

- C) Third, the first Christmas was celebrated by Joseph & Mary in worshipful giving to the Lord (Luke 2:21-24). Joseph & Mary could give very little to God, but they still gave generously. Are you worshiping God with your giving during the Christmas season?
- D) Fourth, Joseph & Mary worshipped God at the birth of their son, and taught Him (Luke 2:51-52) the significance of His own birth. Christian parents should assure that their children do not 'X' out Jesus from Christmas by teaching them the great story of His birth (cf. Luke 2). Is Christ taught in your home at Christmas?
- E) Fifth, Jesus' birth redefined history forever (note BC/AD). God promises that Christ will seem like "foolishness" to the world, but salvation for His people (1st Corinthians 1:18-31). Christmas (for Christians) should distinctively proclaim salvation in Christ for all who might be observing. Do others see salvation in Christ in your Christmas celebrations?
- F) Sixth, Jesus' birth was offensive, threatening and produced violent (even deadly) responses (Matthew 2:16-18). It is a great blessing to share in Christ through suffering circumstances (Philippians 3:10). In all circumstances, STAND FIRM (2nd Corinthians 6:1-10). Is your celebration of Christmas more important than the response of others?
- G) Seventh, God gave us a great gift in Christ at Christmas. It would seem only appropriate to also give gifts to others at this time of year. God's gift was one of reconciling mankind to God through Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:20). Is there an important relationship in your life that requires reconciliation in the "Spirit" of Christmas?

Putting Christ Back In Xmas

Long Beach Alliance Church • December 25th, 2005 • Merry Christmas! • Pastor Chris Lankford

**FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN,
UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN: AND
THE GOVERNMENT SHALL BE
UPON HIS SHOULDER: AND
HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED
WONDERFUL, COUNSELLOR,
THE MIGHTY GOD, THE
EVERLASTING FATHER, THE
PRINCE OF PEACE.
~ISAIAH 9:6 (KJV)**

1) The Birth Of Christ Was Always In The Plan

- A) From the beginning of the Bible (Genesis 3:15), and at all points since (Isaiah 9:6-7) the plan of God has been to defeat sin and save His people through the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Matthew 2:21).
- B) God's plan to reach the whole world with the Messiah is seen clearly in Jesus' lineage (Matthew 1:1-17, Luke 3:23-38). Especially note the women in Matthew's genealogy (Matthew 1:3, 5, 6, 16), along with the connection from Adam (Luke 3:38), Abraham (Matthew 1:2); and King David (1:6).

- C) Christmas has always been a celebration of this truth, that Jesus Christ came into the world, "clothed" in humility (Philippians 2:3-8; Luke 2:24) to be the Savior (Luke 2:1-16).

2) Arguments Over Influences

- A) December 25th has been the recognized date of Christmas since the fourth century* (at the latest). Other traditions have followed (Christmas trees, yule logs, etc.) which were often assimilated with Christian purposes into Christian traditions.

- B) One particularly popular tradition came from an actual person, St. Nicholas, the Bishop of Myra (present-day Turkey). St. Nicholas' legendary gift giving and generosity were foundationally significant for our modern-day American tradition of Santa Claus ("Father Christmas" in Europe).

* Christmas was not an important festival until around the 300's when church leaders embraced December 25th (for the most part) as the date of Christ's birth. It was in this time period that church leaders encouraged congregants to observe the birth of Christ with reverence and worship. Interestingly, the dates for Christmas were attached to the date of Easter (originally). In ancient Jewish traditions (not supported in Scripture), the Jews believed that God appointed the great prophets with an "integral age," meaning that the great prophets died on the same day they were conceived or were born. It is simple to determine when Christ died (since it is attached to the Passover weekend). That date was determined (with a fair amount of accuracy) to be March 25th. Thus, the Feast of Annunciation (celebration of the angel announcing to Mary that she would give birth to the Messiah) is March 25th. 9 months later? December 25th, the date for Christmas. Since December 25th is also close to pre-Christian pagan festivals (Saturnalia, and others), Christians simply "took-over" the pagan dates for their own. This was not uncommon in the early centuries of the church, as they saw this as a "Christianizing" of pagan culture. To say that Christmas was "originally a pagan holiday," is clearly overstating the matter, however, it is remarkable that from the beginning Christmas was meant to be a celebration of God's plan to save His people from sin -- both in the culture, and in eternity. (From various sources, esp. "Why December 25th?" by Gene Edward Veith, Cultural Editor for World Magazine, December 10th, 2005, page 32).

- C) St. Nicholas was a delegate and contributor at the Council of Nicea (325 AD), where some of the important decisions regarding Jesus Christ's deity were first articulated in print. St. Nick was so angered by heresies proposed by Arius (whose view that Jesus was only a man, and not actually God in the flesh), he got up and slapped Arius across the face at one point in the proceedings (he got in trouble for that).

- D) Despite these rich traditions which are associated with the Christmas season, most are not understood or observed in modern-day America. Rather, Christmas has become a highly commercialized "holiday" season, syncretistically assimilating all faiths and perspectives (Christmas, Chanukah, Kwanza, etc.) rather than celebrating the Greatest Gift, Jesus Christ.

- E) As Christianity did with pagan influences tens of hundreds of years ago, the birth of Christ and its significance is now threatened with being assimilated into Western culture.

3) How Can Christians Respond At Christmas?

- A) First, imitate Christ's attitude of humility (Philippians 2:3-7). Jesus' gift was Himself, wrapped in humbling humanity. Christmas should be a season of self-giving, more than gift giving. How have you given yourself in Christ's name?

- B) Second, when Jesus was born, angels (Luke 2:13-14), shepherds (2:15-20), and wise men (Matthew 2:11) all worshipped Jesus. Christmas should be a season of celebrative worship. Has your Christmas been about worshipping Jesus Christ?