

## CHRISTMAS PROPHECIES

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Looking ahead to Christmas is always exciting. It is fun to think about the wonderful things that can happen at Christmas time. When you think of Christmas you may be thinking about the presents you're hoping to get, or about some special holiday fun that you're going to share with your friends. Perhaps you're looking forward with excitement to decorating your home, and to setting up the Christmas tree with all the pretty lights and balls. There are many, many things about Christmas that you can look forward to with excitement. Each year, as you are reminded about it, you can expect that excitement to begin once again. The words, "Only 20 more days to Christmas," "Only 10 more days," and so forth, always cause excitement as you look toward the happy time ahead.

Imagine a world without Christmas. Imagine a world where no one knew what really happened on Christmas day, where no one celebrated the birth of the Lord as a little baby in Bethlehem. If you can imagine such a world, you know how people before the Lord came into the world must have felt. You look ahead to Christmas with excitement. Imagine how much people must have looked ahead to the very first Christmas. For thousands of years people had been wondering when Christmas would happen. They knew that it would happen, but they did not know when it would happen.

How do we know that before the Lord's birth into the world, people knew that He was going to be born? The answer is found in many places in the Old Testament. Again and again, in the Word, people were told by the Lord that He would come. These statements are called Christmas prophecies, because they predict the Lord's coming. We hear many of them at Christmas:

*Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.... And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6-7).*

*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).*

*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel (Micah 5:2).*

*I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near (Numbers 24:17).*

*The scepter shall not depart from Judah...until Shiloh comes (Genesis 49:10).*

Those are just a few of the predictions about the Lord's coming that we find in the Old Testament. In all, there are seventy-six different Christmas prophecies. Each of them reminded people about the coming of the Lord and so helped them to feel the excitement of what would happen. Just as you look ahead with excitement to Christmas, so people, when they heard the prophecies, looked ahead with excitement to the Lord's coming. They could understand that the Lord would be born on earth. This was a very important thing for people at that time, because it helped them understand who the Lord was. It helped them understand that the Lord was a perfect Man, someone who could love them, someone who had made them in His image and so someone whom they could love as well.

You know that these predictions about the Lord's coming on earth did come true. The very first Christmas did happen. After that, people wanted to tell other people about the Lord's birth into the world. So after His birth, when Christians wanted to tell people who the Lord was, to let people know that He really had kept His promises and come into the world, they used these same predictions about His coming.

Think of this. If someone had told you about something that was going to happen, and he was right in every detail, you would believe that he had special knowledge. The Lord, of course, has special knowledge. So the Lord could not only have one person tell about His coming, but He could have hundreds of people, over thousands of years, again and again, tell people about His coming. This very fact helps us to understand that it really was the Lord who was born in the world on Christmas day. For this reason, all the predictions about Christmas are important to us, as well as to people of old times who were waiting for His coming.

So, as we hear the wonderful prophecies of the Lord's coming, the beautiful predictions of His birth into the world, let us remember that the Lord Himself was born on earth as a little Baby in a manger, in Bethlehem of Judea. And this little Child grew up to rule over all the heavens as King of kings and Lord of lords.

What an exciting time Christmas is. What a wonderful time, full of surprises, full of awe. Certainly, when we think of Christmas we can rejoice and be filled with the glad tidings that the angels proclaimed to the shepherds when they said: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).

Amen.