

The Birth of Christ

Danny Brown

“Christmas time” is almost here. Thanksgiving is past. Lights are already up in town and in the stores. Manger scenes will soon make their appearance with replicas of Joseph, Mary and a babe in a manger. December the 25th is just around the corner. Once again we are faced with the questions, “Is this the birthday of Jesus?” and “Does God’s holy word require or approve of setting aside this day as a holy day for a special observance of the birth of Christ?” With the aim of eliciting truth, let us investigate what the Bible says about the birth of Christ.

Prophecy

“And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: 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.” - (Gen 3:14-15)

“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” (Isa 7:14)

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” (Isa 9:6)

“But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” (Micah 5:2)

Joseph’s Vision

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. 19. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. 20. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. 21. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. 22. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 23. 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. 24. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: 25. And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.” (Mat 1:18-25)

Birth of Jesus

"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. 2. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) 3. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. 4. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) 5. To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. 6. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 7. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." (Luke 2:1-7)

Visit of the Shepherds

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 10. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 13. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. 15. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. 16. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. 17. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. 18. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. 20. 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 2:8-20)

Jesus Named and Circumcised

"And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb." (Luke 2:21)

Infant Jesus in the Temple

This event did not take place until at least forty days after His birth because of what the law required concerning Mary's purification. *"And the Lord spake unto Moses saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying. If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child, then she shall be unclean seven days according to the days of the*

separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days, she shall touch no hallowed thing nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled.” (Leviticus 12:1-4)

“And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; 23. (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) 24. And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons. 25. And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. 26. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, 28. Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29. Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: 30. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, 31. Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; 32. A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. 33. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. 34. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; 35. (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. 36. And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; 37. And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.” (Luke 2:22-38)

Visit of the Wise Men

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, 2. Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. 3. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. 5. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, 6. And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. 7. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. 8. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. 9. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the

young child was. 10. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. 11. 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. 12. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way." (Mat 2:1-12)

Flight into Egypt

"And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. 14. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: 15. And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son." (Mat 2:13-15)

Massacre of the Little Children

"Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. 17. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, 18. In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not." (Mat 2:16-18)

Return to Nazareth

"But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20. Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. 21. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: 23. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene." (Mat 2:19-23)

Some Observations

One of the Greatest Events Ever - One of the persons of the Godhead came into this world being born of a woman, being made in the likeness of men and in fashion as a man. By this act Christ demonstrated His unselfishness. Had He chosen to remain in heaven in the form of God the world would be hopelessly lost in sin, man's salvation

depended wholly upon his willingness to give up His place with God and the form in which he previously existed. In doing this He did not benefit himself but man whose form he assumed. Deity chose to dwell here in a human body and was in every sense a man. There was nothing about being a man that Christ, the creator of man, could not readily become and fully identify with. He possessed all the characteristics which men possess for man was made in His image. (see John 1:1-4; Gen 1:26-27) However a human being functions Jesus functioned. As a babe in swaddling clothes, an infant in arms, a young boy, a teenager and as an adult, He was not a potential God, He was Immanuel, God with us. (Matt 1:23). He was, *“Born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness,”* (Rom 1:3,4) He was *“God manifest in the flesh.”* (1 Tim 3:16).

Concerning the Year of Jesus’ Birth - “When Christ was born time was reckoned in the Roman Empire from the founding of the city of Rome. When Christianity became the universal religion over what had been the Roman world, a monk named Dionysius Exiguus, at the request of the Emperor Justinian, made a calendar A.D.526, reckoning time from the Birth of Christ, to supersede the Roman calendar. Long after the Christian Calendar had replaced the Roman calendar it was found that Dionysius had made a mistake in placing the birth of Christ in 753 from the founding of Rome. It should have been about 749, or a year or two earlier.” Henry Halley, Halley’s Bible Handbook, pg. 492. So the reason many say that Jesus was born in 4 or 6 B.C. is because the maker of the Christian calendar made a mistake in coordinating it with the Roman calendar it replaced. However if the year of Jesus’ birth had been important God would have stated it.

Concerning the Date of His Birth - The exact date or time of Jesus’ birth is not revealed in Scripture or in secular history. “The facts that we do possess - for example, the fact of a Roman Emperor’s ordering a taxing or enrolling, the condition of Mary heavy with child, the shepherds’ keeping watch over their flocks in the fields by night, etc. - argue against a December date and favor a warmer time of the year, spring and not winter. (Luke 2:1-20).” (Bill Crews)

Albert Barnes, noted commentator in his comments on Luke 2:9 which says, and there were in the same country shepherd abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night”, says:

“The climate was mild, and, to keep their flocks from straying, they spent the night with them. It is also a fact that the Jews sent out their flocks into the mountainous and desert regions during the summer months, and took them up in the latter part of October or the first of November, when the cold weather commenced. While away in these deserts and mountainous regions, it was proper that there should be some one to attend them to keep them from straying, and from the ravages of wolves and other wild beasts. It is probable from this that our Saviour was born before the 25th of December, or before what we call Christmas. At that time it is cold, and especially in the high and mountainous regions about Bethlehem. But the exact time of his birth is unknown; there is no way to ascertain it. Different learned men have fixed it at each month in the year. Nor is it of consequence to know the time; if it

were, God would have preserved the record of it. Matters of moment are clearly revealed; those which he regards as of no importance are concealed.”

Why December 25th? - It was not because the Bible revealed it or because it was the consensus of opinion of great men, but because a bishop of Rome ordered it.. “In A.D. 354, Bishop Liberius of Rome ordered the people to celebrate on December 25. He probably chose this date because the people of Rome already observed it as the Feast of Saturn, celebrating the birthday of the sun.” - World Book Encyclopedia, Vol 3, pg. 416, 1965.

First Observance of Christmas – Since it is not recorded in Scripture, which reveals “all things that pertain unto life and godliness.” (2 Pet 1:3) Its observance began after the apostolic age among uninspired men.

The earliest allusion to it is made by Clement of Alexandria (ca 200 A.D.) . . . Further, it would seem as if Clement rather censured the attempt to fix accurately the day of our Lord’s birth, itself conclusive evidence against a general recognition of the festival in Clement’s time (A dictionary of Christian Antiquities, Vol 1, pg. 258b)

As late as A.D. 245, Origen repudiated the idea of keeping the birthday of Christ, as if he were a king Pharaoh. (Encyclopedia Britannica, pg. 642)

A fourth century papyrus contains the oldest Christmas liturgy in existence. The nativity festival was separated from the early Christian Epiphany feast and given its own day, December 25th, between the years 325 and 354. In Rome, December 25th is attested as the day of Christ’s birth in 336. (Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, pg. 117)

In the case of the Eastern church there is no certain evidence pointing to a general celebration of the nativity on December 25th before the time of Chrysostom (ca 386 A.D.) (A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities, Vol 1, pg 361b)

Let’s Keep the Story Straight - The Scriptures say nothing of Mary riding on a donkey, yet men have placed a donkey in the scene and even given it a name. How many wise men were there? There is not even a hint in the Bible as to how many there were. (see Matt 2:1-11). Nor does the Bible picture the Wise men coming to the stable the night of Jesus birth and seeing a babe in a manger. Their visit took place after Mary’s purification. According to the Law of Moses Mary was regarded unclean for forty days following the birth of her son. (Lev 12:1-5). At the end of the forty days sacrifices were offered at the temple for her cleansing or purification. Also at that time Jesus, being the first born, was to be presented to the Lord at the temple in Jerusalem and redeemed. (Ex 13:11-15; Nu 18:15,16). The wise men enter the picture after these events. Matt 2:11 says “*they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary. . .*” (emphasis mine - dab). Jesus was now a young child, perhaps even up to two years old, for Herod ordered all the male children two years old and younger to be slain, “*according to the time which he had exactly learned of the Wise-men.*” (Matt 2:16).

The Name “Christmas” - The Encyclopedia tells us, “The name is derived from the medieval Christes Masse, the Mass of Christ.” “The word ‘Christmas’ is ‘Christ’ plus ‘Mass,’ or the Mass of Christ. According to the Catholic Catechism, Mass is the ‘unbloody sacrifice’ of Jesus Christ. The word ‘mass’ refers to the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation - the doctrine that the bread and grape juice in the Lord’s Supper

are miraculously changed into the actual flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. Just how the 'Mass of Christ,' which refers to His crucifixion, got connected with His birth, is something that I have not yet learned. Nevertheless, that is the meaning of the term. Christmas is Christ-Mass." - Grover Stevens

Putting Christ back in Christmas - Christ cannot be put back into Christmas for He was never there. The annual observance of the birth of Christ is a widely accepted and an age-old religious tradition, but not as old as the New Testament. Jesus, the inspired apostles, and the early Christians never observed any such day or time. Christmas is but a tradition of men. During His sojourn on earth Jesus stood against the traditions of men. (Matt 15:1-9; Mark 7:8-9).

Concerning a Religious Observance of the Birth of Christ - We rejoice that Jesus was born. However when one attempts to make December 25th a religious holy day by claiming that Christ was born on that day and that the Lord wants men to celebrate His birthday, he errs.

We have not been instructed to celebrate His birth. To do so would be to act without Divine authority. We are instructed that in whatever we do we are to do it in the name of Christ, that is, by His authority. (Col 3:17) Jesus said, "*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done may wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*" (Matt 7:21-23). The word "iniquity" is defined as "lawlessness" that is, to act without authority. Those whom Jesus said he never knew were those who acted without His authority. Let us learn to abide in the teaching.

The Bible does not mention any such observance by the apostles of Christ nor by the first-century Christians. The Bible furnishes us with "*all things that pertain to life and godliness,*" (2 Pet. 1:3) and provides everything necessary that we may be complete, thoroughly furnished unto every good work. (2 Tim 3:16-17). It also warns us not to add to the word. (Rev 21:18-19). As the Bible says nothing concerning the observance of the birthday of Christ, and since we have no liberty to add to the word of God, we must conclude that God does not desire a religious observance of His son's birth.

Also, we are warned by the Lord Himself not to follow the inventions of men. He said, "*In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.*" (Matt 15:9).

The Encyclopedia makes this interesting statement, "The celebration was not observed in the first centuries of the Christian church, since the Christian usage in general was to celebrate the death of remarkable persons rather than the birth." The emphases of the New Testament are upon the death of Christ and the benefits obtained there from, not upon His birth. The word of God teaches that to be saved each one must believe and be baptized. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). In baptism the individual come into the death of Christ were He shed His blood. (Rom 6:3-4; John 19:34). Each first day of the week His disciples came together to partake of the Lord's Supper in memory of His death for our sins. (Acts 20:7). Through death Jesus brought

him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, to naught making possible His and our resurrection. (Heb 2:14,15). It was through the death of Jesus that God commended His own love for us. (Rom 5:8).

Some Sad Circumstances During this Season of the Year - “Merchants who have wares to sell and people who can be enticed to buy them have truly commercialized it. Too many people buy beyond their means. Most of the gifts are for individuals who don’t really need anything. More liquor is bought and sold, given and consumed, than at any other time of the year. There are more drunks, more drunk drivers, more car wrecks and more DWI’s than at any other time of the year. There are more wild parties, more instances of vulgar conduct and more occasions of fornication and adultery than at any time of the year. So many people act as if they are honoring Bacchus or Venus rather than Jesus Christ. But even those people with honest hearts and sincere motives and pure morals, who truly seek to remember the birth of the Lord, are wrong in thinking that we know when Jesus was born and that God wants us to have an annual celebration of the event.” - Bill Crews.

Some Praiseworthy Things of the Season - Many who never give a thought to religion are brought for however short or however long a period of time, to give some consideration to the Christ of God and to the religion of which He is the author. The call to peace on earth to men of good will is again heard round the world. It is a time when caring about one another and sharing becomes uppermost in the hearts of many. Because it is a national holiday (not holy-day) workers have time off from the job and students are out of school, it is a time of visiting with loved ones and friends. Love, devotion and good will are expressed in the giving and receiving of gifts. The poor are remembered. Generally there is a spirit of kindness, benevolence, forgiveness, love and joy. Whatever good attitudes and acts that characterize this time of year should not be confined to December but should continue throughout the year.

The Lord Authorized Only One Memorial - The Lord’s Supper – “When Christians partake of the Lord’s Supper they remember Christ in His death and look forward to His coming again. (1 Cor. 11:23-29) The Supper is to be observed on the ‘first day of the week.’ (Acts 20:7) We are not authorized to observe any memorial other than the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week. Sadly, men have either ignored this great memorial or they have perverted it. Being dissatisfied with New Testament authority, men have established other memorials. They have ordained December 25th as a day to celebrate the ‘birth’ of Christ which is called Christmas. They set January 6th as a feast day commemorating the manifestation of Jesus to the Gentiles, which they call Epiphany. Easter is yet another observance that man has invented and it is supposed to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Let us remember, however, that Jesus has not authorized us to observe a day for his birth, baptism or resurrection. The only authorized observance is the Lord’s Supper in memory of His death and faithful Christians everywhere will assemble on the Lord’s Day to take the Supper.” (W. R. Jones).

Why Did Jesus Come To Earth?

1. To Destroy the works of the Devil: *He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” (1 John 3:8)*

2. To fulfill the law and take it out of the way: *“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, til all be fulfilled. (Matthew 5:17; see also Col 2:14; Heb 7:12; Gal 5:4)*

3. To be our example: *“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.” (1 Peter 2:21)*

4. To be king: *“Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.” (John 18:37)*

5. To save sinners: *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” (1 Timothy 1:15)*

6. To do the will of the Father: *“For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.” (John 6:38)*

7. To establish His kingdom, the church: *“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven:” (Matthew 16:18-19)*

8. In order to be our high priest: *“Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” (Hebrews 2:17)*

9. To witness to the truth: *“Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice.” (John 18:37)*

10. He came to die as a sin sacrifice for all men: *“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)*

11. He came that men may have life and may have it abundantly: *“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10)*