

# Christmas in the Early Church

Sermon by Andy Sochor

Text: Luke 2:1-14

You may be questioning the title. After all, there was no Christmas in the first-century church. Yet the observance of Christmas is widespread today. Is that compatible with what we read about the early church? And does it matter? The commonly held view of Christmas is that it is a celebration of the birth of Christ. We are going to take the commonly held view of Christmas and see if it fits into the New Testament.

## The Birth of Jesus

- Luke presents this as a historical fact (Luke 2:1-3) – Joseph traveled to Bethlehem with Mary (Luke 2:4-5); while there, Mary gave birth to Jesus and laid him in a manger (Luke 2:6-7); angels announced this to shepherds nearby (Luke 2:8-14), and they visited the manger (Luke 2:15-16); wise men (magi) also visited, but that was not until after they were in a house (Matthew 2:1-2, 11)
- Obviously, at this point, the church was not in existence – it was established on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:47); the church was purchased by the blood Christ shed in His death (Acts 20:28); so the shepherds and magi were not celebrating the birth of Jesus as members of the church

## The Importance of the Incarnation

- Jesus came in the flesh to free us from the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15) – this would require His death on the cross (Hebrews 9:22); this sanctifies us (Hebrews 9:14; 10:10); so there was a body prepared for Him (Hebrews 10:5)
- This also shows us that He can sympathize with us (Hebrews 4:15) – at the same time, He calls us to a higher standard (1 Peter 2:21-22)
- Without the incarnation of Jesus, we would have no hope and no reason to think God cares for us

## No Observance in the Early Church

- Despite the importance of the incarnation and birth of Jesus, it was not celebrated by the early church – this is VERY strange if the Lord expected His people to commemorate His birth
- Paul told the Ephesian elders that he taught them everything they needed (Acts 20:20, 27) – Christmas came much later and could not have been what Paul taught them

## **Warnings against Special Observances**

- Paul addressed this in his letter to the churches of Galatia (Galatians 4:10-11) – he was talking about observances that were not given to them by God; there is some liberty regarding what we do as individuals (Romans 14:1, 5-6, 22); but a church practice is different; we are not to proclaim man-made doctrines (Matthew 15:8-9)
- In addition to this, we have other passages that speak more generally about the need for Bible authority (Matthew 28:18-20; Colossians 3:17)
- When did the observance of Christmas come about? – the earliest records have it in the second century; the date of December 25th was not “picked” until the fourth century; it was not a first-century practice

## **The Memorial That Was Instituted**

- Jesus did give us a memorial to observe – the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:26-29); this was to remember His death on the cross
- The early church practiced it (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Acts 20:7) – we continue to observe it today, and will do so until He comes again (1 Corinthians 11:26)

## **Conclusion**

- There was no observance of Christmas in the early church
- If we went back in time and tried to implement it, it would not be met with apostolic approval
- We need to remember and be thankful for Christ coming to earth – but that does not mean we should invent religious holy days
- Instead, we need to do what He has instructed and authorized us to do – this includes remembering Jesus’ death as we observe the Lord’s Supper each first day of the week