

Jesus' Birth: Celebrate It or Ignore It?

Introduction: Do you celebrate the birth of Jesus? What would you say to someone who asks surprisingly, "You don't celebrate Christmas as Jesus' birth? Why not? How could you NOT celebrate His birth?"

I. A joyful birth

- A. Because of what was prophesied about Him and what it meant to Israel.
 - 1. Unto us a child is born... (Isa. 9:6)
 - 2. Prince of peace. (Isa. 9:6)
 - 3. A child shall be born of a virgin. (Isa. 7:14)
 - 4. A child shall lead them. (Isa. 11:6) A Ruler to shepherd the people of Israel. (Mic. 5:2; cf. Matt. 2:6) Jews concluded he would be a military leader/deliverer/savior.
 - 5. Heir to David's throne. (2 Sam. 7:12, 13, 16)
 - 6. Restorer of God's kingdom that would stand forever. (Luke 1:32, 33; Dan. 2:44)
- B. Wise men/magi sought him to worship him and brought him gifts. (Matt. 2:1, 2)
- C. Shepherds were compelled by the angel's message to visit him. (Luke 2:8-15)
- D. Mary exalts the Lord. (Luke 1:46-55)
- E. Angel to Joseph: "He will save His people from their sins." (Matt. 1:21)
- F. Joyful to everyone who would believe in him. "Through your Seed, all the families of the earth will be blessed." (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:16)

II. Jesus's day of birth is unknown

- A. His "birthdate" was specified and memorialized by the Catholic church in the early to mid 4th century.
 - 1. Catholic Encyclopedia: "Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church" (II: 724-728)
 - 2. *The first observance of December 25th probably took place in Rome between A.D. 325 and 354. The historian, Philip Schaff, wrote "We find it first in Rome in the time of the bishop Liberius (Catholics consider him as a Pope), who on the twenty-fifth of December, 360, consecrated Marcela, the sister of St. Ambrose, nun or bride of Christ, and addressed her with these words, 'Thou seest what multitudes are come to the birth-festival of thy bridegroom.' This passage implies that the festival was already existing and familiar"* (History of the Church, iii:395.
- B. An attempt to compete with the 12-day pagan celebration of the winter solstice which began on December 25th. The 25th was chosen for a variety of reasons, one of which was that on this date was the important Mithraic feast Dies Natalis Solis Invicti (the Birth of the Unconquered Sun). Replacing the pagan feast with Christmas was likely a ploy to make Christianity, the newly official religion of the empire, more palatable to Roman legionnaires, many of whom had been devotees of Mithraism.
- C. Arguments abound for both a winter and a spring birth, yet without resolve.
 - 1. Many scholars say it is unlikely that the event occurred in December.
 - 2. Astrologically: "His" star seen by the magi "in the east" has been argued for both a winter and spring birth. (cf. Luke 2)
 - 3. Climatically: The shepherds with the flocks in the fields at night in winter? (John 2:8)
- D. John 10:22, Jesus attends a Hanukkah festival (December), yet no mention of His birthdate.

- E. Albert Barnes (Presbyterian) says, "But the exact time of His birth is unknown; there is no way to ascertain it." He continues, "Nor is it of consequence to know the time; if it were, God would have preserved the record of it."

III. God was specific about days to be remembered/memorialized

- A. The Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread. (Deut. 16)
- B. Feast of Weeks. (Deut. 16)
- C. Feast of Booths. (Deut. 16)
- D. The Sabbath Day. (Ex. 20:8)
- E. The Death of Christ/"The Lord's Supper." (Matt. 26:26-28)
- F. Interesting: nothing from God about memorializing Christ's birth. (Rom. 14:5)

IV. Living with the joy of Jesus' birth

- A. Like Mary, His birth strengthens me in my trust of God's promises and makes me secure when other people in life fail me. God does the impossible to show us it's possible.
- B. My life is given peace when stresses abound. He's the Prince who gives peace to my life.
- C. I'm not alone because it symbolized God's nearness. Immanuel: "God with us."
- D. His birth gives me reason to be joyful for other souls.
- E. I find joy in conquering power of humility and service. (Phil. 2:5-10) I am reminded of His humility to leave heaven and walk in this same tempted flesh.
- F. I'm reminded of God's praiseworthiness.
- G. He's the King of my life. My Ruler. My Shepherd. He's worth submitting to.

Conclusion: I may not "celebrate" December 25th as the day Jesus was born, because no one knows for sure, but more important than the day is celebrating the joys of his birth by my everyday-life for my Savior who lived, died, and arose from the dead so that I could be redeemed from my sinful life and live with Him eternally. By his death we can live.