

## The Massively Big and Minutely Small Nature of Christmas

*<sup>18</sup> This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

*<sup>20</sup> But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*

*<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means "God with us"). Matt. 1:18-23*

Recently my family was playing a game called In A Pickle, and in this game you are given 5 cards and each card has a noun listed on it. Things like "toaster" and "letter" and "Paris" and "universe".

The object is to lay down an object that describes something that is bigger than the card previously laid down. You also have the option of laying a card smaller than the first card laid down.

So, for instance, if the person before you lays down a card that says "house", you can lay a card down of anything that is bigger than a house. What makes it fun is that you're allowed to think creatively and make a case that your card is bigger than the previous card and then the other players vote on whether they think your argument is convincing or not. The person who lays down the biggest card at the end of a round gets the whole pile of cards and the person with the most cards at the end of the game wins. It's a fun game and we had a lot of laughs playing it.

As we played, at some point someone laid down a big card – it might have been "city" or "America", but whatever it was it was pretty big. And I had one card I had been saving for such a moment. I laid down a card that said "virus". We know firsthand how big, how massively and globally big, a virus can be, don't we? But someone then said, "is a virus really big though? Isn't it microscopically small?"

Yes, a virus is minutely small and massively big at the same time. In fact, I'd go so far as to say the reason it can be so big is because it's so small. A virus can spread around the

world because it's microscopically small, so small it can easily be carried in the moisture of our breath, and easily pass through the fibers of our mask.

Ok, you're saying, that's interesting, but what does that have to do with Christmas?

Only everything.

The angel of the Lord told Joseph that Jesus would save his people from their sins. If we were playing In a Pickle, where exactly would "sins" go on the pile?

That's a pretty easy question to answer when we look at the history of the world and what's going on all around us.

When we think of all the crime and murder, the racial injustice, the abuse, and the wars perpetually going on throughout history – the numbers are too staggering to comprehend. But statistics can't even begin to describe the size and scope of the devastation sin has wrought on the earth.

Add to that all the conflict, betrayal, broken relationships, broken promises, corruption, loneliness, sadness, greed, selfishness, lack of compassion, pride, and we are overwhelmed. We can't even think about it or it would drown us in despair. There isn't a scale on earth that can measure all the devastation and destruction sin has caused.

Jesus came to save his people from their sins. We know where sin goes on the pile: it's massively, globally, historically big. What could be bigger?

But sin is also minutely small. When you think about it, what really is sin? It's not something you can weigh on a scale. An evil heart doesn't weigh a fraction of an ounce more than a pure heart. It can't be seen with a microscope.

And yet, all the wars and murder and racism and division and brokenness come down to this unseen, unmeasurable minutely small thing called sin. The largest wars can all be traced back to a human heart. If no one had war in their heart, or hatred in their heart, wars and racism wouldn't exist. If no one had coveting in their heart, stealing wouldn't exist. The global destruction sin creates only exists because of an immeasurably small thing: sin in the human heart.

So where does sin go on the pile? It goes on both ends: it's massively big, and minutely small.

At Christmastime we celebrate that Jesus came to save his people from their sins, and we see that God's plan to save this sin-soaked world is at the same time massively big and minutely small. Look again with me at verse 20:

***<sup>20</sup> But after he (Joseph) had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."***

There are many ways Jesus could have come and stopped the devastation that sin wreaks in the world.

- He could have split the sky in glory coming as the King of kings and Lord of lords, with all his holy angels behind him, and set up his throne on earth, receiving into his kingdom those who were his loyal subjects, and casting out those who were disloyal and rebelled against his Lordship.
- Or he could have come as a mighty warrior destroying all his enemies and winning a glorious victory for all his friends.
- Or Jesus could have come as the Judge of all the earth, separating the righteous from the wicked. He would invite the righteous to enter into his rest, and command the wicked to depart from his presence forever.

There are many ways Jesus could have come in order to end sin and all its devastation. But there was only one way Jesus could come to save *his* people from *their* sins. Because notice what the angel said? He came to save *his* people from *their* sins. His people needed saving from *their* sins. Not everyone else's sins, not the world's sins. Their sins. Our sins. Your sins. My sins.

Jesus could have come as King of kings, but none of us would have qualified as loyal subjects, we have all rebelled against his Lordship and would have had to be cast out of his kingdom. Jesus could have come as the mighty warrior, but we were his enemies, not his friends so we would have been among those he destroyed in his glorious victory. He could have come as Judge, and we would have received what was justly due for our sins. But we wouldn't have been saved from our sins.

There was only one way Jesus could do that: the Holy Spirit conceived a holy seed in a young Jewish woman named Mary. That seed began as just a few microscopic cells. Nothing mighty, nothing powerful, nothing impressive. That seed would grow and nine months later be born as a baby. What is weaker and more helpless than a baby? God's

plan to save us from our sin comes in the minutely small form of a seed, an embryo, a baby. Put it at the smallest end of the pile.

Because Jesus didn't come to judge our sin, he came to save us from it. And he did that by identifying with us in all our weakness and brokenness and sinfulness. Though Jesus himself never sinned, he experienced firsthand the effects of being sinned against. He knew the side effects of sin: temptation. Sadness. Betrayal. Loneliness. Grief. Jesus came in weakness to walk where we walk, live where we live, struggle where we struggle. We have a High Priest who empathizes with us in our weakness. He knows what it feels like. He's been there.

And on the cross, Jesus who knew no sin became sin for us and died an inglorious death.

God's plan of salvation came to the earth in the form of a minutely small baby born in the small town of Bethlehem. And He saves people one person at a time. One heart, one soul, one life at a time. Because God doesn't love us as a nameless, faceless mass of humanity. He loves you with an intensely personal love. A love that knows you intimately, formed you with love, and keeps such close track of you He knows how many hairs are sitting on your head today.

Praise God for His minutely small, deeply personal way of saving us!

But we can't stop there. Because Christmas tells a story of salvation that is bigger than anything else in human history. The destruction sin has wreaked is only the second biggest story in human history. God had a card to put down on the pile that is bigger by far than sin. That card is Jesus!

***<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:*** In other words, what's about to happen has been foretold by the prophets. God promised way back in the garden right after the Fall that He would tell a bigger story than sin: the story of redemption. Sin's story has an arc. God's redemptive story has a bigger arc!

***<sup>23</sup> "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means "God with us")."***

Immanuel. God with us. That embryo was God. That baby was God. He was a baby, and He was God! He was born in a manger in a stable and He existed eternally! When Mary changed Jesus' diaper, she was changing the diaper of the One whose hand had flung out the stars! The One whose word commanded the universe into existence; who hung

the sun and moon in the sky, commanded the oceans to stay in their place, and whose hand had knit Mary together when she was yet in her mother's womb.

God is not distant. God is not far away. God is with us. Emmanuel.

God's plan of salvation plays the smallest card and the largest card, and He picks up all the cards in between. History is His story! The biggest arc of history isn't despair or hopelessness or meaninglessness, the biggest arc is Jesus' redemptive work bringing brilliant hope, lasting meaning, everlasting life, unfailing love.

God made us and He knows us so well. He knows we need small and personal. We prefer hand-written notes over mass-mailings. We need one on one, intimate friendships, we long to be known and loved for who we are.

But we also need big. We are built for big. Our souls shrink when we get too me-focused. The saying is true, the smallest package is a man who's wrapped up in himself. We long for something bigger than ourselves. To give ourselves to something outside of ourselves.

We long for a glory and a purpose and a meaning and a life that is attached to big and bold and glorious!

The coming of Jesus, and the nature of Christmas provides both those things. He is *God* with us. And he is God *with us*.

Let's pray and thank God for sending our Savior, our Jesus.