



"Lying to ourselves is more deeply ingrained than lying to others."
—Dostoevsky

20-Dec-02

Celebrating a Lie

December 25 is only half a week away, which means by this time next week, the madness—or at least this phase of it—will be over for another year. "Madness" is a purposeful choice of words. It is difficult not to think that hundreds of millions of people celebrating a holiday with little basis in truth is a bit nutty.

Let us be clear: The One we call [Jesus Christ](#) gave up His prerogatives and privileges as [God](#) and became flesh (Philippians 2:5-7) to be born of a virgin, Mary, who was betrothed to an upright Jew of David's lineage named Joseph. As announced by angels, Mary gave birth to Jesus in Bethlehem of Judea in a stable or grotto used as a stable, and she wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger. Soon, shepherds came from the fields to see Him and spread the word of His birth, praising God. Sometime later, star-following wise men from the East visited, presenting Him with gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—and worshipping Him. All these details can be found in the first two chapters of Matthew and Luke.

Now, let us turn to the Scripture where God tells us to celebrate His Son's birth: —. Yes, that is correct. No place in either Testament tells us to honor our Savior by having a birthday bash for Him each year. Strangely enough, Jesus Himself tells us to remember, not His birth, but His death ([Luke 22:14-20](#); I Corinthians 11:23-26)! Certainly, it is important that He was born, but the fact that He died—and how and why He died—has farther-reaching, more eternal consequences!

What about some of the other minor details of [Christmas](#)? To begin with, the date is all wrong. Late fall and winter in Palestine is the rainy season, and it can get quite cold. The best sources say shepherds bring their flocks in from the fields by October at the latest. Also, the details of John the Baptist's conception and birth preclude a winter birth for our Savior (see the Forerunner article, "[When Was Jesus Born?](#)"). At best, this time of year might qualify as the time of Jesus' begetting by the Father.

In addition, where does Santa Claus fit in? Was he one of the wise men? No, he is merely a gift-giving, fourth-century [Saint Nicholas of Myra](#) known for his piety and generosity. And what about Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer, mistletoe, Christmas trees, Yule logs, twinkling lights, stockings on the mantle, and the other paraphernalia of this merriest of seasons? Even a perfunctory investigation will show that most of them derive from overactive imaginations or pre-Christian—that is, heathen, pagan, idolatrous—traditions and practices. It is an open secret, as it were.

To recap, then, the true biblical story of Jesus' birth has been syncretized into a non-Christian festival, and even that has been obscured by a wrong date and a phony crèche scene (no halos, the wise men came later, Mary was not dressed like a nun, etc.). Everything else is a lie, including the need to celebrate it.

This begs the question: Why do people think they can worship and honor God through a lie? The Old Testament says, "God is not a man that He should lie" ([Numbers 23:19](#)). Paul tells us, "God . . . cannot lie" (Titus 1:2). Jesus teaches that [Satan](#) the Devil "is a liar and the father of it" ([John 8:44](#)). David, in [Psalm 5:6](#), declares, "The LORD abhors the . . . deceitful man." Of course, the commandment says, "You shall not bear false witness" ([Exodus 20:16](#); [Matthew 19:18](#)). Surely, a God who will not lie and detests lying people would not wish to be feted in a lying way.

The answer to our question, however, resides in human nature. First, the Bible says, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the [law of God](#), nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). Men simply do not want to obey God and His will. Second, the human "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" ([Jeremiah 17:9](#)). We trick ourselves into believing that we can use a defiled means to worship a holy God. Third, "the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so" ([Jeremiah 5:31](#)). People actually like to be lied to because, they think, they can enjoy the [sin](#) while they can and point the finger of blame at someone else for deceiving them. This approach will not score any points with the Judge (II Corinthians 5:10-11).

We need to ask what Jeremiah does as he concludes his musings on man's deceitful

heart: "But what will you do in the end?"

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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by Martin G. Collins

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