

# Reason For The Season?

*'Tis the season.* Festive decorations have been hung in homes, stores, and city streets and squares. Radio stations are playing new and old songs throughout the month. Most people are busy shopping to find those special gifts for family and friends. Many churches have put out their nativity scenes and are preparing for their annual Christmas service. And the debate in our nation over Christmas continues.

Christians are a people of truth. Lying is to be put away (Ephesians 4:25), but more than just not speaking a falsehood with a neighbor, a child of God has been sanctified by His word of truth (John 17:17). The truth of Christ frees men from sin's enslavement (John 8:31-36). A sinner becomes one of God's children by believing, doing and abiding in the revealed truth. Therefore, God's people are His house, "which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Timothy 3:15). As a people of truth, Christians ought to reflect the light of truth in their words and actions and not defend a practice or tradition to be of Christ when it is not.

As a citizen of the United States of America, I am concerned about the increased sway humanism, secularism and atheism have on all levels of our society. The tolerance for all manner of ungodly conduct while being intolerant of godly values is quite upsetting. My political views are affected by my faith and spiritual values. [Everyone's is, even if they do not admit it.] But the conflict over religious traditions associated with Christmas is one where truth needs to be upheld, not men's preferences.

The word "Christmas" is not a Biblical word. Its literal meaning is *Christ's Mass* or *Mass of Christ*, indicating that it originated in the Roman Catholic Church. Liberius, Bishop of Rome, declared December 25th to be the birthday of Christ in 354 A.D. Yet, before the 5th century there were three dates considered: January 6, March 25 and December 25. The adaptation of a Roman Catholic Mass was done to coincide with a December pagan festival connected with winter solstice. The truth is that the date of Jesus' birth is unknown, and there is no Biblical record of individual Christians or the Lord's church celebrating the birth of Jesus.

Protestant churches, which developed during the Reformation period, desired to keep this man-made tradition. Wanting to observe the misguided celebration of Jesus' birth without the Mass, they retained the term "Christmas" but did not observe the Roman Catholic Mass. Over the centuries "Christmas" has continued to evolve to mean different things to different people. And why not? This particular celebration in the month of December originated with men. God never gave a command to celebrate the birth of the Messiah Jesus; nor is there any Biblical pattern upon which to guide men in the proper manner to commemorate the birth of the Savior.

Jesus was born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem as prophesied (Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2). Matthew and Luke record the New Testament record of the fulfillment. Joseph and Mary traveled from their home in Nazareth, Galilee to Bethlehem, Judea to be registered with the house of David because a Roman census was decreed. While in Bethlehem, Mary reached full-term in her pregnancy and delivered her first son. An angel announced this good news to shepherds watching their flock at night in the fields, and then a heavenly host praised God. That night those shepherds found baby Jesus lying in a manger. [Read Luke 2:1-20.] Wise men from the East arrived later in Bethlehem to worship the King of the Jews. Guided by a star they found the young child Jesus with Mary in a house. [Read Matthew 2:1-12.] If it were not for the divinely inspired Scriptures, the events and significance surrounding the birth of the Lord Jesus would have been forgotten and unknown. Careful examination of the Holy Scriptures reveals that portions of the story of the birth of Jesus are often incorrectly retold during traditional religious celebrations of "Christmas." The account of the birth of the Son of God needs to be declared and proclaimed as it is written but not through an errant tradition of human origin.

In times past when Almighty God desired His people to observe days, months or feasts, He directed

them how to observe those spiritual celebrations. While still in Egypt the Lord instituted the annual observance of the Passover, which commemorated the deliverance of God's chosen nation from slavery (Exodus 12:1-28; Deuteronomy 16:1-8). At Mount Sinai God commanded Israelites to remember the Sabbath day and to keep it holy, setting the seventh day apart from others (Exodus 20:8). The Law of Moses instructed the nation of Israel regarding God's ordained holy days or "holidays". Not only were Jews exhorted to obey, they were warned not to change God's decrees. "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." (Deuteronomy 4:2).

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Ruler and Savior born in Bethlehem, taught as one having authority (Matthew 7:29). That authority stemmed from the heavenly Father because whatever He said had come from the Father (John 12:49-50). Before Jesus' ascension to heaven, He made the rightful claim, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). The Lord of lords did not direct His disciples to celebrate His birth, although it was an amazing and wonderful event, but directed them to proclaim His death by partaking of the bread and fruit of the vine (Matthew 26:26-29; I Corinthians 11:23-26). Thus, Christians continued steadfastly in the breaking of the bread on the first day of the week (Acts 2:42; 20:7). Obviously, Jesus' birth preceded His death. Yet, the memorial of His death is commanded, not the celebration of His birth. One observance is of divine origin; the other is of human origin. One is holy while the other is not.

Kindness, sharing and goodwill are attributes that ought to be manifested throughout the year. "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35). The love and light of Christ ought to be reflected in Christians everyday. Setting time aside to show greater generosity and hospitality is a good deed. Exchanging gifts among family, friends, co-workers and even strangers is an expression of love for our fellow-man. To traditionally do this at a time set aside in the month of December is no transgression. But Christians ought not to promote the deception that "Christmas" is a God-approved celebration of the birth of His Son Jesus.

The plea to keep or to restore Christ in the celebration of "Christmas" is a vain attempt to honor our Lord. Claiming to observe this "holiday" in the Lord's name does not mean that He is pleased with men who do so. Jesus did not institute any memorial or religious celebration of His birth. Many, who have deceived themselves to celebrate Christmas as the birth date of Jesus, live their lives neglecting and failing to do the heavenly Father's will. Jesus Christ desires to be honored and remembered, but not through some man-made innovation. He desires to reign in your heart everyday as Lord, King and Savior.