

THE SHADOW OF CHRISTMAS

David Hillson, 8/15 December 2019, Hope Church

INTRODUCTION

Why do we celebrate Christmas? (ask)

It's the biggest event the world has seen since creation, changed everything

All history divided into before the first Christmas and after, BC/AD

We're going to start our annual preparation for Christmas this year by looking at how the first Christmas was seen from the BC perspective. Imagine ourselves living in Israel in about 200 BC (3760 in Hebrew calendar). How would we have seen the history of the world, looking back and looking forwards?

LOOKING BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS

The Jews had a number of key events to look back on, defining their history, clearly described in scripture:

- Creation, fall, flood, Egypt (slavery & exodus), Mount Sinai (law & nationhood), promised land (kingdom & temple), Babylon (exile & return) ...
- Looking backwards they saw the acts of God, intervening in history, speaking, guiding, leading, protecting, providing...

But looking forwards all was uncertain. What did the future hold?

- God had been silent for hundreds of years, no evidence of his activity or involvement
- Where is God? Has he left us? Are we now alone?
- Hard to have faith, hard to trust God for the future

Nigel's sermon illustration – lamp shadow

Hidden in the mists of the future was God's big GOOD NEWS. He was going to send his son to the earth to redeem everything (the coming of Jesus at Christmas). Seen from 200BC, this event was misty, hidden, unclear...

But such a huge event cast an enormous shadow that stretched back through all history, affected everything before it.

- Shadow = faithful but incomplete representation of reality
- Can understand some details but not all

[BTW, booked dinner at Wolfgang next February, really excited, can't wait, just had to tell you...]

For such a big event as Jesus coming into the world, not surprising that God wanted to tell people, drop hints.

- Amos 3:7 *“Surely the Lord God does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.”*

Prophecy:

- When people communicate the word, will, character and heart of God.
- Often with words but also through actions and attitudes.
- Often prediction of future events, but not always

Bible scholars estimate over 100 prophecies in OT about the coming of the Jewish Messiah, fulfilled in the arrival of Jesus [see handout]. OT prophecies about coming of Messiah are part of the shadow, drawing attention to the reality. Role of prophets is to interpret shadows.

EXAMPLES

Isaiah 7:14 *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”*

- Don’t feel isolated and forgotten, God’s sending an unmistakable sign that he is with you. He’s sending his own son, called “God-with-us”. You’ll know when he arrives – he’ll be born as a baby from a virgin mother!
 - Tick (Matthew 1:21-23)

Micah 5:2-3 *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Therefore, Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labour bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.”*

- Where should we look for this child? He’ll come from Bethlehem – the “house of bread”, home of Ruth & Boaz, town of King David.
 - Tick (Matthew 2:1)

Isaiah 60:1-6 *“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD will rise upon you and his glory will be seen over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising ... And those from Sheba will come, bearing gold and frankincense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.”*

- Kings from the east will bring gifts.
 - Tick (Matthew 2:11)

WHY DOES GOD PROPHECY THE FUTURE?

From the BC perspective, all God's action is in the past, the future is uncertain. What's the purpose of prophecy?

PREP:

- Predict – foretell the future
- Reveal – show us things from God's perspective
- Explain – make sense of what's coming
- Prepare – help us to get ready

Two key responses to prophecy:

- **Hope** – God knows what he's doing, he's not absent, the future isn't uncertain to him
- **Patience** – God will do things in his own time, not when it suits us

Galatians 4:4-5 *“But when the right time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.”*

He wanted them to have confidence that His-story had not finished, there was more to come, they should remain faithful and trust God with their future. God had been with them in the past, intervened on their behalf, cared for them, led them and protected them – and he'd continue to do so.

WHAT ABOUT US, LIVING IN AD?

How does this affect us as we prepare to celebrate Christmas?

- OT prophecy tells us how important the coming of Jesus was, important enough for God to drop heavy hints to and through the prophets, over a period of hundreds of years beforehand.
- It puts Christmas into the context of God's overall plan: creation, fall, judgement, rescue/redemption...
- It puts the rest of the OT in the context of the coming of Jesus, the meaning of the shadows.

The OT Jews looked forward into the cloud, only saw the shadow of the lamppost, had hints about what would happen but not all the details.

We look back to the lamppost, we can see the reality, we know what the shadows meant. We have the full detail about the coming of Jesus: how it happened, who he really was, what he did, what he said, how he lived and died, the resurrection and ascension. We can begin to understand what was going on and why it was so important.

Because we can see clearly, we have a responsibility to respond (response-ability):

- Why did Jesus need to come? How is that part of God's overall plan for humanity?
- How does it affect me? Do I need to be rescued? What will happen if I'm not rescued by Jesus?

LIVING BETWEEN THE LAMPPOSTS

There's another way we're similar to the BC Jews. We can look back on the reality of God's actions and see what he's done in the past. But for many of us, as we look forward, we see an uncertain future, another cloud. What will happen to us, to our children, to the world? What's coming? Where is God, and is he doing anything?

But there's another lamppost ahead, casting a shadow into our times today. It's similar to the first lamppost – Jesus is coming again! The first time he came as rescuer, the second time he'll be coming as king. Like before, there are hints about what might happen, prophecies in the Bible, we can see the rough outline and the key elements, but there are lots of details we can't see.

And like the BC Jews living in the shadow of the first coming of Jesus, the purpose of this second shadow is to give **hope** to our AD world, and encourage us to be **patient**.

God hasn't finished His-story, there's more to come. Jesus will return as King to right all wrongs, defeat evil, banish pain and suffering, usher in his kingdom of peace, goodness and justice. As we look back to see what God's done in the past, we can look forward to the future with confidence, knowing that God is still in charge, and at the right time the lamppost will be revealed in all its glorious detail.

Until then, we can celebrate what we know of the reality of God's past actions, including the amazing events of Christmas, and trust God with our future. **We're living between the lampposts, in the light of the first, in the shadow of the second**: looking back to full detail of the first coming, looking forward with faith and hope to the second coming.

- We need to **respond in faith** to what is clear from the past – Jesus came as redeemer to rescue people from the consequences of our sin and rebellion against God, and to make it possible for us to be reconciled to God and adopted into his family.
- We also need to **stand firm in hope** for the future – Jesus will come again as king to right all the wrongs in the world, and to establish God's kingdom on earth.

PRAYER

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES ABOUT THE COMING MESSIAH, FULFILLED BY JESUS

[Source: <https://www.allabouttruth.org/messianic-prophecy.htm>]

What was prophesied?	Prophecy	Fulfilment
Born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:21-23
A descendant of Abraham	Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18	Matthew 1:1; Galatians 3:16
Of the tribe of Judah	Genesis 49:10	Luke 3:23, 33; Hebrews 7:14
Of the house of David	2 Samuel 7:12-16	Matthew 1:1
Born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4-7
Taken to Egypt	Hosea 11:1	Matthew 2:14-15
Herod's killing of the infants	Jeremiah 31:15	Matthew 2:16-18
Anointed by the Holy Spirit	Isaiah 11:2	Matthew 3:16-17
Heralded by the messenger of the Lord (John the Baptist)	Isaiah 40:3-5; Malachi 3:1	Matthew 3:1-3
Would perform miracles	Isaiah 35:5-6	Matthew 9:35
Would preach good news	Isaiah 61:1	Luke 4:14-21
Would minister in Galilee	Isaiah 9:1	Matthew 4:12-16
Would cleanse the temple	Malachi 3:1	Matthew 21:12-13
Would enter Jerusalem as a king on a donkey	Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 21:4-9
Would be rejected by Jews	Psalms 118:22	1 Peter 2:7
Die a humiliating death, involving:	Psalms 22; Isaiah 53	
1. rejection	Isaiah 53:3	John 1:10-11; 7:5,48
2. betrayal by a friend	Psalms 41:9	Luke 22:3-4; John 13:18
3. sold for 30 pieces of silver	Zechariah 11:12	Matthew 26:14-15
4. silence before his accusers	Isaiah 53:7	Matthew 27:12-14
5. being mocked	Psalms 22: 7-8	Matthew 27:31
6. beaten	Isaiah 52:14	Matthew 27:26
7. spat upon	Isaiah 50:6	Matthew 27:30
8. piercing his hands and feet	Psalms 22:16	Matthew 27:31
9. being crucified with thieves	Isaiah 53:12	Matthew 27:38
10. praying for his persecutors	Isaiah 53:12	Luke 23:34
11. piercing his side	Zechariah 12:10	John 19:34
12. given gall and vinegar to drink	Psalms 69:21	Matthew 27:34, Luke 23:36
13. no broken bones	Psalms 34:20	John 19:32-36
14. buried in a rich man's tomb	Isaiah 53:9	Matthew 27:57-60
15. casting lots for his garments	Psalms 22:18	John 19:23-24
Would rise from the dead!!	Psalms 16:10	Mark 16:6; Acts 2:31
Ascend into heaven	Psalms 68:18	Acts 1:9
Would sit down at the right hand of God	Psalms 110:1	Hebrews 1:3