



## CHRISTMAS 2013 - WHERE IS YOUR FOCUS?

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### INTRODUCTION

Now that many people have just celebrated Thanksgiving, the emphasis on Christmas – in reality – started several weeks ago with:

- Merchants decorating shops, stores, and malls with Christmas decorations in addition to starting Christmas advertising with the advent of “Black Friday” that typically denotes remarkable deals and the rush to buy gifts for family and friends.
- Traveling, visiting friends, family, and attending selected parties/gatherings.
- Recalling Santa Claus, elves, Christmas trees, Charlie Brown, Rudolph, decorations, stockings, and the prospect of opening presents.

Clearly, the Christmas season can become very busy and time intensive with the end result of changing our primary focus from the real reason of Christmas to the materialistic demands of our secular society. Obviously, this dilemma asks the questions “*what is the reason for Christmas,*” and “*are we really celebrating the birth of Christ?*” With these thoughts in mind, let’s briefly explore (1) where did the name of Christmas come from, (2) the true gift of Christmas, and (3) common Christmas misconceptions.

### WHERE DID THE NAME OF CHRISTMAS COME FROM?

The word Christmas is a combination of the words *Christ* and *mas*. *Mas* means celebration, so the word Christmas simply means a Christ celebration or a celebration of Christ. While the Bible does not give an actual date of the birth of Christ, it is true that angels and shepherds celebrated Christ’s birth (Luke 2:11-14) and many people came to worship Christ and praise God for this prophetic event in history (Matthew 2:2). However, it is likely that people began to re-celebrate this event at a later date. Interestingly, December 25 is mentioned by early church father Sextus Africanus as being celebrated in A.D. 221. In reality, December 25 was selected by the Gregorian calendar. However, the primary issue is not the precise date Christ was born but taking the proper time and focus to remember and celebrate Christ’s birth into this world.

A parallel issue that is often mentioned with Christmas is the false perception that it originated from a Roman pagan holiday. Interestingly, the birth of Christ was not a focus of Pagan admiration as Christ was rejected from the early time of Genesis and Pagans had their own holiday called Saturnalia that was the Roman festival honoring their god Saturn. Saturnalia was observed from about December 17-23. So, much speculation is required to overlap and align the two dates and celebrations. A greater concern should be the extent that Christians have minimized their focus on the birth of Christ and adopted some of the secular-pagan practices during Christmas.

### **THE TRUE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS**

Quite simply, the true gift of Christmas is *Christ*, the Son of God, who became a man from a humble beginning to dwell among us to willingly sacrifice himself on a cross for the atonement of our sins and provide a way to save us from our sins and eternal damnation. The primary focus of this gift is that it is free if we simply repent and receive Christ as Savior. Yes, it's that simple and eternally important!

### **COMMON CHRISTMAS MISCONCEPTIONS**

Let's look at some common questions that often surface during Christmas and see if we can separate biblical truth (as outlined in the first and second chapters of Matthew and the second chapter Luke) from secular perceptions.

- **When Mary and Joseph arrived in town Mary was in labor so Joseph was forced to accept any available lodging.**

False. Luke 2:6 indicates that *"so it was, that while they were, the days were completed for her to be delivered."*

- **The New Testament uses the Greek word kataluma that is translated as "inn." Therefore, kataluma means "small hotel."**

False. The Greek word kataluma is best translated as "guest room."

- **The New Testament indicates that Joseph and Mary spent the first night in a stable.**

False. There is no biblical mention of a stable, only a manger. Today, we are aware through archaeology that the common home was over a manger type area for animals (in this area). Additionally, manger was generally the term used for a feeding trough for animals.

- **The New Testament indicates that the innkeeper told Joseph and Mary there was no room for them in the inn.**

False. The biblical account does not mention an innkeeper.

- **Some stories indicate the innkeeper's wife brought towels and water to Mary and assisted Joseph in the birth of the baby Jesus.**

False. Again, there is no mention of an innkeeper's wife in the biblical account.

- **The New Testament says three wise men traveled to see the new baby Jesus and were present the night of His birth.**

False. Matthew 2:1 indicates *"wise men from the East came to Jerusalem."* Three gifts are mentioned (gold, frankincense, and myrrh) but not the number of wise men that either traveled or were present. Additionally, although the Bible is silent on the age of Jesus, it is likely that Jesus could have been 2 years old when visited by the wise men (Matthew 1 and 2).

- **The Christmas tree represents the Asherah poles mentioned in the Old Testament.**

False. The Christmas tree is a German tradition introduced by Prince Albert in 1841.

### **CONCLUSION**

Although we have considered many facets of Christmas, the focus for any Christmas should be the realization that God became a man and gave his life on a cross so that mankind could live in eternity with Him (the gospel). Use the Christmas of 2013 to once again refocus on the birth of Christ and what that means to eternal life with Christ.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- The War on Christmas, Bodie Hodge, Master Books