

GROW IN GRACE

NEWSLETTER

Volume 38, **No.47, November 27, 2012** / Southside Baptist Church & Christian School / P.O. Box 1594 / 1028 South Water Avenue, Gallatin, TN 37066 (615) 452-5951 / **"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our LORD and Saviour JESUS CHRIST. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen."** (2 Peter 3:18)

BEHOLD! A SAVIOUR, Jesus Christ the LORD, is Born!

The Annual 'Christmas' Season is upon us again!

As to our culture's beloved Christmas celebrations— there are many good family gatherings and special church meetings. **Without a doubt** many sincere Christians, (in the context of all that is culturally Christmas), seek to have special times of worshipping the LORD. They set aside time to give thanks for coming of our LORD. They set aside time to do deeds of kindness, to give unto others. Some will make efforts to win battles over covetousness. A good number of folks will try to focus on JESUS. That's great! **However, it is exceedingly difficult because cultural Christmas and the Birth of Christ are so different.**

Indeed, every year a growing number of Christian folk are heard saying, ***"You know, I love Christmas... but I sure will be glad when it's over!" OR: "Christmas has not even arrived and I am already flat out exhausted!"*** Interesting! Here is an annual 'Christian celebration' that is loved, but that exhausts and we could not survive having it year round! New Testament Christians did not have this problem— as they did not have Christmas!

Search the Scriptures— the New Testament Christians had no Christmas! In Greek or in any other language they never shouted out, ***'Merry Christmas!'*** They had no "Black Friday!" They had no Christmas trees, no exchanging of presents or big gatherings for family, food, fun and football! (Sports) They did no drama productions of the birth of Christ. They did not set up manger scenes. They never called Luke, Chapter two, "the Christmas Story." **The historical reality is** that our beloved traditions, (which are ESSENTIAL to our Christmas), began to enter into the practice of the visible church HUNDREDS of years after the birth of Christ. [Note: We are simply reporting true, historical facts without any judgment about them. Christians know that truth is vital.] CONTINUING: While our cultural Christmas traditions are missing in the New Testament—

There is, however, clear Biblical revelation showing that New Testament era Christians greatly rejoiced in and celebrated the birth of Christ! **Their focus was on rejoicing in JESUS and in WHY Jesus came.**

STRANGE: In our era, every December sincere Christians get all exercised in culture wars **over to have or not to have** “manger scenes” and/or the use of the phrase, “Merry Christmas!” out in the public square and/or in the secular business world. **Many demand that lost pagans use religious terminology and display religious scenes in stores and advertisements or we will boycott you!** In 2010, the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, had a ‘*Grinch Alert*’ website on which they publically exposed stores and companies that said, “Happy Holidays’ rather than “Merry Christmas.” **QUESTION:** Just what New Testament example is there for demanding pagans to use genuine or cultural Christian terms and/or scenery? Are such demands a positive witness for the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

EVEN MORE STRANGE are the following exact 2012 quotes from some fine Christian folk. **Each number represents** a different response, just as they wrote them: **1.** 152 days until Christmas! love the holidays...it's the days leading up to it with madness...and then it's wintertime...sigh. **2.** I can't even think about that right now. It seems that I have so many other things to get through first.... **3.** I always wonder why all kids programs are scheduled then?? Why music recitals etc with everything else we have to do? **4.** EXACTLY!! **5.** I wish it was just a relaxing time when we could enjoy ourselves with our families and friends, and not just a time of negative financial impact and stress! **6.** so, let's start now... I feel better already! **Family, food, fun...period.** ~~~~ **7.** Amazing: The New Testament Christians did not have, did not celebrate Christmas in any shape, form or fashion. THEY DID rejoice in and celebrate the glorious reality that GOD HAD COME IN THE FLESH!... [Their rejoicing was] not on a 'day'... but in their LIFESTYLE... for example: Paul has been teaching about Elders and Deacons in 1 Timothy 3:1-15... and then he JUST EXPLODES with spontaneous worship: "And without controversy GREAT is the mystery of godliness: GOD WAS MANIFEST in the flesh.... etc.!!" OR... as in 2 Corinthians 9:1-14 he has been speaking much about generous giving.... but suddenly, he BURSTS FORTH: "THANKS BE TO GOD for His UNSPEAKABLE GIFT!"

8. Oh no lets not talk about that!!!! 9. Dislike. 10. ugh!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

(8, 9, & 10 are responding to 7!) **This is stunning— Christian people expressing displeasure at how the early Christians responded to the birth of Christ!**

SAD REALITY: (1) Many Christians are seriously ignorant of Biblical revelation about the birth of Christ; and remain strangers to the profound celebration of both Angels and humans as to Messiah’s birth! (2) More than a few Christians seem closed to and resentful at even the suggestion of taking a serious look at God’s revelation as to those who MODEL PROFOUND CELEBRATION of the birth of Christ! **Surely, we can profit from the example of New Testament Christians responding to the birth of Christ!!**

THEREFORE, PLEASE— OPEN YOUR BIBLE! LET US NOTE THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS AS TO THE BIRTH OF CHRIST AND BEHOLD THE VERY FIRST

RESPONSES TO HIS BIRTH! MAY WE GREATLY BENEFIT FROM THEIR EXAMPLE!

I. GABRIEL VISITED ZACHARIAS: Luke 1:5-25

By the time this scene finished, Zacharias had been made "dumb, unable to speak"... and his previously barren wife had become pregnant! **According to 1 Chronicles 24:7-19**, there were 24 courses of priests who served. The courses were counted from the spring of the year. Scholars tell us that **Zacharias' course was the 8th**. Thus, he would have been serving **around the first of June**. When his responsibility was finished, he went to his home and soon thereafter, his wife (Elizabeth) conceived, (Luke 1:23-25). **This would place the probable time of conception as being in late June or in July. Thus, John's birth would have likely been the following spring in March or April.** Luke also tells us that **it was in the 6th month of Elizabeth's pregnancy that Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit**, (Luke 1:24-26, 36).

With these calculations we have Biblical evidence **that the actual birth date of Jesus, (6 months after John's birth), would have likely been in September or October. This is of particular interest because we know** that Jesus died precisely on the day of **PASSOVER** and that the Holy Spirit came precisely on the day of **PENTECOST**. **We know** that God's Old Testament Holy Days CYCLED the complete plan of redemption so that Old Testament believers were celebrating the coming FULL SALVATION, every year!

In the Spring of the year they celebrated: **(1)** Passover; **(2)** Unleavened Bread; **(3)** First-Fruits and **(4)** PENTECOST **and in the Fall of the year**, they celebrated **(5)** The Feast of Trumpets; **(6)** The Day of Atonement and **(7)** The Feast of the Tabernacles. **Glorious reality: Jesus already has and/or will fulfill all seven of these grand redemption celebrations!**

The Bible shows that is was in the spring of the year when JESUS FULFILLED the first four of these seven.

Indeed, it is in the BEGINNING of our being saved that Christians experience the New Covenant fulfillment of these **first four aspects of God's FULL SALVATION:**

(1) Christ died for us;

(2) We are separated unto Christ;

(3) We experience the life of the Resurrected Christ and

(4) We experience Christ indwelling and empowering us as we are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ!

Therefore, we have sound Biblical reason to expect that God will continue to unfold His FULL SALVATION in accordance with the Divine Pattern He has already established. Thus, the first coming of Jesus (As well as His Second Coming!) likely was and likely will be precisely in the time of the Fall Feasts of Trumpets/Day of Atonement and Tabernacles. **For indeed, when Jesus came the first time— What happened?** "THE WORD was made flesh and dwelt (**tabernacled!**) among us..." (John 1:14).

Moreover, what happened at His first coming was a veiled foretaste of things yet to come, when for all eternity the redeemed will be in a continual "Feast of Tabernacles!"— A continual spiritual feast of dwelling with Him! (Revelation 22:1-4) **○ COME LORD JESUS!**

The Bible unveils that God has established a SACRED CALENDAR OF REDEMPTION EVENTS which unfold FULL SALVATION! **We would do well to build into our lives a sacred, yearly calendar of FULL REDEMPTION/FULL SALVATION:**

(1) Christ Died for us.

(2) We are separated from sin and unto **Christ**.

(3) Christ was resurrected for us and we are raised to new life in Him.

(4) **Christ** is BAPTIZING and INDWELLING and EMPOWERING His Church by the Holy Spirit.

(5) Christ came! And Christ is coming back— for and with His saints.

(6) Christ: As He is, so we are in Him! Saints are predestined to be like Him.

(7) Christ: All who are in Christ will see Him FACE TO FACE and will rule and reign with Him for all the millennial reign and for all eternity.

Being reminded of FULL SALVATION can be used of God to help us be so HEAVENLY MINDED that we will, increasingly, be of great earthly good until He comes! **THE LORD'S SUPPER** is a grand time and place to do this since we are being exhorted to remember JESUS... UNTIL HE COMES! This suggests that at the LORD'S TABLE we would be wise to meditate upon FULL REDEMPTION!

Note: IT'S NO WONDER that no one in the New Testament fixated on 'baby Jesus' and that they never re-enacted manger scenes, etc. Christ's birth was understood as one giant step in the midst of God's grand unfolding of FULL SALVATION! **Also:** Regardless of the calendar date as to when Jesus was born and regardless of when He will return — **the Biblical revelation of FULL SALVATION is valid and glorious! DRINK DEEPLY!**

II. GABRIEL VISITED MARY: Luke 1:26-38.

Six months after Elizabeth conceived John by Zacharias, Mary (a virgin) conceived the Son of God by the direct agency of the Holy Spirit. This miracle is astounding and glorious! Moreover, there are two statements in these Scriptures which we must always be ready to apply to our lives: **The Angel's confession:** *"For with God nothing shall be impossible!"* **Mary's confession:** *"Behold, the handmaid of the LORD; be it unto me according to THY WORD!"* May these be guiding, daily confessions!

III. MARY VISITED ELIZABETH: Luke 1:39-56.

When Mary arrived in the presence of Elizabeth, **John** (six months in Elizabeth's womb) **jumped for joy!** (Luke 1:41-46) **Yes, pregnant MOM—** inside of you is more than a mere fetus! There cradles a living child who already knows and experiences a lot more than you might think! A 'bonus' message from these Scriptures is **DO NOT ABORT!** Also: **COMMUNICATE** with your unborn child! GIVE YOUR UNBORN child a healthy environment of God's Word and PRAISE TO GOD! (Note: Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about 3 months and returned to Nazareth).

Note: There was no worship of Mary. The total focus was on the coming of Jesus, the Son of God and the need for a response of FAITH! This announcement fills every enlightened, saved sinner with profound joy and celebration; and gives hope to those yet lost. **Note:** Christ was in the womb of a virgin! John was in his mother's womb. John leaped for joy! This was total, focused, undiluted celebration. Let us learn from six-month-still-in-the-womb John: **JOY at Christ's coming is exclusive. Jesus is not merely 'Center Stage'— no one else is on stage and He needs no props or creative scenery from us!** **Note:** Like all of us, Mary was a sinner! She knew it and rejoiced in, **"God my Saviour!"**

The birth of Christ is exclusively about REJOICING in the SAVIOUR! When JESUS is not enough, we have a problem! The birth of Christ is God coming down to rescue His enemies from the wrath we all so richly deserve. It is the ultimate rescue operation from the ultimate disaster. **When eyes of faith see and receive the Saviour— no artificial stimulation, no dazzling sights and sounds are needed in order for the saint to be greatly motivated to go forth in glorious celebration, rejoicing in GOD OUR SAVIOUR!**

IV. MARY RETURNED HOME, JOHN BAPTIST WAS BORN, THE ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED TO JOSEPH: Luke 1:57-80 and Matthew 1:18-25

When Mary, (three months pregnant), returned home— needless to say, Joseph was shocked. Mary and Joseph were betrothed to each other. During this period, they were considered to be husband and wife, although the marriage had not been consummated. In the will of God, they were to remain VIRGINS during this period. At first, Joseph was heartbroken to learn that Mary was pregnant. **It seemed obvious that she had fornicated.** Joseph could have had her stoned or he could have divorced her. He seemed committed to the latter. (Matt 1:18-25)

However, after the Angel of the LORD appeared to Joseph in a dream, Joseph received Mary and together they bore a great shame from society. They were looked upon as fornicators. **Jesus lived 33 years under the cloud of being an illegitimate.(John 8:41)** My O my, what a price Jesus paid for us sinners, even long before He ever got to the cruel cross of Calvary! [O come let us worship and bow down!]

REALITY: The angel did not announce or set up the beginning of a big secular and/or religious holiday. **He announced that Jesus was coming to 'save His people from their sin!'** In all of the Biblical 'snap shots' of exceeding joy and celebration at Christ's birth there is simplicity and singularity of focus. Again: Jesus is not just 'center stage'— no one else is on the stage! **The joy is this:** Jesus comes to save His people

from their sin! That is reason enough for the joy and rejoicing! **QUESTION:** Have you ever participated in a church service of unrehearsed, overflowing JOY and rejoicing in the birth of THE SAVIOUR from sin?

V. JOSEPH AND MARY WENT TO BETHLEHEM. JESUS WAS BORN: Luke 2:1-7

INN: Literally, “guest room”... A totally different word is used when actually speaking of an Inn, such as the Good Samaritan used: Luke 10:25-37. The average home in Bethlehem would have had upper living quarters and a lower portion for their animals to use at night. If visitors came, they would normally stay with the family in the upper portion in the guest area. **In Mary and Joseph’s case,** this was likely the home of someone that they knew; but the guest room was already filled— thus, they went to the lower level, among the animals. When Jesus was born, after being securely wrapped, **he was laid in an animal’s feeding trough.**

Again, based on the information under the first point of this article, the probable time of Christ’s birth was in the fall of the year. This also gives a good explanation as to why there was “no room in the Inn... or guest room”. For in addition to the taxing, **the Feast of Tabernacles** would have drawn as many as two million Israelites to Jerusalem. Bethlehem, just five miles north, would have experienced much overflow. **The Feast of Tabernacles** looked forward to a time of completion and fulfillment, a time when God would dwell with men! **And unknown to the masses, Jesus did just that:** “The WORD became flesh, and dwelt (tabernacled!) among us...!” (John 1:14) **LET US BE WATCHING AND WAITING! JESUS IS COMING BACK!** (Revelation 19-22) CHRISTIAN: Even now Jesus by His Holy Spirit, dwells within, ‘tabernacles’ within you! CHRISTIAN: Your heart is His home! WELCOME HIM!

LET US Be Still! Stand in Awe! The celebration began long before the Angelic announcements to Mary and Joseph! To a prophet, who had been the bearer of so much sad news and warnings of impending judgment and wrath, awesome prophecies give reason to CELEBRATE— *“Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the LORD by the prophet, saying, **Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name, EMMANUEL, which being interpreted is, GOD with us.**”* (Matt. 1:22-23; Isa. 7:14; 9:6-7; 11:1-9)

EMMANUEL! GOD with us! This is easily the testimony of the masses: “O, yes, I can work in listening to a cantata; and they usually sing something about Emmanuel. But I have Christmas shopping to do, parties to plan, parties to attend, presents to wrap, company to prepare for and/or miles to travel... the list is almost endless. No, I have never stopped and personally meditated upon ‘*GOD WITH US*’... It sounds too deep, too serious... not much fun...”

Reality: Indeed, indeed, cultural Christmas is so demanding of time, energy and resources— most have little or nothing left for much else And while cultural Christmas dazzles us with sights and sounds— it often **BLINDS US AND DULLS OUR SPIRITUAL SENSES** to the great wonders of the Birth of Christ!

VI. THE ANGELS PROCLAIMED MESSIAH'S BIRTH, THE SHEPHERDS VISITED THE CHRIST-CHILD IN THE ANIMALS' QUARTERS: Luke 2:8-20

The angels were rejoicing that God was bridging the un-bridgeable gap between holy God and sinful man, “UNTO YOU A SAVIOUR IS BORN, JESUS CHRIST THE LORD!” **REMEMBER: Angels were the first to sin! All sinning angels are FOREVER doomed. They received no mercy, no forgiveness. They are reserved in judgment: 2 Peter 2:4!** The fallen angels receive holy justice and wrath! Yet, fallen men receive mercy and grace. The Elect Angels have no complaint against God! Rather, they lead the way in WORSHIP! We have much to learn from their praise and much to learn from the Shepherds who responded to divine revelation with faith, praise and with spreading the GOOD NEWS!

LET US BE INSTRUCTED, as from heaven’s angels to earth’s lowly shepherds— they all celebrated the coming of the Saviour, Christ the LORD! **And God is shouting to us** from the CELEBRATING Shepherds who quickly became evangelists, preachers— making known what they had heard and seen! *“And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.”* (Luke 2:15-20)

LET US DARE to focus on the utterly amazing: 1. Jesus Christ came in the flesh to save undeserving rebels from the just and eternal wrath of God in hell! **2.** Jesus Christ came to set the rebels free from self, sin and satan; and to make them His own sons and daughters, servants, friends, saints and co-laborers! **3. The Birth of Christ is about salvation from ultimate and eternal destruction!** Rejoicing in the birth of THE SAVIOUR who came to deliver us from our sins deserves the singular, exclusive focus of our whole hearts, even as modeled by EVERY angel and human who first welcomed His birth model for us!

THEREFORE, THE LORD’S SUPPER SERVICES SHOULD BE very CROWDED every time we observe it— next for us, December 16 and 23!

VII. JESUS WAS CIRCUMCISED; PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE; and ADORED BY SIMEON AND ANNA: Luke 2:21-38. I would encourage us (one and all!) to MEDITATE THROUGH the Scriptures that focus upon the incredible PRAISE and WORSHIP that came forth from the Angels, the Shepherds, Simeon and Anna! **O COME LET US ADORE HIM!**

VIII. THE WISEMEN COME AND WORSHIP KING JESUS: Matthew 2:1-12

By this time, Jesus was from 1-2 years old and **living in a house**, not in the animals’ stall. The wise men did not worship the star, or Joseph or Mary. They only had gifts for JESUS. With eyes of faith they looked at the young child Jesus and saw and worshipped the King of Kings! **O, what an amazing and wonderful day it is when JESUS IS WHO WE DESIRE and when JESUS IS ENOUGH!**

IX. JOSEPH, MARY AND JESUS FLED TO EGYPT. HEROD SLAUGHTERED CHILDREN: Matthew 2:13-15; 2:19-23; Luke 2:39-47. Yes, Herod was afraid of Jesus. So, in his attempt to kill Jesus, he slaughtered all the young boys of Bethlehem and the surrounding area, ages up to two. Later, Joseph, Mary and Jesus would return to Israel and take up residence in Nazareth. **Who can measure REDEMPTION’S cost?**

O let us walk through these Scriptures and BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD

who stepped down from His Glory, all the way to the Cross for sinners!
“O COME! LET US ADORE HIM!”

May one and all experience glorious **CELEBRATIONS** of Jesus Christ! James
 Bell

SOUTHSIDE NEWS NOTES!

- 1. Ladies Bible Study— stay tuned for the next series.**
- 2. WEDNESDAYS: PRAYER SERVICE at 7:00PM! YOUTH: Wednesdays, 6-8pm**
 @ Adam and Bethany's home.
- 3. Thursdays @ 6:30pm: OUTREACH VISITATION**
- 4. EVERY SATURDAY @ 8:00am: Men's Fellowship and Bible Study**

Sunday Schedule for December 2, 9

- 1. 9:30am-** Sunday School / **2. 10:45am-** Morning Worship / Children's Church
- 3. Noon Fellowship 'Covered Dish' Meal / 4. 1:00pm- Early Afternoon Service**

Sunday Schedule for December 16

- 1. 9:30am- Church-wide BRUNCH** (Brunch in the place of Sunday School)
- 2. 10:45am-** A SPECIAL TIME OF WORSHIP, REJOICING in the Birth of JESUS CHRIST:
 - a. Several Men will speak— sharing Biblical REASONS why Jesus came.
 - b. The Choir and various ones will lead us in PRAISE/SINGING/CAROLS— Rejoicing in Christ's birth.
 - c. WE WILL CLIMAX the service WITH THE LORD'S SUPPER.**

Sunday Schedule for December 23

- 1. 9:30am-** Sunday School / **2. 10:45am-** Morning Worship / Children's Church / **3. LORD'S SUPPER at conclusion of the worship hour.**

Sunday Schedule for December 30

- 1. 9:30am-** Sunday School / **2. 10:45am-** Morning Worship / Children's Church / **3. Noon Fellowship 'Covered Dish' Meal / 4. 1:00pm- Early Afternoon Service**