



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!

Christmas – Culture & Jesus – Part I

History of Christmas – Facts to Consider

1. **A Pagan Celebration** → Up until the 1800's, 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. **Born in the Spring** → 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. **September Services** → 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 all 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? – John 1:12-14

1. **THE WORD BECAME FLESH** → 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** → *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 into creation as human. He became a first-century Jew.
3. **BECAME** → *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** → *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 actually 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. **SIT** → 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. **SERVE** → 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. **SHARE** → 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?