

Away From The Manger

Introduction

- I. As important as the birth of Christ is to God's scheme of redemption, the Bible does not mention anything resembling a "Christmas Day" celebration to memorialize the birth of Christ.
- II. The Scriptures do not even reveal when Christ was born.
- III. The Scriptures are silent with respect to any festival or holy day of obligation in memory of, in celebration of, or in honor of the birth of Jesus Christ.
- IV. The religious observance of the birth of Christ was not practiced until the fourth century A.D.
 - A. The Catholic church attributes its papal origin to Liberius in 354 A.D.
 - B. Before to 354 A.D. there was nothing but pagan ritual associated with December 25th.
- V. Christians today must look upon December 25th as they do any other holiday designated by the government or custom.
 - A. Therefore, we have no church "Christmas" parties and no special religious services on December 24th or 25th.
 - B. Not only do we not have them, we oppose such being done in the name of the Lord.
 - C. We accept it as a legal holiday and individually we might observe the non-religious customs that are associated with it—but that is a matter of personal liberty to be determined in our homes.
- VI. The fact that we do not make a special observance for the birth of Christ does not mean that we regard it as unimportant or unnecessary.
 - A. Quite the contrary—without the birth of Christ exactly as it occurred prophecy would have been unfulfilled, there would have been no example for us in the flesh and man would still be in his sins.
 - B. Yes, the birth of Christ is important.
- VII. However, His birth was not the only thing necessary for our salvation.
 - A. His life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension were all essential to effect God's eternal purpose (Gal. 4:4–5).
 - B. The announcement of Christ's birth to Joseph was in terms comprehending the total mission of His life which culminated in His death (Matt. 20:28).
 - C. The Scriptures focus upon the death of Christ as the culmination of His coming, not His birth (Rom. 1:3–4).
- VIII. Furthermore, it is not Christ's birth that Christians are commanded to memorialize by a sacred feast.
 - A. The Scriptures authorize the public proclamation of the Lord's death every first day of the week until He returns (1 Cor. 11:23–26).
 - B. Ironically, some who will be upset that I would suggest that "Christmas" is not a holy day, will be the very ones to deny the importance of the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper!

- IX. I submit that because many are bound up in observing manmade holy days they have lost sight of the truly significant principles of the gospel itself.
- A. The extent of the knowledge of some about Christ is only what they have heard about Jesus as a baby in the manger.
 - B. Their knowledge of the Lord is corrupted with the legend, myth, and traditions which come from the paganism and fairy tales.
 - C. Paul warned against this (Gal. 4:9–11).
 - D. The apostle would class the religious observance of “Christmas” as a return to the “weak and beggarly elements,” with the “will-worship” characteristic of the “commandments and doctrines of men” which are to perish and are of no spiritual value (cf. Col. 2:20–23).
 - E. While we are mindful of all the benefits which are ours because He was born, we must realize there is more to the life of Jesus than the manger.
 - F. We need to move away from the manger to other things of great importance, all the way to His death upon the cross and His resurrection from the dead by which He became Lord of lords and King of Kings.

Discussion

I. Away From The Manger To The New Birth

- A. The baby Jesus in the manger had done nothing toward effecting the mission of His life.
 - 1. This remained for Jesus to accomplish in His personal ministry.
 - 2. Jesus came preaching the kingdom which He would establish and identified the terms of admittance (Mark 1:15).
- B. Early in His ministry Jesus encountered Nicodemus, a Jew of the Sanhedrin.
 - 1. To him Jesus taught the “new birth” (John 3:1–8).
 - 2. The agents employed in this birth according to Christ are water and the Spirit (John 3:5).
 - 3. Jesus identifies how both are employed in giving the great commission after His resurrection (Mark 16:16).
- C. Sadly, most religious people know more about the birth of Jesus than about this new birth.
 - 1. They are quite able to answer the question of the wise men, “Where is He that is born king of the Jews?”
 - 2. But, they are unable to properly discern the Scriptures and be born again.
 - 3. Like Pilate, they acknowledge that Jesus is a king (cf. John 18:37), and like Pilate, they scoff at the truth of the kingdom.

II. Away From The Manger To The Rejection Of Creeds

- A. When Jesus entered upon His ministry He attacked the human tradition and creedalism of His day.
 - 1. He denounced the hypocrisy of self-righteousness (Matt. 5:20).
 - 2. Jesus used as examples of this hypocrisy the outrageous behavior of the Pharisees.
 - 3. Whether it was blowing a trumpet upon giving alms, praying on the street corners, ritual fasting, washing of hands and vessels, or broadening the borders of their garments to carry scrolls of Scripture Jesus perceived their inward corruption and determined they had their reward.

- B. There is nothing more despised of God than human tradition imposed upon men as true religion (Matt. 15:1–14).
 1. True righteousness is not measured by the success one has in fulfilling the requirements of humanly imposed standards, rather it is determined by the obedience of faith (Jam. 2:21–24).
 2. The worshippers which God seeks are those that are seeking Him with worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24).
 3. Those that please Him are those that do the things which Jesus His Son says (Matt. 7:21–24).
- C. Perhaps at no other time in the year is there less of what Jesus says done than at “Christmas.”
 1. Like Herod, we profess a desire to worship Him (Matt. 2:8), but we intend to do exactly what suits us best.
 2. We cannot continue to admire the baby Jesus and refuse to listen to Him who speaks to us from heaven, the man Christ Jesus (Heb. 12:25).

III. Away From The Manger To The New Testament Church

- A. “Christmas,” like most other manmade religious traditions, has been used to promote denominationalism.
 1. It is at this time of year that various religious groups will lay aside their doctrinal differences and join together in the celebration of “Christmas.”
 2. There is a feeling of “unity” in their diversity.
 3. Men think: we all believe that Jesus was born of a virgin in Bethlehem; we all sing the same carols; we all put an angel on top of the tree; therefore, we all must be serving the same Lord.
- B. The One born at Bethlehem did not preach diversity (Matt. 16:18–19).
- C. The Christ whom religiously divided men profess to worship established His church and revealed from heaven through His chosen ambassadors its worship, work, organization and terms of admission.
- D. It is rank hypocrisy to gather around the manger of Him who died to purchase His church with His blood (Acts 20:28), singing “Come Let Us Adore Him,” and then perpetuate religious division.
- E. Agreement on the facts surrounding His birth does not make Christians.
 1. Mormons, Catholics, Pentecostals and Protestants of nearly every stripe celebrate the “Christmas” holiday.
 2. Yet, they are divided on the fundamental questions of religion.
 3. Mormons celebrate “Christmas,” but deny the deity of Jesus.
 4. Most Pentecostals celebrate “Christmas” while denying the Trinity.
 5. The wide acceptance of Christmas only coincides with the acceptance of other religious errors.

IV. Away From The Manger To The Realities Of Sin

- A. It is wonderful that we can see at times the goodness of the human spirit.
 1. Christmas time has the power to infuse us with a charitable disposition and a concern for our fellow man.
 2. I admit that this is a Christ-like attribute; however, it should not be limited to December.
 3. It is also at this time of year that we long for world peace and prosperity —most think that this is what was announced by the angels (Luke 2:14).

4. Men become so overwhelmed with feelings of brotherhood and yearnings for peace that the "Christmas Story" is construed as a platform for saving the world.
- B. The serene picture of a mother and her child rejoicing in the love of family and friends does not represent the means by which this world will be transformed.
 1. That is the picture of those transformed by the power of the word of God.
 2. Joseph and Mary were chosen as the parents of Jesus on account of their righteous character.
 3. The shepherds were men of faith who looked for the coming Christ.
 4. The wise men were seekers of truth who upon viewing the star went in search of Him whose coming it announced.
 5. The baby in the manger did not transform Herod, Archelas or their Herodian cronies (cf. Matt. 2:16).
 6. It was the Jesus who went to the cross and revealed His gospel that freed men from wickedness.
 7. Christ crucified is our peace (Eph. 2:14–17; Phi. 4:7).
 8. He is the only hope of the world.

Invitation

- I. When Jehovah wanted to present the great prophet Isaiah with a picture of the coming Messiah He gave him glimpses of His birth (Isa. 7:14; 9:6).
- II. But, in order to give him fullness of understanding, He took the prophet in the spirit and set him at the foot of the cross, as it were, to see the whole ordeal of bearing the sins of the world (Isa. 53:4–5).
- III. If you would reverence Christ as your Lord you need to see what Isaiah saw on Calvary, i.e., the sinless Son of God rejected of men and forsaken of God bearing your sins.
 - A. This is the Jesus in whom you must trust to be saved.
 - B. Yes, He is the child in the manger, but He is much, much more (2 Cor. 5:21).
- IV. In order for you to have this Jesus you must repent of your sins (Luke 13:3), confess Christ (Matt. 10:32) and be baptized into Christ (Mark 16:16).
 - A. Then you are a new creature in Christ whom the Lord has added to His body, the church.
 - B. Come away from the manger to the cross of Calvary!