

“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 25 as his birthday? It was not until A.D. 354 that Liberius, Bishop of Rome, prescribed it to be celebrated on December 25. 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 (Luke 1:26-38).
- Announcement to Joseph (Matt. 1:18-24).

- Birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:25; Luke 2:1-7).
- Announcement to Shepherds and visit (at manger) (Luke 2:8-20).
- Jesus' circumcision (eight days old) (Luke 2:21).
- Jesus' presentation at the temple (about 40 days old) (Lev. 12:1-6; Luke 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 (Luke 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, pg. 8. ■

“Let Us Go Into The House Of The Lord”

Psalms 122:1

David found pleasure in entering into the house of the Lord for the purpose of worship. He was a lad when he had this privilege. ***“How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God...For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness”*** (Psa. 84:1-2, 10 - NKJV). It is God's will that we assemble for the purpose of worship together (Heb. 10:25). Can we join with David in his attitude toward worship? Worship lifts us up and makes us more like Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). It helps us to grow as a Christian. In worship we are reminded of the values that the world makes us forget. We are reminded that life consists of more than just visible things. The world strives to make us forget there is life beyond the temporal.

Proper worship requires preparation and forethought. God is a spirit and is to be worshipped ***“in spirit and in truth”*** (Jn. 4:24). People expect the preacher to prepare his sermon. Certainly, he ought to think and pray and study. He ought to think of God and of the people as he meditates over the scriptures which he would use for edification, exhortation, and encouragement of the hearers. However, Christians should also prepare for the public worship of the Lord. Worship is not accidental; we must prepare our hearts for it. With regard to the preaching of the word, Jesus not only said, ***“take heed what ye hear”*** (Mk. 4:24), but he also said, ***“take heed how ye hear”*** (Lk. 8:18).

Proper worship also requires the proper attitude. David said, ***“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go unto the house of the Lord”*** (Psa. 122:1). He realized that going to worship God did him good. We too, should be delighted to worship God. In the assembly of the saints in worship there should be reverence and awe and veneration because the Lord sees all we do (Heb. 4:13). ***“...Let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe”*** (Heb. 12:28).

We should never willfully forsake such assemblies (Heb. 10:25). Some acts of worship are required on the first day of the week. We are to break bread on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). The early Christians continued steadfastly in the ***“breaking of bread”*** (Acts 2:42). We are also to ***“Lay by in store”*** upon the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2). But, what about other assemblies? For example, the church in Jerusalem met ***“day by day”*** (Acts 2:46). Should I do everything I can to attend such assemblies when possible? As we seek to answer this question, let us seriously consider some general principles that are involved. Jesus said, ***“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”*** (Matt. 6:33). If I willfully absent myself from the assembly, is it possible that I have allowed other things to become more important? Paul instructed the Ephesians, ***“Look therefore carefully how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil”*** (Eph. 5:15-16). When I willfully absent myself from the assembly, am I realizing the value and use of each worship service and am I taking advantage of it for things eternal? We are also commanded to be ***“zealous of good works”*** and ***“ready unto every good work”*** (Tit. 2:14; 3:1). Worship is a ***“good work”*** and if we are not zealous and ready to worship, then we neglect these Divine commandments. David was a lover of worship (Psa. 42:1, 2, 4; 84:1-2), yet some appear to be faithful at one service and completely ignore God at other services. – *tgmc* ■

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

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