Should I Celebrate Christmas?

David Padfield

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Around the first of November, you can hear some people say that we need to “Put Christ back into Christmas.” People everywhere claim Christmas is too commercialized and say that we are overlooking the real meaning of Christmas. Some preachers will ask, “What are you going to give Christ on His birthday?” Most churches will organize Christmas plays, cantatas, and programs.

Since most people recognize Christmas as a religious Holy Day, it would be good for us to study its meaning. Considering Christmas contains the word Christ, it should have some connection with the Lord. If there is a connection with the Lord, we should turn to the New Testament and read of this observance. However, upon a careful examination, we fail to find a single reference to this day in the word of God. Most people at totally shocked when they find out that the New Testament church did not celebrate the birth of Christ as a religious holy day.

When did men first start observing this special day? To answer this question, we have to go outside the New Testament. Historians tell us it was nearly three centuries after the death of Christ before a day was set aside for a special observance for His birth. The Holman Bible Dictionary says, “In the early part of the fourth century, Christians in Rome began to celebrate the birth of Christ. The practice spread widely and rapidly, so that most parts of the Christian world observed the new festival by the end of the century.” Norval Geldenhuys, in his commentary on the gospel of Luke, says, “Christmas was for the first time celebrated in Rome in 354, in Constantinople in 379, and in Antioch in 388.” (Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke)

Chrysostom, a well-known preacher during this time mentioned the late origin of Christmas. “Chrysostom, in a Christmas sermon, A.D. 386, says, ’It is not ten years since this day was clearly known to us...’” (Unger Bible Dictionary).

When was Jesus born? The date of our Lord’s birth has been fixed at many times throughout the year. We cannot say for sure what day of the year our Lord was born on. Several dates have been suggested, including March 25, April 2, May 20, November 8, December 25, and January 6. Most Protestants in America, and Roman Catholics throughout the world, observe our Lord’s birth on December 25. However, Eastern Orthodox and Armenian churches celebrate Christ’s birth either on December 25 or January 6.

The Catholic Encyclopedia says, “Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church... there is no month in the year to which respectable authorities have not assigned Christ’s birth.”

What about the three wise men? In nearly every city in America, you can see a nativity scene with the shepherds, Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus, and the “three wise men.” I do not know how many wise men there were, but I am certain they were never at the manger! Matthew tells us when they found Jesus, they went “into the house” (Matt 2:1–11). No mention is made of the manger. “They came to Jerusalem after Jesus had been presented in the temple, and taken back to Bethlehem, and, therefore, when the infant Jesus was more than forty days old. They must have come at least forty days before Herod’s death, for he spent the last forty days of his life at Jericho and the baths of Callirrhoe; the wise men found him still at Jerusalem. Jesus must, therefore, have been at least eighty days old when Herod died.” (J. W. McGarvey, The Fourfold Gospel)

Who decided to make December 25 the birthday of Christ? This credit goes to the Roman Catholic Church. They explain it like this: “Numerous theories have been put forward through the last 2,000 years to explain Dec. 25 as Christmas Day. The most likely one, however, the one most generally accepted by scholars now, is that the birth of Christ was assigned to the date of the winter solstice. This date is Dec. 21 in our calendar, but was Dec. 25 in the Julian calendar which predated our own... The solstice, when days begin to lengthen in the northern hemisphere, was referred to by pagans as the ‘Birthday of the Unconquered Sun’. During the third century, the Emperor Aurelian proclaimed Dec. 25 as a special day dedicated to the sun-god, whose cult was very strong in Rome at that time. Even before this time, Christian writers already had begun to refer to Jesus as the Sun of Justice. It seemed quite logical, therefore, that as Christianity began to dominate the religious scene in the Roman Empire, the date of the ‘new-born sun’ should be chosen as the birthdate of Christ. Apparently, it bothers some people that the date for Christmas has its roots in a pagan feast. Be that as it may, it’s the best explanation we have for the choice of Dec. 25 to celebrate the birth of Jesus.” (The New Question Box)

This December observance originated with pagans as a feast day to their sun-god, Mithra. It was changed into a “Christian holy day” by the Roman Catholic Church.

Don’t you think we need to observe the birth of Christ? People often ask this question, but I usually ask this in return, “Why should we?” 2 Peter 1:3 tells us that God has given us “all things that pertain to life and