

CHRISTMAS

Lesson w/Answers

Keeping Christ First

This week let's think about Christmas and remember the importance of keeping Christ first.

I don't have a lot of thought-provoking questions this week, as you'll see shortly, but I think the questions below are important; as we work our way through December and the "holiday" season.

Consider the following verses, Luke 1:26-38 and Luke 2:1-20 - both very familiar ones I'm sure - and answer the following questions:

1. How was the very first Christmas, the night of Jesus' birth, celebrated?
 - a. ANSWER: It came almost without notice. It was not a holiday, and in fact to everyone in town except Mary and Joseph, it was a night like any other. There was nothing remarkable about it. With the exception of Mary and Joseph, only the shepherds in the fields, who were visited by the angels to announce the birth, knew that something was dramatically different, and that God had given us a great gift.
2. What was the political and religious climate of the day when Christ was born, and what impact did Jesus birth have on the powers-that-be during this time period?
 - a. ANSWER: The political and religious climate of the day, especially between the organized Jewish religious system and the Roman Government, was strained. Nevertheless, they managed to work together for common goals, most of which had little to do with the people that they were actually serving. The Romans allowed the Jews to keep their form of worship as a means of keeping peace in the land, as long as the Jews recognized the ultimate authority of the Romans. Maintaining the status quo was very much the order of the day, and neither the Roman nor the Jewish leadership wanted to embrace anything or anyone that would, or could, threaten that arrangement. Jesus' birth was seen as very much a threat to both the Romans and the Jews.
3. How was Christmas celebrated when you were young and why?
 - a. ANSWER: For me it was a time of family gathering and great anticipation; and a time of celebrating Jesus' birth. Activities included singing Christmas carols, building a nativity, etc. Recreating the nativity scene in school plays and on television was also central to our celebration of the season.
4. What's different about how we celebrate Christmas today and why?
 - a. ANSWER: The holiday today has become much more secularly-based. The central focus is shopping, gift buying, holiday office parties, etc. Nativity scenes are banned in many places, and even the word "Christmas" has been replaced with "holiday", as in "have a happy holiday", rather than wishing someone a "Merry Christmas". The entire reason for the celebration has been forgotten by many, and within a generation or two, will all but be forgotten.
5. Why should the world celebrate Christ's birth?
 - a. ANSWER: Without it, Jesus would not have come. Without his coming to earth to die for us, he could not have been raised from the dead; and our eternal hope, based on a risen savior, would be in vain. Jesus' birth is the fulfillment of God's promise long ago to send us a Messiah, a Savior. Through Jesus' virgin birth, His life, His death, and His resurrection; we know that our salvation is real.

6. Why does it not want to?

- a. ANSWER: The world does not want to celebrate Christ's birth because to recognize Jesus' birth would be to recognize all of the prophesy fulfilled in that birth -- and all of the prophesy that is yet to be fulfilled in Jesus' return. If the world today recognized Jesus' birth as they should, Satan would be defeated; and a lost and dying world would receive salvation. Unfortunately, those who will not yield to Jesus' rule in their lives will deny His existence, His virgin birth, His death and His resurrection. To do otherwise would require them to surrender their will to his -- something the world will not do.

7. What does how we celebrate Christ's birth tell us about how we live our day-to-day lives?

- a. ANSWER: If our focus is on Christ, we will take that focus and spirit into the Christmas celebration. If, however, our focus is on the world and the ways of this world, then our celebration will reflect that as well. We need to resist the temptation to believe that security and peace comes from owning "stuff", and realize that the only real and lasting peace and satisfaction comes from having Jesus as our Savior. When we do this, our Christmas celebration will take on a whole new meaning.

In looking back over my own life and how my family and I celebrated Christmas, even twenty years ago, I can see how large changes have taken place since then. Some changes were precipitated by the growth of our children to adulthood and going off to start their own families, and some changes have slipped into my life because of the world in which I live and the way in which I live in it.

How about you and your family? Have you quietly allowed compromise, apathy, and the world around you to dampen your excitement about the good news of Christ's birth? Have you gotten so caught up in the "holiday" that you have lost the real reason we celebrate Christmas? And finally, if this can happen to us as believing Christians, then think how much more so the lost world around us will focus on the worldly things and not eternal things during this time of year.

Don't allow the season to take your joy, or cause you to compromise your walk with Christ. Reflect this week on His birth and the great gift that God gave the world that evening some two thousand years ago – the gift of a child, His only Son, and an eternal hope that there is salvation through Jesus. This is the real gift that we should focus on.

May you be richly blessed this week as we celebrate Christ's birth and God's great gift to mankind.

In Christ,

Wes