

WAS CHRIST BORN ON CHRISTMAS DAY?

THE date of the birth of Jesus would not have been a subject of controversy if the churches of Christendom had been consistent in telling their adherents the truth of the matter. That Christmas is a pagan festival with an unseemly Christian veneer or covering is a glaring fact of the Scripture and history.

In The Explanatory Catechism of Christian Doctrine, it is stated in answer to Questions 50 and 51, that our Saviour Jesus Christ was born at Bethlehem on Christmas Day, the 25th of December. But how the churches came about this date, no one cares to ask. The erroneous belief that the priests and catechists cannot lie makes the churchgoers accept this teaching with quiet contentment. The people therefore go all out to celebrate Christmas NOT out of a scripturally grounded faith but because they so were bred.

A true Christian does not do a thing simply because the whole world or majority esteem it highly and do it. Before he does anything, he must first of all satisfy himself that it is in accord with the will of God as revealed in the Holy Scripture. Christ himself said: "...For that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." – Luke 16: 15.

After a diligent research into both sacred and profane history, we have no doubt in our minds that Jesus Christ was born in the month of October, and NOT in December!

We must at this stage point out that the day, month or year in which Christ was born is not positively stated chapter and verse in the Bible for the unlearned or those who do not search the Scriptures to understand. But there are scriptural records including the Bible Chronology from which we can show to those with open minds that his birth took place in October.

Bible Account

In those days there were appointed 24 Jewish priests, the sons of Aaron, to serve in the temple in a year. Everyone officiated according to the order of his course or turn – two every month. The first priest served from the beginning of the first month called Nisan or Abib and retired at the middle of the month; and the second took over from the middle to the end of the month. The priest Abijah served in the eighth course according to 1 Chronicles 24: 1-10. The eighth course started from the middle to the end of the fourth month known as Tammuz, which, according to the Jewish Calendar, corresponds with the latter part of our June to early July. (Vide The Oxford Encyclopedic Concordance, page 197, and The Universal Bible Dictionary by Buckland & Williams, page 475.)

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, was a successor of Abijah. It was when he was officiating in the temple in the order of his turn – "the course of Abijah" – that an angel of God appeared to him saying that his wife, Elizabeth, would bear him a son to be named John. (Luke 1: 5-13) After the completion of Zacharias' period of duty in early July (Tammuz), his wife became pregnant, and she hid herself for five months. – Luke 1: 23, 24.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's conception – Chisleu, which is our December – the angel Gabriel was sent by God to the virgin Mary and he announced to her that she would conceive and bear a son to be called JESUS. The angel added: "And behold, thy cousin, Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible." – Luke 1: 26-31, 36, 37. Consequent upon the annunciation Mary, no doubt, was in high spirits. With haste she went straight to a city in the uplands of Judah to meet Elizabeth. She stayed with her cousin about three months (i.e. from January to March) and then returned home. (Luke 1: 39-40, 56) Something dramatic occurred when Mary visited Elizabeth. As soon as she entered Zacharias' house and greeted Elizabeth, the babe (John) stirred in her womb. The words of

Elizabeth to Mary at that instance, which were motivated by the Holy Spirit, show clearly that Mary herself was already pregnant. Not only did Elizabeth bless the fruit of her womb but she went on to address her out right as “the mother of my Lord”. – Luke 1: 41-44.

According to medical authorities the span of foetal life under normal condition is 280 days, which is nine months; any time in the tenth month the child, by God’s grace, can be born.

This was the case with John the Baptist. The angel appeared to Mary in the sixth month of Elizabeth’s conception and Mary went to her and stayed three months: six plus three equal nine. It was then “Elisabeth’s full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son” – obviously, in the tenth month, April. – Luke 1: 36,56-57.

Having been equipped with this knowledge, let us now count Mary’s conception from that January as was manifest in Elizabeth’s declaration, we will arrive at September as the ninth month; then in the tenth month OCTOBER, Jesus Christ was born. But on which day in October his birth took place no one can tell because there is no record. We of the GKS say only what we can prove.

With regard to the year of Christ’s birth, historians disagree with one another. Some hold to B.C. 2 or B. C. 4, and others suggest B.C. 6. We are no historians, and so we do not wish to be entangled in their disagreements. But from a scrutiny of historical records B.C. 2 is more acceptable to many.

Physical Facts

The physical features of Palestine in regard to the climate lend support to the view that Christ was not born in December. According to the Gospel story, there were shepherds attending their flocks in the open fields by night when Christ was born. This could not have been possible in December, because all accredited authorities agree that December, which corresponds with the Jewish ninth month, Chisleu, (Zechariah 7: 1) was usually a time of winter in Palestine when the people could not stay outside in the night owing to the intense cold. The Oxford Encyclopedic Concordance states that there: was “snow on the mountains”.

But October is the Jewish seventh month called Tisri or Ethanim. (1 Kings 8: 2) It was a time of normal weather that permitted of outdoor or outside activities. Again, the fact that the churches of Christendom observe the death of Jesus Christ (“Good Friday”) in April, confirms that his birth could not have taken place in December. Of a truth, he was killed in April, which is Nisan or Abib, the first month of the Jewish year, when the Feast of Passover or Unleavened Bread was celebrated.

We all agree that Jesus Christ lived for 33 1/2 years. Now let us admit that he was born in December as the churches teach, it will mean, therefore, that his 33rd birthday anniversary fell on December, and six months later, which was June, he died. If it was so, why then are the churches celebrating his death in April and not in June? The plain truth is that he was born in October. His 33rd birthday then fell on October, and six months later, that is, in April, he was slain.

Historical Facts

There is no authentic history in existence that gives support to the teaching that Jesus Christ was born in December. We challenge anyone who may argue this to cite a SINGLE authority to the contrary to prove us wrong. There was no such festival as Christmas until the fourth century, and it was the Romish Church in its characteristic tendency of “meeting Paganism half-way”, that just fixed on December 25 as Christ’s birthday. We shall dwell on this point later on in this sermon.

Earl W. Count, in his book, 4000 Years of Christmas, stated that "December twentyfifth is no more the historical date of His (Christ's) birth than is any other". He added: "The Christians chose it to be His birthday only several centuries after he had lived and died." (Page 34). We cannot do without making reference to the evidence of the well-known ecclesiastical historian, Alexander Hislop. In his distinguished work, The Two Babylons, he wrote: "There is not a word in the Scriptures about the precise day of His (Christ's) birth...What is recorded there, implies that at what time soever His birth took place, it could not have been on the 25th of December... The cold of the night, from December to February, is very piercing, and it was not the custom for the shepherds of Judea to watch their flocks in the open fields later than about the end of October. It is in the last degree incredible, then, that the birth of Christ could have taken place at the end of December." (Pages 91-92, emphasis ours)

On this point there is great unanimity among commentators who include Barnes, Doddridge, Lightfoot, Joseph Scaliger, Joseph Mede, and Jennings, in his Jewish Antiquities. After a comprehensive disquisition on the subject, among other argument, Joseph Mede adduced the following: "At the birth of Christ every woman and child was to go to be taxed at the city whereto they belonged, whither some had long journeys; but the middle of winter was not fitting for such a business especially for women with child, and children to travel in. Therefore, Christ could not be born in the depth of winter..."(MEDE'S Works, 1672).

Hislop also quoted Gill as stating in his Commentary on Luke 2: 8 thus: "The first rain falls in the month Marchesvan, which answers to the latter part of our October and the former part of November...From whence it appears that Christ must be born before the middle of October, since the first rain was not yet come." (The Two Babylons, pages 91-92).

"No date is more unlikely for the birth of Christ than the twenty-fifth of December; but it was the birthday of Mithra..." This was stated by E. E. Kellett in his A Short History of Religions. And Professor Cecil John Cadoux, M.A., D.D., D.Litt. Professor of Church History at Mansfield College, in his book The Life of Jesus, wrote: "There are no grounds for thinking that He (Jesus) was born in December."

Furthermore, the Illustrated World Encyclopedia has this to say: "Our calendar, by which we reckon the days, months, and years, is dated from the first year after the birth of Jesus. We call this the Christian Era. But as we study and read, we will learn that Jesus was not really born on the 25th of December..." (Vol. 5, page 1194).

Roman Catholic Confession

It is heartening to note that at long last both the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches of Christendom have openly admitted that Jesus Christ was not actually born on the 25th of December. It can be recalled that for this veracious view on which the God's Kingdom Society took her stand since her inception, he has been subjected to persecutions of one sort or another.

Concerning the date of Christ's birth, The Catholic Voice of December 1956, has the following to say: "The 25th. Dec., the present feast of Christmas has a longstanding tradition, but it is likely that in the beginning it was simply fixed on one of the great public holidays of the civil year and probably one that was originally a pagan feast"! (Page 179-180, emphasis ours).

In answer to a question as to how the Roman Catholics managed to know from Holy Scripture that Jesus was born on December 25th, The Catholic Voice, issue of July 1962, states: "The Gospels do not mention any date for the birth of Christ. We do not know the date of Christ's birth, not even the year in which He was born," (Emphasis ours) But may we pause to ask: If they do not know the date of Christ's birth, why do they categorically and

dogmatically state in the Catechism and other books that Jesus Christ was born on December 25? Is this not inconsistency? The Catholic Voice continues, "We celebrate the feast of Christ's birth on the 25th of December, at least in the Western Church. The Eastern Catholic Church celebrates the same feast on the 6th of January. These dates are not based on historical evidence of the exact date of Christ's birth..." (Emphasis ours)

Protestant Admission

The following piece extracted from "A Christmas Sermon" by a Protestant Pastor, which was published in the African Challenge of December 1959, speaks for itself: .. Was Jesus born on December 25? In fairness to the critics who ask this question, it must be admitted that although we know the year" (unlike the Roman Catholics that do not know the year) "the exact day of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ is not known...Long before Christ was born, December 25 had been the time for a noisy pagan festival in honour of the god of the sun, In time, however, the Church substituted Christmas for the old pagan festival with the view of turning the minds of the heathen to the true living God"

The reason of the Church for changing the date of Christ's birth, as given by the Pastor, is flimsy. It is not by changing the birthday of Christ to that day of a pagan carnival that would win people to Christ. Rather it would lead to more ungodliness, and that is why up till today Christmas is still; defaced with pagan marks.

Christmas is Paganism

"That Christmas was originally a Pagan festival is beyond all doubt," stated Alexander Hislop. "The time of the year, and the ceremonies with which it is still celebrated, prove its origin," he added. (The Two Babylons, page 93) Concerning Christmas, E. E. Kellett wrote: "No one can doubt that it has many pagan characters; and indeed this is why it was totally rejected by some Dissenting Churches." (A Short History of Religions).

The GKS has always held that there is nothing in the celebration of Christmas that reflects the teaching or character of Jesus Christ, or portrays the glory of God. The "Christmas Editorial" of the African Challenge of December 1959, vindicates our view. It states in part: "Christ, the matchless Saviour of mankind, would undoubtedly be grieved by the way the world celebrates His traditional birthday. The world as well as those who are Christians by name celebrate Christmas with great jubilation at the expense of worship...The Christmas season is increasingly becoming a time for most business people to make more money. The most profitable season of the year for nearly all shops is the Christmas season, when the public is enticed: 'Do your Christmas shopping early!' Another thing that robs us of the meaning of Christmas is traditionalism... Do not some even join pagan customs with their Christmas celebrations?" Please let people ponder these things and stop deceiving themselves.

If there is any season when the Police at most have a restless time in the year, it is the Christmas season. If there is any period when more cases of crimes, accidents and deaths are reported in the year, it is the same notorious Christmas season.

The acts of lawlessness and hooliganism that always characterize its celebration are but sure proofs that it is an unchristian affair. It is a time when people eat and drink in excess. Some disfigure themselves with all sorts of masks, carry about dreadful images and others paint their faces and run amok like crazy people to do havoc and disturb the peace of responsible people. How can the Christian mind imagine that all these abominations are done to honour the Son of God, Jesus Christ the Righteous who is the Prince of Peace? It is unthinkable!

This sermon does not warn you against celebrating the birthday of Christ at the spiritually appropriate time and in a Christian manner to the glory of God. St. Paul advised that God should be served in the way acceptable to Him. – Hebrews 12: 28.

The vanity of Christmas has been exposed enough. History condemns it. The Holy Bible, which is the law book and guide for all true Christians, does not justify it. A word is enough for the wise. And Christ says, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."