrate His incarnation, to carry the message, and to keep our hearts attuned for His second coming.**



GOD AT WORK

Many junior and senior high students have responded to the evidence of *FaithSearch* at recent events:

"It has given me a lot of trust in the Bible and it gave me a more certain object to have faith in and welcome Him as my Savior." —Sr. high student

"This was very awesome. It really touched my heart. Thanks for doing this." —Jr. high student

"Wow. It always seemed hard to just believe, but you told things that back everything up. I am now ready for humility and to accept God." —Sr. high student

"It answered a lot of my questions I wanted to know." —Jr. high student

At just three of our fall events, **88 teens** each made a faith commitment to follow Jesus as Savior and Lord.

FAITHSEARCH

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FaithSearch Field Reports



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Merry Christmas from your *FaithSearch* evangelists. This month we are sharing our hearts with you in one voice, even as we are working together to fulfill God's call on our ministry.

It has been an exciting and challenging year, as we eagerly and earnestly labor to call people to new life in Jesus Christ by proclaiming the Gospel with evidence, which is the *FaithSearch* message. We have a sense of urgency for the monumental task before us, and of anticipation to see what God has in store for our ministry.

This has truly been a year of forward movement and advancement for *FaithSearch*, in spite of the current financial climate. We are seeing "Extending the Vision" (ETV) fulfilled right before our eyes. **The heart of ETV is multiplication:** seeing others trained to use *FaithSearch* in their own ministries. This vision for multiplication is targeted not just for our own country and culture, but for "All Peoples Everywhere."

We now have trained thirty-two India Campus Crusade for Christ leaders to present the *FaithSearch* message. Through their own proclamation, over 350 Hindus have made first-time faith commitments to follow Jesus Christ. We have also trained fifty *FaithSearch* Discovery teachers here in the U.S., and they are beginning to use *FaithSearch* in their personal ministries.

We're not just training others, however. Wherever we go, people are responding to our proclamation of the *FaithSearch* message as never before—in English, Spanish, and through translation in several Indian languages. It is very affirming that young people are also finding answers in *FaithSearch* to the challenges of life right here at home (see "God At Work" on page 1).

Through the use of our discipleship tool, *Growing Faith*, we have nurtured people in their new-found faith; others have come to faith during the study. In addition, forty-six people have taken training to use *Growing Faith* for discipleship. Half of these have agreed to be called on as part of our growing Metro area discipleship network.

It is thrilling to see the Spanish edition of *Surprised by Faith* (*Sorprendido por la Fe*) being used extensively to reach Latinos for Christ. We are also excited to be nearing final production of the Russian translation of the book, and have been praying for direction for the next translation project. A recent meeting with our contacts from the Middle East has confirmed beyond any doubt that Arabic is to be our next project.

These are some of our impressions from this year of forward movement and advancement. Their effect, we pray, will last a lifetime—even an eternity. Indeed, we rejoice with those who have been touched by the *FaithSearch* message and whose lives have been powerfully changed for eternity. Hundreds of individual comments and thanks bless us, and eloquently demonstrate that "Extending the Vision" is working, to the glory of God.

CLASSIFIEDS



"Unwrapping the Truth About Christmas"

Special Christmas pricing:

75-Pack for only \$21. (Save \$6)

See www.faithsearch.org/Christmas for details and ordering.

April 1, 2006

Celebration Banquet

No Fooling! Celebrate in 2006

The 2006 *FaithSearch* Celebration banquet has been scheduled for Saturday, April 1, at the Northwestern College Blue Room. Plan now to attend this fabulous event.



Praise

Rejoice with us!

1. Praise God for tremendous excitement in the *FaithSearch* Discovery training events. Thank Him for people with a heart for helping the lost and sharing the Gospel, and praise Him for the way they will affect the Kingdom for Him!
2. Thank the Lord for a wonderful opportunity Carlos had at an EFCA retreat. He presented *FaithSearch* Discovery in Spanish and networked with many Latino pastors. Thank God for Carlos and his growing ministry with *FaithSearch*.
3. Praise God that He continues to sustain us financially and work miracles of multiplying "loaves and fishes" right before our eyes. While we continue to experience a serious deficit, God is providing and we are continuing to trust!



Prayer

Please lift in prayer:

1. Please continue to pray for the evangelists and the people who will be attending our upcoming events! Pray for many who don't know Him to come with receptive hearts and for diligent follow-up. Use our event schedule as your guide.
2. Please continue to lift up to God the ministry of Faith Studies International as a whole. Ask God for His leading and guiding. Pray for wisdom, trust, protection, and His will to be done.
3. Please continue to pray that God will continue to bring forth our financial provision, especially to finish the calendar year strong.
4. Please continue to pray regarding our infrastructure changes. There is still much to do and wisdom needed! Pray that God continues to superintend the many details.