

## **12.09.18 ~ The Priority Message of Christmas!**

Two weeks from this Tuesday we will celebrate the birth of God's Son, Jesus Christ, who came to save us from sin's penalty.

There are 195 countries in the world today, of which 160 celebrate Christmas in some way or another, while 36 do not in anyway observe Christmas.

Most of the world, until recent times, used a dating system focused on the birth of Jesus Christ, as follows: B.C., "before Christ," for happenings before His birth; and A.D., Anno Domini, "in the year of our Lord," for happenings after His arrival.

There is a growing effort today to delete BC and AD, permanently replacing them with BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era), in an attempt to remove Christ and Christianity from all calendars. But, what is the pivotal date for BCE and CE? The very same as BC and AD - the birth of Christ.

This is yet another feeble attempt by a godless world to try and remove the message of Christmas, exchanging Merry Christmas with Merry xmas, Happy Holiday, or Seasons Greetings.

Christmas is a compound word made up of two words: Christ [the Anointed or Holy One], and Mass [an assembly or gathering for religious observances].

Easter celebrates and honors the sacrificial death and sovereign resurrection of God's One and Only Son, God's payment for sin and provision of eternal life to everyone who believes in Him.

Christmas celebrates and honors the birth of God's One and Only Son, God's ultimate Christmas gift to us, Immanuel [God with us].

Was Jesus born on December 25? What do the Scriptures reveal about that? I'm glad you asked.

**Read Luke 1:26-27, 30-31, 34-36, 39-41...** At the time of Mary's conception through the Holy Spirit, she went to visit her aunt Elizabeth, and upon greeting her, Elizabeth's baby "leaped in her womb," for Elizabeth, was six months pregnant with John, who would later in life be known as John the baptizer.

**Luke 1:56** tells us that Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months. According to the Jewish religious calendar, concerning the division of the priests, Mary's visit with Elizabeth, at which time Mary was pregnant, would have been late in the month of Kislev (November-December),.

Kislev is the time of the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, which begins on the 25th day of Kislev (close to our December 25) and lasts for eight days. Isn't it interesting that we as Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus, who is (**John 8:12**), "the Light of the world."

John the baptizer, Jesus' cousin, was born near or during Passover in the month of Nisan (March/April); for he was six months older than Jesus. Remember, Gabriel announced Mary's pregnancy when Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John; therefore, Jesus would have been born in the month of Tishri (September-October), at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Our celebration of December 25 doesn't really line up with the actual birth of Jesus, but it is very probable that it lined up with the time of His conception, when the true biological life of Jesus began in the womb of Mary.

**Luke 2:8** tells us, "there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night," when Jesus was born.

A little research on past and present weather patterns in Palestine will lead you to conclude that there were not any shepherds out in the fields, around Bethlehem, at the end of December, for it is below freezing and can be very rainy.

**Ezra 10:9**, records that, "all the men of Judah and Benjamin [were] assembled at Jerusalem... ..in the ninth month (Kislev) on the twentieth day of the month, and all the people sat in the open square *before* the house of God, trembling because of the heavy rain."

**Jeremiah 36:22** tells us, "the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month (Kislev), with *a fire* burning in the brazier [or firepot, something that holds hot coals] before him," because of the cold.

The climate of Palestine in December, in Bible times, especially Jerusalem and Bethlehem which are at 2500 ft elevation, could be very cold (dropping to well below freezing at night) and raining, i.e., "it was not the practice of the shepherds of Judea to be out with their flocks in the open fields later than about the end of October; it was the custom then (as it is now) to withdraw the flocks from the open fields and house them for the winter."

**Read Luke 2:1-7...** So, Luke says there was a decree issued at the time of Jesus' birth, that a census would be taken of all the inhabitants of the earth, and everyone was to return to their hometown, the town of their ancestors.

It wouldn't be sensible to hold a census in December, more likely, a census would be taken after the harvest season, September or October, when the weather was more moderate and dry, allowing safe and easy travel.

So, why was December 25 chosen to be set apart as the celebration day for the birth of Christ?

The Romans celebrated the Festival of Saturnalia in December, from about the 17th-25th they worshipped the birth of the s-u-n god. Very common customs during that festival were the exchanging of gifts and the decorating homes with evergreen boughs and lighted candles.

The decision to celebrate the birth of God's Son on December 25th, came about during the middle of the fourth century, through the promotion of the Roman Emperor, Constantine the Great, after his conversion to Christianity in the 4th c. A.D.

The celebration of Christ's birth during the winter solstice, seems to have been an attempt to Christianize the popular pagan celebrations and festivities already in place; what we see today is a bizarre mixture of both pagan and Christian elements.

But regardless of the historic or pagan background of December's traditions, whether or not Jesus was born on December 25th, our purpose is to turn the eyes of all people toward Jesus Christ, the Savior who has come.

The light of the world has indeed come, and the Christmas season, with all its celebrations and customs, presents the church with a wonderful opportunity to proclaim and live out the good news of peace with God, forgiveness and eternal life has been granted to everyone who trusts and believes in God's Son, Jesus Christ.

See **John 1:1-4, 14, 18...** Christmas is about the Incarnation of God, God the Son putting on flesh and living among us, showing us the Father (cf **John 14:6, 9**), "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father."

Jesus paid for our sins, as is exemplified by His first words on the cross (**Luke 23:34**), "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And Jesus' last words on the cross announced the finalization of that payment (**John 19:30**), "It is finished," then He bowed His head and gave up His spirit."

Jesus went to the cross to pay [in full] the penalty for our sins. This same Jesus, fully man yet fully God, was taken down from the cross, placed in a tomb, and three days later He came out of the grave alive.

Christmas is about the fulfillment of the promised Messiah, sent by God to save us from the eternal consequences of sin

Christmas is a time when many people are more open to talking about the things of God, therefore, we should make the most of this opportunity to be witnesses of the marvelous message of God's greatest gift, Jesus Christ.

Christmas is a time to honor the Savior's birth by sharing the message of His advent to earth in the flesh of a baby named Jesus; God's greatest gift, Immanuel.

The majority of the world today either rejects Jesus Christ outright, is totally confused about Him, or is just indifferent toward Him and has, instead, turned to man-centered traditions and religious rituals that are promoted and supported by network television, public education, secular religion, and the commercial marketplace.

If you are a Christian, the greatest gift you can offer to an unbeliever is the Good News about the Special Child whose birthday we celebrate at Christmas: Jesus [God's Salvation], Immanuel [God with us], born to a virgin in Bethlehem, put to death on a cross at Calvary, buried in a borrowed tomb, only to come out alive on the third day - and everyone who calls upon Him for the forgiveness of sins will be saved to eternal life - that is the priority message of Christmas!

Jesus Christ, God's Son, Lord and Savior!

*Pastor Mike*  
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