

CHRISTIAN MONEY \$ENSE

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Talkin' to Jesus 'bout Christmas

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You don't have to read very far in the Gospels to figure out that Jesus had some very pointed opinions about some topics. He didn't think much of the Pharisees (Matt 23:1-36). He enjoyed being around the outcasts of society who were searching for truth (Matt 9:9-13), and He knew exactly why He had come to earth - to redeem sinners (John 3:16).

Interestingly, Jesus was far more concerned about His impending death than His supernatural birth. The birth of Christ is described by His followers in the NT, but Jesus did not talk about it Himself. The virgin birth, or what we call the Christmas story, is a pivotal event in the history of mankind: God with us - Immanuel (Matt 1:23). Without a sinless Savior, we do not have a sufficient Savior.

For church history buffs, Christmas was not celebrated by the first followers of Christ. It began to be practiced centuries later as Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. In fact, the timeframe and some of our traditions for Christmas partially stem from the Roman holiday, *Saturnalia*. Roman Christians attempted to renew this pagan holiday into a Christian holiday.

I have never talked face to face with Jesus. In heaven I will, but that won't happen on earth. Sometimes I wonder what Jesus thinks of our Christmas celebrations. We do not have any direct statements in Scripture regarding this, but we do have general principles in the Bible that can be used to evaluate Christmas and other traditions. Based upon these principles, would Jesus give the Robbins family a thumbs up or a thumbs down on our version of Christmas?

Here are some of my thoughts:

- Getting a real Christmas tree on a snowy night is fun, but it is not the best part of Christmas.

- Receiving gifts that you really like is fun, but it is not the best part of Christmas.
- Buying gifts that others like is fun, but it is not the best part of Christmas.
- Going into debt for Christmas gifts is definitely not fun and is definitely not the best part of Christmas.
- Getting a tax deduction for year-end giving is fun, but it is not the best part of Christmas.
- Being with family or watching Christmas specials on TV is fun, but they're not the best part of Christmas.

What is the best part of Christmas? It is Jesus: God with us - Immanuel (Matt 1:23). I think Jesus would have the Robbins and all of us reconsider our emphasis this year. Did you know that there was no Christmas tree in the stable? No one but Jesus received any gifts for His birth, and those may have been given up to two years later.

Children (and some adults) think that Christmas is all about them and the presents they will receive. Christmas is about Jesus. What gifts will you give Him this year? Your children would be horrified if they did not receive any gifts. Will you treat Jesus worse than your children?

We give to Jesus when we support Christian ministries. Why not consider a very special gift to a ministry this holiday season? Jesus does not care that the economy is down. He still expects to be worshipped. Christmas is all about Jesus.

BBC Foundation has been ministering to churches and individuals regarding biblical stewardship since 1992. Send your questions on finances and stewardship to: BBC Foundation, 538 Venard Rd., Clarks Summit, PA 18411. Phone: (800) 451-8668, website: bbcfoundation.org; e-mail: info@bbcfoundation.org