

Myths Of Christmas

Introduction. Everything we do is by the authority of Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17). Jesus also told the woman at the well "... and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

A large part of the world will celebrate the birth of Christ soon. If you go by any denominational church building this time of year, you will probably see slogans on their outdoor signs like, "Let's put Christ back into Christmas" or "Jesus is the reason for the season." Some will even ask, "What are you going to give Christ on His birthday?" Unfortunately, even churches of Christ will have messages like these emblazoned on their buildings, and will organize Christmas plays and programs.

In order to respect the authority and truth of Christ, there are five myths of Christmas that need to be scrutinized to see if this holiday can be religiously celebrated before God.

I. MYTH #1: December 25th Is The Birthday Of Jesus

- A. Scripture does not reveal and there is no way to accurately determine the exact day Jesus was born.
- B. The birth of Jesus did not take place in winter but in the summer.
 - 1. Zacharias, the father of John, belonged to the course of Abijah, the 8th priestly course to serve in the temple during the year (1 Chronicles 24:10; Luke 1:5, 8-9).
 - a) Josephus wrote, "He divided them also into courses; and when he had separated the priests from them, he found of these priests twenty-four courses ... and he ordained that one course should minister to God eight days, from Sabbath to Sabbath ... And this partition hath remained to this day" (*Antiquities*, VII 14:7).
 - b) The Jewish sacred year began with the first new moon of Spring (between March 22nd and April 25th). This means his time to serve would have occurred in May or June.
 - c) John would have been born probably in February or March. Since Jesus was six months older (Luke 1:36), He would have probably been born in August or September.
 - 2. The shepherds were tending their flocks in the fields at the time of the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:8). Sheep were not kept out in the open at night any later than September, so Jesus had to have been born during the warmer months.

II. MYTH #2: Christmas On December 25th Is In The Bible

- A. Sextus Julius Africanus, a historian from Egypt, composed a chronicle of world events in A.D. 221 which listed Jesus' birth on December 25th.
 - 1. It coincided with Saturnalia, the Roman feast of their Sun god, Saturn. The most generally accepted theory is that the birth of Christ was assigned to the date of the winter solstice.
 - 2. It was made an official Roman holiday by the Council of Nicea in 325. It is believed that in 345, Bishop Liberius of Rome ordered the people to celebrate Christmas on December 25th.

- B. Interestingly, there is no consistency because Catholics celebrate December 25th, while the Orthodox Church celebrates January 7th as Christmas.
- C. December 25th was chosen by men, not God. Do not give Him something He has not asked for (Genesis 11:1-4; Leviticus 10:1-2; 1 Kings 12:25-29).

III. MYTH #3: Mary Remained A Virgin Until The Day Of Her Death

- A. A Catholic and Orthodox tradition states that Mary was always a virgin, meaning that she and Joseph never had sexual relations and that the “brothers” of Jesus mentioned in the Bible were cousins.
 - 1. “Accusation has been made by many rationalists and other attacking the perpetual virginity of Mary because of reference in the gospel to the ‘brethren’ of our Lord. This reference denotes solely a group of cousins. It is clear from the gospels that Mary kept her resolve and had no other children after the virginal birth of Christ” (*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 601).
 - 2. Two issues are involved. First, a married woman that has no children is no proof of her virginity. Second, the Bible is clear in representing Mary being a virgin and that she had more children other than Jesus (Matthew 1:25; Luke 1:34; 13:55-56; John 7:2-4). The word for “brethren” in Matthew 13:55 occurs almost 350 times in the New Testament. When it does not mean a spiritual relationship of Jews or Christians, it always means siblings who share one or both parents.
- B. “It is traditional, at the conclusion of the (wedding) ceremony, for the bride to take a bouquet to a side altar and lay it at the feet of a statue of the Virgin, at the same time praying that she might emulate Mary as a wife and a mother” (Karl Keating, *Catholicism And Fundamentalism*, p. 259).
 - 1. The fact that Mary was miraculously the mother of the Messiah has nothing to do with the question of her privilege and obligation in the holiest of human relationships.
 - 2. The Catholic dogma of Mary’s perpetual virginity would actually debase and degrade the mother of Jesus, making her a disloyal wife, unfaithful to her marriage obligations. Not many men would want their wives to “emulate Mary as a wife” if the Catholic claim of her perpetual virginity were true.
 - 3. The marriage relationship is not incompatible with holy living. Married couples are not to refrain from the physical relationship, except for short periods of time devoted to fasting and prayer (1 Corinthians 7:2-5; cp. Hebrews 13:4).

IV. MYTH #4: There Were Three Wise Men

- A. No one knows the number of wise men except that there were more than one. Traditions identify a variety of different names for the Magi. In the Western Christian church they have been all regarded as saints and are commonly known as Melchior (Persia), Caspar (India), and Balthazar (Arabia).
- B. The number three is conjectured solely from the fact that they brought three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matthew 2:11) There may have been 10 wise men, we do not know, but since these were common items of value, each wise man, regardless of the actual number, probably brought an amount of all three.

V. MYTH #5: God Wants Christians To Celebrate The Birthday Of Christ

- A. The church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the apostles, did not celebrate His birth. Moreover, the Bible never tells us to celebrate the birth of Christ but to celebrate His death.
- B. In the New Testament every first day of the week is a “holy day.” It is sacred, consecrated, dedicated, hallowed, and sanctified.
 1. It is holy because of what happened on that day.
 - a) Jesus was raised from the dead on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1; Luke 24:1, 13, 21, 46).
 - b) Pentecost was on the first day of the week (Leviticus 23:15-16), which means that the Holy Spirit fell on the apostles on that day (Acts 2:1).
 - c) The first gospel sermon under the Great Commission was preached on the first day of the week (Acts 2:14-40), which, because of the people’s obedience, marked the beginning of the church (Acts 2:47).
 2. It is holy because it is a day of worship and devotion to God (Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7; 100:1-5).
 - a) Two of the acts of worship are specifically limited to the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
 - b) In contrast to Christmas that commemorates His birth, every first day of the week Christians get to commemorate His death and resurrection — the event by which our sins are forgiven.
 - (1) In this memorial God tells us what to do, when to do it, and what the purpose is, just as clearly as with Old Testament feasts.
 - (2) Since God has authorized the Lord’s Supper as the memorial He wants for Jesus’ death, and since all admit that He never authorized modern “holy days,” by what right do we observe them religiously?
 3. It is holy because it is called the “Lord’s day” (Revelation 1:10).
 - a) What other day could John have designated the “Lord’s day”? By the end of the first century, Sunday was commonly referred to as the “Lord’s day.”
 - b) Note that John spoke of the “Lord’s day” and not the “Lord’s hour”. Too often we feel that if we have devoted an hour of our week to “going to church,” we have really honored the Lord. The “Lord’s day” suggests a day that is set apart for service to God. When we understand that, why worry when occasionally we sing all five verses of the closing song? Why worry if occasionally a sermon is ten minutes longer? Why be upset when the closing prayer takes two minutes longer than normal?

Conclusion. Christians do not celebrate Christmas as the birth of Christ because they do not think the birth of Christ is important. As a result of His birth, the whole plan of God was revealed. Furthermore, Christians do not celebrate Christmas because they refuse to honor or remember Christ. We gladly wear His name and no other.

We do not celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday because it is of human origin. Christ never authorized the worship of His day of birth. God does not want His Son remembered as a baby lying in a manger, but as the suffering Savior and resurrected Redeemer!