

What Difference Does It Make?

(2 John 7-11)

I. Introduction

- A. Think about this question— “*What if there was no Christmas?*”
1. What would we really miss if there was no Christmas holiday season?
 - a. Would people stop visiting family? Would we never give gifts?
 - b. Would Wal-Mart and Targets close? Would school last all year ‘round?
 2. So what would we really miss if there was no Christmas?
 - a. There’d be no eggnog or fruit cake— this is only time we see those.
 - b. We’d miss risking life-n-limb shopping on Black Friday & Christmas Eve
 - c. We’d miss environmental waste of trees and electricity powering lights
 3. We could live without a lot of the holiday hoopla— *we used to quite nicely*
- B. What about the story behind the holiday? The “*true meaning of Christmas?*”
1. For the record, I do know Jesus wasn’t born December 25 (*1-in-365 chance*)
 - a. Christmas was a Christianized version of a pagan winter solstice festival
 - 1) Many of our holiday traditions are from the pagans (*tree, mistletoe, etc*)
 - 2) And the Bible never says celebrate or commemorate Jesus’ birthday
 - b. Church I grew up in ignored all religious connections to the holidays
 - 1) We avoided nativity scenes, religious cards or wrapping paper, etc
 - 2) It’s OK to enjoy Christmas as long as you avoided religious themes
 - 3) Same view as today’s postmodern, politically-correct secular humanist
 - c. People do think about Jesus this time of the year—I’m glad we can too!
 2. **Question:** *What if we had Christmas holiday, but Jesus hadn’t been born?*
 - a. What if the story of angels, wise men, manger and virgin never happened
 - 1) It would still be a good story, like George Washington & cherry tree
 - 2) It could teach peace on earth... *What difference would it make?*
 - b. There were ancient pagan birth stories that sound like gospels (*sort of*).
 - c. What if gospels are legend too? Meaningful and touching, not historical?
 3. There were false-teachers at the end of the first century who taught this
 - a. The false teachers claimed Christ and stressed Christ as spiritual reality
 - b. They just denied He ever came in the flesh. *What difference did it make?*

II. What Difference Would It Make: Text (Reading: [2 John 7-11](#))

- A. John is so upset that forbids Christians from extending basic hospitality
 - 1. He tells them not welcome them or to have them over for cup of coffee
 - a. To spend time with these guys at all “*shares in his wicked work*” ([v. 11](#))
 - b. This goes beyond simple doctrinal disagreement or ways of doing church
 - 2. So we have to ask, “*What were these guys doing that has John so upset?*”
 - a. They denied “*the Christmas story.*” Well, what he actually said in [v. 7](#) *May deceivers who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh...*
 - b. His grammar here is interesting; John uses a *present participle* here
 - 1) So it’s not “*Jesus came in the flesh*” but “*Jesus comes in the flesh*”
 - 2) Jesus’ coming in the past has an impact one the present and future!
 - 3. But false teachers denied that; Jesus **didn’t come** and it **doesn’t impact us**
 - a. John uses strong language to describe them– “*deceiver*” and “*antichrist*”
 - b. One who “*abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God*” ([v. 9](#), KJV)
 - c. Bible condemnations don’t get much stronger than “*hath not God*”
- B. John didn’t intend this as what Cecil Hook calls “*a Monkey-Wrench Scripture*”
 - 1. HE says we’ve used this as one-size-fits-all condemnation of issue *du jour*.
 - a. It doesn’t matter if the issue is music, multiple cups, or the millennium
 - b. If you deny (my view of) “*the doctrine of Christ,*” you don’t have God!
 - 2. A look at context shows us that John’s “*doctrine of Christ*” is more specific
 - a. Grammar can be either “*what Christ taught*” or “*teaching about Christ*”
 - b. In context, John clearly has a particular doctrine of Christ in mind
 - 1) They guys denied that Christ had ever really come in flesh and blood
 - 2) They accepted a Greek dualism that said pure spirit can’t have a body
 - 3) So Christ had no body, no physical form—He didn’t come in flesh
 - c. The false doctrine of these false teachers was they *denied the nativity!*
 - 3. For John, believing that Christ came in the flesh was essence of the gospel
 - a. He began his gospel with a dramatic declaration of incarnation ([Jn 1:14](#))
 - b. [1 John](#) begins with equally dramatic testimony to Christ’s coming ([1:1-2](#))
 - c. He saw faith in Christ’s coming as a basic test of orthodoxy ([1 Jn 4:1-3](#))
 - 4. John teaches if we don’t believe Christ came in flesh, we can’t be Christian

III. What Difference Does It Make: Today

- A. Why did early Christians invent a special festival observing birth of Christ
 - 1. Of course, December 25 was chosen because of the pagan festivals
 - a. This was the date of raucous and riotous festival to sun god Mithra/Sol
 - 1) Church didn't want Christians acting like a bunch of heathens
 - 2) Church didn't want its converts tempted to return to paganism
 - b. So "*Christ's Mass*" because alternative festival held on December 25
 - 2. But why did early Christians feel the need to celebrate Christ's birthday?
 - a. Maybe because they saw (*rightly*) how central Christ's birth is to gospel
 - b. It was in Christ birth that "*God became flesh and dwelt among us*"
 - c. We call it "*incarnation.*" John saw it as central point of orthodox belief
- B. Sure, we need to be aware of some of the dangers of our traditional holiday
 - 1. **First**, we should not be in favor of crass consumerism and materialism
 - a. Our mad dash to spend cash this time of year is as pagan as Mithra
 - b. It's easy to get wrapped up in stuff we forget about people in need
 - 2. **Second**, we must be aware of seasonal inaccuracies in the birth narratives
 - a. The wise men didn't come to the manger; there weren't necessarily three
 - b. Santa was most definitely NOT part of the original nativity scene!
 - 3. **Third**, it's traditional for some to attend church only one time a year
 - a. A once a year holiday stressed Jesus can become a once-a-year religion
 - b. Daily living the "*Fruit of Spirit*" becomes once a year "*Christmas Spirit*"
 - 4. While admitting these dangers, this time of year can focus us on the story
- C. Why is the story of the birth of Jesus so central to the gospel itself?
 - 1. **Atonement**: Without Bethlehem, there could not have been a Calvary
 - a. Death, burial and resurrection is gospel of first importance (**1 Cor 15:3**)
 - b. John's false teachers denied more than just that Jesus had not been born
 - c. If Jesus weren't born into flesh, He could not save us (**Heb 2:14-15**)
 - 2. **Solidarity**: At Bethlehem, God became flesh and dwelt among us
 - a. He came wrapped in flesh, wrapped in swaddling clothes as one of us
 - b. God came in the flesh to declare solidarity with our infirmity (**Heb 4:15**)
 - c. We can never say that God doesn't understand; He has one of us

IV. Conclusion

- A. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is the atonement that takes away our sin
 - 1. Is it possible that the greatest sacrifice Jesus made was **at Bethlehem**?
 - a. John's picture of pre-incarnate Christ is one of Creator (**John 1:3**)
 - b. Paul paints the exact picture of Christ the Creator (**Col 1:16**)
 - 2. But at Bethlehem, the Creator laid aside all of His power and majesty
 - a. He became powerless, an infant who depended on a teenaged girl
 - b. **Phil 2:7** says he “*made himself nothing*” or “*emptied Himself*” (NAS)
 - c. Sacrifice culminated at Calvary began at Bethlehem (**Phil 2:7-8**, NLT)
- B. The greatest story ever told begins in a barn in an obscure village in Palestine
 - 1. The God who spoke the world into existence was born a helpless baby
 - a. The voice that spoke from the burning bush now was a crying infant
 - b. One who sat on heaven's throne was wrapped in rags and laid in manger
 - 2. We have to avoid a great danger that attaches to this season of the year
 - a. That great danger is not the pagan roots or traditions of Christmastime
 - b. That danger is not marketing or over-commercialization of the season
 - c. Danger isn't secularization makes Christmas back into a winter festival
 - 3. Danger is that story of Jesus birth will becomes trite and worn in telling
 - a. Danger is that we will lose sight of the wonderment of what it means
 - b. God was born into our world just like us... so we can be like Him

*Fragile finger sent to heal us, Tender brow prepared for thorn.
Tiny heart whose blood will save us, Unto us is born, Unto us is born
Wrap our injured flesh around You, Breathe our air and walk our sod.
Rob our sin and make us holy Perfect Son of God, Welcome to our world.*