

A Time For Truth

By

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Real Joy is found in truth, not fiction! Bible scholars generally are agreed that Jesus was not born on December 25; in fact, that He was not born in December at all. September seems to be the most likely month, and some have worked this down to September 21 or 22.

The apostles and early Christians celebrated the death of Jesus, as He had requested, not His birth. It was not until the third century that some began to observe his birthday, and not until the fourth century that it was accepted by most churches. The Roman Catholic Church, under Bishop Liberius, substituted the birthday of Jesus for the heathen solstice festival, which celebrated the birthday of the Sun-god, Helios (Sol = Mithra) on December 25. By the year 450 AD the 25th of December came to be observed throughout the churches and its name derived from the emphasis placed upon the Roman Church “mass”: Christ’s mass = Christmas.

We know this about the birth of Jesus: He was born to die for our sins. The conception of Jesus, without a human father, was a great miracle (an immaculate conception), and His birth was an event of great magnitude, but it was only the beginning stage of His glorious accomplishment. Without His sinless life, His death on the cross, and His resurrection, there would be no atonement for our sins, no reconciliation with God, no divine presence of God’s spirit, and no hope of our own resurrection from death to immortality.

Real joy comes from this: *knowing that our sins are forgiven*. This requires that we realize that there is such a thing as sin, that we are guilty, and that we deserve death for it. But who wants to think about sin or guilty in the midst of Christmas festivities, when our time is occupied with material preparations and our thoughts with temporal pleasures.

Maybe that’s why the joy at Christmas time is only simulated—unreal, trumped up, produced by an external atmosphere of beautiful lights, music, parties, booze and everything that can be thought of to bring merriment and pleasure. But for those with no relationship to Christ, the joy is all dashed to pieces the day after, because the celebration was not about Christ and what he has done, and therefore nothing was changed.

One day Jesus will return and all the dead will be resurrected. **Judgment Day!** Then, our greatest desire will be forgiveness. When we stand before the Judge (God will judge all the world by Jesus Acts 17:31) our minds will not be focused on Christ’s birth, but on His death!

We will not be thinking of a Christmas tree, but the tree of crucifixion, because it was our sins that put Him there.

We will not be thinking of a babe in a manger, but of a Man who was in a tomb until God raised Him up and made Him King of kings and Lord of lords.

We will not be thinking of the fun we had at the Christmas party , but of sin committed at all the parties...the drunkenness, the lust, the gossip, the greed, the foul thoughts and selfish acts.

We will not be thinking of giving and getting, but of God's gift of His only begotten Son, and how we have received or rejected that gift.

The birth of Jesus gives real joy only to those who, through genuine faith, receive the benefits of the grace which was brought by His death and resurrection.

Most of the traditions which are part of Christmas have their roots in pagan practices—the tree, bells, exchanging gifts, mistletoe, the Yule log—but they are generally observed without any religious connotations at all. They have simply become traditions of habit.

White Christmas is hailed as a time to remember Christ's birth, the character that dominates the Christmas scene is not Jesus, but Santa Claus. Parents who never attempt to teach their children the truth about Jesus, are eager to have them believe in Santa as soon as they are old enough to sit on his lap at the mall.

Newspapers and television, which are careful never to expose the true nature of Jesus as God's Son and our only Savior, are just as careful to exalt Santa Claus, and to ridicule anyone who would say he is not real. In fact, the god of Christmas, to all appearances, is not the God of Creation, but Santa Claus as he is portrayed in every form and in every way possible at this season of the year.

This is a Christmas tradition with the potential for great harm. By nature children are anxious to believe their parents. When they encourage a child to believe in Santa Claus, the child accepts by faith all that is said about him. They hear the song, "Santa Claus is Coming to Town," and are impressed with the message.

"He knows when you are sleeping,
He knows when you're awake;
He knows if you've been bad or good,
So be good for goodness sake."

It doesn't take a psychologist to figure out that a child sees Santa as a god-like person, who sees all, knows all, can be everywhere at once, and can give whatever one asks for. The concept a child has of Santa is easily transferred to his or her concept of God.

Note some of the lessons the Santa Claus story teaches:

1. One is acceptable to Santa by being "nice" as opposed to "naughty." This translates into being acceptable to God by just being a decent person.
2. No matter how disobedient the child has been, at Christmas he will get something from Santa anyway. This strengthens the idea held by many, that even though there are warnings about judgment and punishment, in the end, God will accept everyone.
3. Santa just visits once a year, and then only when people are asleep. No wonder the child grows up with no awareness of God having a part in his daily life. We only need to be concerned about Him in regard to Judgment Day, or as we approach death. Even then there's not much to worry about if we can say we've been "good." And most everyone judges himself as fairly "good."
4. Children may write letters to Santa, tell their parents what they want Santa to bring them, and sit on his lap in the department store naming the gifts they want from him. Usually it is implied by parent or "Santa" that he will deliver as instructed. Some parents go into debt to see that the child's faith in Santa is not betrayed. But often the prayer to Santa goes unanswered. Early on this is translated to mean that prayer to God is only a form, he doesn't necessarily listen, or if He does, He doesn't answer.

When the child finally discovers the truth, that he has been deceived, eh may doubt other things his parents tell him. Is the story of Jesus also just a fairy tale? What a strange irony, to insist that children be honest and tell the truth, while all the time lying to them about Santa Claus.

Before you accuse me of trying to take the joy out of Christmas, read the rest of the story! Jesus, the Word made flesh, is the One who could say, “I am the truth,” and “The truth will make you free” (John 14:6, 8:32). Shouldn’t His birth be celebrated in truth? And don’t we want freedom for our children? Then teach them the truth. In fact, parents are commanded to do this. “The father to the children shall make known thy truth” (Isa. 38:19).

Tell them that the jolly fat man with the white beard and the “Ho, Ho, Ho” is a fictional character, like Batman or Superman. They can enjoy him as such, but he has nothing to do with reality. Let them know that Santa doesn’t bring them anything, that it’s their parents who buy these things because they love them. Why should Santa get credit for bringing them fun and joy, when you are the one working daily to do this? Tell them that the real giver of all good gifts is God, and the giving of His Son is the greatest gift of all (James 1:17, John 3:16).

Most important, teach them the whole story of Jesus, His immaculate conception, virgin birth, sinless life, death for our sins and resurrection to immortality. Impress upon them that His birth was essential, but it was His death for our sins that brings the real joy to the world. Tell them that He will return to give immortal life to His people.

Christmas will continue to be the most widely celebrated holiday of the year, whether observed out of sincere faith or pagan tradition. It can be an opportunity for believers to call attention to man’s desperate need of a Savior and God’s only solutions. It’s time Christian parents exalted Jesus above tradition. **Tell the children the truth. Santa Claus is NOT coming, but Jesus is!**

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