

Christmas and the Tri-Unity of God

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Although neither Ohev nor any other Jewish congregation celebrates Christmas, whichever Ohev elder delivers the message on the *Shabbat* closest to Christmas, ordinarily selects a theme related to the holiday as a way of reminding ourselves of our connection to the Christian world through our common faith in Yeshua, and our common belief in the inspiration of the New Covenant Scriptures. We do this with some discomfort though because, as I suggested, we Jews generally do not celebrate Christmas, although I hasten to admit that, here in the United States, many of us have picked up on the festive and commercial aspects of it, and it is not unheard of to find Jewish homes with Christmas decorations, and even trees with presents beneath them. But these are typically the homes of Jews who have assimilated into secular society; religious Jews of the wider Jewish community do not acknowledge Christmas in any visible way.

This avoidance of Christmas is a reality even for us Messianic Jews who believe in Yeshua, because of the holiday's association with Christianity, which brings with it, both a foreign culture and an association with persecution of the Jews that was historically either committed or permitted by the Christian Church. But we have a conflict about this because, on the one hand, we do believe what Christians believe about Yeshua, but we continue to fight against the accusation of the wider Jewish community (and sometimes four families) that, because we believe in Yeshua, we have ceased being Jews and have become Christians. We say that it is not so, but if we are seen celebrating Christmas – one of the two uniquely Christian observances – that all but proves it to them. In stark contrast to this, some of us are pulled in the other direction by family members who either have married Christians or have assimilated into secular America. In such cases, we are often drawn uncomfortably into their celebrations of Christmas on some level. These are some of the reasons why, each year, I struggle with how to present Christmas in our Shabbat message that is given during the Christmas season.

As I prayed about what to say about Christmas, two things came to me. First, how odd it is that God chose to send Himself to us as a baby instead of just one day appearing as an adult. Second, how ironic it is that Christmas (forget the date accuracy issue) has developed into an elaborate birthday party for a Jew (Yeshua), contrary to the Jewish custom of His day. There is considerable evidence that, in antiquity, Jewish births were celebrated with great joy, but annual Jewish birthdays were not. For example, the only mention in Scripture of a birthday celebration for an adult is the one for Pharaoh recorded in Genesis 40:20. And the only occurrence of birthdays in the *Talmud*, is in Mishnah Avodah Zarah 3:1 which refers to pagan rulers. Nowhere do we see birthday celebrations for Jews in the ancient world. In my pointing this out, please understand that I am not saying there is anything wrong with birthday celebrations; they have certainly become common among today's Jews when you consider (for example) the many elaborate celebrations of *B'nei Mitzvah* that we encounter. I just think it is ironic.

Now the matter of Yeshua coming to us as a baby is interesting. Yeshua is sometimes referred to as the "second Adam," but Adam was created as an adult so there is no analogy there. It might have been God's accommodation to the Jewish understanding of the day that the expected

Messiah would be fully human, and that his lineage would be traceable to David through natural birth. Or perhaps it has to do with Yeshua having to experience everything that other men experience, including having both an earthly and a heavenly father. We can't know unless God reveals it. Scholars may someday discover the actual date of Yeshua's birth, but I predict that even when all Israel will finally know Him, even then Christmas will not be embraced as a celebration by Jews.

Despite what I have said, I do see value in our 21st Century celebration of Christmas, in both its religious and a secular sense. For one thing, it is the one time of the year when we pay special attention to the biblical details of Yeshua's birth, and that alone is of great value. For me, the most fascinating aspect of that is how God impregnated Miryam with His own seed so that Yeshua would grow to be His son, in whom would reside the fullness of the deity, and also the identity of a Jewish man. Let me read [Luke 1:26-35](#) which are the verses I find most pertinent to this:

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Miryam. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Miryam, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name YESHUA. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." Then Miryam said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."

To me, this account rivals science fiction in challenging the boundaries of our comprehension and, at the same time, causing all of Scripture to hang together with consistency. It has also provided me with a model for how to understand the tri-unity of God – how God can be both one and plural – a very difficult concept that I will share with you in a few minutes, after I mention some other virtues of modern-day Christmas.

People talk a lot about the “Christmas Spirit” and, except in for what takes place in the shopping malls, I think it has validity because, during the week that precedes Christmas, there is a change in the air as our attention is drawn to higher godly virtues such as love, compassion, charity, peace, hope, and faith. It ought to be that way all year long and every day but, since it is not, it is well that this season brings it out. I think I can capture what the Christmas Spirit is by stringing together certain words of Scripture; it is a long reading, but it is important so please receive it:

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could

remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (1Co 13:1-13 NKJ)

“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Yeshua the Messiah and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. (1Jo 3:16-24 NKJ)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Messiah's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.” (Gal 5:22-26 NKJ)

"The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mar 12:29-31 NKJ)

That's it! I understand if you are skeptical that Christmas really brings these virtues to the forefront, and you may say that the thoughts and the words are nice, but what change does that make in us? Well, I see an indication that many people's moods and behaviors change for the better during the Christmas season, as we are impacted by gay colorful lights, the jingle of bells, and non-stop motion pictures, stories, and songs that carry moral (if not religious) messages. Bottom line: The Christmas Spirit is no humbug, and I suggest that we should promote it, even in

its secular expressions, while always looking for opportunities to teach about Yeshua. On the other hand, I do not believe it is expedient for Messianic Jews to join Christmas celebrations publicly, because the attack against our Jewish identity by our critics is still very real.

I said I would share my understanding of the triune God as I have been inspired by Luke's Gospel account, and I will attempt to do so but, for you to understand it, you will have to let your imagination soar; it is a model taken from biology, so those of you who studied biology in High School will have an advantage. A model is an inexact copy of something that can tell us something about the real item. To explain my model of the Godhead, I enlist your patience as I temporarily digress into teaching biology, but I promise that I will come back to Luke, and tie it all together.

I visualize the triune God in heaven as being analogous to an amoeba – a one-celled protozoan that has two nuclei floating in a sea of cytoplasm. In amoebae that have two nuclei, one of them is typically larger and more dominant than the other, and they communicate with each other chemically via the amoeba's cytoplasm, a kind of gel in which they are both embedded. One more thing that is important to know about amoebae is that they can change their shape at will by sending out tentacles of their cytoplasm that allow them to move and interact with their environment. Imagine that the larger nucleus of an amoeba is God the Father, the smaller nucleus is God the Son (the Word), and the amoeba's cytoplasm is the Holy Spirit. The entire amoeba represents God – one God – but triune because, although we are describing a single amoeba, the amoeba is the sum total of its two nuclei and its cytoplasm in the same way that God is the sum total of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The amoeba's two nuclei and cytoplasm always work together because they communicate, without interruption, through their common interface, the amoeba's gel-like cytoplasm. Similarly, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit always work together because they are able to communicate through their common interface which is the amorphous Holy Spirit. If you remove any of the components of the amoeba, the result ceases to be an amoeba. In the same way, if you remove the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit from God, God is no longer God.

I hope you have the picture clear so far, because there is a bit more of this kind of explanation needed before we return to Luke. God's normal way of being omnipresent on earth is through the Holy Spirit whose nature it is to be fluid – just like the amoeba's cytoplasm. The Holy Spirit can project stalk-like extensions of Himself from heaven to earth, and cover an entire geographic area, a single person, or multiple persons without ever disconnecting from the rest of God who remains in Heaven. That is the mechanism by which God communicated with the prophets of old. The Holy Spirit lowered an extension of Himself upon the prophet, all the while maintaining a connection to the Father and the Son in Heaven. And as the prophet moved about on the earth, the extension of the Holy Spirit moved with him, all the while staying connected to the Godhead in Heaven. And if there was more than one prophet that needed to be communicated with, separate but identical extensions of the Holy Spirit were provided for each of them. With this model in mind, you can see why even non-prophets received power and were able to prophesy when they came close to a prophet or were in the vicinity of where the Holy Spirit was at work.

Now, finally, Luke. In chapter 1, verse 25, the angel tells Miryam:

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."
(Luk 1:35 NKJ)

We know that Miryam was impregnated shortly after that because she was already with child when she embarked on her journey to visit Elizabeth. According to the model of the Godhead I just described, what actually occurred was that the Holy Spirit lowered an extension of Himself (like the projection of an amoeba) down upon Miryam, and God the Son (the smaller of the two amoebic nuclei) descended through the extension and implanted Himself, as a seed, into Miryam's womb. At no time in this process – even while inside Miryam, was the Son ever separated from the Father who remained in Heaven, because the Holy Spirit did not withdraw his extension from Miryam.

When Yeshua was born, the Holy Spirit's extension followed Him out of Miryam's womb, and I believe that another Holy Spirit extension was provided for Miryam. As Yeshua grew to adulthood and moved about on earth, the Holy Spirit communicated every move and thought of His to the Father; that is why Yeshua could say as quoted in John 14:10-11:

"Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves."

And also, as He said in John 10:30 and almost got stoned for it:

"I and My Father are one."

Yeshua remained connected to the Father via the Holy Spirit throughout His life except for one moment while He was awaiting death on the cross and cried out:

"Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"
(Mat 27:46 NKJ)

I believe, in that moment, the Holy Spirit withdrew Himself from Yeshua, leaving Him, for the first time in His life, to experience being separated from God the Father. It was a necessary consequence of Yeshua's taking upon Himself the sins of the world.

Connection to the Father through the Holy Spirit returned to Yeshua shortly thereafter when He was resurrected to life, and He never again had to experience such a separation. Yeshua walked the earth and taught His disciples for forty days, at which time He was taken up to be in His original state, at the right hand of the Father. Following through with my amoeba model, my conception of how this happened is that the extension of the Holy Spirit that cloaked Yeshua and kept Him connected to the Father retracted and lifted Him up to Heaven. Then, following

through on Yeshua's promise that, after He left He would send another, when *Shavuot* arrived, multiple extensions of the Holy Spirit descended upon many in Jerusalem and, for the first time, all of mankind was granted the ability to be connected to the Father and Son directly, through the Holy Spirit, in the same way as the prophets of old.

I trust that neither God nor any of you will view my comparing God to the lowly amoeba as sacrilegious and, in fact, I credit God Himself with giving me the model I described in order to help me understand His triune nature; but I leave it for you to discern. So I end now with a prayer that this message will give you a better understanding of how Jews relate to Christmas, and a conceptual model of God's triune nature and how His being *echad* is consistent with Yeshua visiting us on earth. I pray that you will all have a blessed Christmas, with health and safety and, God willing, we will be together again next week on New Year's Day.