

Should We Celebrate Christmas as a Religious Holiday?

Since Christmas is recognized by most people as a religious Holy Day, it would be good for us to study its meaning. Considering Christmas has the word Christ in it, it should have some connection with the Lord. If there is a connection with the Lord, we should be able to turn to the New Testament and read of this observance. However, upon a careful examination, we fail to find a single reference to this day in the word of God.

When did men first start observing this special day?

To answer this question, we have to go outside the New Testament. Historians tell us it was nearly three centuries after the death of Christ before a day was set aside for a special observance for His birth. "Christmas was for the first time celebrated in Rome in 354, in Constantinople in 379, and in Antioch in 388." (*Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Norval Geldenhuys, p. 102). A well known preacher during this time mentioned the late origin of Christmas. "Chrysostom, in a Christmas sermon, A.D. 386, says, 'It is not ten years since this day was clearly known to us...'" (*Unger Bible Dictionary*, p. 196). "Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the church, and before the fifth century there was no general consensus of opinion as to when it should come in the calendar, whether January 6th, March 25th, or December 25th." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 5, p. 641).

When was Jesus born?

It comes as a shock to many individuals that the Bible does not tell us when Christ was born; but we are reasonably certain He was not born in December.

Nearly everyone remembers reading about the appearance of an angel to the shepherds. In Luke 2:8 we read, "Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night." This rules out the birth of Christ as a winter event. "According to this statement, Jesus cannot have been born in December, in the middle of the rainy season, as has been since the fourth century supposed ... According to the Rabbins, the driving forth of the flocks took place in March, the bringing in of them in November..." (*Critical and Exegetical Handbook To The Gospels of Mark and Luke*, H.A.W. Meyer, p. 273).

Adam Clarke makes this observation: "It was a custom among the Jews to send out their sheep to the deserts, about the Passover, and bring them home at the commencement of the first rain; during the time they were out, the shepherds watched them night and day. As the Passover occurred in the spring, and the first rain began early in the month of Marchesvan, which answers to our part of October and November, we find that the sheep were kept out in the open county during the whole of the summer. And as these shepherds had not yet brought home their flocks, it is a presumptive argument that October had not yet commenced, and that, consequently, our Lord was not born on the twenty-fifth of December, when no flocks were out in the fields." (*Adam Clarke's Commentary*, p. 857).

Who decided to make December 25 the birthday of Christ?

This credit goes to the Roman Catholic Church. They explain it like this: "Numerous theories have been put forward through the last 2,000 years to explain Dec. 25 as Christmas Day. The most likely one, however, the one most generally accepted by scholars now, is that the birth of Christ was assigned to the date of the winter solstice. This date is Dec. 21 in our calendar, but was Dec. 25 in the Julian calendar which predated our own ... The solstice, when days begin to lengthen in the northern hemisphere, was referred to by pagans as the 'Birthday of the Unconquered Sun'. During the third century, the Emperor Aurelian proclaimed Dec. 25 as a special day dedicated to the sun-god, whose cult was very strong in Rome at that time. Even before this time, Christian writers already had begun to refer to Jesus as the Sun of Justice. It seemed quite logical, therefore, that as Christianity begun to dominate the religious scene in the Roman Empire, the date of the 'new-born sun' should be chosen as the birthdate of Christ. Apparently, it bothers some people that the date for Christmas has its roots in a pagan feast. Be that as it may, it's the best explanation we have for the choice of Dec. 25 to celebrate the birth of Jesus." (*The New Question Box*, p. 28-29).

This December observance originated with pagans as a feast day to their sun-god, Mithra. It was changed into a "Christian holy day" by the Roman Catholic Church.

Don't you think we need to observe the birth of Christ?

People often ask this question, but I usually ask this in return, "Why should we?" 2 Peter 1:3 tells us that God has given us "all things that pertain to life and godliness." Everything I need to know of a religious nature has been revealed in the Bible. 1 Peter 4:11 says that if I speak, I must speak "as the oracles of God." If God would have wanted us to observe the birth of Christ, he most assuredly would have told us!

How should I remember Jesus? God has left three memorials to Christ -- all of which point to His death and resurrection.

- First, water baptism reminds us of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:3-4).
- Second, the Lord's supper is a constant reminder of His death. As we partake of the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, we "proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).
- Third, our worship on the Lord's day, the first day of the week, reminds us of His resurrection (Matthew 28:1; Acts 20:7; Revelation 1:10).

God does not want His Son remembered as a baby lying in a manger, but as the suffering Saviour and now resurrected Redeemer.

- by David Padfield

What We KNOW About Christmas

The world is fully into the seasonal observance of Christmas. While there are many myths and misconceptions about Christmas, there are some facts that we KNOW. For instance:

1) We know that the Bible does not reveal the date of Jesus' birth. God simply did not choose to supply this information.

2) Biblical evidence indicates that Jesus was almost certainly NOT born on December 25th. The fact that shepherds were in the field at night tending their flocks on the night that Jesus was born points to a date that would have been in a warmer month of the year. By late December the flocks would not have been kept out in the fields at night.

3) The religious observance of Jesus' birth did not begin until several centuries after the New Testament was written. There is nothing in the New Testament that indicates a special "Christmas" celebration by first century Christians.

4) Many historical references confirm that December 25th was designated by the Catholic church as a day to celebrate the birth of Christ. This celebration first took place in Rome around 350AD. There is clear evidence that this date was chosen to divert a longstanding pagan tradition of worshipping the sun at this time of year.

5) We KNOW that Jesus was born of a virgin in Bethlehem about 2,000 years ago. He came to save lost men from their sins (Luke 19:10). We are grateful beyond measure for the wonderful gift that God gave us in sending His Son to this earth. But the Scriptures give us no authority for a special religious observance of His birth (Colossians 3:17).

- by Greg Gwin