



By Dr. Richard Youngblood

Question: Since we do not really know what day of the year Jesus was born and many Christmas customs came from pagan religions, should Christians celebrate December 25 as the birthday of Jesus?

The many uncertainties that exist about our winter Christmas celebrations have led to different views of Christmas. For some people, Christmas is entirely a secular season for partying. They give little or no thought to the fact that Jesus was ever born into our world. Others believe in Jesus, but refuse to connect with Christmas. They oppose the religious emphasis on the holiday because the actual day and month of the birth of Jesus is not known and because many of our Christmas traditions originated in paganism, not in Christianity. These people may participate in Christmas as a time for family, love and giving; but they do not celebrate the holiday as the birthday of Jesus.

However, I doubt that Jesus is upset with anyone honoring his birth on December 25 or any other day of the year. While we do need to separate fact from fiction in our Christmas traditions, most believers in Jesus would love to see more, not less, attention given to him all through the year. If we eliminate our Christmas presentations of the birth of our Savior and King, we greatly reduce the exposure many people have to the salvation and hope that comes through Jesus.

The celebration of Christmas stands as a great witness to the fact that the Son of God did come into our world. What began with a birth to a young virgin—not in a king's palace but in a stable in the little town of Bethlehem—has resulted in the world's most popular holiday. Although the birth of Jesus had been foretold hundreds of years before and was announced by angels from heaven to humble shepherds in the field, few on earth at the time were aware of when it occurred. Now, even some countries that claim little or no connections with the Christian faith celebrate Christmas as a holiday. More great art has been painted, music composed and inspiring literature written about Christmas and the birth of Jesus than any other single event. More is done to help and bless those who are less fortunate at this time of year than any other. No one should be hungry at Christmas. Even opposing armies at war have been known to have lain down their weapons for at least a temporary peace in celebration of Christ's birth. How can we explain this powerful impact of Christmas after more than 2000 years? Christmas testifies that Jesus is no mere legend but is indeed the Son of God.

Because of the good that has come from our Christmas celebrations, Christians should be glad for this opportunity to bring praise and honor to the Son of God. We recognize that we have no way of knowing what day Jesus was actually born, but we also see nothing wrong with a time of emphasis on the coming of the Christ into this world. As for having pagan backgrounds, our traditions of today have no more to do with pagan origins than does the use of the names of the days of the week. These all come from the names of ancient pagan mythological gods. To decorate a Christmas tree no more means that we worship trees than speaking of Sunday, Monday or Thursday means that we believe in the false gods from which these words come.

For all humanity, the greatest single event that has ever occurred was not man's exploration of outer space but was the coming of Immanuel ("God with us") from heaven to earth. Born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit of God, Christ combined the two natures: that of God and of man. He put on our skin and lived a life of poverty among us. He experienced the same joys and faced the same pains, grief, rejection and difficulties that we face in this sinful world. Therefore, he is able to act as our representative before God, our high priest who offered himself for our sin. In him we see human life as it was intended. By his coming into our world, he confirmed God's infinite love, compassion and understanding of us. He suffers for us and with us.

Yes, we do need to separate fact from fiction about Christ and Christmas; but let people everywhere join in singing his praise whenever we can, even on December 25. "Joy to the world, the Lord is come."

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