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The truly scriptural way to celebrate the birth of Christ.



A synopsis of two sermons preached in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on December 20th, 1998 and January 3rd, 1999 by the minister, Rev. Ivan Foster.

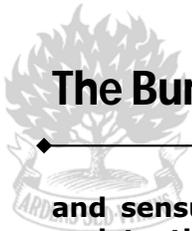
The birth of Christ has been the centre of celebration since it was first announced in Genesis 3:15. *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel*. Here is the first mention of the seed of the woman, the promise of a divine Saviour. That it was deemed a reference to a Redeemer may be seen in Adam immediately afterwards naming his wife, *Eve*, which means *life*, Gen 3:20. The darkness of the great curse that befell Adam and Eve was lightened by the promise contained in God's words to the devil. Eve's name was testimony to the hope entertained by Adam that a Saviour would one day be born Who would redeem sinners from the curse of a broken law.

In Gen 4:1, the birth of Cain is recorded and it is commonly believed from the joyful exclamation of Eve, *I have gotten a man from the LORD*, that she believed that Cain was the promised Redeemer. Her words literally translated read, *I have gotten a man, the Lord*. Thus the very first celebrations organised by man to mark the birth of the Redeemer were based upon error. Eve's celebrations, and surely Adam would have joined with his wife in the celebrations, were baseless. She who had been deceived about sin is now deceived about the Saviour. Cain was not the Christ, indeed Cain . . . *was of that wicked one*, 1 John 3:12.

The excesses and wickednesses of today's 'Christmas' celebrations show that sinful man is still wrong in his celebrations of the birth of Christ. That some Christians attach themselves to the periphery of these celebrations does not alter the essential unscripturalness of it all.

Do we then ignore the birth of Christ? I think not. Adam and Eve were right in rejoicing in the hope of the birth of the Redeemer, though wrong if they thought that Cain was the promised One. My only objections to what goes on at this 'merry' time of the year is that the vast majority of celebrants have the wrong person in their thoughts and engage in the wrong activities by way of celebration. It is not a Christ but a Cain they welcome. The activities are, by and large, an indulgence in pagan excesses: drunkenness, gluttony and the abandonment of decency and decorum.

There is nothing new in such activities surrounding this Christianised pagan feast. In 1644, the English parliament issued an order, directing the populace to observe the monthly fast which fell on December 25th, the day on which the feast of the nativity (Christmas) would normally be celebrated. The order reads in part: ". . . **this day in particular is to be kept with the more solemn humiliation, because it may call to remembrance our sins, and the sins of our forefathers, who have turned this feast, pretending the memory of Christ, into an extreme forgetfulness of him, by giving liberty to carnal**



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and sensual delights, being contrary to the life which Christ led here on earth, and to the spiritual life of Christ in our souls, for the sanctifying and saving whereof, Christ was pleased both to take a human life, and to lay it down again."

-- Page 284, Vol 2, Neal's History of the Puritans].

The anti-puritan Royalists objected strongly to this order, but it had the support of most of the Puritans since it was but the position that the Scottish Church had adopted since the Reformation.

Yes, we should celebrate the birth of Christ. The people of God have ever done so. In the Old Testament ages, they did so anticipatively. The prophets referred to His coming birth and revealed its miraculous nature. *Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel*, Isaiah 7:14. The miracle of the virgin birth was known about long before it took place. That the One Who would be born was no mere man, but God manifest in the flesh, was evident from the name given Him of God: Immanuel -- God with us. When Christ was born John wrote: *And the Word was made 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.

It is when we turn to the Bible's accounts of the birth of Christ that we see how we should mark His birth. How was the news greeted amongst the believers of that day? Their reactions to the news should be the pattern for our celebrations of Christ's birth.

I will point out one elementary matter. Christ was not born on or near 25th December. It is generally agreed that shepherds would not be out in the fields watching their flocks in the dead of winter. Just at what time of the year Christ was born is not known. But it does not matter for His birth is cause for a daily celebration rather than on one day of the year only. By all means, let us remember His birth on 25th December, but if we do, we will most certainly not engage in the so-called festivities of the season. A remembering of Him and His birth will cause us to eschew to a large degree, those activities in which Christendom engages by way of marking the birth of the Saviour.

What then can we learn from the Bible about celebrating the birth of Christ?

I. WE SHOULD CELEBRATE WITH HUMILITY

Few things can bring home to us our sinfulness and lost condition like the birth of Christ. Words cannot set forth the condescension of the Lord when He stooped to take upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh. That God had to become man in order to save sinners underscores just how sinful and helpless we are. That God should undertake such a work for so unworthy a people shows His love and grace. *And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*, Philippians 2:8. How unseemly is the giving of full rein to greed, self-indulgence, and carnal desires on the part of young and old which is engaged in at this time of the year!

1. Christ's state from His conception to His resurrection was one of humiliation.

Solomon wondered: *But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!* 2 Chronicles 6:18. What a mystery is God dwelling in a body of flesh! *And with-*



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out controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh , 1 Timothy 3:16.

2. Christ was made lower than those who before served Him. *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man* , Hebrews 2:9. Little wonder the angels wished to study the writings of the prophets related to Christ's birth and then upon the infant Himself. Peter refers to their interest. *Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into* , 1 Peter 1:10-12.

3. Such was Christ's humiliation that none saw Him as God. He was God. *Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men* , Phil 2:7-8. But those who met Him during His earthly ministry, even those who directly benefitted from the exercise of His divine power, did not see Him as God. *Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? Matt 13:55.* This was their response to His wisdom and mighty works. *He was despised and rejected of men . . . he was despised, and we esteemed him not* , Isaiah 53:3.

4. In His incarnation, Christ chose those of lowly standing as His family . Poverty and obscurity were the social environs of the Saviour. *For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich* , 2 Corinthians 8:9. These considerations forbid us and our children engaging in the celebrations that surround us.

II. WE SHOULD CELEBRATE WITH JOY

Joy marked the birth of Christ in a most remarkable way.

1. Joy filled our Saviour's heart as he was born . *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God* , Heb 12:2. The joy of redeeming His people from their sins sustained Him in all His undertakings as our Redeemer.

2. Joy filled Heaven at the birth of Christ. *And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. . . . And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men* , Luke 2:10, 13-14.

3. The saints of God rejoiced. We have only to read the account of Simeon's reaction to the birth of the Redeemer and that of Anna the prophetess in the gospel of Luke to see



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something of the joy experienced by believers at the gladsome news of Christ's birth. Luke 2:25-32; 36-38.

4. Even the unborn rejoiced. The reaction of the unborn John the Baptist to the sound of the voice of Mary, the Saviour's mother, is miraculously indicative of the joy caused by the coming of Christ. *For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy*, Luke 1:44.

III. WE SHOULD REJOICE UNASHAMEDLY

The shepherds told everyone as they rejoiced in the gospel news, Luke 2:16-20. The wise men likewise openly rejoiced at finding Christ, Matt 2:10. In contrast, whatever religious content there is in the usual activities surrounding 25th December is either ecumenical or senseless sentimentality.

1. We should celebrate by singing God's praises. Any mention of God's name in the merrymaking of men but adds insult to injury. In truth, men wish no mention of the God of the Bible in their festivities. A strong gospel witness would be widely resented. The reaction of the crowd of Romanists and ecumenists gathered at the City Hall in Belfast to greet President Bill Clinton during a visit to Northern Ireland at the Christmas period in 1995 is an example of the world's reaction to the Bible's account of Christ's birth. Rev. Eric Smyth, the Lord Mayor of Belfast that year, before asking Clinton to switch on the Christmas tree lights, attempted to read Luke's account of the Saviour's birth. He was booed and catcalled by many in the crowd. The voice of the Christian should, however, be raised in rejoicing at the birth of Christ.

2. We should celebrate by witnessing to others . Luke 2:17. How little of the true story of Christ is made known at this time of the year. Thoughts of a midnight visit from a non-existent being with god-like qualities are more common even in Christian homes than are the thoughts that occupied the shepherds and the wise men. Children of Christians are beside themselves with the thrill of a visit from Santa in a manner they never display in response to the boundlessly more glorious story of the Saviour.

3. We should worship Christ. *And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh*, Matthew 2:11. How often prayer meetings and services are cancelled in order to avoid clashing with the planned celebrations! The man-made festivities are given priority over the God-ordained means of worship. This ought not to be. Thoughts on the birth of Christ ought to drive us to our knees in worship not to the shops in a spending spree.

What of you sinner? Have you been guided by the star of the gospel to the feet of Christ? Have you seen Him and fallen down before Him in worship? Have you bidden welcome into your heart and life the One for Whom there was no room at the inn? Have you presented Him with the gift of your love and obedience?

Until you have, you have not celebrated the birth of Christ in a God-pleasing manner.