

The Festival of Christmas

Throughout the world today, Christmas is being celebrated with much merry making and great jubilation, not only by Christians, but also by the people of other religion. We hear of people exchanging Christmas cards, of dinner parties and festivities, and of giving gifts to one another. Homes are decorated with Christmas trees, buntings, streamers and twinkling lights. The children gather together and jump with joy as they receive gifts from so called 'Father Christmas' or 'Santa Claus'. Mothers bake traditional Christmas cakes and families meet to share the traditional Christmas turkey and plum pudding. In traditional churches there are pageants to depict nativity scenes, Christmas bazaars, choir practices and carol singers from house to house. Oh yes, there is an atmosphere of joy, love and friendliness towards all. But side by side there is also a mood of drunken revelry, of engaging in lustful passions and of indulging in the desires of the flesh in the name of Jesus. Millions are spent on Christmas cards, decorations and gifts. No wonder, the shopkeepers look forward to Christmas with such eagerness!

Did you know that the Bible makes no mention of Christmas or even the celebration of Jesus' birthday? Nor is there any mention of the celebration of His birthday by His parents, Mary, Joseph, or even the disciples! Jesus, Himself never makes any mention of his birthday unlike many do these days! Nor is there any hint of Christians celebrating the birth of their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ in any of the writings of Peter, James, John or Paul. Then why do Christians the world over celebrate Christmas as the birthday of Jesus Christ? Why is Christmas such an important occasion for many, many Christians? Today, the Christmas season seems to be a license for all kinds of religious activities that amount to little more than tradition, ritual and custom.

It is necessary for every true child of God to take another look at the tradition of Christmas with an open mind. May the Holy Spirit help us to see whether the current concepts and practices are valid for the true believer. If the Holy Spirit would show us the truth we shall surely know what the true Christian attitude should be towards the celebration of Christmas, and we shall be set free from the bondage of the traditions of this world.

The Historical Background of Christmas

Have you seen or read about Santa Claus, carol singer softly singing 'silent night, holy night', holly and mistletoe, stockings filled with chocolates and presents, and of gaily decorated Christmas trees? What you have seen does not talk

of the true Christian spirit but of the evolution of the Christmas tradition that has sprung up and out of many older faiths and beliefs.

In the first three centuries after Christ walked upon this earth, there was no such festival as that of Christmas. The disciples and followers of Christ did not celebrate the birth nor did they commemorate the death of our Lord Jesus. In the face of heavy persecution, the Christians of that day were given to following after the footsteps of Jesus. Their only desire was to glorify His name and imitate Him inwardly. There was no attempt to celebrate His birth in any kind of outward manifestation. They cherished His teachings and thoughts and celebrated His presence in their inward beings.

During the fourth century, Emperor Constantine of Rome adopted Christianity as the state religion. This had a tremendous impact upon Christianity. In the first place, Christians were no longer persecuted for following Christ. Overnight, Christianity became an accepted religion. As the Roman Emperor himself became a Christian, thousands of people changed their faith and turned to Christianity so that they would find an entrance into the Emperor's court. To be a Christian became the done thing. Thus, a new brand of Christians emerged on the scene - a people who were essentially Christians of convenience and opportunity. This was how the era of pseudo-Christianity made its appearance. People became Christians not because they were convicted

of their sins but because they desired to be identified with the Emperor's convictions and thereby hoped to acquire some personal gain from the State. Instead of truly turning to God and repenting from their hearts, people sought the king's favor by identifying with his religious concepts.

In a few years after the Emperor became a Christian, the Church was flooded by half-hearted Christians, whose only desire was to seek the benevolence of the king. Sadly, this mass movement of people into the Church resulted in the growth of an outward form of Christianity that had little resemblance to the true teachings of Jesus Christ. Upright men, who loved righteousness and stood for the truth of the gospel, were reduced to a minority and they were totally inundated by the majority voice of carnal, self-seeking Christians.

Amidst such an environment, the multitudes, who had forsaken the delights of their pagan feasts to become name-sake Christians, longed to have some 'Christian' festival where they could be seen rubbing shoulders with the Emperor and his favorites. They missed the song and dance of their pagan celebrations and craved every opportunity to outwardly display their fleshly desires. So what did they do? They adopted the then popular festival of Mithras, unto the sun god, which was celebrated on 25th December and proclaimed it to be the birthday of Christ! In this way, they Christianized an existing pagan festival and made it their own. The mysterious god Mithras was worshipped in some countries as

the personification of light. The pseudo-Christians easily convinced themselves that nothing could be better than to adopt this pagan feast to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. There was many a true and sincere believer who resisted and opposed this move of the popularists. But gradually, as pressures from the State mounted, the Church elders succumbed to the inevitable and accepted the proposition. By 440 AD the church officially decreed that the birthday of Christ, the Light of the World, would be celebrated every year on 25 December. Such is the historical background of Christmas. Undoubtedly, its roots lie in popular pagan festivities. Christmas was the clamoring cry of a people who were once submerged in pagan superstition and who had become Christians only to suit their selfish ambitions. They were the initiators of the present Christmas tradition.

There was one more reason why the Church of the fourth century was urged to accept 25th December as the birthday of Christ. Long before the commencement of the Christian era, there was a Babylonian custom of celebrating the birth of the son of the Babylonian Queen of Heaven, a pagan female deity. This festival, held on 25th December in honor of the Queen of Heaven, was among the most popular and well-loved festivals. We find some mention of this festival in the book of Jeremiah, wherein it is written:

“children gather wood, fathers kindle the fire and the women knead the dough to make cakes to the queen of heaven and to pour out drink offering

unto other gods “ (Jeremiah 7:18)

On that day, people decorated their homes with greenery and celebrated with dancing, feasting, and lighting fires. A further mention of the Babylonian Queen of Heaven is found in verses 17-19 and 25 of Chapter 44 of Jeremiah. The peoples' lives were greatly governed by pagan superstition, mythology and mystique. It is for this reason that the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah cried out:

"thus saith the Lord, learn not the way of the heathen and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain; for one cutteth a tree out of a forest, the work of the hands of the workmen, with the axe, they deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with hammers, that it move not". (Jeremiah 10:2-4)

Beyond all doubt, the festival of Christmas has its origin in the customs, traditions and beliefs of a pagan people. Significantly, Christmas is often called Yuletide. Yule was the name of an old Celtic festival celebrated in honor of the winter solstice, during which a giant Yule log was cut, with great ceremony and merry making, to mark the beginning of the return of the sun's northern swing. The winter for people in the cold northern lands (Druid and Celtic cultures) was a time of long nights and great gloom. The festival of Yule ushered in the beginning of warm days which

gave the people plentiful reason to rejoice. The celebration of this festival was associated with widespread carousing and rowdiness. As Christianity spread among the nations to the north, the festival of the winter solstice was blended and mixed with the Christian tradition. The winter solstice celebrations were given a Christian sanction, and the nature of the pagan celebrations were merged into the Christian festival. Once again the Church tried to stamp out this custom, but when the Church was split and divided into many denominations, what was banned in one, was joyfully accepted in the other.

The Tradition of Santa Claus

There are many origins of the Christmas tradition of Santa Claus or 'Christmas Father'. According to one story, Santa Nikolaus or Saint Nicholas, who lived in the early part of the fourth century, was the bishop of Myra and Lycia in Asia Minor (Turkey). Legend has it, that when Nicholas was a boy, he went out at night to give presents to people to spread tidings of happiness and joy. As time went on, he became a patron saint of children, and of travelers, bakers and merchants in Russia. By the sixth century he had become an important saint in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Even today, during the month of December, the feast of Saint Nicholas is held in **7**

Netherlands and Belgium, when a boy is elected bishop, given the robes of a bishop and made to ride through the streets on a white donkey, while a parade of adulating people follow after him. It is usually accompanied with great joviality, merriment and gift-giving.

The concept of Santa Claus was brought to America by the Dutch. "Sinter Klass" came to early New York (New Amsterdam) when the Dutch portrayed him as a jolly old man. Gradually, through the literature and drawings of the 18th Century, he evolved into the present figure of Santa Claus. He was fused with the Norwegian mythical figure of "Kris Kringle", who contributed the sleigh and reindeer to the tradition. It is noteworthy, that the latter's name was "Christ child". He is the Father Christmas in England complete with long-tail coat, a beaver hat and stockings. He is plain 'Noel' in Catholic France and Canada. He is the Holy Birthday Old Man in China. And in Germany, he is "Pelz Nichol" or Nicholas-in-fur. In Germany, he is pictured as a hairy imp and the parents of all the children tell him how their children have behaved during the year! The children who were good received presents.

To the European mind, Santa Claus is a tall, thin stately person. However, in Washington, Irving in his "Knickerbocker History of New York" (1809) had presented him as a jolly old man with a broad brimmed hat, a man with huge breeches, smoking a long pipe; a man who rode over the tree tops in a wagon; took presents from his pocket and dropped them down the chimney! In 1822, Clement C More wrote the famous, "A Visit from Saint Nicholas"

and described Santa Claus as a person with a nose like the cherry...white beard...sleigh pulled by eight reindeers...dressed in fur from his head to his foot...". In 1837, Thomas Nast, drew a cartoon titled, "Santa Claus and His Works". This cartoon pictured his workshop with a record of good and bad deeds (like God), a sleigh, a pocket of toys, stockings over the fire place and the Christmas tree.

The concept of Santa Claus as a gift-giving, jolly old man, who rides a sleigh drawn by reindeers, and fills children's stockings with their wishes, has emerged gradually over the last few centuries. How sad that this lie has been propagated to the rest of the world. In a literal sense, this jolly old man is one of the many Anti-Christ's of I John 2:18-22 & 4:1-3. Today, Santa Claus has blossomed into a full grown idol. His throne can be found in most departmental stores, churches and Christian homes. Will we be like Israel of old and sacrifice our children to heathen gods? It is time for parents and leaders to take a radical stand for the truth.

The Legends Behind the Christmas Tree

There are several stories and legends concerning the traditional Christmas tree. People in Scandinavia worshipped trees such as the sacred oak of Odin. When they adopted Christianity and became Roman Catholics, they incorporated this into their Christian festivities. Their pseudo-Christianity could

not remove the old carnal nature from the unregenerate human heart. Their strong carnal desires to have a winter festival could not be stemmed by Christian influence.

Some say that the traditional Christmas tree is an evergreen tree of the northern snow clad forests. It was the only tree that remained green throughout the cold winter months. Therefore, people believed that the spirits of the forest took shelter in it to escape the cold, dark days of winter. They believed that if the tree was brought into their warm house, it would welcome the spirits of the forests, who would then be grateful to them for the rest of the year. In some countries, people hang small cakes and biscuits on the tree so that the spirits of the forests would be well fed! Can a believer really be a party to such mythological, legendary nonsense?

One legend has it that the first Christmas tree was revealed in a miracle to an English missionary named Wifred (Boniface). He found some heathens worshipping at the sacred Oak of Odin, in Germany near Geismar. He stopped the sacrifice and cut down the oak. A fir tree appeared in its place which he dubbed, the tree of life and which was said to represent Christ.

Decorating homes and churches with ever-greens began in ancient times. The Romans exchanged green branches for good luck on the first of January. The English took over this custom at Christmas. The Germans were probably the first to decorate trees with stars, toys, miniature angels, nuts, candy, and candles etc.

Some people claim that Prince Albert, the German consort of Queen Victoria, introduced the Teutonic custom of decorating the Christmas tree with tinsel, cotton wool, and candles, to help the weak winter sun to retain the warmth! With the spread of the British Empire, the Church gradually gave in and withdrew its opposition to such fanciful ideas. However, a true believer in Christ needs to shun all man-made practices that have little meaning to the true Christian walk.

The Christmas decorations we find in Christian homes have an interesting origin. The Roman festival of Saturnalia was celebrated on 19th December for seven days. Saturn was a Roman god of the harvest, who was pictured as a bent old man with a scythe in one hand and a serpent in the other. The festival spelt freedom from inhibition, great jubilation and considerable license to engage in orgiastic activities. The people sacrificed animals: law courts and schools were closed, criminals were spared punishment, and banquets were held with dancing, feasting and great merriment. The Romans decorated their temples with greenery during the Saturnalia feasts. The cultural traditions of Druids, Romans and Saxons for greenery such as mistletoe, holly and ivy, were gradually absorbed by the British and it became a part of the Christmas scene. The custom of exchanging kisses under the mistletoe hung up at Christmas reminds one of the orgiastic pasts, but it has now become a token of love that people should feel for each other at this festive season. However, this is what remains of the orgies of Saturnalia. The MC (master **11**

of the ceremonies) of these orgies was known as the Lord of Misrule. He dressed as a king went around filling goblets with wine to make sure that every one was in the right mood, all through the night. Such are the origins of our five-star culture, where drinking and revelry mark the celebration of Christmas. It is interesting to note that according to history, this winter festival was banned by the Church puritans because of the widespread and popular rowdiness that accompanied its celebrations. The practice of wearing masks and silly paper hats to conceal ones identity, so that people could forget themselves and have a good time, regardless of the consequences, was a hallmark of these celebrations. The Church continued to oppose such celebrations in general. Yet today, we see that these customs have entered into the traditional Christmas celebrations. Go to any Christmas party at any hotel, club, restaurant or church and you will find the spirit of Saturnalia prevailing even this day. Beware, true child of God, and stay away from the idolatry of the uncircumcised heart.

Christmas Cards

Christmas cards were not in use in pre-Christmas times. The first commercial Christmas cards appeared around 1843. This was accompanied with general criticism and condemnation, because the card depicted the family cheerfully drinking wine and liquor. Nevertheless, by 1875, several publishers had mass produced Christmas cards of various kinds.

Various themes have been used to depict the Christmas message. The traditional Catholic centerpiece has been a picture of the crib depicting the birth of Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem. Others depict the star of Bethlehem and the three wise men from the east. Today, the markets display a large variety of cards that meet the need of every pocket.

Christmas greeting cards have now become an industry by themselves. The practices of sending greeting cards have led to tremendous commercialization, but the themes we see are often of no Christian relevance at all. For some people, it is a matter of pride to display the Xmas cards they have received from their wide circle of friends. To others it has become a means of remembering their friends. Indeed, sending Christmas cards to all and sundry has become a ritual. Christmas cards are normally sent to all acquaintances, friends, and relatives, irrespective of the true feeling one has toward them. Does the believer want to be a part of this tradition of hypocrisy?

What does the Word of God say?

A true disciple or a Christian is one who aligns his life in line with God's Word. The Scripture portions in Psalm 127:1; Exodus 25:8, 40; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Colossians 3:1-3; Matthew 11:12; clearly speak to us of how a true child of God should build his life.

Reasons why a True Disciple of Christ should not Celebrate Christmas

Jesus Was Not Born On December 25th:

It is an unchangeable truth that Jesus was born of a virgin named Mary. The Bible declares it very clearly and no man of this world can ever change it. The one book in the whole world, which has gone through much persecution and trial, is the Holy Bible, God's Word. But it is still alive and the power of God unto salvation to all those who turn to it and live by it. The Lord Jesus Christ is a Man of History. He is no illusion. There is not one word in the Scriptures about the precise day of Jesus' birth or of the month when He was born. The Scriptures say, "and there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8). According to God's Word when the shepherds heard the angels announcing His birth to them, they were feeding their flock by night in the open fields. The climate in Palestine from December to February is piercing cold. It was customary for the shepherds of Judea to stop watching over their flocks in the open fields after October. There is great unanimity among scholars and commentators on this point. Barnes, Doddridge, Lightfoot, Joseph Scalinger and Jennings in his "Jewish Antiquities", are all of the opinion that December 25th could not be the right time of our Lord's birth.

In Luke chapter 2 verse 3-5 we read:

"and all went to be taxed every one into his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth into Judea unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David); to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child."

When Jesus was born, every woman and child had to go to the city where they belonged to be taxed. It would not have been fitting to collect taxes in winter because some people had to travel over long journeys. Taxes were never collected during the bleak winter months. It would have been especially difficult for a woman with child to travel in winter. Therefore, it is most unlikely that Jesus was born in the middle of winter because we are told that His parents traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Moreover, Jesus Himself says, "but pray ye that your flight be not in the winter" (Matthew 24:20). If winter was so bad a time that even to flee would not be advisable, then winter would certainly not be a fit time for women and children to travel and for shepherds to lie in open fields looking after sheep. Indeed, it is admitted by the scholars and candid writers of all groups that Jesus' birth did not take place on December 25th.

God Has Not Commanded Us To Commemorate The Birthday Of The Lord:

Neither the Scriptures nor the Holy Spirit of Revelation has told us that God has instructed us to celebrate Jesus' Birthday. If God has not instructed us, why

waste our time and efforts on these things? A child of God is to obey that which is revealed in the Bible. The Apostle Paul says in verse 16, of Chapter 5, of 2 Corinthians, The Apostle makes it very clear that we need to know Jesus Christ by revelation and not after the flesh. It is so easy to know about Jesus Christ as a man of history by the application of our flesh, i.e. our natural intelligence and mind. Similarly, we can know some things about outward aspects of His life on the earth such as His personality, His miracles and works and His spoken words. In fact in the days of Jesus Christ's earthly ministry there were many people who came to see, hear and know Him in a worldly sort of way. But such knowledge did not help them at all. On the other hand, the Apostle Paul, who did not eat, drink, or touch Him in any outwardly way, as many others did, provides us an outstanding testimony of one who stands out to be one of the greatest disciples and apostles of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul warned the believers, with much burden upon his heart, to stop giving importance to any particular day (such as the birthday of Jesus!). Furthermore, the very act of honoring any birthday, be it of Jesus or any ones else is not according to God's Word but according to man's tradition.

The only two birthdays mentioned in the Word of God are that of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt (Genesis 40:20) and that of Herod, the king of Judah (Matthew 14:6). And the climax of these birthday parties was that Pharaoh hanged the chief baker and Herod beheaded John the Baptist, the prophet of God. If God has not given us any instructions about celebrating Christ's birthday, why waste time and effort and money on such things? Should we not concentrate our

attention on such things that are revealed? The cultural Christianity that we see all around us today has little or no desire to obey and invest in the things that God has clearly revealed or instructed us clearly in His Word and instead emphasize minor, outward, extraneous matters such as the birth festivities of Jesus Christ. He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.

Christmas Is A Pagan And Not A Christian Festival:

That Christmas was originally a pagan festival has been established beyond all doubt by scholars and many academicians. We have clearly seen that in the first part of this meditation. "Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. (Mark 7:13). "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24).

The Spirit Of The Lord Has Commanded Us Not To Observe The Ways Of Heathen:

"Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the LORD your God. After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine

*ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God."
(Leviticus 18:2-4).*

The Lord spoke to King Solomon about the consequences of his disobedience in going after other gods in the book of I Kings. "And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded. Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant." (I Kings 11:10-11).

The Christmas Story As Told By The World Is A Lie.

The world has provided us many imaginative legends, myths, folk lore and tradition concerning the birth of Jesus Christ. If we closely observe the Scriptures in Matthew Chapter 2 verse 1-16 and Luke Chapter 3 verses 21-24 and 39, we will be able to recognize the man made additions very easily. For example, what is commonly heard is that three wise men came to Bethlehem from the East. But the Bible says "there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem". No mention is made of there being 'three' wise men. Such are the additions of the man-made story of traditional Christmas. Again, we have often heard it said that Jesus was born in a cattle shed or in a manger. But if we take another look at Luke 2:7, we see very clearly that, "she brought forth her first born son and wrapped him in a swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger." Baby Jesus was undoubtedly laid in a

manger, but the Scripture does not say that He was born in a manger! People have added many things to the story of Jesus' birth. People have taken several things from heathen traditions to supplement the birth account of Jesus and many of those things have no true relationship with Christ or with Christian life. "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it. (Deuteronomy 12:32)". Beloved, God's Word is sacred. Proverbs 30:6 say, "Add thou not unto His words lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."

The Attitude of a True Believer To Christmas

Beloved Christian, God is separating a people unto Himself who shall not defile themselves with the Babylonian system. God desires His true children to be non-conformists, who would follow Him in every way. James, the Apostle says in Chapter 1 and verse 21-25, Any person who knows what is right to do but does not do it, to him it is sin.

Beloved child of God, do not be like the unbeliever; do not follow others without asking yourself whether what they do is right or not. Many believers know that Christmas is not scriptural. Yet, year after year, they indulge themselves in worldly practices. They justify their actions by arguing that Christmas is a good occasion to witness His life and teaching to others. They use their

logic and reasoning to do what they think is right rather than to depend on the Spirit of God. We know that the Holy Spirit of God has chosen not to reveal the real birthday of Jesus so that people would not be led into what is of little profit. It matters little when and where Christ was born. What is important is that we follow in His steps and be obedient to His teachings. Let every true believer rather be a witness to the falsehood of the man-made traditions of Christmas and thereby uphold the name of our Lord and purpose of His coming. Let every child of God cease to make lame excuses to follow the pattern of traditions based upon heathen practices that bring no credit or glory to the Lord. It is time for believers to be true witnesses of the Christian way of life, taking up of the cross and following the Lord in their daily life. Come out from all that is of Babylonia, of Laodicea and of the false, apostate or lukewarm Church. Beloved, let us be content that God does not intend His Church to celebrate the birth of His Son. If God wanted us to do so, He would surely have commanded us to do so.

Let every true believer recognize the power of man's tradition that compels His people to celebrate Christmas even though God does not want His church to do so. Many Christians have been brought up in bondage to the traditions of Christmas. Their minds are indoctrinated and numbed by the compelling social pressures. They carry on with the same old tradition for tradition's sake, forsaking the truth of God's Word. O beloved, let the truth set you free. Be not shackled to the Christmas tradition of man, which has no foundational basis in the Word of God.

Dear child of God, ponder about the fact that when Jesus was born, the people of this world did not receive Him with open arms! When the King of Kings was born on the earth, the religious leaders did not rejoice that the four-hundred year silence of God had come to an end. No one celebrated the coming of the Messiah, though the silence of God had at last been broken. This happened because it is written, God did not intend that the birth of His Son be celebrated by the world!

What is the attitude of the Christian today? Why do Christians readily rejoice that the Saviour of our mankind was born in December, but forget and neglect Him during the rest of the year? The way Christians behave at Christmas time, it seems as though they become lovers of Jesus all of a sudden, come December every year. Apparently, they only want to accept Him and His teachings during the Christmas season. They are reluctant to take up the cross and follow on to become His disciples. It is easy for man to make a manger, decorate his house and to raise a toast to Jesus. But it is infinitely more difficult to follow Jesus in truth and spirit. It is time true believers run away from this entertainment-oriented Christianity and the spirit of commercial Christianity.

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Telephone 91-11-25032928 / 25034946

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Visit our website www.oilnwine.org for further details and messages.

Address your correspondence to the author at joythomas@oilnwine.org

