

GROW IN GRACE

NEWSLETTER

Volume 45, No. 51, December 18, 2018 / Southside Baptist Church / P.O. Box 1594 / 1028 South Water Avenue, Gallatin, TN 37066 (615) 452-5951 / **The Grow in Grace Newsletter is a WEEKLY Bible Study**, plus local church news notes— designed first and foremost for members and those attending services at Southside Church; and is sent forth with the desire to aid one and all, (including friends far and wide), in the experience of 2 Peter 3:18. ***“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our LORD and Savior JESUS CHRIST. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen.”*** **NOTE: Next Grow in Grace Newsletter, scheduled for 1/8/2019**

“A Festival that Re-models itself at Every Step to Fit the People Among Whom it Settles!”

When it comes to ‘Christmas’... I do not believe that the Bible believing Christians I know are doing whatever they choose to do, (during the December holiday season), as an purposeful expression of bowing to Roman Catholicism; or as an embracing of ancient pagan religion. **Indeed, in the midst of the annual season**, a good number genuinely seek to place an emphasis upon the reality of Jesus having come to earth to save us from our sins! **HOWEVER, honesty requires us to confess** that, (in and out of churches), the annual Christmas season is filled with deceiving ‘GRINCHES and SCROOGES’— designed to HINDER heart focus upon CHRIST! An honest HISTORY LESSON will help us to understand how we got to where we are; and the truth of God’s Word— neither adding to **nor** taking away from it, (Deut. 12:32; Rev. 22:18-19), will aid us in giving JESUS CHRIST preeminence in worship and service!

IN THIS ARTICLE, THERE ARE THREE POINTS: **[1]** A brief history of what is known around the world as, CHRISTMAS— only quoting from those who dearly LOVE CHRISTMAS! **[2]** What the Bible says about Christmas. **[3]** What the Bible says/reveals about the Birth of Christ.

POINT ONE: Highlights of the HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS

Dr. Earl W. Count, dedicated his pro-Christmas book, **“To you who have loved Christmas and have made it beautiful.”** On page 11, he states, *“Christmas is one of mankind’s greatest experiences. For more than four thousand years, spreading over the earth, it has drawn loyalties and longings of millions of people...”* On page 12, he states that ancient history tells us, *“of an old, old Babylonian festival that moves westward, dividing its ways as it comes: through Greece into Rome as a festival that **remodels itself at every step to fit the people among whom it settles.**”* [Quotes from Four Thousand Years of Christmas]

Various Encyclopedias and other readily available sources chronicle these events and reveal that **although different names were used— for 4000 years man has** indeed had a great December celebration, on or around December 25. The Babylonians were among the first who are known to have engaged in merry-making, feasting, gift-exchanging December festivals. **Moving west, when we get to Rome** we find that beginning in the middle of December, the Romans celebrated what was called ***Saturnalia***.

In the third century, something took place that would radically impact the whole world, even to this day! **The Roman Emperor Constantine claimed** to become a Christian and established Christianity as the state religion. Persecution of Christians

ceased. **He required all of his armies to be baptized.** However, there was a problem: **Saturnalia had the hearts of the masses.** How could the state church, Roman Catholicism, overcome the practices of the people's beloved traditions? **Pope Gregory** believed that the best policy was to let the masses keep their practices, but to change the names of their temples and their traditions; and then to do these same practices to the glory of God.

Therefore the Catholic Church simply re-imaged the great celebration day of the masses, normally December 25, to be changed to the birth day of Christ. And, of course, they re-imaged many of the practices. THE CENTER-PIECE of the holiday would be the CATHOLIC MASS. Over time the name was shortened from 'Christ's Mass' to 'Christmass'... to Christmas. Thus, **the very first Christmass was around 300AD.**

BUT WHAT IS THE MASS?

The Creed of Pope Pius IV, states: "I profess that in the Mass is offered to God a true, proper, and propitiatory sacrifice [that is, a sacrifice which satisfies the justice of God and so offsets the penalty for sin] for the living and the dead; and that in the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist there is truly, really and substantially, the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ; and that there is a conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the blood, which the Catholic Church calls Transubstantiation."

NOTE: The MASS is seriously contrary to the New Testament. *It fully denies the once and for and totally sufficient atoning sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary.* (Heb. 7:24-28; 9:1-28; 10:7-18) **NOTE: Bible believers will be quick to say, "I do**

not celebrate the Catholic Mass at Christmas!” THIS IS TRUE. (REMEMBER, *ALL I am doing in this article is discovering and tracing roots* of the December 25 celebration.)

Thus far, WE ARE SEEING that the celebrations of December, which were already being practiced in Roman culture... **‘Jumped ship’ and got mixed up in Christianity by the actions of Emperor Constantine and the Roman Catholic church.**

Maymie R. Krythe, in her **pro-Christmas** book, *ALL ABOUT CHRISTMAS*, writes in similar fashion: “A celebration at the time of the winter solstice, when all were looking forward to the coming of spring, was not an original idea with Christians.” She proceeds to speak about the Saturnalia; and then says: **“At first** [the first 100+ years of the New Testament Church], Christ’s birthday was not observed by His followers... **But in the third century, Roman Catholicism became dominant under Constantine.”** And so the Roman Catholic church, (being unable to abolish the customs of the masses she had baptized by force), brought over their ancient practices and Christianized them!

WE ‘FAST-FORWARD’... During the middle-ages, **Christmas** was a most popular holiday— there were tournaments, pageants, and plays. Some were religious.

THEN (during the 1500-1600s) **came the Protestant Reformation.** The Reformers were in revolt against Catholicism. They rejected the Roman MASS; therefore it was natural for them to reject, (what to them was the greatest Roman Catholic Mass), Christmass.

In 1642, under Oliver Cromwell, the Reformers gained political power. Puritan preachers openly preached against

observing Christmass. **They influenced the British Parliament to pass a law forbidding the celebration of both Christmass and Easter.**

Parliament decreed penalties of imprisonment for anyone caught celebrating the holiday!

HOWEVER, IN 1647, riots broke out in various places demanding the legalization of Christmas. The Puritan government stood firm and proceeded to break up Christmas celebrations by force of arms. **People were arrested and jailed.** In the next elections the Puritans were **thrown out of power and Christmas was back on the march!"**

CRITICAL NOTE: There is ZERO PLACE in Biblical, New Testament Christianity for seeking to FORCE adherence to religious or Biblical practices or doctrines— regardless if the practices and doctrines are right or wrong.

LIKEWISE, there is NO PLACE for bad attitudes or of fussing/fighting among folks in families or churches who are at different places in their beliefs and understanding as to Christmas.

RATHER, the powerful New Testament ‘weapons’ to wield, (so as to effect godly change), are the Gospel— Love, bless, pray, do good, do not be overcome by evil, overcome evil with good; personally DRAW UPON GRACE to manifest Christ... and leave all others with the LORD!
The Puritans were **DEAD WRONG** in their methods.

PUSHING FORWARD to the ‘new world’ with our sketch of Christmas history, we find that when the Puritans came to the shores of America, they celebrated Thanksgiving but not

Christmas. In fact, there was a 5 shilling fine for any pilgrim found observing Christmas!

Again, they may have been well intended; but their method was wrong. Certainly, volumes could be written about the varied ways in which the world has celebrated Christmas.

However, we move to America and the twentieth and the twenty first century and note the **Modern Day Commercialization of Christmas.**

James H. Barnett, in *The American Christmas: A Study in National Culture*, writes: “At the close of the war in 1918, the American economy was geared to a high level of output and a host of new products were ready to be sold. However, the consumer demands were shrinking, and there was a serious danger of a stagnant market. Both merchants and advertising agencies recognized the commercial possibilities of the folk festivals, and began to exploit these occasions shortly after 1920. This was immediately successful and **has continued unabated** to the present.”

Mr. Barnett, if you could only see us now! The commercialization of Christmas has exploded! **Our very national economy depends on a BIG CHRISTMAS!**

MOREOVER, church growth experts know the power of holidays; and so they guide churches in how to ‘use Christmas’ and other holidays to grow their churches. (Many use Pope Gregory’s method, year around!)

ECONOMIC REALITY: TO HAVE A BIG CHRISTMAS in a home and/or in a church takes a lot of money! Here in 2018, MANY people will once again speak words from heavy and

fearful hearts: ***'We have no money for Christmas!'*** Fear and pain will be in the faces of so many. (Stealing increases as folks try to provide Christmas for their families.)

AND, YES, IN THE MIDST OF ALL THIS, there are many big-hearted Americans, (Christians or not), **doing what they can to help others 'have' Christmas— example,**

I read this past week of ONE MAN who bought over \$19,000.00 of toys for poor and needy kids in his city! He wants them to be able to 'have Christmas!' **AND THERE ARE many Christian families** seeking to have godly family times, seeking to focus on giving and not getting, and seeking to be truth tellers, etc. **BLESSINGS UPON THEM!**

We conclude our 4000 year 'sketch' of Christmas by just noting the **Growing CULTURE WARS!** MANY PROTEST: **"How dare** others commercialize Christmas or remove the public display of manger scenes, etc... **How dare** they not call the tree, a Christmas tree!"

REALITY: THINGS HAVE BEEN CHANGING IN AMERICA! We are in a re-modeling, re-imaging stage of the December holiday in America **because** our society is becoming more and more SECULAR.

This leads us **back to the insightful quote of Dr. Earl W. Count:** *"Christmas is one of mankind's greatest experiences... as a festival that remodels itself at every step to fit the people among whom it settles..."*

POINT TWO: WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT CHRISTMAS

NOTHING. There is simply NO mention of Christmas in the New Testament in any shape, form, or fashion. **We do not have any Biblical example** of anyone celebrating the birthday of Jesus.

There is no mention in the Bible of the MASS. **NO ONE in the New Testament sought to connect JESUS with** any of the beloved festivals of their day, common in the Roman Empire. REALITY: Jesus is NOT the reason for the ‘season’ of part I. (Again... I am only reporting historical truth.)

POINT THREE: Biblical Revelation of the Birth of Christ and the New Testament era Responses to His Birth.

ALTHOUGH, the New Testament does not give us the BIRTH DATE of Jesus; and ALTHOUGH the Holy Spirit breathed Word of God does not show any New Testament Christians celebrating the birthday of Jesus— NEVERTHELESS, God’s Word is full of wonder and celebration when the topic is the birth of Christ! They just could not stop rejoicing! **May we profit from their examples!**

1. THE ANGEL, when speaking unto Joseph, “...*that which is conceived in her (Mary) is of the Holy Ghost... **thou shalt call his name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins.***” (Matt. 1:20-21) **Note:** The angel had only ONE MESSAGE: Jesus was coming **to ‘save His people from their sins!’**

2. The prophet, Isaiah: “**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.**” (Isa. 7:14; 9:6-7; 11:1-9)

3. Gabriel to Mary! “*And, behold, thou shalt bring forth a son, and shalt **call his name JESUS**... the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called **the Son of God**....*” (Luke 1:28-36)

4. John Baptist, six months in Elisabeth’s womb; and Elizabeth:

“... the babe (John) leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believeth: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the LORD.” (Luke 1:41-45) **NOTE: JOY at Christ’s birth is exclusively focused on JESUS as SAVIOUR!**

5. Mary’s magnificent Celebration! *“...My soul doth magnify the LORD, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour... For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name...”* (Luke 1:46-55) **NOTE:** Like all of us, Mary was a sinner! She knew it and thus rejoiced in, **“God my Saviour!”** The birth of Christ is God coming down to rescue His enemies from the wrath we all so richly deserve.

6. The Angel of the LORD and a great multitude of HEAVENLY HOSTS burst forth in praise, giving **grace-filled revelation to lowly shepherds**, *“Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the LORD...”* (Luke 2:10-14)

7. “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)

8. Simeon and Anna! *“Then took he Him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, LORD, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: **For mine eyes have seen thy salvation**, which thou has prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”* (Luke 2:28-38)

NOTICE— GOD- FOCUSED celebrations are NEVER an escape from reality; and they never cater to the rich, or the

talented, or those who feel themselves righteous! **The typical American Christmas requires** lots of money and no broken down lives or families. **In contrast, the Birth of Christ shouts** — BRING NO MONEY! Bring all your broken down lives! Bring a hungry, humble heart and enter into every day CELEBRATION and an eternity with JESUS!

9. LATER, Gentile Wise-men had left the long entrenched but empty celebrations of Babylon in search of the King of the Jews. By Divine revelation they had learned of ONE WHO WAS WORTHY OF WORSHIP AND PRAISE! “... they... fell down, and **worshiped Him**: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented **UNTO HIM** gifts...” (Matt. 2: 1-11)

EVERYTHING was FOCUSED ON JESUS!

10. AFTER the DEATH, the RESURRECTION, and ASCENSION of JESUS, (in the midst of daily life) — **THE INCARNATION**, the coming of God in the flesh, **brought forth CONTINUING CELEBRATION by New Testament Christians:**

1. “And the Word (Jesus) became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

2. “Thanks be to God for His unspeakable Gift.” (2 Cor. 9:15)

3. “...Jesus Christ: Who being in the form of God,...took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men...he humbled Himself ...unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil. 2:1-11)

4. “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH.....” (1 Tim.

3:16)

THEREFORE, let us give preeminent focus to the absolutely astounding: God came in the flesh to save undeserving rebels (That's us!) from the just and eternal wrath of God in hell! **He came to** set rebels free from self, sin, and satan. **“O Come, let US adore HIM!”**

THIS IS STUNNING: Most folk in the first century found no reason to rejoice in the Advent, the Coming of Messiah. **But they did find reason to crucify Him! Why?** Because He exposed their sin, which they loved! Those who do not believe that they need to be saved from their sins and saved from the holy wrath of God will never welcome and celebrate the Saviour! *However, for those who have been broken over their sin— never GET OVER the Coming of Christ!*

GRINCHES and SCROOGES ABOUND— DON'T ALLOW the annual Holiday system to steal and/or MINIMIZE CHRIST and HOLY CELEBRATIONS OF CHRIST! LET US ALL DARE to focus on the utterly amazing: Jesus Christ came in the flesh to save undeserving rebels from the just and eternal wrath of God in hell!

Jesus Christ came to set the rebels free from self, sin, and satan; and to make them His own sons and daughters, and co-laborers! **REJOICING IN** the birth of THE SAVIOUR who came to deliver us from our sins deserves the focus of our whole hearts! **MAY ONE AND ALL EXPERIENCE THE JOY, WONDER and CELEBRATION OF JESUS CHRIST UNTIL He comes back!**

****** Jesus left heaven and came to earth on the GREATEST,** most costly missionary journey of all time— to save sinners!

****** In Christ we have the high calling of God in Christ Jesus to LIVE and TAKE the gospel to the world. LET US COME TOGETHER to PRAY and to GIVE for the furtherance of the Gospel!**

James Bell

SOUTHSIDE NEWS NOTES:

MONDAYS: Jail Ministry— (This ministry is presently ON HOLD... PRAY FOR opening of doors!)

TUESDAYS: Come and sing every Tuesday night at Gallatin Health Care Nursing Home. Meet at the front door at **5:15PM.**

WEDNESDAYS: → 6:30pm— Children Ministry/activities; → 6:30pm— **Youth** Activities and Bible Study—

→ **6:30pm— Wednesday CHURCH PRAYER SERVICE...** (Enter via IRON STEPS; or double doors by gym)

***** LADIES BIBLE STUDY— Next meeting scheduled for Tuesday, JANUARY 8, 2019 @ 11:00am; Continuing in LUKE.** ENTER at the back of the church building, [*Doors open at 10:30am... re-locked at 11:10am*]

***** MEN: EVERY SATURDAY @ 8:00am:** Men's Fellowship/Bible Study! (**STUDY: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN!**) ENTER AT THE back of Church building... under the drive-thru awning. [**DOORS OPEN FOR FELLOWSHIP, Juice, coffee, Hardee's biscuits & Donuts at 7:30am!**]

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SUNDAY SERVICES: December 23, 30

EVERY SUNDAY: Sunday School at 9:30am /Worship at 10:45am

ADDITIONAL NOTES... ABOUT EACH SUNDAY:

1. December 23— NO evening service

2. December 30— NO 5TH Sunday Evening Service

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