

AWAY FROM THE MANGER

December 8, 2013

We are coming to the time of year when children begin to think about stockings hung by the chimney with care (if there are chimneys anymore), the perfect placement for the Christmas tree, and all sorts of things that go along with this coming holiday season. This is a fun time of year when many of us are able to reunite with family members that we may not have seen for most of the year, and enjoy the traditions of the season. However, many in the world view this time of year as a particularly religious time and mistakenly attribute the season to the birth of our Lord. History does not tell us the day or month that the Lord was born, but we do know that it couldn't have been anytime during the winter months because the shepherds were "abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Lk. 2:8). The greatest problem with a religious observance of Christ's birth is that the Holy Spirit never inspired a New Testament writer to command it to take place. He did, however, inspire the New Testament prophets to command us to observe the day of His death and resurrection from the grave (Mt. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). Aside from the observance of the Lord's Supper, Paul condemned the celebration of religious days (Gal. 4:10-11).

Does that mean that one cannot observe a traditional secular holiday? No! Christians are permitted to observe those days as long as it is not made into a religious day. It is not mandatory to observe a secular holiday, but at the same time it is permissible to do so. The decision to observe, or not to observe, falls under the category of a scruple. Paul taught about scruples to the Corinthians and Romans; he said, "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). Similarly, he taught that if one was not able to, with a good conscience, eat meat that was once offered to an idol that they should not do it, but if one could eat the meat and not harm his conscience then that was acceptable as well (1 Cor. 8:4-8).

Since it is His death and resurrection that we are to celebrate, we need to be able to look at His life away from the manger, because it is there that we find the great blessings that He has given to the world. It was away from the manger, that Christ achieved the success of His earthly mission.

Away from the manger, he was baptized. In the Jordan River, at the hand of his first cousin, John the Immerser, he fulfilled all righteousness (Mt. 3:15). His baptism was not for the remission of sins (1 Pet. 2:22); instead it fulfilled righteousness and was an example to His followers. His submitting to baptism showed the great importance that He placed upon it.

Away from the manger, the Lord was the greatest preacher the world has ever known. He taught with those wonderful parables that we are blessed with today. He addressed the moral, political, and religious problems of the day. He came preaching that the kingdom of heaven was about to come into existence (Mt. 4:17), and, like John, He tried to prepare the people for its coming.

Away from the manger, Christ promised to build His church (Mt. 16:18). In order to build or to establish the church, Jesus, the man, had to go to the cross and be the propitiation for man's sins (1 Jn. 2:2). The promise He made to build His church was satisfied on the first Pentecost after His resurrection (Acts 2:1-47), and about three thousand people became the first members of the church of Christ.

Away from the manger, Jesus became the author of eternal salvation to those that believe and obey (Heb. 5:9). All people need to understand that Jesus is not the eternal babe that lay in the manger., He is the eternal Word that became the Son and now resides in heaven at the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33).

It is acceptable to observe a Christmas celebration as a secular holiday, but it is not acceptable in the sight of God to set apart a holy day of observance when He has not authorized such a practice. ,We are not required to participate in any secular holidays, but we are required by God to observe the one day that He has commanded, and that day is the first day of every week (Acts 20:7).