



To Bless the World

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Scripture: *Genesis 12:1–3; Isaiah 49:6; Malachi 1:11; Galatians 4:4; Luke 1:26–28, 31–33; Matthew 4:8*

Idea: The whole world would be blessed because the whole world needed blessing. It needed Christmas.

[No doubt you've seen or will see signs, car clings, and posts that state:]

Jesus is the **reason** for the season.

[I appreciate the sentiments: Jesus versus the commercialization of Christmas; let's keep Christ in Christmas, and Jesus is the reason we celebrate Christmas. But if Jesus was correct, and the authors of the New Testament were correct, it may be more accurate to say, "You are the reason, and I am the reason. Without us, there would be no Christmas." Or to be more to the point...]

If we weren't such a **mess**...

No Christmas!

[For God so loved his rebel race that he moved in our direction and sent us a Savior. Maybe some new clings are in order that say...]

I'm the reason for the season.

My **boss** is the reason for the season.

My **mother-in-law** is the reason for the season.

[The birth of Jesus was for our benefit, and it benefitted us in many ways. In this series, we're focusing on three reasons Jesus came. They are three specific reasons God sent Jesus. The first one comes to us by way of...]

The **Story of** Christmas



[We're all familiar with the Christmas story. But some of us are not so familiar with the story of the backstory to the Christmas story.]

[The story of Christmas doesn't begin with a teenager who isn't sure how she got pregnant. It begins 2,000 years before that with a couple who couldn't get pregnant. The story of Christmas begins with a remarkable promise to a less-than-remarkable man named Abram.]

Genesis 12:1-3

¹ The Lord had said to **Abram**, "Go from your **country**, your **people** and your **father's household** to the land I will show you.

[We're not told why God chose Abram or later Joseph and Mary. In ancient times, a person's country, people, and household represented security and protection. God asked Abram to leave all of that and said in exchange...]

² I will make **you** into a great **nation**,

[At that time, Abram is 75, and he and his wife, Sarah, don't have any children. He's probably thinking, "A great nation? I'd be happy to be a great-grandfather." But God wasn't finished:]

² **and** I will **bless** you; I will make your name **great**,

[The promise came true, and Abraham's name became great. There was more, and it set the stage for Christmas 2,000 years before the first Christmas.]

² **and** you will be a **blessing**.

[Someone will be better off because of you. Who? This is the amazing, unbelievable, and impossible part of God's promise. God tells Abraham exactly who will be blessed or better off because of him.]

³ ... and **all** peoples on **earth** will be **blessed** through you."

[The entire world and every generation will be better off. In ancient times, people groups didn't bless one another. They...]

Conquered
Enslaved
Plundered

[... one another. But Abraham believed God even though he didn't live long enough to see the promise fulfilled. Eventually, he and Sarah had a son, Isaac.]



[The entire family was extraordinarily dysfunctional. Abraham and Isaac each lie about their wife's identities. Isaac had two sons who hated each other.]

[One of Isaac's sons had 12 sons. Ten of the sons sold one brother into slavery. Nobody was getting blessed. The entire family ends up enslaved in Egypt and in no position to bless anybody. Then, God sent...]

Moses

[When Moses was done, Egypt wasn't feeling blessed. Soon the Canaanites weren't feeling blessed either.]

[Eventually, in 1000 BC, Abraham's family became an official kingdom.]

The **Kingdom** of Israel

[The first two kings went to war with surrounding nations. The third king, Solomon, marries the daughters of surrounding nations and worships their gods. Instead of blessing other nations, Israel became like them.]

[God judges the nation by allowing them to be invaded. Nebuchadnezzar's "stormtroopers" destroy Solomon's temple. It seemed as if all opportunity was lost, and chaos reigned. Israel couldn't bless herself, much less anybody else.]

[But God is a promise keeper. In the midst of chaos, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah.]

Isaiah 49:6

"I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

[Light to the Gentiles? Gentiles weren't impressed. Israel couldn't save herself. How would the nation bring salvation to the ends of the earth?]

[This idea was insulting. Their economy was in shambles. Nobody's feeling blessed. But God keeps his promises.]



[Around 436 BC, 1,600 years after God's promise to Abraham, he spoke through the prophet Malachi. His words were impossible to take seriously. Malachi says to the people of Israel, "Do not fear. Don't abandon hope!"]

Malachi 1:11

"My **name** will be great among the **nations**...

[If the people could have responded, they would have said, "No, it won't. Your name is mocked among the nations. Your nation is pathetic. We (Israel) can't feed or protect ourselves. Stop with the hype. Zeus's and Jupiter's names will be great. Buckle up because Alexander is about to leave his mark on the world. His name will be great." Malachi continues:]

"My name will be great among the **nations**, from where the sun rises to where it sets.

In **every place** incensed and pure offerings will be brought to **me**, because **my name** will be **great** among the **nations**," says the Lord Almighty.

[Nobody listened or took Malachi seriously. Why should they? They'd already been overrun by Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and the Macedonians.]

[To add insult to injury, in 63 BC, Roman General Pompey annexed Jerusalem and Judea into the Republic of Rome. So began the Roman occupation of Judea. Three things were clear:]

All the **nations** would not be blessed through Abraham.

Israel would **not** be a light to the Gentiles.

Their God would not be **worshipped** throughout the world.

[Nobody was interested in a god too weak to protect his people. When things were as hopeless as they had ever been and God's promise to Abraham was completely and hopelessly out of reach, God moved. The apostle Paul sets it up for us:]

Galatians 4:4

When the **set time** had fully come...

[When God had everything just the way he wanted it—an expanding empire exporting a common culture and language, a highway and seaport system connecting major population centers, and a means by which to export something to the world that was for the world—when the set time had fully come...]



Luke 1:26–27

²⁶ God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of **David**.

²⁷ The virgin's **name** was Mary.

[In some ways...]

The story **of** Christmas...

[... with all its twists and turns, off-ramps, interruptions, dead ends, the ends, and “never gonna happen”...]

makes the **Christmas story** easier to believe.

[It was a narrative that played out over 2,000 years. When Jesus was born, Babylon was uninhabitable. The Persian empire was reduced. Alexander's kingdom had been carved up. Rome was considered eternal but would eventually capitulate to the baby King.]

[Perhaps the reason for the waiting was political. Perhaps God was making a political point. Namely...]

The **kingdoms** of this world...
do not have the **capacity** to **bless** the world.

[They could only rule the world. So, we should not be surprised that when Satan took Jesus:]

Matthew 4:8

... to a very high mountain and showed him all the **kingdoms of the world** and their **splendor**.

[Satan said, “All this I will surrender to you if you surrender to me.” Jesus said, “No thank you. I’ve not come to assume command of a network of failed kingdoms filled with peacekeepers but not peacemakers. I’ve not come to conquer the world. I’ve come to bless the world by giving my life for the world and to demonstrate the way forward for the world.”]

Luke 1:27–28, 31–33

²⁷ The virgin's **name** was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said...

³¹ “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him **Jesus**. ³² He will be great and will be called the **Son of the Most High**.”



[So, it turns out God kept his promise.]

Israel would be a **light** to the **world**.

The God of Israel would be **worshipped** throughout the **world**.

The world would be **blessed** through **Abraham**.

[And the world would be better off because of Abraham.]

[So ends the backstory to the Christmas story. It's a 2,000-year saga that is fascinating, amazing, and inspiring. It's also a bit convicting. If the arrival of Jesus was a blessing to the world, shouldn't Jesus's followers be a blessing to the world as well?]

Are we?

[Am I? Are you? Are we? If the world is better off because of Jesus, shouldn't the world be better off because of his followers?]

Is it?

[If Jesus was the light of the world, shouldn't our collective presence make the world brighter?]

Does it?

Does it **matter**?

[It matters a great deal. These are good questions to wrestle with, especially this time of year. From where I sit, you are a blessing to your community. You are a light in our world. People are better off because of you. Because you are not content to simply believe things about Jesus. You have chosen to follow him and embrace his ways. When a community of people does that, the world becomes a better place.]

[At Christmas, God blessed the world with a different kind of King who came to establish a different kind of kingdom. It was an others-first kingdom ruled by an others-first King. And wherever and whenever his followers come together to live out that kingdom ethic, the world is a better and blessed place.]



[To bless the world was just one of three reasons God gave us Christmas. Next time, we will talk about the second one in Part 2 of...]

Graphic: Title slide for *Reasons for the Season*

Prayer

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Outside of your personal experience, but based on personal observation, how has the coming of Jesus **blessed** the **world**?
2. How has the coming of Jesus served as a blessing to **you**?
What was missing **before** you came to faith?
3. The story of Christmas reminds us that when God is **silent**, he's not necessarily **still**.
What are the **implications** of that for us?