

What? No Special Christmas Services!!

Recently a person, in obvious sincerity, inquired as to why this congregation has not scheduled a special Christmas program. After all, this is the time of the year in which we are hearing so much about Christmas. Many, many churches are heavily involved in special religious services, ostensibly held in honor of Christ, and in order to celebrate the birth of Christ. Even so, the Seffner church of Christ has no such services scheduled. For us, December 25 will come and go, and there will be no change in our usual worship schedule. Are we weird, or what? Are we simply trying to be different for the sake of being different? The question mentioned at the beginning of this article is a good question; it deserves an answer.

First, however, we acknowledge that the message of the Bible is often considered “strange” to people of the world. For example, in Acts 17:15-34, we read of the labors of Paul and Silas in the ancient city of Athens, at that time a leading center of art, philosophy and literature. In that center of human philosophy Paul preached “*Jesus and the resurrection*” to the people, and they brought him to the Areopagus and said “*you are bringing strange things to our ears,*” Acts 17:20. Some even accused Paul of being a “*babbler,*” others said “*he seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,*” vs. 18,19. In that highly acclaimed city of culture and philosophy Paul preached the truth; yet they accused him of being a “*babbler,*” and said he was “*bringing strange things to our ears.*” Obviously, they regarded Paul as a real weirdo; his message to them was “*strange,*” but he was preaching the truth. And in today’s world Bible truth is often considered stranger than fiction!

But let us return to the issue at hand; why has this congregation not scheduled a special, religious, Christmas service? There are several reasons. Please note a few such reasons.

1. The Bible is our only religious guide; it is our creed book. We admit that most religious bodies follow a man-conceived creed book in addition to the Bible. But we have chosen to follow only the Bible. Why? Because it is “*the word of God,*” which was revealed by the Holy Spirit, Heb. 4:12; I Cor. 2:10-13. We truly believe that “*all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,*” and this enables the man of God to be “*complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work,*” 2 Tim. 3:16-17. God’s “*word is truth,*” John 17:17, and “*His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to glory and virtue,*” 2 Peter 1:3. Yes, the Bible is our only guide book in matters religious; however, the word “Christmas” does not even appear one time in the Scriptures!

2. We do not know when Jesus was born! Supposedly, December 25 is celebrated as the birth of Jesus. However, we do not know either the day or the month when Jesus was born! We do know that when Jesus was born Shepherds were “*living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night,*” Luke 2:8. Adam Clarke wrote, saying, “It was a custom among the Jews to send out their sheep to the deserts, about the Passover, and bring them home at the commencement of the first rain; during the time they were out, the shepherds watched them night and day.” However, from Ezra 10:9-13 we read of the men of Judah and Benjamin who “*sat in the street of the house of God,*” and they were “*trembling,*” in part because of “*the great rain,*” and it was said to be “*the ninth month.*” The “*ninth month,*” the month Kislev, answers to a portion of November and December (by our calendar), and it was the middle of the rainy season, which began with light showers in October and lasted to mid-April. December was a cold month;

the shepherds had come in from the fields long before December! We do not know the month when Jesus was born, but we do know it was **not** in December!

3. Jesus instituted the Lord's supper, a memorial feast which looks back to His death and forward to His return, I Cor. 11:26. When we eat the unleavened bread (which symbolizes Jesus' body), and drink the fruit of the vine (which symbolizes His blood), we do it "*in memory of*" Jesus, Luke 22:19; I Cor. 11:24,25. If we follow the practice of the church in the first century we will observe the Lord's supper "*on the first day of the week,*" Acts 20:7, and **every** week in the year has a "*first day,*" the day we call Sunday. Jesus taught us to remember his **death** (which we commemorate every Sunday, or every "*first day of the week*"); He did not authorize us to celebrate His birthday. Moreover, if He had wanted us to celebrate His birthday He would surely have revealed both the day and the month when it occurred — which He did not!

4. Even the word "Christmas" should cause us to pause and ponder. From the standpoint of etymology, "Christmas" is the word "Christ" followed by the suffix "mas," which is a shortened term for "mass," and when "mas" is jointed to the word "Christ," it literally means "the mass of Christ." This necessarily suggests that "Christmas" was originated by the Roman Catholic Church. Thus we ought not be surprised to learn that the word "Christmas" does not appear in the Bible.

5. In actuality, "Christmas" is of Catholic and Pagan origin. Regarding this statement, please note the following words from **The World Book Encyclopedia** (50th anniversary edition): "Scholars do not know the exact date of Christ's birth. For more than 300 years, people observed His birthday on various dates. In A.D. 354, Bishop Liberius of Rome ordered the people to celebrate on December 25. He probably chose this date because the people of Rome already observed it as the Feast of Saturn, celebrating the birthday of the sun. Christians honored Christ instead of Saturn as the Light of the World." As one writer put it, the apostate church sought to "Christianize" those pagan practices it could not stamp out. Hence, the apostate church, instead of celebrating the birth of the god of the sun, changed it to the practice of celebrating the birthday of **the Son of God**.

6. For hundreds of years the religious observance of Christmas has become a tradition — a tradition instituted by man. This reminds us of another instance in which Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees, "*you have made the commandments of God of no effect by your tradition,*" Matt. 15:6. He then exclaimed, saying, "*Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips. But their heart is far from Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men,*" Matt. 15:7-8.

7. If Christmas Day is really the birth day of Jesus, then people are giving to the wrong persons. I find it amazing that people claim to be celebrating the birth of Christ; yet they are giving gifts to each other — not to Christ! In fact, some become so deeply in debt in purchasing their "Christmas gifts" for each other, that they are not able to give as they have "*been prospered,*" I Cor. 16:1-2, to the Lord!

Conclusion:

Perhaps it should be re-emphasized that we are referring to the religious observance of Christmas as the birth of Christ. It is without biblical authorization. This reminds me of Galatians 4:10-11, wherein the inspired apostle chastised the saints in Galatia for religiously observing certain Old Testament events, which were done away when the "New Covenant" succeeded the Law of Moses. In these verses Paul said: "*You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have labored for you in vain.*"

Now, having said all the above, let me make this clarification. “Christmas Day” has been made into a national holiday. This means that all of us are affected. Stores are closed. People are home from work. Schools are out, etc., etc. In some respects, whether they admit it or not, most people in various ways are forced to “observe Christmas.” However, It is one thing to observe it a “holiday” and something else to observe it as a “**holy** day.” There is nothing inherently wrong in giving gifts to friends, family members, fellow workers, etc. It is no more wrong to give gifts in December than it is in July. And it is good for family members to get together and enjoy one another’s company. In fact, for the most part, we need more such interactions among family members, and it is never wrong to re-new past friendships, etc. In conclusion, I would say “enjoy your holiday,” but don’t make it a special religious **holy** day, though on each day we must diligently strive to “*be holy*” because **God** “*is holy*,” I Pet. 1:15-16

—Bobby Witherington