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Christian Perspectives ? what if we only got the baby?

Sometimes I think that at Christmas we can get stuck on Jesus the infant, lovely and completely enthralling as any human infant can be, but the potential for a true relationship with an infant is limited and one sided in the beginning. It is all give on the part of the parents and all take on the part of the infant. Only very gradually does that change so the relationship becomes one of give and take on both sides. If we focus on the relationship we have with Jesus the infant, we can miss what we are able to learn and draw from a relationship with the mature Jesus of the gospel stories, the Word made flesh as the Gospel of John expresses the realized potential of that infant.

If we only receive the infant Jesus, then we can miss out on knowing the Jesus who offers us wisdom for life. We would miss out on Jesus saying to us, ?Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse not barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!?

If we only received the infant Jesus we may not have heard wisdom that teaches us to be responsible. We are quick to blame our circumstances and others for our faulty behaviour. But Jesus in the words of Matthew's Gospel teaches us, ?Listen and understand: It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.?

If we only got the infant Jesus, we would miss out on the wise Jesus telling us to keep our priorities straight, ?No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.? And again as he says, ?Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.?

If we knew only the infant Jesus, we would miss out on understanding the fullness of his love. We would miss the way in which he accepted those who came to him for help, not just the men of Judea, his equals in the society of that time and place, but also a Samaritan woman with whom he struck up a conversation at a well. They talked of worshipping God on two different mountains as their traditions dictated. Jesus shared that in time all would worship God in spirit and in truth.

Jesus welcomed the children when others wanted to whisk them away so he would not be bothered by them. Jesus was not afraid to interact with beggars, the poor, those who were sick, even those with dread diseases like leprosy. He extended welcome, hospitality and healing to all.

If we only had the infant Jesus, we would not have heard of love expressed as forgiveness. Remember the wonderful story he told of the prodigal son, the one who took his share of the family fortune and squandered it. In abject poverty and humiliation returned to ask his father to hire him as a servant. Instead the father was so over-joyed he welcomed his son with open arms, gave a banquet in his honour because as he declared, ?let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!? If we only had the infant Jesus we would not have learned that love is expressed in that sort of forgiveness, up to seventy times seven and more as Jesus taught his disciples. Forgiveness opens the door to renewing relationships that are suffering from the everyday neglect, the purposeful hurt and the thoughtless disrespect we inflict on those we say we love. It is the mature Jesus that tells us the way to peace is also to love our enemies and to figuratively turn the other cheek in humility to those who injure us. It is the grown up Jesus who encourages us to go the extra mile and to give our shirt as well as our coat if someone is in need of it. Such sacrifice is at the opposite end of the scale to the ?me first? demands of an infant.

Jesus came into the world as a tiny infant ? as we read in the Gospel of John, the potential of light shining in the darkness, light that is not overcome by darkness, the Word that was with God, now made flesh. We get to know this light, gradually entering into relationship with Jesus as he develops from an infant into a mature and wise teacher, who loves humbly and generously. Then we also can begin to notice the revelation of light, wisdom and love in our lives as well. The potential is there in the manger. The fulfillment is in the life of Jesus the Christ and in his life reflected in each one of us.

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