JESUS WHO WAS BORN

Posted on October 10, 2014 by Eddie

Jesus wasnâ€™t born in a nice unit in a modern hospital. He was born in a fairly primitive building, perhaps lit by smoky oil lamps. His mother was an unmarried teenage girl, in a town far away from her family and friends. Iâ€™ve no doubt that the women of the village gathered round to help the strange girl who found herself giving birth a long way from home. That's what happens in relational societies. When Jesus came into the world, he was a funny colour and if he didnâ€™t start screaming immediately, a woman no-doubt smacked his bum to get his lungs working and some air flowing.
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Jesus Birth Was Real

By saying his birth was real, I donâ€™t mean that it was a historical fact â€“ though it was. There is no serious scholar who denies the existence of the man Jesus Christ. What I mean is that it was real in the sense of being gutsy or earthy.

Our view of Jesus birth tends to be nice and sanitized; conditioned by school nativity plays or mediaeval paintings. We have this picture of a sainted Mary in her nice blue robe (why is it always blue?), with a clean, chubby, little baby on her knee; quite possibly with a halo.

This picture is captured by the awful Christmas carol, Away in a Manger:

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but the little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.

What?

Letâ€™s put some reality into this scene. There was blood, there was pain and there was fear. Those of you who have given birth or assisted when a baby has been born know that it is far from a pretty experience â€“ even though the outcomes are amazing.

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Jesus birth was intense and painful, it took place in conditions that would give a health and safety inspector a heart attack on the spot and it was ultimately absolutely wonderful. Just like thousands of births that happen every day on planet earth.

It is important that we get to grips with this reality. Jesus was born in the normal fashion to a young unmarried girl, who lived in a country occupied by a foreign army and within a couple of years he and his family would flee to another country as political refugees.

Jesus birth is relevant in our world today. He wasnâ€™t shielded from the pain, suffering and persecution that is the reality for all of us in some way or another. Jesus birth speaks to the teenage mother andÂ the refugee in the inner cityÂ and to the people fleeing from Isis in Syria and Iraq. Jesus birth is relevant and we have to rescue it from the sticky sentimentality of Christmas.

Jesus Was Born In A Time and Place

OK, that sounds obvious. But it is important. Jesus didnâ€™t become generic humanity in some sort of bubble. He became a young Jewish boy in first century Israel. His life was firmly rooted in the

history and geography of the place he was born. You can see this in his teaching; he told stories that make sense in a society where most people lived off the land. He laced his teaching with references to Jewish religion, life and history.

To do this, he spent almost thirty years as part of the community before he ever started teaching. The only reference we have to him during this time is when we find him in the temple debating with the teachers there. Jesus was obviously keen to learn.

The importance of this is that we live in a specific time and place, too and our Christian life needs to reflect that. We have to learn from the life of Jesus in a different time and place and apply what we learn to our situation.

All this means we need to:

1. Read the Bible with the newspaper in our hands. We need to prayerfully bring the concerns of the world and the things that people are asking us about and to read the Scriptures in that light.
2. We canâ€™t expect the Bible to be a book of answers for our problems. It is a book, which will shape our thinking in a way that helps us to discover the answers. The implication of this is that we canâ€™t just dip into the Bible, we need to meditate on it, read the whole story, get to grips with it.
3. Be prepared that some Christians will disagree with us. Many of these questions are complex and donâ€™t really have a simple Christian answer.

Jesus Was There

Through the Bible story, we see a God who wants to be involved with people. In the Garden of Eden, God came down and walked and talked with Adam. He appeared to the children of Israel in a pillar of fire or cloud to guide them across the desert and his presence could actually be seen in the most sacred place in the Temple. Then in the New Testament, God took this a step further and he was born as a human being. Even to this day, God continues to be directly involved with his people, he is present in our lives by his Spirit â€“ living inside Christians.

Jesus birth at Nazareth was the most dramatic example of something that God has been doing throughout history â€“ he is present. He isnâ€™t distant, far away in heaven and not involved with us. He isnâ€™t someone who wound up the clock and then vanished from sight. The notion of God as an old man with a beard sitting on a cloud looking down on us couldnâ€™t be farther from the picture in the Bible.

There are implications for us in this. If we are followers of a God who is present with people, then we need to be present with people, too. Our responsibility is to reflect the life of God to the people around us â€“ but we can only do that if we are present in their lives.

OK, Iâ€™ll admit here that I am much better at this in theory than I am in practice, but here are a few

concrete suggestions:

- Put your blooming phone away. So often we are with people, but we arenâ€™t with people because we are checking email, bookface and what have you. It is a difficult discipline not to do this stuff, but it is important.
- Take time to be with those who are closest to you. For people with busy lives, it can be difficult to take time to be with family and friends, but we need to build it in to our programmes. If you have small children, it can be really difficult for husbands and wives to spend time together, but you have to find a way to do it. Equally, busy, career minded husbands need to make time for their children.
- You need to have time for people who are not Christians. You shouldnâ€™t be so tied up with Christian stuff, that you have no time for friends and family who arenâ€™t believers.

This is part of a talk I gave for Exilio in Southampton last weekend.Â