

Disclaimer! [The article "Christmas is..." follows below.]

Yes, I realize that if you go back into history, you will find that most of the things associated with Christmas have pagan origin. That's not the focus in this article.

When most people today think about Christmas, they don't think about the historical origins of the various customs and traditions they practice. But sooner or later the birth of Jesus DOES enter their minds - it's inescapable with all the reminders they see everywhere. The modern desire, however, is to SUPPRESS that awareness and to replace it with something "less religious" (or at least less "Christian"). It is this desire to SUPPRESS the truth, which is addressed in the article below.

Someday those "pagan trappings" will be forever gone, like chaff blowing in the wind. But the truth of Jesus' birth (as well as his death, burial and resurrection) will remain forever. I may not like many of the things that the world has chosen to associate with this occasion. But I can still make use of this opportunity, to try to turn people's focus away from the pretension and toward the eternal reality that all will someday acknowledge.

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CHRISTMAS IS...

Down through the centuries, Christmas has become associated with Christianity. Because of this, it stands out, as does Easter, as a "sore thumb" to those who would oppose Christianity. People try to suppress this association; they corrupt it, provide substitutes for it, or try to lessen its impact; yet (whether or not we like it) the association remains. As prophesied 500 years before Christ came, "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." (Habakkuk 2:14) Christmas is one of the ways this has been accomplished. Though people and nations may hate, suppress, and reject this knowledge, they are powerless to make it cease. Even nations *dedicated* to hating Jesus must acknowledge that Jesus *did* live and teach!

The world has (and will continue to have) no substitute for the Christ of Christmas. It may offer anything from crass materialism to empty sentimentality. It may introduce distractions and substitutions. It may claim that the "true meaning" of Christmas is "love and good will," or some other abstract, nebulous concept. Indeed, there *is* often truth in what it says - the lie occurs in what it *doesn't* say: It mentions what is secondary and ignores (often suppresses) what has primary importance. Furthermore, what it *does* say, it is *powerless* to accomplish. People may say "peace and love" in December (often while half-drunk), but when January comes, they go back to hating, back-stabbing, and cutting each other's throats!

For God's people, Christmas can be a celebration of joy. It is a celebration of joy for what God has done - not only two thousand years ago, but now and in the future. All other legitimate meanings are secondary and have value *only* because of this.

Two thousand years ago, God did *exactly* what he promised he would do. He fulfilled, to the exact detail, the many hundreds of promises - prophecies given over a period of several thousand years. At that time, *God* took the form of a man. Although he was by very nature deity, Jesus Christ humbled himself and took the nature of a man. Although he was (and is) the Sovereign Lord over all creation, he became a servant.

The birth of Jesus Christ is not the only thing we celebrate. His birth was just the starting point for his greatest accomplishment. Jesus was born so that he might one day die as a ransom for many - that they might not receive the wrath they deserve. Although he was sinless, he bore the sins of others - of we who have chosen to follow him. He was born so that he might also one day rise from the dead - thus guaranteeing new (and eternal) life for those who look to him for salvation. He changes our lives, and continues to change us throughout our lives - enabling us to begin to have *authentic* love and goodwill toward others. He was born so that, having himself died and risen from the dead, he might come again and judge the living and the dead. At that time, "*every* knee shall bow and *every* tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is LORD" (Philippians 2:10-11). For those who follow him, it will be a time of excitement and joy. For others, it will be the first time they face the reality of who Jesus is ... but it will be too late.

Christmas can be a celebration of joy for those who belong to God, for those who accept and follow his ways. Its historic authenticity (the *fact* that it did truly happen as God said it would) is a permanent guarantee and reminder that everything God promises for the future will also come to pass. For those who do *not* know God or follow his ways, the birth of Jesus is a solemn warning of future events. But *more than that*, it is an offer of *life* for those who might listen and turn to God - that they, too, might share in our joy.