

*Serendipity*. I've commented on the word before and how I first heard it in connection with Roentgen's discovering the X-ray. *Serendipity* is not luck, but rather an unexpected good fortune when pursuing a different expectation — and then realizing what one has found. Roentgen was conducting an experiment involving some sort of radiation, when he accidentally had his hand between a film plate and the particular source of radiation, as best I recall — and, “No; I am not young but I was not there,” — and when he developed the plate, he realized what must have caused the skeletal image of his hand to appear.

In other words, sometimes we do not find exactly what we are looking for, but rather, something of equal or greater value.

And that sort of sums up how we get from that of which prophets for seven hundred years had been seeking and what in fact occurred when God came to earth as a human being, as we read from two different Isaiah's — the book of Isaiah was written over a period of two hundred years by what appear to have been — and logically would had to have been — three different writers. The first two of these writers was writing at a time the nation of Judah, one of the two surviving tribes of the people of Israel, the Jews, was under siege (by Assyria), the second when they were in captivity following defeat by Babylon. These writers were looking for one who would deliver them from that siege and captivity, respectively. And indeed, the first human to whom the term *messiah*, which in Hebrew means “anointed,” and has the meaning, “God's anointed,” the first human to whom the term *messiah* was applied by this Second Isaiah was Cyrus the Great, Emperor of Persia, who in 539 BCE conquered Babylon and freed the Jews in captivity there.

But the Jews were seldom not in *captivity*, that is, seldom ruling themselves, over the centuries between their liberation by Cyrus and the time Jesus was born in the Roman occupied and ruled “Holy Land” of Judea and Galilee.

The expectations of exactly what the messiah might be did vary somewhat; it is hard to be precise because there are no writings in the Hebrew Bible, our "Old testament," after about 160 BCE, and the extra-biblical Jewish writings we have vary. Still, because the messiah was expected — our reading from Isaiah 9 — to come from the lineage of the great warrior and king of 1000 BCE, David, son of Jesse, the expectations were mainly for someone like him: a king, and presumably a warrior.

But that was not, of course, what the people found. They were looking for something earthly and human and aristocratic; they found something heavenly and divine and humble; they were looking for a son of David; they found the Son of God.

It was good fortune; it might or might not be labeled "serendipity," but it was not luck. They were looking, and those whose minds and imaginations were open found something of far greater value than merely a king.

Is Luke's story of the birth of Jesus factually accurate? Who knows, but it is a *true* story: God came to earth in the form of a baby boy. And we like Roentgen are fortunate if looking for something more important than ourselves, we find in the Christmas story the idea of *Immanuel*, God with us.

And when we find that, to paraphrase Jesus own parable, we want to go and rid ourselves of all else and devote ourselves to him, for finding him beats finding a king or gold or fame or anything, for He is the way in which we see God and know God.

Christ is born. Hallelujah. The world will never be the same, and if we accept Him into our lives, neither will we be the same.

Amen.