

Lesson 5: The Word made Flesh

The Second Article of the Apostle' Creed

REDEMPTION

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

What does this mean? I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

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The countdown to “the 25 Days of Christmas?” Do we really need a countdown to the countdown? Do we even need a countdown?

First things first. We don't know exactly when Jesus was born. Back in those days, they didn't remember birthdays as much as they remembered the day people died. No birthday parties, no cakes and no gifts. In fact, you didn't even get named until a week or so after you were born (because so many babies died.)

In 386 A.D., (Christianity wasn't legal until 313 A.D) Pastor John Chrysostom said in a sermon that Jesus was born on December 25th. He got that date because Jesus was conceived in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy (John the Baptizer) and the Bible says that happened when Zacharias (Elizabeth's husband) was on duty as priest on the Day of Atonement. Since we know when the Day of Atonement was around 1 B.C/1 A.D., Pastor Chrysostom thought he could know when Jesus was born. That's a long explanation that reminds us there is a reason for December 25th being chosen, but there is no birth certificate - so don't be surprised when you get to heaven to find out it was a different date. Some people point out the sheep wouldn't have been in the fields in December, so....

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It should also be said that while most people celebrate Christmas on December 25th, the Orthodox church doesn't celebrate it until January 7th. This is because of an argument over the two primary calendars (Gregorian and Julian) and the Western Church (Catholic) chose December and the Eastern Church (Orthodox) chose January.

Much of the Western church celebrates Epiphany on January 6th, which is the coming of the Wisemen (who bring gifts to the baby Jesus).

Some people think the reason December 25th was chosen is because it was the Roman festival of Saturnalia (from which we get Satur(n)day. It is also the Winter Solstice, the day when the "sun" returns and the days get longer. Since these would have been Roman festivals that everyone would have been celebrating, it would have been easy for the Christians to celebrate alongside them without fear of being arrested. In truth, we don't know exactly why they chose that day - but it's not as important that we find the exact day as it is that we celebrate God's gift of a Savior.

And then there are the Jews who don't celebrate Christmas - but do celebrate Hanukkah, the festival of lights, just before Christmas.

The next thing we need to understand is that Jesus was most likely born before Himself. All of Western History is divided into B.C. (before Christ) and A.D. Anno Domini (in the year of our Lord.) Since there is no such thing as the year 0 - and the mean old King Herod died around 4 B.C., we're pretty sure Jesus was born about 4 B.C. All sorts of things like astronomical events, the census and other things (especially His death 33 years later) line up with this year.

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There are a lot of things we associate with Christmas. Let's see where some of those things came from:

We get Christmas carols from the _____, even though the Bible says "they said" - not "they sang."

We get Christmas gifts from the _____, who brought gold, frankincense and myrrh to help the family when they fled to Egypt. The Gold was because Jesus was a _____, the frankincense was because Jesus was also a _____, and the Myrrh helped us understand how Jesus was going to save us because it is used on _____.

There are two people credited with giving us the Christmas tree. _____
_____ and Saint _____.

Read Luke 2, John 1 and Mark 1 and answer the following questions:

- 1) Why did Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem?

- 2) How did they get there?

- 3) Is the Innkeeper mentioned in Luke 2?

- 4) Who authorized the Census to be taken?

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- 5) Who named the baby? (Luke 1:31)

- 6) What does His name mean?

- 7) Why did they go to Bethlehem?

- 8) Besides Mary, Joseph and the angels, who knew about the baby first?

- 9) Does the Gospel of Mark talk about the birth of Jesus?

- 10) What does St John call Jesus in his Gospel?

- 11) Read Genesis 1:3, how did God create everything?

- 12) What does John say Jesus brought into the world?

- 13) Who are all the people in Matthew 1?