

## **BIBLE QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY DR. AYODEJI AWE**

**QUESTION 80- I WATCHED A VIDEO IN WHICH SOME FOLK HAD PASSIONATELY CHALLENGED THE CHRISTIANS' CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS AND EASTER, ALLEGING THAT THESE WERE ROOTED IN HEATHEN PROCLAMATION AND MACHINATIONS. PASTOR, WHAT IS YOUR TAKE ON THIS? IS IT A SOUND BIBLICAL DOCTRINE FOR CHRISTIANS TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS AND EASTER?**

### **ANSWER:**

Though popular myth had put the birthday of Christ at December 25, general consensus had not always stood in its favor. It is big that scripture does not assign a date for Christ's birth. The oldest gospel, of Mark, written about 65AD starts with the baptism of about 30yr old Christ. This suggests that the earliest Christians did not have the knowledge of or interest in his birthday. Biblical scholarship later delved into the puzzle. Dionysius Exiguus, a Scythian monk and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies at Catholic University of America, member of Pontifical Biblical Commission, constituting a limited mention, are noted to be among a number of scholars who have made efforts to determine the date Christ was born. Yet, there has been no unanimity.

The celebration of Christmas started around the 4th Century when Church officials in Rome decided to institute the birthday of Christ as a holiday. Originally referred to as the feast of Nativity, it began to spread. By 432, it was southward in Egypt and Westward in England by 599. 200 years later, nearly the whole world was celebrating Christmas.

The remote background of Christmas celebration was a Roman pagan celebration called Saturnalia, usually spanning the whole week of Dec 17-25. In a bid to convert pagans, the Church imported Saturnalia but with all of its ungodly festivities. The Pope eventually in 54 AD declares the last day, December 25 Christmas day. At this junction it is important to identify that the motive was noble: to win them over by competing with them. But as it turned out, it would not be easy. Christians struggled to record tangible success at refining the practices of Saturnalia. According to Stephen Nissenbaum, professor of history at UMass, Amherst –“In return for ensuring massive observance of the Savior's birth by assigning it to this resonant date, the Church for its part tacitly agreed to allow the holiday to be celebrated more or less the way it has been”. In essence, the earliest Christmas were celebrated by drinking, sexual indulgence, singing naked in the streets (from whence carol singing probably emerged) etc, which were the usual pastime of Saturnalia.

This gory image that would not go away became a concern for some Christians who were becoming very sensitive to the diabolical nature of what is supposed to be a godly celebration for what it is. It turned out to be no historical surprise that the Puritans in mid 17<sup>th</sup> Century began to phase out the celebration of Christmas convinced it was becoming too worldly for Christian comfort.

In all of this we ought to note that however noble the intent, celebrating Christmas is not a must. In other words, if any chooses not to engage, there should be no condemnation (Rom.14:5-6). However to those with the true and appreciative intent, let it be broadcast that such is rooted in scripture. Reviewing the history of God's relating to his children, certain days had always been selected for epochal reasons to enjoy special status (see: Exo 12:14, Lev.23:41, Deut. 16:15 etc). Presenting what can be stated as an ongoing argument, David under the anointing writes: "teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). Paul takes it further when he candidly stated that he who regards a day as special if persuaded rightly, does so to the Lord (Rom.14:6ff, *ibid.*). These all sum up that we could be mindful of dates and days if they remind us of the wondrous dealings of God in the form of his greatness and who He is to us. Celebrating the unveiling of Christ the Savior to our life's landscape with the pricy purpose of overturning eternal damnation to everlasting life with our Alpha in omega dimension cannot be faulted by any measure. Especially on this plat, eternally reflecting and appreciating the Lord is worth all the celebration in the world.

The detractors may want to play the condemnation card of heathen copycatting of the decoration of the Christmas tree which was rooted in the ancient Asheira cult worship of trees. In response, we must declare that many modern believers do not care about Christmas trees. It is actually cumbersome and not many these days care to saddle their living rooms with messy trees. Beautiful well lit palms and the likes of pretty trees decorate the homes of those who favor the style. When such is the case, faulting the simple glamour would be basically absurd and far fetched.

What of the gift giving and exchange tailored after the ancient St. Nicholas' that was tainted with the heathen craze for the celebration of Saturnalia? It is ungodly, the accusers echoed. But better believe this, that the Christ we celebrate is an epitome of giving in love, a model that the universe is called to emulate. The scripture says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that who so ever believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Therefore the reality and the truth is that Christ and this divine

giving theme predated St. Nicholas. Saturnalia probably stole from divinity. Therefore as we celebrate Christmas, we demonstrate the duplicating of the love of God towards man by giving not just material gifts but also opportunities of worshipping the Lord and becoming partakers of the gospel. We pray many accept and swap sides.

With renewed grace and enlightenment, post modern believers should feel uninhibited to renew the ageless motivation for seizing the day out of the hands of the unbelievers. The gospel must be preached in all the earth not only as a witness but also as opportunity to fill the mansions prepared with saved saints. So Christmas would be celebrated on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December without guilt, in the same manner that Easter would some time in spring. Just as in our days in America when believers shield their youth from celebrating Halloween, believers should not be abashed to hijack and dominate the world with Christ by every celebration in town.

Therefore, if you are a believer we wish you a joyous celebration of Jesus our Savior at this yuletide; He is really worthy having paid the price for such honor. But if you are reading this piece and you have never surrendered your life to Jesus that He may save you and assume the lordship of your life, I implore you to seize this moment and ask him in. At such a time like this, you would have just given yourself the greatest gift ever. Be forgiven, saved and blessed as you do, IJN.

*To have your questions answered, for counseling or prayers, or for opportunities for fellowship in our 9am or 11am Sunday Services and 7.30pm Tuesday service, feel free to contact us at:*

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***\*Join us for a special Xmas Day Worship and Praise service on Mon Dec. 25, 10am.\****