

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

“Christmas Fiction”

By Steven J. Wallace

About this time of year there is a jingle that is heard throughout the season. It often sounds like this: “Keep Christ in Christmas” or “Christmas is nothing without Christ but everything with Him.” Unfortunately, there is much “Christmas Fiction” today, fables that ring as if they are good and true but upon closer investigation are found to be falsehoods.

Keep Christ In Christmas

One cannot keep Christ in Christmas because Christ was never in Christmas to begin with. This may often come across as shocking to most but it is no doubt the truth. While we read of the “what” of Jesus’ birth in the Bible, we nowhere read of the “when” and certainly not Christmas. What then of Christmas? The answer is simple; it originated with men and not God. The Bible doesn’t identify either the year or the month and day that Jesus was born and yet droves of people commemorate December 25th as his birthday? It was not until A.D. 354 that Liberius, Bishop of Rome, prescribed it to be celebrated on December 25th. The choosing of this date was probably influenced by the pre-existing celebration of pagan festivals such as the celebration of Mithras, the supposed god of light and truth. Also in December the Romans celebrated Saturnalia, often filled with riotous and orgiastic behavior. It appears that Christmas was invented to assist in the transformation of pagan festivals from such carnal and depraved behavior to something more palatable to moral goodness.

However, even if we did know the birthday of Christ, there is no authority in the Bible, the word of God, for commemorating it as a religious holiday. It is his death, burial and resurrection that the Lord stresses his followers to memorialize (Matt. 26:26-30; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-29). For the first-century Christian, this was a regular and weekly practice (Acts 20:7). How can we keep Christ in Christmas when Christmas was created four centuries after he was born? We have as much authority to keep Christ in Christmas as we do the fourth of July.

Three Wise Men At The Manger

Other fables and myths are publicly preached in “nativity scenes” that show three wise men gathering around a manger to see baby Jesus. Where does the Bible show that there were only three wise men? It is very assumptive to presume there were only three wise men simply because Jesus received three “kinds” of gifts. If one should say today that he received at his birthday clothes, music CDs, and computer software, it is ludicrous to assume that he must have only had three people at his party!

We don’t know how many wise men were present to see and worship the sinless Son of God, but we definitely know that they did not see him in a manger. When Jesus was visited by the wise men, they “*had come into the house*” (Matt. 2:11), not into a barn. Incidentally, the wise men were not the same as the shepherds as given in Luke’s account, but distinctively different. They were from the “*East*” (Matt. 2:1) which is more than likely Persia. On the other hand, the shepherds were living in the fields of the “*same country*” (Luke 2:8) in which Jesus was born. The shepherds saw Jesus right after he was born (thus in a manger) but the Scripture implies that the wise men were expecting to see a child who was up to two years old, from Herod’s deplorable action (compare Matt. 2:7 and 2:16), thus a while after Jesus’ birth.

Born In December

As for when Jesus was born, please consider that more than likely, Jesus was born between March and November. Scholars tell us that this is the time frame when shepherds would drive their sheep out to deserts and mountainous regions and then bring them back by October or early November.

Here is a chronology that presents the facts better than these half-truth dramatizations that are given today:

- Announcement to Mary (Lk. 1:26-38).
- Announcement to Joseph (Matt. 1:18-24).
- Birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:25; Lk. 2:1-7).
- Announcement to Shepherds and visit (at manger) (Lk. 2:8-20).
- Jesus' circumcision (eight days old) (Lk. 2:21).
- Jesus' presentation at the temple (about 40 days old) (Lev. 12:1-6; Lk. 2:22-38).
- Wise men visit Jesus (at house) (Matt. 2:1-12).
- Journey to Egypt (Matt. 2:13-15).
- Massacre of children (Matt. 2:16-18).
- Return to Nazareth (Lk. 2:39; Matt. 2:19-23).

Be Careful What You Teach

Having said all that, we should be careful that we teach biblical events in a truthful way, ***“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment”*** (Jas. 3:1). Christmas is a time to spend time with family, exchange gifts, and eat good food, but there is no biblical authority for observing it as a religious holiday. To those who want salvation of the soul, we must not look into the manger, but to the cross in humble obedience (Col. 1:19-23; 1 Tim. 2:5, 6; Rom. 6:3-9). – ***Truth Magazine***, December 21, 2000. ■

A Word about the Season

By Joe R. Price

Every year at this time the subject of whether we celebrate Christmas comes up. The answer depends on whether one is asking about the religious celebration of the birth of Christ or about the seasonal holiday of goodwill.

There is absolutely no Bible support for a religious observance of the birth of Jesus. Yes, the Bible records the event of His birth, and we thank God that our Savior came to earth. But the fact that the Bible records the historical account of His birth does not authorize us to have a religious holiday to observe it (the traditions of men, notwithstanding). There is no evidence of a “Feast of the Nativity” until the 4th century A. D. “Christmas” means the “mass of Christ” and refers to a special mass that was conducted to honor Christ’s birth. Clearly, it is a Catholic expression originating with the Catholic Church. The religious celebration of Christ’s birth is an invention and addition of men. It has not been ordained by God in His inspired word, the Bible. Therefore, we will not held captive to the traditions men have added to the gospel of Christ (Col. 2:21-23; Gal. 1:6-9)

Just as acts that are viewed as religious by some can also be practiced non-religiously (cf. circumcision, Acts 16:1-3; washing hands, Mk. 7:1-4; eating of meats sacrificed to idols, 1 Cor. 10:27), it is possible to celebrate this holiday season non-religiously. As a festive, joyous expression of goodwill, the seasonal traditions of Christmas can be kept by all. Yet, we must be careful not to give our endorsement to the religious additions of men that go beyond the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn. 9-11).

Some may call us “scrooge” or say we do not believe in the birth of Jesus. These things are not true. We honor the birth of Christ, but we will do so God’s way, not man’s way. We must be careful not to think that God must accept whatever we say He should accept from us; remember Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2). If one can give Bible authority for the religious observance of the birth of Jesus then we will retract what we teach on the subject and start offering religious observance of Christ’s birth. If that cannot be done, then join hands with us in being careful not to add to God’s word (1 Cor. 4:6). — ***The Spirit’s Sword***, December 4, 2011. ■

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God” (Col. 2:16-19—NKJV).

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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