

Our hearts have all been warmed by the sights and the sounds and the services of this Christmas season. Since Christmas is the biggest and most popular of all the holidays, people share their opinions.

- Some wonder why the Christian church still tries to make it a spiritual thing when it's so commercialized. They're barging in on the Christmas shopping season which begins in October.
- Others question the December 25 birthday of Jesus. Wasn't that a pagan holiday in ancient times? And, if we don't know the exact day of Jesus' birth, why would December 25 have been their choice?

There are many more, but these are the two we'll keep and ponder. If Christmas is just a tidal wave of tradition which carries us each December, that's not what God wants it to be for us. With Christmas less than a week ago, let's ask: ***"Why Do We Celebrate Christmas?"***

Here's an answer: Christmas is worth our time and celebration. When the angels announced a Savior born in Bethlehem, there was no question in the shepherds' minds what they should do next: ***"Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."***

- They didn't worry how much this trip would cost them – they left their sheep.
- They didn't worry what others would think of them visiting a young couple who just had their first child.
- They didn't worry if this was a pagan holiday, or the Sabbath.
- They didn't feel self-conscious about their emotions and public display of praise. They copied the angel choir in the skies.
- They didn't hesitate, they hurried as fast as they could.

God had finally sent the promised Messiah to save them from their sins. Nothing could be more important than seeing this heavenly visitor and

worshiping him. This was worth their time and celebration.

Does the shepherds' reaction to Jesus' birth give us any ideas on why we should take the time and do take the time to celebrate Christmas?

There are some who point to the fact that Christians in the early centuries didn't follow the shepherd's example and celebrate Jesus' birth at all. Maybe they didn't. But by 300 AD, Jesus' birth was celebrated on January 6, and within 50 years, December 25 became the date they were observing the birth of Christ.

Even if they didn't immediately observe the birth of Jesus, we've got to believe they rejoiced and praised God when they read, heard or studied Luke chapter 2.

Parents, can you ever forget that feeling when your child was born? We wouldn't have to celebrate their birthday, but we want to because they are special to us.

Is anyone more special than Jesus? No one's birthday in the history of this world, has been more of a miracle. You should know, you confess it often: Conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary – God became human to take away all of our sins. Can you think of a birthday more worth your time and celebration?

- Jesus' birthday is worth the time writing, composing, playing and singing every Christmas carol and message.
- Jesus' birthday is worth the time planning, decorating, rehearsing and worshipping in church during this season.
- Jesus' birthday is worth our time off from work and school so that together with our families we can contemplate God's love.

If buying and exchanging gifts helps reflect the gift God sent to the manger, then do it. If decorating your tree, house and yard helps reflect the glorious

sight that heaven offered the shepherds, then do it. If, like the shepherds, every special thing we do during this season is done to glorify and praise God for all we have seen and heard, then we're celebrating Christmas for the right reason. Don't let anyone make you feel badly about how you celebrate Christmas. Jesus' birthday is worth it.

Here's another answer: Christmas offers Christians a unique witnessing opportunity. We read: **When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.**

Shepherds just might be the least likely witnesses in Israel. Over the years God had sent prophets, kings and priests to preach to his people. But on this night, it was a group of shepherds who spread the good news.

There had been plenty of bad news in Palestine of late. Their own religious leaders were corrupt. High taxes were being collected by fellow Jews for the Roman government. The Roman census meant more taxes. The rich got richer. The poor got poorer.

But then these shepherds got the word out that the promised Savior had been born. He came for all people. He came to take away all sins. He came to make heaven accessible to all sinners. They knew, because they had seen heaven open and the angels appear to them. They knew, because that's what heaven told them.

We might be the least likely witnesses, as well. No prophets, kings or priests in this group. But our celebration of Christmas gives us the unique opportunity to share a message of life and hope with others.

- What better time to share the Light of the World around here than on December 25, when we've just gone through the shortest and darkest days of the year?
- What better time to announce the gift of eternal life and salvation than when another year passes, and people are reminded how quickly life passes?

- What better time to announce a Savior from sin than when so many are reminded of their sinful shortcomings?
- What better time to announce the Bringer of Peace than when there is so much animosity between people and in families?

If you are still wondering if we should celebrate Christmas when and as we do, consider the unlikely and unique sources God uses in our Christmas celebration to spread the real message of Christmas.

First of all, he uses us.

- The religious Christmas card you send.
- Your religious Christmas decorations.
- Your personal testimony about keeping "Christ" in Christmas.
- Your invitation to a Christmas service - even though they're not church goers.
- Your participation in a special Christmas choir or caroling group.
- The message of our children in their Christmas Eve services.

God also uses the media – radio, TV, CD's, YouTube, Internet, Social media – so many, many people hear that the Lord came to Bethlehem. That's what people hear in their cars, homes and shopping malls. God is being taken out of most public things in our society, but at Christmas, it's as if the door is still open for the real message of God's love for sinners to get out into the world.

Yes, there have been and will be abuses that creep into the celebration of Christmas – excessive partying, an overemphasis on the traditions of Christmas and Santa Claus. While they can be and are distractions - Christmas can't be silenced. It's worth our time, celebration and worship. You showed that by showing up here this morning! It also gives us a unique opportunity for witnessing. You can show that each day.