

## **Christmas, Holy Week, and Easter: Comparison, Contrast, Completion**

*“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.” (1 Timothy 1:15, ESV)*

The first half of the Church Year (Advent through Pentecost Day) focuses upon the life and work of Jesus Christ. And as we look at the birth, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, it's easy to see that there are comparisons and contrasts. And most importantly, there is completion. Let's start by taking a look at some of the similar things that are found in the Christmas, Holy Week, and Easter accounts.

First, there are angels. An angel (named Gabriel) appeared to Mary to announce that God's promised Savior, who was to be named Jesus, would be born to her (Luke 1:26-38). An angel also told Joseph about this miraculous virgin birth that would occur (Matthew 1:18-25). Nine months after Mary conceived, angels proclaimed the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:8-14). Years later, Jesus would be tempted, and then angels would comfort Him (Mark 1:13). An angel also came to aid Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He died (Luke 22:43). And after Jesus rose from the dead, angels were present again. An angel opened Jesus' tomb and told the women that Jesus had conquered the grave (Matthew 28:2-7). And forty days after Jesus rose from the dead, angels encouraged the disciples as they watched Jesus ascend into heaven (Acts 1:10-11). Angels were present throughout Jesus' earthly ministry and following His resurrection.

Another interesting point worth comparing is that Jesus' mother was with Him throughout His earthly life. Mary was at Jesus' birth (Luke 2:1-20), at His presentation at the temple (Luke 2:22-38), and with Him during the visitation of the wise men (Matthew 2:11-12). Mary was at Jesus' crucifixion (John 19:25-27). While the Bible doesn't tell us whether Jesus appeared to His mother after He rose from the dead, yet we are told that Mary was with the disciples when they met together after Jesus' Ascension (Acts 1:14). The above passages and other verses in Scripture tell us that Mary was a part of Jesus' life while He walked this earth.

My friends, there are many things about Jesus that never changed throughout His earthly journey. He began life in a very humble setting (Luke 2:7), didn't have many possessions throughout His ministry (Matthew 8:20), had even His clothes taken from Him (John 19:23-24) as He was nailed to a cross naked, and had to be laid in another person's tomb after He died (Matthew 27:59-60). At His birth and at His death, Jesus' body was laid in a place provided by someone else.

See, interesting comparisons can be made when it comes to Jesus' birth, life, suffering, death, and resurrection. But there also are obvious differences between the narratives mentioned above. For Jesus began His earthly life in a womb but ended it in a tomb. He was born as a baby but died (and rose again) as an adult. There was rejoicing as well as visitors at Jesus' birth - but He endured shame, abandonment, and words of ridicule at His death.

Yet, Christmas, Holy Week, and Easter all tell of a Divine promise and plan that came to completion in Jesus' birth, life, suffering, death, and resurrection. For right after our first parents rebelled against Him, God vowed to send a Savior to deliver mankind (Genesis 3:15). And thousands of years later the Lord fulfilled the holy pledge that He made to humanity. For He Himself took our human flesh to be our substitute – being fully God and fully man.

See, Jesus is our Creator. And as a descendant of our first parents, He is also our brother. He could stand-in for you and me because He is one of us. And He could conquer our enemies because He is God. He perfectly kept the commandments in our place. He suffered the punishment of sin, the tortures of hell, that we deserve. He died the death that we ought to die. And He bodily rose again in victory for us.

Jesus has taken away all our sins, overcome the devil, and defeated death - all for us. ***“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”*** Christmas occurred so that we can be saved. Holy Week happened so that we can be saved. Easter took place so that we can be saved. The work of saving us was completed (John 19:30) by the One born of Mary who suffered, died, and rose again. And ***“foremost” “sinners”*** like the Apostle Paul, like you and me, receive all the benefits of Jesus’ saving work through the Gospel, in Word and Sacrament.

Thanks be to God for Christmas, Holy Week, and Easter. What a magnificent story. It makes for great comparisons and contrasts. And most of all, this story’s completion reveals God’s faithfulness to His promises and His incomprehensible love for you and me. For this story is greater than any other narrative ever told. And being played out in human history, it’s no fairy tale – it truly happened in real time and real space. What a privilege and comfort to meditate upon Jesus’ life and work. For the Gospel is the story of our deliverance, the source of our hope, and the guarantee of life with God which never ends.

Shay and I wish each of you God’s blessings on the remainder of your Lententide as well as a very Happy Easter.

In Christ crucified and risen,  
Pastor