

From Emperor to Servant in Nine Months

["The Christmas Search Engine" video]

Yes, the only "reason for the season" is Jesus the Lord. Though we know that, does it show in our daily lives, particularly when this season gets busy, hurried and hectic? Christmas has accumulated so many traditions and customs over the centuries, that, as the video illustrated, our Lord's birth can be forgotten entirely, and often has been. Such that at various times, Christmas celebrations have been outlawed. Indeed, about a half dozen, ahem, "carolers" came to our door late Thursday night, after we'd dressed for bed. Our doorbell camera recorded them raucously singing, and swaying, "We Wish You a Merry Christmas", wine glasses in hands. They're probably some new neighbors. No harm done. But over the centuries, many Christmas customs have "devolved" into sinful excess.

Not just customs, but myths have accrued to Christmas like ugly barnacles to a ship. Often heard is the origins of Christmas on December 25 are pagan. They're not. The pagan celebrations for the winter solstice are on the actual solstice, December 20-23, depending on the year, not the 25th. Then there's the now popular theory that Jesus couldn't have been born as late as December, because the Bible records the shepherds keeping watch

over their flocks, since it's too cold for shepherds and sheep to graze. So most likely, Lord Jesus was born in early Fall, late September or early October, feasibly during the Feast of Tabernacles. Well, who's been in Bethlehem in December? In most years, it's not even close to freezing. So there would have been shepherds and sheep on those hills. But yet many claim our celebrations on December 25 as Lord Jesus' birthday have been wrong for nearly 2,000 years! Do you think that God, Who orchestrated the very birth of His Son in human flesh, could not also have made sure that we fallible humans celebrate His birthday on the right date?

Forgive me for forgetting the author who quoted a lesser-known early church father of the second century, who stated that since the actual date of Jesus' crucifixion was known, and since the church knew that He was conceived on the exact same date, by counting forward 280 days, the usual length of a pregnancy, they came to the December 25th date. It's possible the date is wrong. The Bible doesn't say exactly, but I'd say that Christmas Day is more than likely the actual date, regardless of the changes in our calendar systems over the centuries.

This is all ultimately, "academic". The day doesn't matter; what matters is that He was born as a human baby. We see the myriad depictions of His babyhood in a stable, or a cave. Another myth is some mean old innkeeper refused to let Mary and Joseph have a room. Fact is, little backwater towns like Bethlehem don't have hotels or inns. Ever tried staying in a tiny, rural town? They

don't have hotels! Bethlehem is estimated to have had only 300 souls. So when travelers arrived, they expected to be put up in relatives homes. Wealthier families had larger houses with guest rooms. Spare bedrooms, anyone? So the so-called innkeeper was undoubtedly a relative of Joseph's, maybe a distant cousin. But their guest room was full of other relatives were already there. For the same Roman census. So Joseph and Mary had to sleep in the stable room, the adjacent cave, where the livestock slept.

At our Lord's birth, Luke specifically records, twice!, that Mary wrapped Him in "swaddling" cloths. Bethlehem was just six miles from Jerusalem and the Temple, where at least two lambs were sacrificed morning and night, every day. Many of these lambs came from Bethlehem. Unblemished lambs, designated for sacrifice, were wrapped with "swaddling" cloths, marking them for sacrifice. As was our Lord Jesus, though Mary surely had no idea the profound meaning of what she was doing when she used the only fabrics at hand to keep Baby Jesus warm.

From the moment of birth, His "destiny" as the Lamb of God to be slain as the once and forever sacrifice for sin was set. Though He'd been the Emperor of All Creation, He descended from heaven to earth, into Mary's womb, and nine months later, was born as a royal king Whom all the world adored! No? No. He'd "chosen" the wrong family; nobodies in the world's eyes. But even lower, Lord Jesus came first as God's servant, not to lord over man. But to serve mankind, to help us each see the truth

which sets us free from the devil's deceptions, to be healed with all wounds made whole. As Christ's followers, like Him, we are also each born to serve one another. Never seeking our own advantage, or fame or fortune, but to build each other up ever closer to Him, the Lord Jesus, Who is everything and is our everything.

["Silence and Fury" video]

So lose yourself in Him. Get lost in Him. And you know what? There you'll find yourself, the person you were always meant to be, completely whole and perfect, like you've never known yourself before. All because you're in Him!

One of the best ways to lose yourself in Him, is to praise Him from your hearts. Let's do this, right now, raising your voices as we all sing together "O Holy Night".

["O Holy Night" music video]

