

# Where are the Church's Christmas Decorations?

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In many man-made denominations during this time of year you will see plenty of Christmas decorations. However, where are the seasonal decorations in the Forum Terrace Church of Christ? Did someone forget to put them up? Doesn't this congregation believe in the Son of God?

New Testament Christians, such as the Forum Terrace Church of Christ, do not observe the birth of Christ during Christmas or at any other time of the year. Many people ask with a puzzled and shocked look upon their face, "Why not?" There are several reasons for this.

## **The Date Of Christ's Birth Is Unknown**

One of the reasons we cannot celebrate Christ's birth is because we do not know the day, month or even the year in which He was born. The very first mention of observing Christ's birthday on Dec. 25th was by Chrysostom of Antioch (347-407). All throughout history there has been various speculations as to the date of Christ's birth. In Egypt, one reads about the first "Christmas" feasts observed on May 20th. Later Clement of Alexandria (150-215) set His birthday on November 17th.

Several scholars believe there is substantial evidence from the Biblical text which denies the December 25th date. For their evidence they cite Luke 2:8, which says, "*Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.*" Shepherds only kept night vigil over their flocks in the spring when the lambs were born.

When God desires his children to observe or worship in a particular way He gives them clear instruction. If God wanted us to observe and worship the birth of Christ He would have told us when and how. The date of Christ's birth remains a secret thing, known now only by God. "*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law*" (Deut. 29:29).

## **Christmas Originated From Paganism And Human Traditions, Not The Word Of God**

It is a well established fact that the early church did not observe Christmas. "*Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the church. Irenaeus and Tertullian omit it from their lists of feasts...*" (Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 3, p. 724, 1908 edition). McClintock and Strong in their "Cyclopedia of Ecclesiastical Literature" sum it up very well: "*The observance of Christmas is not of divine appointment, nor is it of New Testament origin. The day of Christ's birth cannot be ascertained from the New Testament, or indeed, from any other source. The church fathers of the first three centuries do not speak of any special observance of the nativity* (vol. 2, p. 276). Oscar Cullman, a modern church historian, said the early Christians "*altogether rejected such a festival as unchristian*" (The Early Church, p. 34). Thus, neither the wise men or the early Christians ever heard of Christmas.

It is strongly believed that December 25th was chosen to celebrate the birth of Christ because of the festival of the winter solstice (When the earth's northern pole is tilted the greatest distance away from the sun). On our calendar this would be December 21st, but it was December 25th on the Julian calendar which predated our own. On this day the pagans observed the "Birthday of the Unconquered Sun."

Furthermore, many Christmas traditions originated from paganism not the Bible. The Northern Europeans believed that the trees of the forest were inhabited by spirits. They brought the trees into their homes to appease these spirits and show them that they were welcomed to the festival. Mistletoe was thought to possess magical qualities to cure diseases. Celtic priests called "Druids" practiced kissing under the mistletoe. The Norse god Thor, rode through the sky in a red coat for the winter festivals, like Santa Claus.

To these you can add the many other myths surrounding the life of Christ: animals speaking the night Jesus was born, three wisemen, a drummer boy seeking to honor Christ, etc.

## **Christmas Has Its Roots In Catholic Traditions, Not The Bible**

"*In A.D. 354, Bishop Liberius of Rome ordered the people to celebrate on Dec. 25th. 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* (WORLD BOOK ENCYCLOPEDIA, vol. 3, p. 416, 1965 ed.)

The name "Christmas" is of Catholic origin. It is from the old English "Christes Masse" meaning "Mass of Christ" or "Christ's Mass". Mass is a Catholic version of the Lord's Supper. From the 6th century onward the Catholic Church held a midnight mass on the eve of the celebration. From this developed the name "Christmas" though the name was not used popularly till the 11th century. You cannot find Christ in Christmas because He is not a Catholic and, therefore, does not go to mass.

Remember, Jesus condemned those who followed the traditions of men, "*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. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men'*" (Matt. 15:7-9).

## **Observing The Birth Of Christ Misses The Point Of His Life**

For the early church the focus was on the cross on Calvary, not the manger in Bethlehem. The New Testament Christians were commanded to observe His death not His birth. We are told when, where, how, why, and with what to observe His death in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26). But not one word is said about observing His birth. It is quite ironic, that millions are willing to observe His birth once a year, which is not even commanded, but few are willing to observe weekly His death in the Lord's Supper which is commanded. When God wants His people to do a thing He gives them all the information they need to do it right. The Bible supplies us with every detail, so that we will know exactly how to celebrate the event. The Bible has done this in regard to the Lord's Supper. The Bible gives us no information about observing birthday of Christ. Therefore, we are to observe the Lord's Supper, not Christmas.

## **Observance Of Christ's Birth Is Without Any Scriptural Authority**

In all fairness, there is Biblical evidence for the celebrating of the birth of Jesus. On several occasions joy and celebration marked both the

announcement of His coming and His birth. For example, it was announced to Mary with joy, (Lk. 1:28-32), Elizabeth (Lk. 1:41-45), angels (2:10-14), shepherds, (Lk. 2:20); Simeon (2:25-32); Anna (2:36-38); and the wise men (Mt. 2:10). However, all this does not provide us with any authority to celebrate His birthday in the Christian Dispensation. Since we are now under the Law of Christ we must find a direct command, approved apostolic example or necessary inference in the New Testament to authorize the celebration of His birth through Christmas.

Consider the following consequences of observing Christmas as Christ's birth without scriptural authority:

- **It would violate the law of faith.** The source of all religious faith is the Word of God. *"Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God."* (Rom. 10:17).
- **It would violate the law of worship.** True worship must be expressed in spirit and truth, *"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."* (Jn. 4:23,24).
- **It would violate the law of silence.** There are those who will defend this practice by saying, "God didn't say 'Thou shalt not celebrate Christmas'". *"Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God;..."* (1 Pet. 4:11). When God specifies one thing it excludes all other additions. When God specifically commanded us to observe the Lord's death by way of the Lord's Supper, all other observances are excluded which have not been specified, such as, the Mass of Christ or Christmas; or Easter. The Bible is silent about observing Christ's birthday. Therefore, we as New Testament Christians cannot observe it.
- **It would be an addition to the Word of God.** According to Revelation. 22:18 those who add to God's Word will be punished. *"For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the*

*plagues that are written in this book;"*

- **It would be practicing lawlessness.** In Mt. 7:21-23 Jesus condemned those who practiced religious acts without authority. *"Not every one who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'"*

There is no authority for anyone anywhere at anytime to observe Christmas as the birthday of Christ. There should be no special services by the Lord's Church either religious or secular in content.

– Daniel R. Vess

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**Service Times**

**Sunday**  
Bible Study.....9:30 am  
Worship Service.....10:30 am  
Worship Service.....5:00 pm

**Wednesday**  
Bible Study.....7:30 pm

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