

## Transcript 184

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the God Questions podcast. Joining me today is Gwen. Gwen is the administrator of [compellingtruth.org](http://compellingtruth.org) and also handles all of our volunteers. Kinda keeps them in line helps them to know how to best answer the questions that you all submit. And also Nelson, he's the director of video content. And if you've been on the Got Questions YouTube channel much, I'm sure you've seen Nelson. So Nelson, Gwen, thanks for joining me today. As we celebrate the Christmas season, we receive a lot of questions about Christmas. If you look at the previous episodes of the podcast, we we did a whole episode of frequently asked questions about Christmas and cover some of the biggies. But today we're going to be adding to that with the sort of the different conversation. Some people were really asking the questions why should we celebrate Christmas and what is the true meaning of Christmas? So that's going to be the focus today. So Gwen, why don't you start us off. When if someone were to ask you why do you celebrate Christmas or even phrase it differently, why do Christians celebrate Christmas? How would you answer that question?

Gwen Sellers

I feel like there are really so many reasons when you're just thinking theologically, and this kind of gets to the the true meaning of Christmas. You know what we're celebrating is the birth of Jesus Christ. And isn't that just incredible? I mean, that's like the core of the gospel. This is God taking on human flesh to come live a perfect life, die for our sins, rise again, and bring salvation. So it's God dwelling with humanity. I mean, it's what the entire Bible points forward to. So it's just that pause to really to recognize that and to to really sit in it and imagine, like, wow, our Savior really was born, like as a baby. And so I think there's that.

Gwen Sellers

And then there's also just that how important it is to pause and celebrate those kind of things. I mean, in the Bible, you see God institute these festivals that are supposed to be reminders for his people and that are also supposed to look forward. And that's one thing that I think is unique, maybe more to Christians about Christmas is celebrating Advent. That whole like anticipating up to Christmas Day and awaiting the birth of Jesus, which speaks to that longing in the Bible of like the Savior is coming. The Messiah is coming. But for us today, it's that longing that Jesus is going to return. So we have the security of the promise fulfilled, that he has come, and then we use that to give us hope that he is going to return. So like, it just ties that longing back in. And I mean, there's a ton of other reasons. And Nelson what are some that come to your mind?

Nelson Domingues

There's so many, of course. Just like you. Everything you said is spot on. The reason we celebrate Christmas is it's all about Jesus, right? I mean, this is it's, it's what the church does together. It's one of the things that I and my family really enjoy about the Christmas time. It's the time that the church at large, all around the world together recognizes the one, the very thing that Jesus came in the flesh and was born on Earth to be the light for the world. To show us love and kindness, to bring us joy. And so I am reminded about that. And it's why we celebrate the fact that Jesus gave up all of heaven to be here

with, with humanity to eventually take on sin and become sin for us so that we could, we have our life with God. And it's an amazing thing. It's the thing to celebrate and the thing that to think about.

Nelson Domingues

As I drive around the neighborhoods and the streets, and as we go to stores and you look around, you see lights everywhere on trees, on decorations, stars on trees, and and lights down on houses and all that. I always like to point out to my kids like how beautiful, that is. And I love how, even if the world isn't recognizing Jesus at the moment, maybe they're just recognizing the holiday, Christmas right, or just the holidays in general. I love how the world beyond just the church, but the world is also recognizing something too. And you can say it's commercialized. You can say whatever you want to say about, but I personally like the fact that the world changes for like a month and it lights up. And and there is a a spirit of of of joy and and and good tidings that are just everywhere you look. And I enjoy that. And whether you're in the church and you're you're really recognizing that this is all about Jesus. Or you're out in the world and you're recognizing that something is special that's happening. I think in both those areas, Christians have the obligation to tell the world, hey, what this this holiday is really about. And I love that the world celebrates it. The church for the right reasons and the world at large is celebrating something. And Christians have the opportunity at that moment to say, you know what we're celebrating the light of the world. We're celebrating the joy that Jesus brought during this time. And so it's a very special time. To me it's not about the gifts at all. It's about the gift given to us in Jesus Christ.

Shea Houdmann

And Nelson, you brought up a great point and just for everyone who is listening, we are well aware that there are a lot of people, Christians even, who do not celebrate Christmas or who even strongly opposed to celebrations of Christmas for some of the reasons you mentioned, like the commercialization. Or some people want to focus on some of the Christmas traditions that have Pagan origins and so forth. But I look at it as what you were saying, Nelson, is that there's a time of year where people, even with this commercialized as it is, people still understand this is the celebration of Jesus birth. There's there's a different attitude among the holidays that people are more into the spirit of giving, being generous, making sacrifices for other people, for caring for people, for getting together with family, even with some of the difficulties, as that can contain. But if there's a time of year that people are going to even attend church is typically going to be around Christmas or around Easter, so there's so many opportunities to present the gospel. Even having conversations with people who maybe aren't familiar with the American culture and the all they've ever heard about Christmas is funny story about a guy in a red suit coming down a chimney and bringing gifts to children. And like, well explaining, no, here's what Christmas is really all about.

Shea Houdmann

So one thing I saw about Christmas and this is the opportunities you have to be a witness for Christ in a different way. And then the openness that some people have to the gospel, to going to church at Christmas time, that they really don't have any other time of year. And I think that's worth celebrating. I think that's worth recognizing as an opportunity to proclaim the gospel in word and deed, pointing people to what the ultimate reason Jesus came to Earth was, there's to die on the cross for our sins, and

that was impossible with that Christmas. So many, many things I celebrate about Christmas, but I celebrate the opportunities we have to share the gospel.

Nelson Domingues

Think it's interesting how some Christians and people's convictions can lead them where they may, but I've heard many times people will kind of accuse Christians of saying, like you know, Jesus wasn't born in December. And and and how did we know the that date he was born? And you know, I'd like to tell those people like we don't know, and in fact most Christians do know that December 25th this is most likely not the day that Jesus was born. But that's not the point. The point is we chose a date on a calendar right long ago. Many, many hundreds of years ago, and the date was recognized and still goes on in perpetuity that this is the day we just recognize the gift of Jesus Christ. And that's what Christmas, the date of Christmas, when it happens, the time of year that happens. That's what we're recognizing. We're not saying that he was born on this day. We're celebrating his birthday because it's so much more than that, right? It's the day where the church for centuries has recognized the coming of Jesus Christ, and we all gather around, and we all say Hallelujah. Amen. Jesus is here, and he was born for us. And it's the time of celebration, and it's packed with just so much joy, regardless of the actual day he was born. This is the day that is now in stone that we recognize. We are celebrating the birth of Jesus, and I think that's a worthy celebration.

Gwen Sellers

When I think like both of you have alluded to of this idea of the entire culture changes. Like there is an effect for Christmas and even yeah, like even cultures that don't celebrate Christmas and think like it's a western thing, you know they still well, notice it and notice something different. And what what I notice in you know, Christmas movies, they're always talking about oh, there's Christmas magic. Or oh, there's a hopefulness this time of year. And I think that Christmas can really put in stark contrast, hopelessness and hopefulness. Because for a lot of us, you know, Christmas is in the winter. Which is, which is difficult for people emotionally sometimes anyway. It's darker. Nelson, you talked about lights and just how great is that when you're driving home at 5:00 at night and it's dark but like, but all these lights, that's like pointing you to brightness. But I think too sometimes the pressure of the holiday Shea you talked about family and how that can be difficult. Or sometimes people think, you know, oh, Christmas is supposed to be perfect. I'm supposed to feel, you know, loved and joyful, and hopeful and everything's supposed to be great. And the reality is it's not. And for a lot of people, not only is it just like not perfection, but like there's deep sadness and grief and longing and pain and broken relationships. But I think, you know, like the answer to that is the joy of Christmas. It's the hope of Christ. Like so again, when you think about Jesus like stepped into that willingly into that human suffering. So he understands and we can have hope in him.

Gwen Sellers

So I think part of the joy of Christmas is that really that stark contrast of we live in a fallen world and we have a resurrected savior. So like that gives us incredible perspective and joy. And that's such a deeper, richer joy than wow I got a really great gift. Or, you know, like, oh, those Christmas lights are so beautiful. And I think when we have that broader eternal perspective, it actually makes those little joys all the bigger because we know, like, this is just a foretaste. And, you know, if it's not 100% perfection, oh well. So like, we get to really fully enjoy it for all that it is. And I think for us as believers, you know,

knowing that Christmas can be difficult for people, we get to share hope with them. And I mean like, how incredible is that?

Nelson Domingues

Yeah, I don't want to make light of anyone's despair or discouragement or feelings of sadness during Christmas. We know that's there. There's a lot of people like, just like you said Gwen, that are going through loss, some people are feeling like this is the time of year where they especially know that they're alone and that there aren't many friends that are around them and it can be a very difficult time of year. And that is hard. God made us beings who want to commune with each other and ultimately to commune with him. Right. And so we have a natural inborn longing to be with other people. To experience true joy. That's why Jesus came to earth, to be with us so that we wouldn't be alone. And I love in the announcement from the Angels to the shepherds in Luke, Chapter 2, verse 10. They said fear not. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. And it's for all the people. This joyous season is for all people. It's about Jesus. Now, regardless if you have people around you or you don't have people around you, the most important being the universe loves you, came to Earth to be with you. To save you so that you can have a relationship with him. And our joy is supposed to be found in him, not in our circumstances, not in whether or not we got invited to, you know, X amount of Christmas parties or holiday parties or whatever it is. Or whether or not even we're suffering some loss during that time. Maybe something difficult happening during the time of year. Those things are all real. Those things do hurt, but Jesus came to be with you during those moments of pain to remind you that he brings us longing, lasting joy.

Nelson Domingues

And again, there's another reason for us to just remember what we're really recognizing. We're not recognizing just this happy time of year. We're not recognizing the fact that gifts are coming and going. We're not recognizing all the things that while those can be good things, the main point of course, what I want to say is it's really about Jesus. And so when we're fixed, have our eyes fixed on him, I think he can help bring a new perspective even in our loss, even in our loneliness that in fact we're not alone. We're not lost. Jesus is with us.

Shea Houdmann

Nelson, you hit on the point of joy and how Christmas is supposed to be joyous season. My my experience with Christmas in my life is interesting in that for the first 15-16 years of my life, when I wasn't a believer, my family while a good family, a loving family and a nominal Christian family, Christmas was just all about gifts. The whole childhood was like, what's the really cool, expensive gift I can talk my parents into getting me for Christmas? And that was my whole attitude about the holiday. And then coming to faith in Christ in my late teens and then starting to experience Christmas differently. And then getting married and seeking to celebrate Christmas as Christians. It's it's a totally different type of joy. The joy that comes from receiving the gifts is it's fleeting. It's you get the the buyers remorse. You get the emptiness when you're trying to find your joy in things. But then recognizing the Christ is the meaning of Christmas as an adult, as a believer we're seeking to follow him. MeLissa and I still do the gift giving. We still enjoy giving each other gifts, giving our friends and family gifts. And receiving receiving gifts. But it's a totally different thing. The gifts are sort of our way of just showing love and appreciation to other people. They're not what the holiday is all about. Ultimately, we want to focus on Christ. We

want people to see there's something different in the way that we celebrate Christmas, the way our attitudes at Christmas time.

Shea Houdmann

And again, going back to even the the word Christmas, the Christ mass. The mass is the Roman Catholicism is the word for sacrifice. So it's even the word Christmas points to Jesus sacrifice is the ultimate meaning, that Jesus was born came into this world so we could pay the penalty for our sins through his death, demonstrated by his resurrection. So even the very name, Christmas, points to what the true meaning of Christmas is supposed to be, that is of focusing on Jesus. Whether we do that by giving each other gifts or whatever other trappings or whatever, participate in what the culture around us does, we can do that in a way that marks us as different. We can do that with an attitude that's different. We can do that with a different focus and our priority that hopefully will be attractive to the world. That we will be the light in a dark place to those who are struggling, that they'll see something different in us and be attracted to it as a result giving us the opportunity to share Christ, which is ultimately the the the true meaning of Christmas. So I'm not saying my wife and I do a perfect job at it. We can get trapped in materialism and wanting things and focusing on the wrong things, just like anyone else can. But our goal is always to truly point people to the true meaning of Christmas in our words and our actions to how we celebrate Christmas.

Gwen Sellers

Well, I think that's, you know like we we see that people are longing for that. I think that's kind of what we, I appreciate the way you brought up that contrast like of Christmas before Christ you know in your life and then Christmas as a Christian. And I think that is how we can see the difference. Like we see the longing in society as people know, like there is supposed to be more. There is supposed to be perfection. There is supposed to be love, generosity, joy, hope, peace. Like all these things we were, we were built for those and we long for it. And I think what happens when people disconnect Jesus from Christmas is it becomes manufactured. And we can't do that. Like we we don't have it in ourselves to like to drum up that joy, that peace like. And that's that whole like workspace salvation like we we can't do it. But God can, so I think as believers that is like our joy yeah, is is deeper and we're not having to make it up. I mean we we actually legitimately have hope and have peace because we know the true story of Christmas.

Gwen Sellers

You know, preparing for this, I was looking at different verses that talk about joy and just really struck by, but that it is a biblical theme. And you know, so talking about like Jesus, the author of Hebrews says. Who for the joy set before him, endured the suffering of the cross. Like God wants people to be with him. Or John 15 is talking about abiding in him. And you know if if you obey my commands, you'll abide in my love. Just as I obey in my father, my I obey my father's commands and abide in his love. And then your joy will be like my joy will be in you, and your joy will be complete. So like, just this heart of God to really to, to be with his people, for his people to be with him, to be in union and to experience that fullness. And that's I think what Christmas gives us that little kind of foretaste of and that reminder that God really is doing this and like really is fulfilling his plan and that we get to be part of it. And it's a wonderful thing.

Nelson Domingues

There are so many distractions during Christmas time, when we go to the stores, or just with people and just so many different distractions. I mean, you name it, it's everywhere you look, right, the commercialization of Christmas is everywhere and also the pressure that people face as well during Christmas. You know, a lot of people think about the bills. You know, it's not that joyful because I'm gonna have amount of bills to pay. And I gotta find everyone a present. It's like all these obligations. And I think what's really important is for us personally, I mean it's our responsibility for ourselves and if you are a leader of your home or a mom or a dad or a husband or a wife or a leader of any kind anywhere, it's it's our obligation to remind the people around us you know, those pressures are really are artificial. You're really placing those pressures on yourself. We really ought to be reminding each other what this season is about. What this time, what this, this celebration truly is.

Nelson Domingues

And I think it's hard for kids to to kind of get that. I know my kids just like all of us, we were young. I mean, I I'm Shea kind of mentioned that he's looking about the gifts and thinking about, you know, what kind of cool gifts you might get. And I was the same exact way. And I think most kids probably are. And, you know, just kind of hoping to get whatever you asked for and and having all these wonderful things. And that's great. It reminded me that my parents loved me. It reminded me that that they wanted to give me these gifts that I love. I understood that my parents worked hard to give me the gifts that I got. And I appreciated that I hope enough, but I know now looking back, not enough, as a parent myself. So when I think about Christmas with our kids, it's our responsibility, my wife and I, to show them what the season is really about. And while they might have a tree in the house, while there might be presents under the tree, we remind them about what these things are. There's a star on our tree. We remind them that it signifies Jesus, that he's the light of the world. There's lights on our tree. We signified that it's it's a brilliant time. It's a special celebration filled with lights and color and joy. And there's ornaments. And the ornaments on our tree remind us of little keepsakes that we have, you know, things that the kids have made or places where you've been, or ornaments that maybe a parent has given, or someone else has given. So things that remind us of the people around us or just things that we enjoy as a family together.

Nelson Domingues

And when it comes to the presents, that they understand, that it's from us. You know, in my family we, my kids know that Santa Claus doesn't exist. We we chose as as a family not to have that in their lives because I didn't want to have a hindrance for them. Other parents can choose what they want from my family was my conviction that I didn't want to lie to my children. I don't want to pretend there was some magical being and then have them disappointed later on down the road and then them questioned, perhaps even God. I never wanted that for them because if they might have thought, well, Santa Claus is fake and and and and all that, so maybe Jesus isn't real either. And I didn't want them to to wrestle with the fact that in my eyes, they might wrestle with the fact that we've lied to them for years. And I don't want to do that. I don't look down on their parents who do, but I think it's something very important that the kids understand that Jesus is real and we're really celebrating him. And one of the traditions that we have is we have a birthday cake. We know it's not the exact date of his birthday, but it is a celebration of his birth. And it is a moment during our family time that we gather around, have a cake, have a candle, and we pray together and we just celebrate Jesus, talking to him like he's right there, just

thanking him for what he's done in our lives. And when we pray together before we open our gifts as well, recognizing that he is the giver of all good things. And so again, it's our responsibility to remind the world and particularly ourselves and our family, of what the season truly is all about.

Shea Houdmann

Nelson, that's an excellent segue to what I wanted to ask next. And I've I've seen this question already a couple of times this December, someone asking something basically to the effect of what is the true meaning of Christmas? And like the whole conversation we've had points to that. But some people really struggling with how to exactly explain it. So if someone were to come up to you and how about Nelson you go first and then you Gwen. And and I'll just ask you what is the true meaning of Christmas? How would you answer that question in a relatively succinct way?

Nelson Domingues

If it's a non believer your saying?

Shea Houdmann

And either.

Nelson Domingues

You know, I think an easy way for me to say is Christmas is the time of year where the church all around the world gathers and recognizes that Jesus came to Earth as a baby and was born for us to live for us, and then die for our sins.

Gwen Sellers

Yeah, that's excellent. I think, I mean, if you want just like a few word answer, I would say it's Emmanuel, God with us. And you know, like and then I think that goes into like and then all that implies, which is why we get things like gift giving. Or Nelson I love that you were talking about how each decoration on your tree has meaning and that just reminded me that, yeah, like, I loved growing up that time we would spend as a family decorating together. And I think of you had mentioned earlier like the obligations and stress of Christmas for people sometimes. And I think sometimes it's business also. But then there also is this like really sweet, just family time. I mean nobody else is doing anything on Christmas Day, so you're just, you get to just be together and enjoy one another and kind of take a pause from the busyness of the world. And you know, my church has been talking about love one another is one of our series, and just that whole idea of like, Jesus came to reconcile us to to God, but also to one another. And I think how Christmas can be that time of just of community and really being with other people and sharing the love of Christ.

Shea Houdmann

You again segued perfectly into what I was going to say. So thank you for that. And we didn't even prepare this ahead of time. I would point to love. And to me and John, 3:16 is not like a Christmas verse, but I think it encapsulates what Christmas is to me. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. Jesus being born is the first part of God giving us his son, bringing his son into the world. And ultimately Jesus dying for the on the cross for our sins that is God allowing his son to be sacrificed for our benefit, for our salvation, to provide

forgiveness for our sins. So it's an ultimate act of God's love that he sent Jesus in the world to be our savior. So that to me it has to be our focus as Christians, as Christ followers at Christmas time is focused on remembering God's immense, perfect love for us. And then through that seek for ways that we can love others, whether that's through gift giving, whether it's acts of service, whether that just being a wonderful friend, being a counselor to people, seeking to meet other people's needs, helping people. So many ways that we can show God's love to others through the way we operate at Christmas time. So to me, if someone asks what is the true meaning of Christmas, I would attempt to answer it as one word, love. But then obviously use that as an opportunity to explain the gospel. But your answers were right on the nose as well, and that so many ways that we can take Christmas and the fact that people are celebrating it and make that a very, very easy bridge into sharing the gospel in Word, in deed with people.

Gwen Sellers

Just to add one more and as you yeah, as you're saying that what's coming to mind for me is is that sense of hope and that sense of fulfillment. I mean so even with like Emmanuel, God with us, but then it's ultimately like going there again. I mean, you know, like the new heavens and the new Earth, God makes his dwelling with people. Or love like, yeah, incredible. The the sacrifice of Jesus and the love there. And that's not where it ends. Like there is that future. And so like, you know, the promise of the gospel that the Messiah is coming and he was born and lived with us, and he's coming back. So to me it is. Yeah, I mean, it's all of that. It's love. It's hope. It's the gospel. Like I mean it's Jesus is the other one word answer you could give.

Shea Houdmann

Amen. So Gwen, Nelson, Merry Christmas to both of you. To those who are listening, all of us that Got Questions hope that you experienced joy this Christmas season. With God's help, you're able to keep your eyes on him, is the reason for the season. And as you celebrate, ultimately you celebrate Jesus and what his coming into the world resulted in, that is the provision of salvation, that by grace alone through faith alone, in Christ alone, we can all be saved. So again, Merry Christmas from GotQuestions.org. Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.