

Publishing Editor's column

AS YOU READ these words, the extravaganza of Christmas as celebrated by our contemporaries will be moving to its finale. What is generally thought of as a Christian festival is for many an excess of materialism and self-indulgence, often with such undesirable outcomes as drunkenness, debt and even family breakups. It is ironic that remembering the birth of one who "ha[d] not where to lay his head", who taught that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth", should produce behaviour that is the very antithesis of his life and teaching. This development is in no small way connected to the decision of the apostate church in the fourth century A.D. to designate the birth date of Jesus as 25 December, which followed the Roman feast of Saturnalia and coincided with the feast of Sol Invicta, the unconquered Sun. A number of the practices involved in those pagan festivals—for example, religious rituals, trees, wreaths, garlands, feasting, paper hats, giving gifts—are found in the contemporary celebrations.

It is noticeable that neither Jesus nor his apostles said anything about remembering his birth; the emphasis we have is on his life and death. So Paul teaches that Jesus said: "this do in remembrance of me". This illustrates the statement in Ecclesiastes 7:1: "A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth". The most obvious reason for this is that birth offers only the potential of a 'name', whereas at death the final character is evident. At Jesus' death we see the man, without fault, who had humbled himself and had become obedient to the death on the cross, for which reason "God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name . . ." (Phil. 2:8,9). We are able to see a man, as God intended, and be rightly impressed by his qualities. The following thoughts are provoked by these considerations.

For those who claim to follow Jesus' teaching, accept the status of "strangers and pilgrims", and have here "no continuing city", it would seem logical to have no association with the Christmas celebrations of our contemporary culture. In practice we find it very difficult not to be involved at some level. I write this not by way of criticism of whatever involvement the reader may have, but rather to reflect on how difficult we find it not to be affected by, and then drawn into, the culture of the age we are in. While it may be possible to

engage in some of the activities, such as family get-togethers, that this festival affords, without overindulgence, a more serious question arises. How much are we tied into and therefore moulded by the culture around us in other areas of activity that might be less obvious than Christmas celebrations? What of our behaviour in work, our involvement in social activities, our leisure pursuits, etc.? Are we really, in practice, walking as children of light, having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, holding forth the Word of life? Are we really strangers and pilgrims who are seeking the heavenly country and the city that God has prepared for those that love Him? When we bear in mind the call that will come, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4), we can see the challenge presented to us by, perhaps, a too cosy acceptance of the culture of our age. Remember Lot!

At his birth Jesus was sought as the one "that is born King of the Jews"; at his death he was lifted up, and above him was displayed the title, "JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS". His resurrection evidenced the fact that the one born to be King had justified the title by living a life of service and God-centredness. He "learned . . . obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:8,9).

This same King we expect; but more than King of the Jews, for he is now titled, "King of kings, and Lord of lords". He is the "Faithful and True", of whom it is written, "and the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked" (Isa. 11:1-4). His desire is to share this great work of rulership and redemption of the creation with those who have followed him, those in whom Christ has been formed by hearing his word and being constrained by his love.

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