

12.13.20 ~ The Marvelous Message of Christmas!

Twelve days from today we will celebrate the birth of God's Son, Jesus Christ, who came to save us from sin's penalty.

There are 195 countries in the world today, of which 160 celebrate Christmas in some way or another, while 35 do not in anyway observe Christmas.

It is interesting that most of the world, until the later part of the 20th century, used a dating system focused on the birth of Jesus Christ, using the designation of B.C., "Before Christ," in order to set apart history occurring before His birth; and A.D., Anno Domini, [Latin, "in the year of our Lord"] for history occurring after His birth.

There is a growing effort (by academia, the scientific community, and atheists) to delete BC and AD, replacing them with the designations BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era); this is an attempt to remove Christ and Christianity from all calendars and calendrical systems. But isn't it interesting that the pivotal date for BCE and CE is the very same as that used for BC and AD, i.e., the birth of Christ.

It can be said that those who deny God's existence and therefore Christ's advent to earth, have their own holiday, celebrated each year on April 1, i.e., April Fool's Day. **Psalm 14:1** tells us the reason for this holiday, because "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'"

The godless spirit of the world also tries to remove the Christmas by changing the greeting of Merry Christmas to Merry xmas, Happy Holiday, or Season's Greetings.

But Christmas is a compound word made up of two words: Christ [the Anointed or Holy One], and Mass [an assembly or gathering for religious observance].

Christmas celebrates and honors the birth of God's One and Only Son, Who came to save us; God's ultimate gift is named Jesus [God's Salvation], and He is called Immanuel [God with us].

But was Jesus born on December 25? What do the Scriptures reveal about that? I'm glad you asked. Please turn to **Luke 1:26-27, 30-31, 34-36, 39-41...** At the time of Mary's conception (through the Holy Spirit), she went to visit her aunt Elizabeth, and upon greeting her, Elizabeth's baby "leaped in her womb," for Elizabeth, was six months pregnant with John, who would become John the baptizer, proclaiming (**John 1:23**), "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said," (**29**), "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Luke 1:56 says Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months. According to the Jewish religious calendar, concerning the division of the priests, Mary's visit to Elizabeth, at which time Mary was pregnant, would have been late in the month of Kislev (November-December),.

Kislev is when Hanukkah (the Festival of Lights) is celebrated, which begins on the 25th day of Kislev (late December) and lasts for eight days. The Jews celebrate the Festival of Lights while Christians celebrate Jesus Christ, Who is (**John 8:12**), "the Light of the world."

John the baptizer, Jesus' cousin, would have been born during Passover, in the month of Nisan (March-April); he was six months older than Jesus. Remember, Gabriel announced Mary's pregnancy when Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John; therefore, Jesus would have been born in the month of Tishri (September-October), at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Our celebration of December 25 doesn't line up with the actual birth of Jesus, but it is very probable that it lines up with the time of His conception, when the biological life of Jesus began in the womb of Mary.

Luke 2:8 tells us, "there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night," when Jesus was born.

What does the record of weather patterns in Israel tells us? A little research on past and present weather conditions in Palestine will lead you to conclude that there were most likely no shepherds out in the fields around Bethlehem, at the end of December, for it is often below freezing and very rainy or snowing.

Here is some insight from the Old Testament:

Ezra 10:9, records that, "all the men of Judah and Benjamin [were] assembled at Jerusalem... ..in the ninth month (Kislev) on the twentieth day of the month, and all the people sat in the open square *before* the house of God, trembling because of the heavy [and cold] rain."

Jeremiah 36:22 tells us, "the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month (Kislev), with a *fire* burning in the brazier [or fire pot, i.e., a container that holds hot coals) before him," because of the cold.

The climate of Palestine in December, during Bible times, especially in Jerusalem and Bethlehem (which sit at an elevation of 2500 ft.), could be very cold and wet (dropping to well below freezing at night), i.e., "it was not the practice of the shepherds of Judea to be out with their flocks in the open fields later than about the end of October; it was the custom then (as it is now) for the shepherds "to withdraw the flocks from the open fields and house them for the winter."

Turn to **Luke 2:1-7...** Luke says there was a decree issued at the time of Jesus' birth, that a census would be taken of all the inhabitants of the earth, and everyone was to return to their hometown, the town of their ancestors (Rome the world's Ruler was taking inventory).

It wouldn't be sensible to hold a census in December (if you wanted an accurate count), much more likely, a census would be taken after the harvest season, during September-October, when the weather was more moderate and dry, allowing for safer and easier travel.

So, why was December 25 chosen to be set apart as the celebration day for the birth of Christ? That is a great question, let's see if we can find an answer:

The Romans celebrated the Festival of Saturnalia in December, from about the 17th-25th, during which they worshipped the s-u-n god Saturn. Common customs during that festival were celebrations that included the exchanging of gifts, feasting, and decorating homes with evergreen boughs and lighted candles.

The decision to celebrate the birth of God's Son on December 25th, came about during the middle of the fourth century A.D., through the promotion of the Roman Emperor, Constantine the Great, after his supposed conversion to Christianity.

The celebration of Christ's birth during the winter solstice, seems to have been an attempt to Christianize the popular pagan celebrations already in place (in honor of the sun god), so that Christians could simultaneously honor and worship the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

The union of these celebrations brought about a bizarre mixture of both pagan and Christian elements that still exist today.

But regardless of the historic or pagan background of December's traditions, whether or not Jesus was born on December 25th, our purpose and pleasure during this time of year is to try and direct the hearts and minds of all people toward Jesus Christ, the Savior who has come.

The light of the world has indeed come, and the Christmas season, with all its celebrations, customs, and festivities, presents the church with a wonderful opportunity to both live out and share the good news of peace, love, faith, and hope that has been granted to everyone who believes in God's Son.

See **John 1:1-4, 14, 18...** Christmas is about the Incarnation of God's Son (full of grace and truth), i.e., God putting on flesh and living among us, in order to serve and exemplify the Father.

John 14:6-7, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." **9**, "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father."

Jesus made full and final payment for our sins by His own blood, as expressed through His words while on the cross (**Luke 23:34**), "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing," (**Mark 15:34**), "At the ninth hour (3pm) Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Before sundown Jesus declared (**John 19:30**), "'It is finished,' then He bowed His head and gave up His spirit."

Jesus paid [in full, by His own death] the penalty for our sins. This same Jesus, being fully man yet fully God, was taken down from the cross, placed in a tomb, and three days later He came out of the tomb alive.

Hebrews 9:26-28, "He [Christ] has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after

this *comes* judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him." **Hebrews 10:17-18**, "And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more. Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin."

Christmas is about God giving us His Son, the Messiah, sent to save us from the consequences and eternal curse of sin.

Christmas is a time when many people are more open to talking about the things of God, therefore, we ought to make the most of this opportunity to be witnesses of the marvelous message of God's greatest gift, His own Son.

Christmas is a time to honor the Savior's birth by sharing the message of His advent to earth in the flesh of a baby boy, named Jesus; God's Son, Immanuel.

The majority of the world's people either reject Jesus outright, are confused about Him, or are just indifferent toward Him and have instead, turned to man-centered religious rituals that are promoted and supported by network television, public education, the godless news media, and the commercial marketplace.

If you are a Christian, the greatest gift you can offer to an unbeliever is the Good News about the Special Child whose birthday we celebrate at Christmas: Jesus [God's Salvation], Immanuel [God with us], born to a virgin in Bethlehem, put to death on a cross at Calvary, buried in a borrowed tomb, only to come out alive on the third day, and for 40 days to show Himself to His followers, after which He ascended up into heaven before His disciples.

Because all this is true, and because God is loving, merciful, faithful, omniscient, omnipotent, and eternal, the words of Paul (**Romans 8:38-39**) should encourage and comfort all of us, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Please don't attempt to celebrate Christmas without knowing the One to Whom the celebration is directed, Jesus Christ, the Lord. Everyone who calls on Him for the forgiveness of sins will be saved, He turns no one away.

The Marvelous Message of Christmas, is this: God loves you so much that He gave up His own Son to die for your sins, so that you might believe in Him now, and live in heaven with Him forever; and for that reason we ought to unabashedly, fervently, and perpetually proclaim, **Merry Christmas!**

Pastor Mike
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