

## ***Celebrating Christmas***

Celebrate Christmas with Christ in view, knowing that it's most likely not His birthday at all.

*Bethlehem and Golgotha, the Manger and the Cross, the birth and the death, must always be seen together.*

—J. Sidlow Baxter

*Christmas is coming! Quite so; but what is "Christmas"? Does not the very term itself denote its source—"Christ-mass." Thus it is of Romish origin, brought over from Paganism. But, says someone, Christmas is the time when we commemorate the Savior's birth. It is? And who authorized such commemoration? Certainly God did not. The Redeemer bade His disciples "remember" Him in His death, but there is not a word in Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, which tells us to celebrate His birth.*

—Arthur Pink

*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 NIV*

Christ Himself instituted the ordinance of Communion, commemorating His death and sacrifice on the Cross, where the bread and wine represent His broken body and blood shed for us. While it is true that nowhere in Scripture are we admonished to celebrate Christ's birth, there is a scriptural precedent set forth in Luke 2:8–14, 16–18; where an angel brings the news of the birth of the Messiah, the Lord, to the shepherds tending their flocks in the field, and the heavenly host of angels are there praising God and this event. After witnessing the event, the shepherds went on to spread the joyful good news. Likewise, in Matthew 2:1–3, 11; we see the Magi, the wise men from the east, come to worship the newborn King, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Therefore, we have a biblical precedent for celebrating His birth.

However, with that said, we as Christians should also understand the basic facts surrounding Christmas. While we are now generally certain of the year of Christ's birth in 4 BC, and His death in AD 30, at the age of thirty-three (there is no "0" year in the timeline as we go straight from 1 BC to AD 1), we are not certain about the actual day of His birth. The original year set for Christ's birth in AD 1 has been shown to be incorrect. (For reference, BC denotes *before Christ* and the designation follows the year; AD denotes *anno Domini*, "in the year of the Lord," and that designation precedes the year. The more recent "religiously neutral" designations are: BCE, meaning "before common era," and CE, meaning "common, or current, or sometimes even Christian era." Regardless, the calendar of dating is still the Gregorian calendar based on the birth of Christ.)

It is highly unlikely that Christ was born on December 25<sup>th</sup> for many good reasons, notably that shepherds of that area, even today, are not typically out in the fields with their flocks due to both inclement weather and lack of available pasture. During the winter season, the flocks are typically penned and somewhat sheltered. Also, it would have been an arduous journey for pregnant Mary to make this trip of about seventy miles over rather difficult terrain in inclement weather, and probably on foot as they were poor, most likely not owning a donkey. This would also have been an inappropriate and inconvenient time for a taxing census by the Roman government requiring everyone to register in their hometown. The

most likely date of Christ's birth is probably in the spring, late March to early April in 4 BC, and there is more data to substantiate this.

The early church did not celebrate Christ's birth, and it wasn't until about the third century, some three hundred or more years later, that it began to be observed. The date set was in fact most likely appointed to appease the new influx of pagans into the church with pressure to keep their old holiday celebrations, substituting a Christian designation for a pagan event. The December 25<sup>th</sup> date is most assuredly the former pagan celebration of the winter solstice, most notably the Roman heathen festival of Saturnalia, honoring the god Saturn, the Babylonian celebration of Semiramis, the queen of heaven, and the Egyptian goddess Isis, giving birth to her son Horus, all occurring on similar days.

Therefore, good Christian, celebrate Christmas with Christ in view, knowing full well the history of it all and realizing that it's probably not His birthday at all.