



"The high-minded man must care more for the truth than for what people think."
—Aristotle

23-Dec-05

A Sanitary Christmas

The winter solstice has just passed, beginning the coldest three months of the year, and this means that [Christmas](#) is only days away. It used to be that the solstice and Christmas coincided - a remarkable coincidence (wink, wink) - but because of the inexactitude of our calendar, the solstice has crept forward a few days over the past few centuries. If we were to stick around long enough, we could witness Christmas celebrated in springtime! Come to think of it, a hefty percentage of the world's population already celebrates it as the heat of summer arrives - but for reasons altogether different!

Lately, Christmas-keeping Christians have been forced to stand up for Christmas. Atheists, agnostics, and the ACLU-crowd have been clamoring for the removal of religion from Christmas celebrations. They want advertisers to market the season without reference to "Christmas," instead using the innocuous "Holiday" moniker. They want businesses to ditch playing traditional Christmas carols over their in-store audio systems in favor of "winter music" - in other words, to play "Sleigh Bells" instead of "Away in a Manger." Countless courts have weighed in - some on one side, some on the other - concerning Christmas crèches on public property. Christian groups have had to file lawsuits to force school systems to allow

their students to sing "Silent Night" - and not some wintry parody - during winter concerts!

This is all extremely ironic - even hilarious at times. Christmas-celebrating Christians rush to the barricades to defend this most sacred holiday from the godless hordes, all the while totally missing the fact that they are defending the indefensible! Where is their authority to keep the day in the first place? Rome? Probably. Jerusalem? Nope. Bethlehem? Hardly. The Bible. Not a chance!

In reality, by its materialism and syncretism, this world's Christianity has helped the modern, secular world sanitize - not Santa-ize - Christmas. This supposedly Christian holiday has been systematically disinfected of its biblical "taint" simply because it is fundamentally *unbiblical*! Its only scriptural basis is [the Gospel](#) accounts of the birth of Jesus, and they prove that the traditional Christmas teaching sits on foundation of sand.

The Nativity - a fancy word for "birth" - of [Jesus Christ](#) is found in two of the Gospels, Matthew and Luke. Try as one might, a birth date for our Savior cannot be found in either, and in fact, honest, objective scholars and theologians admit that a winter date is perhaps the least likely time. December, as any biblical geographer will attest, is the beginning of the rainy season in Palestine, and shepherds would have stopped leaving their flocks in the fields at night a good month or two before then. Majority opinion places Jesus' birth in the autumn, probably on or near the fall festivals of Trumpets or Tabernacles.

Other aspects of the traditional Nativity also fail the test of biblical authenticity. For instance, the Gospels do not say that there were three wise men, nor are their names anywhere recorded in history. In this case, the number three has its source in the number of gifts the wise men gave to Jesus: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. It is certainly possible that He received other gifts from them, but Matthew decided to highlight these particular three for symbolic reasons.

Many of the manger scenes even get details wrong, like the fact that when the wise men showed up, Jesus was no longer a newborn lying in a manger, but as Matthew writes, a "young Child" living in "a house" ([Matthew 2:11](#)).

Traditional Christmas crèches also tend to combine Luke's account of the shepherds' arrival almost immediately after His birth with the coming of the wise men, which evidently occurred perhaps weeks or months later (see verse 16: Some contend that it could have been as long as two years later!). And, of course, none of the Nativity participants wore halos!

These few scenes are the extent of the Bible's information about Christ's birth. Neither Mark nor John saw fit to add to what Matthew and Luke had already written. Both Mark and John begin their narratives about the time of Jesus' [baptism](#) three decades later. Why? In the grand scheme of Jesus' life, His birth is of less importance than His ministry, death, and resurrection. Certainly, it was a wonderful day when God-in-the-flesh appeared among us, but it pales in meaning to what He taught, what He sacrificed for us, and what He now does for us as our living High Priest. Why dwell on His past, helpless infancy when we can rejoice in His present, powerful advocacy?

The Christmas controversy does not hinge on whether it is politically correct to wish someone "Merry Christmas!" but on a factor that is far more significant: truth. Is Christmas true? The biblical facts shout a resounding, "NO!" Then why celebrate a lie? Falsehood is never good, never beneficial, never right. Keeping a false holiday in dedication to Jesus is still a lie. Do we really think He feels honored by a lie, which is [sin](#) (check [Exodus 20:16](#) and [Revelation 21:8; 22:15](#))? He receives much more honor when we, instead, keep His commandments ([John 14:15; 15:10](#)).

We can only [hope](#) that today's swirl over this holiday wakes Christians up - not just to America's eroding Christian values, but to the sad fact that what most assume to be ever-so-Christian is nothing of the sort.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Four Views of Christ \(Part 1\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The Bible paradoxically is both simple and profound, understandable only to those who have been called, love the truth, and are given to careful scrutiny, enabling the searcher to describe every nuance of what it is they desire. The obsessiveness of both a lover and a sports-trivia enthusiast characterize the level of effort involved. The life sustaining manna of the Bible, while abundant and plentiful, is hidden—layered in types, symbols, and allegories. In the typology of the four Edenic rivers flowing from one source (Genesis 2: 10) and the four living creatures (Revelation 4:6-8: lion, calf, man, and eagle) lies the foundation for understanding the gospels as four distinct representations of the same Life.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Was Jesus Christ Born Under the Law?](#)

by Earl L. Henn (1934-1997)

As Christians, we are followers of Jesus Christ, but many subtle arguments are advanced to prove we really do not have to walk in His footsteps—that He did it all for us. Earl Henn explains that such teachings are ridiculous!

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