

THE PURPOSE OF
Christmas

RICK WARREN



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Published by Howard Books, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020
www.howardpublishing.com

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Library of Congress Control Number: 200832575

ISBN-13: 978-1-4165-5900-9

ISBN-10: 1-4165-5900-0

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Edited by Denny Boulinghouse

Cover design by John Lucas

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A serene winter scene featuring a snow-covered path leading through a forest of evergreen trees heavily laden with snow. A rustic wooden fence runs along the right side of the path. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and quiet, typical of a snowy day in a forest.

THE PURPOSE OF *Christmas*

*To every thing there is a season,
and a time to every purpose
under the heaven.*

ECCLESIASTES 3:1 KJV

WHY IS CHRISTMAS SUCH A BIG DEAL?

It's the largest celebration around the world each year. Other holidays get a single day, but Christmas is emphasized for an entire month, one twelfth of every year. During the Christmas season, billions of people set aside their normal routines to decorate their homes, send out greeting cards, buy gifts, go to Christmas parties, attend church services, sing Christmas songs, watch Christmas TV specials, and travel long distances to be with their families. Christmas sights and sounds fill the air everywhere. There are stores, and even careers, that are exclusively dedicated to preparing for and celebrating this holiday. When Christmas comes, you can't miss it. It's everywhere.

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If you stop to think about it, it is astounding that the simple, unassuming birth of a peasant boy born two thousand years ago in the Middle East has caused such commotion—his birthday even causes traffic jams today in places like New York City, Tokyo, and Rio de Janeiro.

You may have never realized that every time you check your calendar or refer to a date or write one down, you are using Jesus Christ as your reference point. Because of Jesus, history is divided into BC (*before Christ*) and AD (*anno Domini, in the year of the Lord*). Every other event in history and every event on your calendar today is dated by how many days and years it has been since Jesus Christ appeared on earth.

Even *your* birthday is dated by *his* birthday.

The night Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, a small group of poor shepherds was quietly tending their flocks of sheep in a nearby field. Looking up at

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the stars, nothing seemed any different from a thousand other nights. But what was about to happen would transform not only the shepherds' lives but billions of other lives as well. The world would never be the same. Suddenly a bright light lit up the sky, and an angel from God appeared above them and began speaking to them. It seemed unbelievable and scared them.

The Bible gives us the original Christmas story:

There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be

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a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

LUKE 2:8–14 NIV

The angel said that Christmas would bring “*great joy . . . for all the people*.” Really? For many people, getting ready for Christmas seems more of a hassle than a source of happiness. It is a source of stress. They feel pressure, not pleasure, when it comes to Christmas. It’s a duty, not a delight. They endure Christmas rather than enjoy it.

There are many possible reasons you might feel uneasy or lonely or even depressed during the Christmas season. You may dread spending time with oddball relatives. Maybe relationships are strained and uncom-

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fortable in your family. Maybe you don't have anyone to be with this Christmas. Christmas may remind you of losses or hurts or how things have changed. You may have a religious background that doesn't include Christmas, or you may have no faith at all; watching others celebrate may make you feel uneasy. Maybe you're just exhausted and worn out from all that's happened in your life this past year. This Christmas, God cares deeply about how you feel, and so do I. It's why I have written this book.

Regardless of your background, religion, problems, or circumstances, Christmas really is the best news you could get. Beneath all the visible sights and sounds of Christmas are some simple yet profound truths that can transform your life for the better here on earth and for forever in eternity. Right now there's nothing more important for you to understand than the implications of Christmas for your life.

If you'll slow down for a few minutes, take the time

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to read this brief book, and pause to consider the purpose of Christmas, you can receive and enjoy the best Christmas gift you'll ever be given. It is God's Christmas gift to you.

God's Christmas gift to you has three qualities that make it unique. First, it is the most expensive gift you'll ever receive. It's priceless. Jesus paid for it with his life. Second, it's the only gift you'll ever receive that will last *forever*. Finally, it is an extremely practical gift—one you'll use every day for the rest of your life. Interested?

It is no accident that you are reading this book. God planned your birth, and before you were even born, he knew this moment was coming. In fact, it may be that all your whole life up to this moment has been preparing you to receive God's Christmas gift to you.

On the first Christmas night, the angel announced three purposes for the birth of Jesus: