

BIRTH OF CHRIST: FACT AND FICTION

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INTRODUCTION: SCRIPTURE READING - (JOHN 18:33-38)

A. This is the time of year in which our society, and even nations around the world celebrate Christmas:

1. For many people Christmas is simply a secular holiday – A time for gathering with family and others we love, a time for giving & receiving gifts, & a time to head home & eat good meals!
2. For others, especially around here, Christmas is a time in which people celebrate the birth of Jesus
 - a. On the radio, the tv, & in stores & we hear a lot of religious music written about His birth
 - b. We pass manger scenes in church yards & people's yards alongside other religious symbols
 - c. Many of our friends, neighbors, coworkers openly discuss spiritual things now than any other time – This time of year seems to make even the heathen try to look religious!
3. We may feel uncomfortable by the taking advantage of spiritual things as a marketing tool or churches creating unauthorized activities during this season – Is there anything to be thankful for?
 - a. Can't we be thankful for any time so many people are more conscious of spiritual things?
 - b. Shouldn't we be thankful for opportunities Christmas brings to engage ourselves in spiritual discussions and teach other people the truth? We don't have to work to create doors of opportunity for teaching because they are everywhere we turn!

B. With so much being sung about, talked about, and pictured around us let's spend our time today looking at Jesus' birth from the standpoint of separating what is fact from what is fiction!

I. SEPARATING THE FACT FROM THE FICTION & THE REALITY FROM THE MISCONCEPTIONS :

A. Due to the way it's being presented, many can get the facts of His birth confused with the fiction:

1. Many people's idea of Jesus' birth is formed by how the story is told & the many nativity scenes
 - a. The problem is many don't go back to the Bible, so it's very easy to walk away believing the fiction as fact! (i.e. movies on Christ) → Tell the story as commonly presented
 - b. The story sounds nice but is it how things really took place? What is fact & what is fiction?
2. Many believe they arrived in the town of Bethlehem and wound up staying in the stable because they couldn't find an inn, or hotel, that had any available room **(Luke 2:4-7)**
 - a. Indicates they'd been there for a while – likely visiting family & friends since this was home
 - b. The idea of an "inn" (hotel) may not be right since it's a different Greek word from what's translated as a hotel... Likely a private guest room **(Mark 13:13-14; Luke 10:33-35)**
3. The traditional picture shows three wise men coming to visit Jesus while He was yet a new born:
 - a. First of all, the Bible never says there were three wise men, just that they brought three gifts – Could have been four, two, or any other plural number **(Matthew 2:11)**
 - b. They are often pictured as just men who were wise... Or 3 kings wearing crowns & purple robes. But the term translated "wise men" most often refers to sorcerers or those who study the stars. Learned astrologers is probably the best picture **(Acts 13:6-8)**
 - c. They didn't visit Jesus in the manger in a stable but to a house and by the time-line they gave Herod it had been around 2 years since the star appeared **(Matt 2:11, 7 & 16)**
4. There are various traditional assumptions made that the scriptures just do not make:
 - a. The angels who appeared to the shepherds are often shown singing, but the text just says they were praising God and speaking, "Glory to God in the highest..." **(Luke 2:13-14)**
 - b. Angels are often pictured present at Jesus' birth – Seems likely, but the Bible doesn't say it
 - c. "Away In The Manger" says, "The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes but little Lord Jesus

- no crying He makes.” – Since He took on the form of a man, He would’ve cried often!
5. Finally, while Mary was certainly a virgin when she had Jesus, some people say she remained a virgin for the rest of her life. Mary went on to have more sons and daughters! **(Mark 6:3)**

B. Facts And Fiction Concerning The Celebration Of His Birth:

1. While many are getting more educated about it, some still believe Jesus was born on Dec 25, 0:
 - a. The Bible simply gives us a general timeframe by who was ruling at the time **(Luke 2:1-2)**
 - b. December 25, is unlikely since the shepherds had their sheep in the field at night! In the winter months shepherds brought them home... plus it gets very cold there at night!
 - c. The year zero doesn’t exist! Our calendars jump from 1 BC to 1 AD – Most scholars agree that when the current calendar dates were set they were set by inaccurate information and that Jesus was born a few years earlier – 3 BC to 5 BC
 - d. People have debated the day for ages & they will continue to do so! The fact is that the Bible doesn’t tell us when He was born and gives us no reason to need to know that!
2. So we ask, “Why was December 25 chosen as the day to celebrate Jesus’ birth and who chose it?”
 - a. Nothing is said of a religious observance of His birth or for the first 3 centuries after Christ With opposition Pope Liberius adopted the day in 354 AD & became accepted when the first “Christ Mass” was held by Pope Sixtus III – It is originally a Catholic creation!
 - b. Dec. 25 falls with the date of a celebration by the Romans to their primary god... The sun! They celebrated the birth of Mithras, a Persian sun god, supposedly born on that day
 - c. Mario Righetti: “To facilitate the acceptance of the faith by the pagan masses, the church of Rome found it convenient to institute the 25th of December as the feast of the birth of Christ to divert them from the pagan feast, celebrated on the same day in honor of the ‘Invincible Sun’ Mithras, the conqueror of darkness.” (Manual of Liturgical History, 1955, Vol 2, pg 67)
3. While initially protestants rejected the celebration of Christmas, it has become widely accepted & celebrated religiously by many groups – Are such celebrations okay? **(2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 7:12-14)**
 - a. If we wish to follow the Bible pattern, to be like the church we read about established by Christ & His apostles, we cannot celebrate it as a church because it’s not there!
 - b. One objects, “But the Bible doesn’t say not to!” This one doesn’t understand God’s authority! The scriptures clearly affirm God’s silence is prohibitive, not permissive!
 - c. Another says, “It’s a good thing! A day of worship and thankfulness!” Just ask Nadab & Abihu! When we worship God if it’s not according to God’s word it’s not good!
 - d. When God wants us as a church to keep observances or celebrations He gives the time frame for doing so & instructions for carrying it out! **(Lev 23:27; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 11)**
4. While we see the error around us, we must be on guard in going to the opposite extreme:
 - a. We may feel guilty if we start singing “Joy To The World.” Some feel it’s okay to lead songs about His birth as long as its during the month of July! It’s rarely preached on!
 - b. We tend to feel like we must run from doing anything that looks like the religious world around us **(1 Thess 5:22)** → In condemnation we can only run so far as truth leads us!
 - c. His birth is part of the Bible, the gospel, and is something we certainly should be thankful for & praise God for! Avoiding this subject robs us of joy, spiritual strength, & hope
5. Is it okay for a person to use this time of year to remember the birth of Christ? **(Romans 14)**
 - a. To create a special religious ceremony would be without authority, especially within a local church, but an individual using this time to think more about this event is different!
 - b. By remembering the event I mean to meditate, study, pray, & sing about it – Would it ever be wrong to do this with any aspect of the life of Christ? How do you condemn that?

- c. People in the 1st Century were allowed to observe days as long as they didn't violate God's word, their conscience, or cause others to sin – What about Christmas & Jesus' birth?
 - d. What about one who was fully devoted but in religious error? They obey the gospel & for a while may feel compelled to continue to remember it on an individual level to God!
6. I know of some Christians who object to any celebration of Christmas - whether civil or religious:
- a. First, if you feel it's not correct you better not do it! If not from faith it's sin! **(Rom 14:23)**
 - b. Is circumcision sinful? It is when done as a religious act, as an attempt to mingle the old law with the new law that it becomes wrong! What about Christmas? **(Gal 5:2-6)**
 - c. Even atheists put up Christmas trees, lights, & give presents! This doesn't mean we're making a special religious observance of the day that isn't authorized in scriptures!
 - d. Some Christians are afraid to do anything that would cause anyone to think they are like the religious world – The same logic can be applied in the positive direction! We don't want to leave the wrong impression that we aren't religious or spiritual people!

C. With misconceptions out there & groups celebrating it in an unauthorized way, what does His birth mean to us? Many things cause us to think about it right now, so here's some thoughts:

1. People say, "Remember the reason for the season!" – Well, we need to be sure we remember the reason for His birth in the first place! Some quickly forget why He was born **(1 Tim 3:14-16)**
 - a. Why do many love so much His birth & worship with such emotion during Christmas, but pay little attention to the rest of His life during the rest of the year? The little baby Jesus in a manger doesn't require anything of them! But the baby Jesus grew up!
 - b. The same Jesus is the Jesus of the cross! He is the same Jesus who's teachings drew lines in the sand and demanded righteous living! He's the same Jesus who calls for self denial, total devotion to Him, dying with Him, being baptized, and carrying our cross!
 - c. It was for all these reasons Jesus was born! His birth was with a purpose! **(John 18:36-37)**
2. His birth reminds us of God's great love for us & His desire to save us **(John 3:16; Matt 1:21-23)**
3. The birth of Jesus reminds us of the surety of God's prophecies and promises:
 - a. Notice the emphasis **(Matthew 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17)** – All prophecies of His birth were fulfilled
 - b. Most estimates say there are over 300 prophecies concerning Him – It's as if God was painting a picture saying, "Here is what the Messiah is going to look like"
 - c. George Heron, a French mathematician, calculated the odds of one man fulfilling only 40 of those prophecies are 1 in 10 to the power of 157 - A 1 followed by 157 zeros. Comparatively, your odds on winning the state lottery are 14 followed by 6 zeros.
 - d. When God gives us a prophecy or a promise it can be counted on! No man, circumstances, force, or the passing of time can nullify His words! We can set our hope in His word!