

# *Should Christians Celebrate Christmas?*

(Luke 2: 1-7)

- I. When was Jesus born?
  - A. Many Christians have been taught that Jesus could not possibly have been born in December. The primary argument against a December date involves the supposed habits of Judean shepherds and their sheep. In essence, it is argued that the sheep are not on the hillsides (as the Bible indicates they were) in the month of December. Therefore, it is argued, Jesus must have been born in the spring, when sheep would be grazing outside the fold.
  - B. Such, however, is not accurate. In the middle of the month of December, Judea experiences a rainy season that promotes substantial grass growth by the end of the month. In a typical year, shepherds graze their sheep on the Judean hillsides the last two weeks in December. In addition, the temperatures are reasonably mild that time of the year.
  - C. In addition, the Bible presents strongly indicates the possibility that Jesus was born in December.
    1. Before his death, David assembled the materials that would later become Solomon's Temple. According to I Chronicles 24, he also organized the priesthood into twenty-four orders—two orders to serve in the temple for each month of the year.
    2. The order of Abijah (the 8<sup>th</sup> order—I Chron. 24:10) served in the fourth month of the year. Remember, the Jewish year begins with a month corresponding to our April. The fourth month, therefore, would be July. The order of Abijah served the temple in the month of July.
    3. Luke 1:5 indicates that Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was of the order of Abijah—serving his priestly term in the month of July.
    4. Following his priestly service in July, Zechariah's wife Elisabeth became pregnant (Luke 1:24). Therefore, Elisabeth conceived either in August or September. Her first month would be September or October.
    5. Luke 1:26 states that the Virgin Mary conceived in the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Elisabeth's pregnancy—either February or March. Mary's first month was either March or April, and her ninth month was either November or December.
    6. Remember, the rainy season in Judea does not begin until sometime in the middle of December. Given the fact that the sheep were grazing on the hillsides, Jesus must have been born in late December. Although the exact date of Christ's birth is unknown, it may be that God in His providence has directed Christians to celebrate on the 25<sup>th</sup> because it is the correct date. At any rate, the 25<sup>th</sup> is very close to, if not exactly, the correct date.
- II. What about the supposed pagan origins of Christmas?

- A. While December 25 was a significant date for some pagan religions, such association does not forbid its use as a Christian holiday.
- B. Christ's victory over Greek and Roman paganism may be seen by His dominance of their formerly pagan holiday.
- C. Traditions of Christmas may frequently be traced to Christian, rather than pagan origins:
  - 1. The Christmas tree—Lutherans cherish the story of Martin Luther's midnight walk on Christmas Eve. It is said that he was so taken with the beauty of stars shining through the bows of a pine tree that he hewed down a tree, brought it home, and decorated it with candles.
    - a. Regardless of origin, the Christmas tree is widely regarded as a decoration—not an object of worship.
    - b. The Christmas tree may be explained to symbolize the tree upon which Jesus, the Light of the World, died.
  - 2. Santa Claus
    - a. While Santa Clause as we know him is certainly mythological, the origin of Santa Clause is actually Christian.
    - b. St. Nicholas, in the fourth century, modestly filled the Episcopal see of Myra in Lycia, never dreaming that he was to be the patron saint of Russia, of thieves and boys and girls, and at last, in his Dutch name as Santa Claus, to enter the Christmas mythology of half the Christian world. [Will Durant, *The Age of Faith*, p. 62]

### III. The Biblical Basis for Celebrating Christmas

- A. The Bible nowhere specifically commands the celebration of Christmas, nor does the New Testament require the commemoration of Christ's birth on a particular day.
- B. However, the celebration of extra-Biblical holidays is not forbidden in the Bible.
  - 1. The Jews celebrated many feasts that were commanded by the Lord—Passover, Trumpets, etc.
  - 2. The Jews also commemorated holidays not specifically sanctioned by the Lord—Purim (Mentioned in Esther, but not commanded by God) and later Hanukah.
  - 3. Nowhere does the Scripture condemn extra-Biblical holiday celebrations.
- C. Romans 14:1-12 specifically states that the celebration of holidays for New Testament believers is perfectly acceptable, though not required (14:5, 6).
  - 1. Believers should not judge each other based on holiday observance/non-observance (1-4).
  - 2. Christians are at liberty to choose between observance and non-observance (5).
  - 3. Should one observe a special holiday, it must be observed as unto the Lord, with Christ the central theme (6).
  - 4. We must not condemn each other for holiday observances (10).