



WHAT HAPPENED ON DECEMBER 25TH 1 A.D.?

You say, "That's easy, that was when Christ was born!" Well, that is the obvious answer but it is incorrect. Why?

For one thing, Luke says, "*Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.*" (Luke 2:8)

The fact that the flocks were in open field indicates a date prior to October. It is also unreasonable to expect a census to be taken in the Winter as Matthew writes, "*And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.*" (Matthew 24:20)

Why, then, December 25th? It was officially proclaimed by the church fathers in 440 A.D. as a vestige of the Roman holiday of Saturnalia, observed near the winter solstice, which was among the many pagan traditions inherited from the earlier Babylonian priesthood. The church did not celebrate Christ's birth until about 350 AD and, by that time, the actual date was not known.

If not in the Winter, on December 25th, when? For many years Bible scholars have assumed it was some time about 4 B.C. Imagine Christ being born four years Before Christ! Actually, some recent scholarship has come up with the date of September 29, 2 B.C. I guess it's too late to do your Christmas shopping for this century!

Where did this date come from and is it really correct? The year was derived on the basis of:

- Dates associated with Herod
- Dates associated with Cleopatra
- The fact that Zachariah was serving in the temple prior to His birth.

The year may be correct. The exact date is still a guess and, besides, the calendar has been changed (at least) once since then. In fact, our current "A.D."

calendars were not created until many years after Christ's birth.

What should we do about this "dilemma?" We have three options:

- Don't celebrate Christmas at all as some, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, do. After all, Christ said we are to observe the Last Supper and the observance of Easter is certainly in order, but the Bible does not say we are to celebrate Christmas. As noted before, the early church did not celebrate Christmas.
- Celebrate Christ's birth at some other time of the year. There are people who do this but I know of no particular date that has been chosen for this. This way Macy's and Gimble's and K-Mart can do whatever they want on December 25th and we can celebrate Christ's birth in a more fitting way.
- Continue to celebrate Christ's birth on December 25th. The date does not matter, it is what the day commemorates that is important.

May I suggest that the best choice is to continue to celebrate on December 25th. If nothing else, the name "Christ" is still a part of the word "Christmas" and, as such, can provide opportunity to speak to an unsaved friend about Christ.

While carols like "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" have been largely replaced by "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer," the old carols are still around to be heard with their message of God's gift to mankind.

While the celebration of Christmas has become largely secular, we can still keep the proper perspective on Christmas in our own families and church.



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