

Minister's Message – December 2011

Christmas

Why is it that many people imagine God to be an old man with snowy white hair and a long beard? Is it because Moses was an old man when he led the Israelites out of Egypt? But what about Jesus; he was not an old man. Jesus was just 33 when he was crucified. Yet Jesus did refer to God as his Father.

As I look at a painting of 'jolly father Christmas' on a calendar I wonder if the image of God as an old man is taken from Santa Claus! I have heard that people without Christian backgrounds do think this way. I am sure some children are confused by the message of Christmas and the myth of Santa Claus, of fir trees and all the rest. Is the truth of the birth of Jesus, the Son of God getting through this mythology and commercialism?

Let us be clear that the God and Father of Jesus, who is also the creator of this universe, is not an old man and it is offensive to ever picture him as such. 'God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth'.

You will not find the word 'Christmas' in the Bible. That is because it was not celebrated by the early church. What did the early church celebrate? They celebrated the death of Jesus because it was by his death, by his sacrifice, that our sins are taken away when we believe in Jesus. They celebrated his death in their weekly, not annual, gatherings to worship Jesus. Even in the sixth century the church was more into celebrating Jesus' baptism than his birth.

Christians met each week on the day that Jesus rose on the dead, the first day of the week. In remembering Jesus' death and resurrection they also remembered his birth. They remembered what is written in the Bible, namely that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem with an animal feed trough for his cradle. That Jesus was born the Son of God was integral to their belief in Jesus. They did not know the day of his birth because it is not recorded. They were not into making things up when it came to worship!

I mentioned Jesus being just 33 years old when he was killed. Jesus said 'he who has seen me has seen the Father, so how can you say show us the Father' (John 14:9). Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Thousands of people saw Jesus when he walked in this world but they left us no painting or photograph. So it is again pure imagination to draw a picture of Jesus, and then God in the image of Jesus. Jesus has returned to the glory of heaven. He will come again and we will all see him soon.

To return to Christmas celebrations; some can remember when Christmas was not all about money and bright lights. It was not even a public holiday in the USA until 1870. Santa was not invented until 1773, and the fir tree after that. In fact more widespread celebration of Christmas seems to match a decline in true worship.

If you want to celebrate the birth of Jesus the Son of God you can do so every week in a church service, or every day in your prayers. Is He not worthy of much more than an annual celebration?

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