



## The Birth of Christ and Christmas

by Joel Stephen Williams

Some years ago I was doing a series of sermons on the life of Christ. The third lesson was on the birth of Christ. It was during the summer months, but we sang songs like, *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing* and *Joy to the World*. The parents of one of our families were visiting that Sunday, and they were of the opinion that “the Churches of Christ do not believe in the birth of Jesus.” They were in absolute shock when we started singing those songs. When the sermon discussed the birth of Christ, they were even more dumbfounded. At lunch they declared to their family: “So you really do believe in the birth of Jesus after all!”

If the only thing we do at Christmas time is either say absolutely nothing about the birth of Christ, or we constantly lecture people that we do not know when Jesus was born, we end up teaching a negative message about Christmas. The impression some people get is, “They do not believe in the birth of Jesus.” While reminding peo-

ple that we are not commanded to set aside a special day to honor the birth of Jesus, although there is nothing wrong with remembering his birth at any time (Rom. 14:4-6), the message some people hear is that we are opposed to the birth of Jesus in some manner. Our intentions may be good, but what we achieve, at times, is counterproductive.

Is there anything wrong with setting aside a special time to center our thoughts on the birth of Jesus. Granted, we are not specifically commanded to do this. However, is it wrong to think about, sing about and teach about Jesus’ birth at any time of the year? Must we only do it in July because others tend to do it in December? One veteran gospel preacher used to respond to this sort of thinking with a touch of sarcasm. He would say, “The Episcopalians down the street use their front door to go in and out of their church building. I guess we need to use the windows.”

A useful parallel to our situation is found in the celebration of two fes-

tivals by the Jewish people, festivals which were not commanded by God anywhere in the Old Testament. One is the Feast of Purim which celebrated the deliverance of the Jewish people as recounted in the book of Esther. The second is the Feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah, at which Jesus was present (Jn. 10:22), which originated during the days between the Old Testament and the New Testament and celebrated the cleansing of their temple. As Daniel Rouse suggests: “If God’s people chose to spontaneously celebrate the cleansing of their temple and their deliverance as a people, could not God’s people today similarly celebrate the birth of the Savior and his resurrection from the dead?”

While we do not know when the Nativity happened, late December is a good time to draw attention to the birth of Jesus. Others around us are doing the same, so our teaching emphasis will provide good reinforcement for the precious truth of God’s incarnation.