

God Became Man – A Reason to Celebrate

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Scripture: Luke 2:8-11 (NIV)

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."

Introduction

Christmas is not pagan. There, I said it! Now let's talk about it.

First, let's establish two guiding principles since we are Christians living a Christ-centred life, meaning:

1. We want to see Jesus in all things.
2. We want to see all things in light of Jesus.

Once we master this, our primary world-view changes from self and others to Jesus. When we focus on Jesus, God alone is glorified. Let's jump straight into some mythbusting about Christmas.

God became man so that men can become children of God – CS Lewis.

Myth #1: The Bible Does Not Command Us to Celebrate Christmas

This essence of this argument is the absence of a prescript, meaning a command, regulation or a law authorizing a celebration.

In this sense, indeed, the Bible does not command us to celebrate Christmas. However, the Bible does not forbid us to celebrate Christmas either.

Therefore, we turn to biblical precept, meaning a behaviour, action or principle. I will highlight 3 Scriptures and 1 occurrence:

1. Zechariah 2:10, "*Shout and be glad, Daughter Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you,*" declares the LORD."
2. Psalm 87:6-7, "*The LORD will record in the register of the peoples: 'This one was born in Zion.'* Selah. Singers and pipers will proclaim, '*All my springs of joy are in You.*'"
3. Luke 2:20, "*The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*"
4. The festival of Hanukkah (Chanukah) is not commanded in Scripture. The events took place around 200 B.C. Although not commanded, it is clear from John 10:22-23 that Jesus attended Hanukkah.

Scripturally, the birth of Christ is a cause of thankfulness, joy and celebration. Keep in mind though, We do not celebrate as the world does. We praise God, glorify God and being a people upon whom God's favour rests, we enjoy Godly peace.

Myth #2: December 25th, Saturnalia and Sol Invictus

That pagans hold a festival on a given date does not rule that particular date out for any other purpose. It does not mean that it is impossible for Christians to celebrate Christmas and pagans their occurrence on the same date. Christmas is pagan only if you intend to worship pagan gods.

Saturnalia

Saturnalia is an ancient Roman festival in honour of the god, Saturn. The (Northern Hemisphere) winter solstice links with the festival, bringing the date to around 25 December. At saturnalia, there was feasting, goodwill, gifts etc. Saturnalia originated

as a farmer's festival to mark the end of the autumn planting season in honour of Saturn.

Saturnalia's practices are similar to Christmas, but its origins are very different from Christmas. Saturnalia celebrates an ending, but with Christmas, we celebrate a beginning! Do you see the difference?

Sol Invictus

Sol Invictus, meaning "unconquered Sun" was the official sun god of the later Roman Empire and a patron of soldiers. On 25 December AD 274 (i.e. well after Jesus' birth), the Roman emperor Aurelian made it an official religion.

Come December the 25th, what will you celebrate? God becoming man or Sol Invictus? Christmas is pagan only if you intend to worship pagan gods.

Footnote. Compared to the magnificence of God, Saturnus and Sol Invictus don't really qualify for the status "god" (small "g"). The context in which we see pagan gods is given in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, "*So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that 'An idol is nothing at all in the world' and that 'There is no God but one.'* For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

Myth #4: Christmas is not on or Around December 25th

Conception and Crucifixion

December 25th is a date of history. The angel Gabriel's announced Mary's conception while Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John the Baptist (Luke 1:26). The Byzantine calendar celebrated John's conception on September 23rd and his birth, nine months later would be June 24th. The annunciation of March 25th is 3 months before John's birth and 9 months before December.

The church father Chrysostom traces Zechariah's service to the Day of Atonement,

thus making the conception of John the Baptist happen in the Northern autumn. Add six months and Jesus' conception is in the Northern Hemisphere spring, around late March. Nine months later is late December.

There is the fascinating “integral age” tradition. This is the belief that the Prophets died on the same day they were conceived. Therefore if the date of the crucifixion is known, then His birthdate can be calculated. Evidence points to Jesus been crucified on April 3rd, A.D. 33. With the Annunciation on March 25th, His conception would have taken place a few days later around April 3rd, and His birth would've taken place some 9 months after that, roughly on December 25th.

What About the Sheep?

Some argue that Jesus couldn't have been born in December because the shepherds were out in their fields, and it would've been too cold for the sheep to be there. The average winter temperature in Israel is about 13 degrees, which is not too cold for sheep. The shepherds would have been with their sheep in the fields because the Awassi sheep in Israel give birth over December and January.

Now, December the 25th might not be the *exact* date of Jesus' birth, but it is close. However, we do not celebrate the date of December 25th, we celebrate the birth of Christ: God becoming man.

Footnote 1. We need to understand that every day belongs to God (Hebrews 2:10-18), including December 25th. Christians don't have to find an opening in the pagan calendar to celebrate anything; indeed it is paganism that is hijacking one of God's days.

Footnote 2.

Looking back in history, it appears that Emperor Aurelian introduced paganism to December 25th in 274 and in so doing give a pagan significance to a date already of importance to Roman Christians.

Footnote 3. The “anti-Christmas” movement sometimes draws into their arguments some writings of the church fathers (Cyprian, Tertullian, Origen, Chrysostom and

Augustine) to prove their point that Christmas is about Sol Invictus etc. But when the same writings of the church fathers are considered in the correct context, they offer up little credible support of the movement's arguments.

Conclusion

Christmas is not the time to show everyone that you can decorate, bake and sing. We do this in love because the love of Christ adds sincerity and a desire to share the Good News in all possible ways. Decorating, baking and singing at Christmas time is part of the celebration through which the Christ of Christmas is proclaimed.

We celebrate Christmas because, as the angel said, because the birth of Jesus Christ is "good news." Good news is meant to be celebrated. In fact, the angel said the news of Jesus' birth would cause "great joy" and would be "for all the people." (Luke 2:10-11). Even the shepherds took note of Jesus' birth and instead of returning to the sheep with a sense of deep disappointment, Luke 2:20 explicitly states that they "*glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen.*"

In celebrating Christmas, we thankfully celebrate our Saviour, because we needed deliverance. God got involved, He came in love to rescue us from certain death.

Next week, we look at the symbols of Christmas such as the Christmas tree. Spoiler alert... it's ok to have a Christmas tree!

Let us look forward to the celebration of the birth of Christ – who changed the dynamic between God and man.

Amen.