

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

By Joe R. Price

Only God knows the day on which Jesus was born. The Bible does not say; only that he was born in the days of Herod the Great (37-4 BC) and Caesar Augustus (27 BC-14 AD) (Matt. 2:1; Lk. 2:1), and that there were "shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Lk. 2:8). Those who observe December 25 as His birthday should know this, yet many do not.

- Historians do not know the date, although many have speculated on it.
- The Roman Catholic Church does not know the date. During its early development there was much disagreement over the date and its celebration. In 354 AD Liberius, the Bishop of Rome, declared December 25 to be the day for celebrating the birth of Christ. This date gradually became the prevailing view and practice.
- The Orthodox Churches do not know the date; they choose to celebrate the birth of Jesus in January.
- The Protestant Churches do not know the date; they have retained the Catholic view and practice.

Likewise, the Bible does not command, show an example of or infer the practice of a "Feast of the Nativity" (i.e., Christmas). Men began and continue the religious celebration of Christ's birth; not the word of God.

HERE ARE SOME THINGS WE DO KNOW ABOUT THE BIRTH OF JESUS:

- It was prophesied centuries earlier (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:22-23). His birth was divinely planned and accomplished (Lk. 1:30-31). The virgin gave birth to a son whose name was Jesus ("savior," Matt. 1:21, 25).
- It was the right time for God to send His Son into the world. "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal. 4:4).
- It was the day on which God became flesh. "...that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Lk. 1:35). Jesus is Immanuel, which means "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). On that day the Word, who is deity, became flesh (Jno. 1:1, 14). A body was prepared for him that would be sacrificed for the sins of the world (Heb. 10:5-10).
- It was troubling and joyous. Unrighteous men were troubled. Men like King Herod, who feared the prophesied ruler (Matt. 2:3-6). He was so worried that he murdered the babies of Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16). On the other hand, angels praised God, wise men worshiped the child and shepherds glorified God (Matt. 2:11; Lk. 2:8-20).
- It was never observed as a religious festival in New Testament days. "There is no evidence of the existence of a Feast of the Nativity before the 4th century" (Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, III:601). Since God did not command a religious celebration of Christ's birth, we do not offer Him one. Instead, we continually rejoice, praise and worship God for His wonderful gift of love: a Savior, a King... His Son! (Jno. 3:16)