

Hartford Bible Students

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DO WE ALL CELEBRATE THE SAME CHRISTMAS?

Approximately 80% of the U.S. population claim to be Christian. And yet Christmas is reported to be celebrated by 95% of Americans. Why would 95% of people living in the United States celebrate the birth of Christ when only 80% of them claim to be Christian? Christmas has, obviously, become a very secular holiday. Many people who are not Christian want their families to enjoy the seasonal festivities.

The Meaning of Christmas to Christians

But what is the meaning behind Christmas? It may surprise some Christians to learn that the word "Christmas" is nowhere found in the Bible. The word "Christ" comes from the Greek word "Christos," which means "the anointed." The suffix "mas" evolved from the Old English word "maesse," meaning festival, feast day, or mass. Though it may also come as a surprise to some, it has long been recognized by Bible scholars that December 25 is not the date of Jesus' birth. December 25 may have been chosen to coincide with the ancient Roman solar festivals. Jesus' actual birth date would have been around October 1. Needless to say, December 25 has become universally accepted as the date to celebrate Christ's birth. And most Christians feel that it is not necessary to quibble over the exact day to commemorate our Savior's birth in the flesh.

The Scriptures clearly direct us to commemorate Jesus' **death** on its anniversary with the bread and the cup in 1 Corinthians 11:24: "*This do in remembrance of me.*" But Christians are nowhere told to celebrate Jesus' **birth**. However, it certainly would be appropriate to remember the miraculous event of God sending his only-begotten Son to earth, as well as the exchanging of gifts to our families, friends, and those in need as tokens of our love.

Who was Jesus?

Many of our non-Christian friends believe that Jesus did live, and even that he was crucified. However, they do not believe that he was the Son of God, "*a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord*" (Luke 2:11). And even many Christians do not fully understand who Jesus was. The Bible clearly indicates that Jesus had a pre-human existence. He was the only-begotten son of God. John 3:16, "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only*

begotten Son..." Jesus was the only direct creation of God. Jesus was created as a perfect spirit being, and he lived with God in the heavens.

John 1:1 describes this time: "*In a beginning was the Word, and the Word was with the God, and a god was the Word.*" (Emphatic Diaglott Translation)

Jesus is here called "the Word," which is translated from the Greek word "Logos." Jesus was "a god" or a mighty one, a spirit being. And he lived with "the God," Jehovah, the Father.

As the "Logos," in his pre-human condition, Jesus was God's chief craftsman in creation. Proverbs 8:30-31, "*Then I was by him, as a master workman; And I was daily his delight, Rejoicing always before him, Rejoicing in his habitable earth; And my delight was with the sons of men.*" Colossians 1:16, "*For by him [Jesus] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth.*"

After Adam's fall into sin, which resulted in all mankind being born in sin, God sent his only-begotten Son to the earth, to be born of a virgin, so that he might redeem the world. But to redeem mankind from sin, it required an equal price -- it required a perfect human life [Jesus] for a perfect human life [Adam]. So Jesus could not come to earth as a spirit being. He had to come to earth as a human being! John 1:14, "*And the Word [Logos] was made flesh, and dwelt among us.*" 1 Timothy 2:5, "*For there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*"

Under Jewish law, you were not considered to be a man until the age of 30. It wasn't until age 30 that Jesus could offer himself as a sacrifice and say, "*Lo, I come...to do thy will, O God.*" (Heb. 10:7) And for 3 ½ years Jesus daily sacrificed his life doing his Father's will until he finished it at the cross.

Virgin Birth: Myth or Miracle?

Since the entire theory of the Atonement presented in the Scriptures demands that of necessity our Redeemer must be an unblemished male of the human race and yet separate from it, this becomes a very important point before the minds of the Lord's thinking people. How did

God accomplish the impossible? *"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one."* Job 14:4

It is indeed impossible to explain a miracle by scientific facts, but it should not be too difficult for anyone with faith to appreciate the concept of the virgin birth. After all, the Almighty God could certainly create the spark of life which would bring forth a child from this humble, blessed woman. Those who only see by scientific sight will declare the virgin birth a myth. However, to those who accept the miraculous account, we can apply Scriptural logic which will serve to increase our faith.

First, we must clarify that the miracle of Jesus' birth was that he was born perfect from a mother who had inherited the sin of Adam. The Catholic doctrine of the "immaculate conception" claims that Mary was conceived without original sin - created perfect for the purpose of bringing forth a perfect offspring. However, it was not necessary for Mary to be "made perfect" in order to give birth to a perfect child. Indeed, Mary identified herself to be of "low estate." Luke 1:48 The word *father* has the significance of life-giver. There is no human father who can produce a perfect child, since all have inherited the sin of father Adam. So it was necessary in this case that God should beget this perfect child by power from on high. This was the gift our Heavenly Father gave us - the gift of Jesus Christ.

What Happens to Non-Christians?

All non-Christian religions believe eternal life is obtained by noble works decreed in their respective sacred writings. However, Christians believe that the

only basis for salvation (from Adamic condemnation and death, pronounced back in Eden) is faith in Jesus. *"There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12) *"The wages of sin is death: The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ the Lord."* (Rom. 6:23)

On first look, this doctrine seems to leave out billions of non-Christians who have never accepted or have never even heard the name of Jesus as the only way to salvation. Does this mean that these billions are lost? The answer to this perplexing question is found in 1 Timothy 2:3-6, where the Apostle Paul states, *"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus: Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."*

Yes, all the billions who have ever lived are going to be delivered from Adamic death by Jesus' life offered in exchange for the life lost in Adam: "As in Adam all die [all were born in sin] even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (I Cor. 15:22) Then, after the resurrection from Adamic death, all will have a fair and equal opportunity to come to a knowledge of this truth. Most non-Christians have died without ever hearing this wonderful truth.

In this Christmas season, let our hearts be filled with appreciation for God's unspeakable gift of sending his Son to earth for our redemption.