

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTMAS

1. Christmas is significant only in that it **represents the incarnation** of the God-man-savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, into human history.
 - a. One emphasis then is the **humanity of Jesus Christ**, albeit born of a virgin.
 - b. Christ's birth is the **fulfillment of** many Old Testament **prophecies**. (Micah 5:2; Isa. 7:14; 9:6, 7; Zech. 9:9; Psa. 72:10)
 - c. However, the great significance of Christmas is not the commemoration of the fulfilled prophecies but the **anticipation and foreshadowing** of Christ's messianic work, the saving work of the cross and His subsequent resurrection.
2. The Christmas story comes from the New Testament. (Luke 2:1-32 and Matt. 1:18-2:15)
 - a. The birth of Jesus Christ took place while Herod the Great was still living, not long before his death (Matt. 2:20, 22) yet possibly as much as two years before. (Matt. 2:7, 16)
 - b. The Jewish historian Josephus identifies the year of Herod's death as 4 B.C. He even tells us the time of the year, just before Passover (Nisan 14) and records an eclipse of the moon which preceded his last illness.
 - c. This eclipse has been dated astronomically as March 12, 4 B.C. So, the spring of 4 B.C. is the date of Herod's death and the last possible date for the birth of Jesus.
 - d. However, according to Matthew 2:16 Jesus could have been born in 5 or 6 B.C.
 - e. It is noted from Luke 2:8 that the shepherds were outside with their flocks, bivouacking in a mild time of the year, March to November. If it had been winter, the sheep would have been in fold.
 - f. **Possible dates** for the birth of Jesus Christ:

| <u>BIRTH</u> | <u>DEATH</u> | <u>AGE OF JESUS AT CRUCIFIXION</u> |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| (1) Mar. 1, 4B.C. | Wed., Apr. 28 or Nisan 14, 28 A.D. | 31 years |
| (2) Mar. - Nov. 5 B.C. | Wed., Apr. 28 or Nisan 14, 28 A.D. | 32 years |
| (3) Mar. - Nov. 6 B.C. | Wed., Apr. 28 or Nisan 14, 28 A.D. | 33 years |
| (4) Mar. - Nov. 7 B.C. | Wed., Apr. 7 or Nisan 14, 30 A.D. | 34 years |
| (5) Mar. 1, 4 B.C. | Wed., Apr. 25 or Nisan 14, A.D. 31 | 34 years |

NOTE: Jesus began His public ministry at about the age of 30. (Luke 3:23)

3. Jesus commanded us to **commemorate His death** not His birth. (Luke 22:19, 20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26)
 - a. In fact, the **exact date of Christ's birth** is obscured, indicating that the occurrence has more significance than the exact date.
 - b. The Hebrews celebrated basically seven feasts which portrayed Israel's national beginning, its historic position, and its prophetic future.
 - c. However, while the Hebrews recognized that Messiah was coming to deliver them, they had **no feast to anticipate His birth**, only Passover, First fruits, and Atonement, which anticipate His death and resurrection. (1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Cor. 15:23; Heb. 9:12, 24, 25; 10:12)
 - d. Therefore, while we recognize the **necessity for the birth** of Jesus Christ to fulfill His destiny: the **work of the cross, His resurrection, and His ruler-ship** in the Millennial Kingdom, we are not commanded to celebrate Christmas but rather His death until He returns for us at the "rapture." (Matt. 26:29; Mk. 14:25; Luke 22:16-18; 1 Cor. 11:26)
4. The first mention of the **observation of Christ's birthday** appeared, not in the New Testament, but **around 200 A.D.**
 - a. For many years several dates were used.
 - b. The date of **December 25th** was first mentioned **in 336 A.D.** because it coincided with the time of the "**Feast of Saturnalia**," which ran from Dec. 17-24th, celebrating Saturnus, the Roman god of agriculture.
 - c. **December 25th** was also the supposed birth date of the god "Mythra," the god of light, called the "sun of righteousness." This is an Iranian/Persian cult which blends the dualism of Mani (English is "mania") with the emotional initiations of the mystery religions.
5. The **real significance of Christmas** is found in the purpose for the incarnation:
 - a. Jesus was born to "**save His people from their sins.**" (Matt. 1:21; Lk. 2:11; Jn. 1:29)
 - b. Jesus was born to "**seek and to save that which was lost.**" (Luke 19:10)
 - c. Jesus was **born to die** (the crucifixion – payment for all of our sins). (Jn. 12:27; Matt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45; Lk. 2:7, 12 - "swaddling cloths")
 - d. Jesus was born to **destroy the works of the devil.** (1 Jn. 3:8)

- e. Jesus was **born to be a king** (resurrected and glorified).
(Zech. 9:9; Rev. 17:14; 19:16)
NOTE: The gifts of the magi for Jesus, “...*King of the Jews.*” (Matt. 2:2, 11)
(Matt. 27:37; Mk. 15:26, 32; Lk. 23:38; John 19:19-22)
- (1) **Gold** – represents the **royalty and deity of Jesus** and was given to kings.
 - (2) **Frankincense** – represents the **saving work of Jesus**; it is incense burned before a king; it represented the burnt offering in Israel.
 - (a) It is a type of the cross upon which Christ, “our burnt offering,” offered Himself. (Heb. 9:14)
 - (b) It is a type of Christ as our intercessor through whom our prayers and praises ascend to God the Father. (Heb. 13:15; Eph.5:2; Heb. 13:15)
 - (3) **Myrrh** – represents the **humanity of Jesus**; it is a gum resin used as an ingredient of perfume, often used for embalming and in making holy anointing oils
6. Christmas brings the promise of “*peace on earth,*” but only to those who accept reconciliation through the work of Christ (**Luke 2:14**) and not to those who remain in unbelief. (Matt. 10:34; Lk. 12:51; John 14:27; 16:33; 1 Thess. 5:3; Jer. 6:14; 8:11; Ezek. 13:10)
- a. **Peace** – is the result of the work of reconciliation. (Eph. 2:13-17; Jn. 14:27a)
 - b. **Reconciliation** – is the totality of the work of God toward mankind to restore the broken relationship and make peace. (2 Cor. 5:17-21; Rom. 5:8-11)
7. How people view Christmas and Jesus Christ:
- a. Unbelievers see **Jesus Christ as a baby**. (Herod – Matt. 2:13-16)
 - b. Baby believers see **Christ on the cross** providing their salvation. (1 Cor. 1:18)
 - c. Growing believers see **Christ in resurrection**. (1 Cor. 15:3ff; Acts 2:24-32)
 - d. Mature believers see **Christ in all His glory and majesty**. (1 Cor. 2:7, 8; Heb. 1:3; Phil. 3:20, 21; Col. 3:1-4)