

CHRISTMAS – CULTURE & JESUS



It seems that the most awesome event of human history, the coming of God to earth as a babe in a manger, has been forever obscured by Santa, shopping, and merrymaking. So, is it really “the most wonderful time of the year”? Only in relatively recent times, the past 200 years, has Christmas even been celebrated by most Christians. Up until the 1800’s, the day recognized as Christ’s birthday was largely a pagan celebration. In most of the world, especially in England and America, Christmas was not a time of worship, prayer, and reflection; rather, it was a day set aside to sing bawdy songs, drink rum, and riot in the streets. In this study, we will consider Christmas and Culture in how we came to celebrate the birth of Jesus as we do today. The hope is that we will find ourselves in awe of Emmanuel – God with us!

Highland Colony Men’s Roundtable
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Finding the Real Jesus of Christmas can be a fight through culture

Bible Verses: John 1:12-14; Philippians 2:1-11; II Corinthians 1:3-7; Job 2:11-13; Luke 10:25-37; Hebrews 2:17; Hebrews 4:15
Music: The Story Behind the Song: O Holy Night <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8fsgVuyAgw>
The Nativity Story • O Holy Night • Josh Groban <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkqrRVK0qFM>
Video: Saving Private Ryan - See You On The Beach <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICEFOx5Hc2Y>
Resources: Book: *Stories behind the Great Traditions* of Christmas by Ace Collins

History of Christmas – Facts to Consider.

1. _____ → Up until the 1800s, the day recognized as Christ’s birthday was largely a pagan celebration. Only in the past 200 years, has Christmas even been celebrated as Christ’s birthday. In most of the world, especially in England and America, Christmas was not a time of worship, prayer, and reflection; rather, it was a day set aside to sing bawdy songs, drink rum, and riot in the streets.
2. _____ → History tells us that it took over 300 years for the church to decide on a day on which to honor Christ’s birth. December 25th is unlikely the actual day when Mary gave birth to Jesus. Most modern Bible scholars believe that Christ was probably born in the spring, based on what we now know of Roman census practices.
3. _____ → The first Christmas services were usually held in September, during the Jewish Feast of Trumpets (modern-day Rosh Hashanah). Within a few years, more than a dozen different days had been assigned by various congregations as the birth date of Christ. Eventually, the most common date for celebrating Christ’s birth was January 6th, modern-day religious holiday of Epiphany. In 320 Pope Julius I had grown tired of seeing the birth of Christ celebrated on scores of different days by churches across the empire. The pope specified December 25th as the official date of the birth of Jesus Christ.

BIRTH OF JESUS - What Is the Incarnation?

1. _____ → The *incarnation* refers literally to the *in-fleshing* of the eternal Son of God — Jesus “putting on our flesh and blood” and becoming fully human. The doctrine of the incarnation claims that the eternal second person of the Trinity took on humanity in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The incarnation is not only the way in which Jesus became Immanuel — God *with us* — but it’s an eternal testimony that he and his Father are unswervingly *for us*.
2. _____ → *The Word* refers to the eternal divine Son who was “in the beginning with God” and who himself is God (John 1:1). From eternity past until he took on humanity, the Son of God existed in perfect love, joy, and harmony in the fellowship of the Trinity. Like the Father and the Spirit, he was spirit and had no material substance. But at the incarnation, the eternal Word entered creation as human. He became a first-century Jew.
3. _____ → *Became* does not mean that he ceased to be God. In becoming man, he did not forsake his divine nature, as if that were even an option. Rather, he became man by taking on human nature in addition to his divine nature. It is essential to the incarnation — and very helpful throughout all theology — to recognize that divinity and humanity are not mutually exclusive. The Son of God didn’t have to pick between being God and being man. He could be both at the same time. The eternal Word became human.
4. _____ → *Flesh* isn’t merely a reference to the human body but the entirety of what makes up humanity — body, mind, emotions, and will. Hebrews 2:17 and 4:15 teach that to save human beings Jesus had to be made like us “in every respect” except our sin. In the incarnation, everything proper to humanity was united to the Son of God. The Son of God did not only become like man; he became truly and fully human.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LIFE FROM THE INCARNATION - Philippians 2:1-11; II Corinthians 1:3-7

There are three simple S-words you can practice to be a part of the incarnational life of Christ.

1. _____ → Be available to sit and listen and be with a person in need. You might be amazed at the difference you can make by letting go of the struggle to come up with just the right words or actions to “fix” your friend or “make it all better.” Just be there. (See Job 2:11-13).
2. _____ → Notice the needs of your loved one, and do what you can to meet those needs, without drawing attention to your service. (See Luke 10:25-37).
3. _____ → After you have earned the right to speak, through your gentle presence and your humble service, there may come a ripe opportunity to offer words of comfort, hope, and faith, based on your personal experience. Don’t try to venture into some theological territory beyond your own life and faith experience. Just keep it real, share from the heart, and offer a few simple honest words about what has made a difference for you and what are your hopes for your friend.

ACTION: Journal This!

1. When has someone sat with you in a time of need? When have you been able to sit with someone in need?
2. When have you served another in need?
3. When have you offered feedback to another, after asking if you can offer your thoughts?



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"O Holy Night"

O Holy Night!
 The stars are brightly shining
 It is the night of the dear Savior's birth!
 Long lay the world in sin and error pining
 Till he appear'd and the soul felt its worth.
 A thrill of hope the weary soul rejoices
 For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!
 Fall on your knees
 Oh hear the angel voices
 Oh night divine
 Oh night when Christ was born
 Oh night divine
 Oh night divine

Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming
 With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand
 So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming
 Here come the wise men from Orient land
 The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger
 In all our trials born to be our friend
 Truly He taught us to love one another
 His law is love and His gospel is peace
 Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother
 And in His name all oppression shall cease
 Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
 Let all within us praise His holy name

Bible Verses – The Message

John 1:12-14 - 12 But whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said, He made to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves. **13** These are the God-begotten, not blood-begotten, not flesh-begotten, not sex-begotten. **14** The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

Philippians 2:1-11 - 1 If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care - **2** then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. **3** Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. **4** Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. **5** Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. **6** He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. **7** Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! **8** Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death - and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion. **9** Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, **10** so that all created beings in heaven and on earth - even those long ago dead and buried - will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, **11** and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.

II Corinthians 1:3-7 - 3 May all the gifts and benefits that come from God our Father, and the Master, Jesus Christ, be yours. **4** Every time I think of you - and I think of you often! - I thank God for your lives of free and open access to God, given by Jesus. **5** There's no end to what has happened in you - it's beyond speech, beyond knowledge. **6** The evidence of Christ has been clearly verified in your lives. **7** Just think - you don't need a thing, you've got it all! All God's gifts are right in front of you as you wait expectantly for our Master Jesus to arrive on the scene for the Finale.

Job 2:11-13 - 11 Three of Job's friends heard of all the trouble that had fallen on him. Each traveled from his own country - Eliphaz from Teman, Bildad from Shuhah, Zophar from Naamath - and went together to Job to keep him company and comfort him. **12** When they first caught sight of him, they couldn't believe what they saw - they hardly recognized him! They cried out in lament, ripped their robes, and dumped dirt on their heads as a sign of their grief. **13** Then they sat with him on the ground. Seven days and nights they sat there without saying a word. They could see how rotten he felt, how deeply he was suffering.

Luke 10:25-37 - 25 Just then a religion scholar stood up with a question to test Jesus. "Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?" **26** He answered, "What's written in God's Law? How do you interpret it?" **27** He said, "That you love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and muscle and intelligence - and that you love your neighbor as well as you do yourself." **28** "Good answer!" said Jesus. "Do it and you'll live." **29** Looking for a loophole, he asked, "And just how would you define 'neighbor'?" **30** Jesus answered by telling a story. "There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. **31** Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. **32** Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man. **33** "A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man's condition, his heart went out to him. **34** He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. **35** In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill - I'll pay you on my way back.' **36** "What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?" **37** "The one who treated him kindly," the religion scholar responded. Jesus said, "Go and do the same."

Hebrews 2:17 - 17 That's why he had to enter into every detail of human life. Then, when he came before God as high priest to get rid of the people's sins,

Hebrews 4:15 - 15 We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all - all but the sin.

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