

12.15.19 ~ 'Tis the Season of Christmas

Today is December 15, 2019, ten days from today we celebrate the birth of God's Son, Jesus Christ, Lord over all, and Savior to those who believe in Him.

Next Sunday, I'm going to use these Candles to tell the story of the Advent God's One and Only Son, the God-Man, the Creator, Sustainer, and Judge over everything that has or ever will be created.

Today I want to encourage you to boldly proclaim and intimately worship the Savior, Jesus Christ, and to pray for opportunities to share His message.

Out of 195 countries in the world today, about 160 of them celebrate Christmas in one way or another; although, I am in no way suggesting that the majority of the world recognizes, let alone, revere God's Son, we know that is not true; but instead, note that about 35 countries in the world today do not in anyway observe Christmas.

It is fascinating that most of the the world, until recent years, used a dating system focused on the birth of Jesus Christ the Lord; either looking forward to His coming, i.e., B.C., "before Christ," or looking back to the point where He entered our world, i.e., A.D., "anno domini," "in the year of our Lord."

There is a growing effort today to do away with B.C. and A.D. and replace them with BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era), in an attempt to remove all connections of Christ and Christianity from our calendars;

According to David Barrett et al, editors of the "[*World Christian Encyclopedia*](#): In the U.S., many Christians -- particularly conservative Protestants -- feel under attack by secularists and followers of non-Christian religions. Simultaneously, many secularists and non-Christians feel under attack from conservative Protestants. This conflict becomes particularly serious during Christmas time.

Dionysius Exiguus was a 6th-century monk who is known as the inventor of the Anno Domini (AD) era, but it was not widely used until after 800 BC. By the 15th century, all of Western Europe had adopted the **B.C./A.D.** system

Wikipedia - The term "Common Era" can be found in English as early as 1708, and became more widely used in the mid-19th century by Jewish religious scholars. In the later 20th century, the use of CE and BCE was popularized in academic and scientific publications as a culturally neutral term.

Fred Espenak, writing for the *National Aeronautics and Space Administration* (NASA) wrote: *"The Christian bias in Exiguus' dating terminology may be perceived as chauvinistic or insensitive to other religious belief systems. Fortunately, there is an alternative which preserves the year numbering established by Exiguus and now an unavoidable legacy of the historical record. The religiously neutral abbreviation BCE (for 'Before Common Era') can be substituted for 'BC.' Similarly, the abbreviation 'CE' (for 'Common Era') can replace the nonsecular term 'AD'." "These modern terms are to be preferred because they do not impose a particular theology on the reader or writer."*

The truth is, Christmas is a compound word made up of two words: Christ [the anointed One], and Mass [assembly or gathering for religious festivals or observances].

Easter celebrates 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. Christmas celebrates the coming of God's One and Only Son, God's ultimate Christmas gift to us.

But, was Jesus born on December 25? Most likely not, it is not very probable that he was even born in December, for several reasons, but first, let's look at what the scriptures reveal about the timing of Christ's birth.

See **Luke 1:1-57**. We are told that, at the time of her conception through the Holy Spirit, Mary went to visit Elizabeth, who was six months pregnant with John; and Mary stayed with them (**Luke 1:56**) for three months.

According to the Jewish calendar (at the time of Jesus), of the division of the priests, Mary's visit with Elizabeth would have been late in the 9th month of Kislev (Nov-Dec), at which time Mary was pregnant. This was the time of the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, which begins on the 25th day of Kislev, very close to our calendar date of December 25; and so, Christmas, the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus (the Light of the World), was much more likely the time of His conception.

John the baptizer, Jesus' cousin, was six months older than Jesus, and since John's birth was near or during Passover (Nisan= Mar/April), according to the Jewish calendar Jesus would have been born in Tishri (Sept-Oct) at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Our celebration of Christmas doesn't really line up with the actual birth of Jesus, but it does line up with the very probable time of His conception in the womb of Mary.

See **Luke 2:1-8**. Now, think about this, **Luke 2:8** tells us, "there were shepherds living out in the fields watching over their flocks at night."

A little research on the weather patterns in Palestine clearly suggests that there are not any shepherds in the fields, near or around Bethlehem, in December.

"The climate of Palestine...the cold of the night, from December to February, is very piercing, and it was NOT the custom for the shepherds of Judea to watch their flocks in the open fields later than about the end of October."

"As is well known, the shepherds in Palestine do not 'abide in the fields' during the winter season because of the extreme, cold temperatures. The shepherds always bring their flocks in from the mountain slopes and fields no later than October 15th!"

"The temperature in the area of Bethlehem in December... can drop to well below freezing, especially at night," and it is common to have snow in "Jerusalem and nearby Bethlehem in December and January."

"A common practice of shepherds was to keep their flocks in the field from April to October, but in the cold and rainy winter months to take them back home and shelter them."

"Shepherds and their flocks would not be found "abiding" in the open fields at night in December, for the paramount reason that there would be no pasturage at that time. It was the custom then (as it is now) to withdraw the flocks (during Oct.-Nov.) from the open districts and house them for the winter."

"Israeli meteorologists tracked December weather patterns for many years and concluded that the climate in Israel has been essentially constant for at least the last 2,000 years...broadly speaking, weather phenomena and climatic conditions as pictured in the Bible correspond with conditions as observed today."

Here is something else to think about, **Luke 2:1** says there was a decree issued at the time of Jesus' birth, that a census would be taken, and therefore everyone would have to return to the town of their ancestors.

Taking a census in winter would have been impractical and unpopular. Generally a census would take place after the harvest season, around September or October, when the weather was good and the roads were still dry enough to allow easy travel. The census, "could hardly have been during December 25, for such a time would surely NOT have been chosen by the authorities for a public enrollment, which necessitated the population's traveling from all parts to their natal districts, during bitter cold, snow storms and rain - making journeys both unsafe and unpleasant in winter.."

There is no way that Jesus was born on or near December 25, so, why was that day selected to be set apart as the traditional anniversary of the birth of Christ?

Many of the earth's earliest inhabitants were sun worshipers, very dependent upon the sun's dominance of the daytime heavens; having turned long ago from worshipping the one true God and creator of all things, the Roman empire worshipped a plurality of gods.

To the Romans, the month of December marked the Festival of Saturnalia (December 17-24), Common customs during that festival were the giving of gifts, and decorating of homes with evergreen boughs and lighted candles.

The decision to celebrate Christmas on December 25th was made sometime during the fourth century, by church bishops in Rome, and through the promotion of Constantine the Great, the first Christian Roman emperor, in A.D. 325.

It was decided to celebrate Christ's birth during the winter solstice, in an attempt to Christianize the popular pagan celebrations; but this failed, the festivities continued, and what has remained is a very bizarre amalgamation of pagan and Christian practices like we see today.

But regardless of whether or not Jesus was born on December 25th, our purpose is to turn the eyes of all men toward the Christ of Christmas.

See **John 1:1-4, 14, 18; 8:12; 1John 1:5.**

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

The Christmas season is all about the Incarnation of God: for He put on flesh and lived among us, then He went to the cross to pay the penalty for our sins.

Christmas is a time for reverent worship, like that of those first shepherds who rejoiced and praised God for sending His Son, the Savior, born in the town of David: He is Christ the Lord.

Christmas is about the fulfillment of the promised Messiah, sent by God to save us from our sins.

Christmas is a time when people tend to be more open toward the gospel, and we should make the most of every opportunity, to be witnesses of the saving grace, mercy, and love of God, through Jesus Christ.

Christmas provides a wonderful opportunity for us to share God's greatest gift to mankind: Jesus Christ, Immanuel.

Tonight, as a family of believers, we will share a fellowship meal together in honor of God's Son.

Next Sunday during morning worship, the sermon will celebrate the birth of God's One and Only Son; and then on Christmas Eve we will sing many of the traditional hymns and in-between we will tell the story from the Scriptures.

If you know someone who hasn't received Jesus Christ, please invite them to come, so that they might have the opportunity to receive God's Gift.

Although the majority of the world rejects Jesus Christ, and most of the rest of the world is totally confused about Him, by what they see and hear in the media, out in the marketplace, through all the myths, man-centered traditions, and secular religious services masquerading as church.

But please, don't let any of that distract, discourage, or dissuade you from celebrating and sharing the Reason for the Season of Christmas: God came to us in the flesh of a baby boy, having been conceived in the womb of a young virgin, for the intended purpose of providing forgiveness for sin and eternal life to everyone who will but believe and receive God's indescribable, irrevocable, and eternal Gift: Jesus Christ, God's Son, the Lord and Savior.

If you are a Christian, it is your greatest blessing to spread the news: Jesus Christ has come, and everyone who calls upon Him for the forgiveness of sins will be saved.

And because of that sovereign truth we can and we should boldly say to all who will listen, Merry Christmas!

Pastor Mike