

What About Christmas?

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Few people think there is any certainty about the date of our Lord's birth, but the date is not important. However, the fact of his birth and the doctrine that he was born of a virgin are of the utmost significance. He had to be born in order to die, and the virgin birth is the basis of the incarnation. Therefore the birth of Jesus Christ should be as joyfully believed by us as it was by those lowly shepherds to whom it was announced by the angel of the Lord.

I am thankful that once a year the world is so widely reminded of the birth of Christ. Every December there are plays, songs and exhibitions around the world that remind people of the miracle of the Saviour's birth. The fact that such a thing happens each year is almost a miracle itself.

In addition, the joy that families have as they gather at Christmas time is another reason I thank God for this season. Many of my most cherished memories of childhood are of the times when we all gathered around the Christmas tree. I know that some people have problems with this because of the history of some of these things. It is true that Christmas literally means Christ's Mass, but words often change in meaning, and today that is not what most people associate with Christmas. The same is true of the pagan background of some things connected to Christmas. For several centuries many things that had pagan connections have been without any such significance. Sunday formerly meant the day of the sun; Monday was moon day; Wednesday was Woden's day; Thursday was Thor's day; and Saturday was Saturn's day. Today we use the names of the days of the week without any thought of pagan worship. I was born in January, but I do not worship Janus, even though I was born on his feast day!

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Over the years the American people have borrowed from other nations and times, and Christmas has become Americanized as we have blended the traditions of many nations. Christmas is a holiday in our nation as well as many others, and I am thankful for the heritage which has brought joy and fond memories to so many. I have always felt that Christmas is the highlight of the children's year, and therefore of the whole family.

Jesus is pre-eminent in history as well as being our Saviour. It would be strange if the world, whose history is dated from the reference point of the Lord's birth, did not mark a day on the calendar to note the fact that he was born. That no one knows

when he was born is not important. The world knows the fact of it, and that is what counts.

The Bible gives us the record of Jesus' birth. At a time when so many are reminded of his birth, it seems to me to be obviously appropriate to teach the facts about the birth of Christ rather than to dwell on former meanings of customs which are now entirely different. The truth about the birth of Christ is a fitting subject of songs and sermons at any time, and I can think of no reason to add, "except in December." (Gospel Advocate, December 20, 1979)