

# Christmas: Did The Apostles Memorialize His Birth, Or His Death?



By Bradlee Dean

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Everybody loves to celebrate Christmas, the birth of Christ (most scholars believe He was born in September between 6 and 4 BC). Yet, what did the disciples commemorate?

Today, we love to get together, eat, give each other presents, enjoy the beautiful lights, and a baby in a manger. Who can't get excited about a baby?

People make much of the birth of Christ, but did you know that in the Bible, we find no record that the New Testament Church ever celebrated Christmas? Don't get me wrong, I don't think it's wrong to celebrate the birth of Christ. However, when it comes to a memorial, the New Testament Church didn't have a monument to remember the birth of Christ. What did they memorialize? They remembered Christ's death in the Lord's Supper. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-34.

There are many traditional images we have surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ, the Word that was made flesh as a sinless human being, and dwelt among us (John 1:14).

We see images of Mary and Joseph in a humble stable with cows, oxen, a donkey, some sheep, and a baby lying in a wooden manger slightly overflowing with hay or straw.

We see the shepherds worshipping Him and the wise men are there bowing before Him as they present their gifts. We may even see a little drummer boy standing nearby, although he is not found in the Scriptures.

We think of the dramatic, brilliant, and startling angelic announcement that heralded the arrival of the Savior to the shepherds as they kept watch over their flocks by night.

“And the Angel of the Lord said unto them, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a Manger.” – Luke 2:10-12

The Greek word for manger is ‘phatne’, which means ‘stall.’

These shepherds were officially entrusted to care for flocks that produced unblemished lambs to be sacrificed as sin offerings in the temple.

The sign to the shepherds was that the baby was wrapped in swaddling clothes with special strips of cloth wound around the baby lying in a stall. How could it be that this sign would tell the shepherds exactly where to find the baby Jesus?

Micah 5:2 tells us that out of Bethlehem would come a ruler over Israel.

This was confirmed by the chief priests and scribes when the wise men came to Jerusalem to look for the new-born King. They asked, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” (Matthew 2:2)

But did you know that in the time of Jesus, just outside of Bethlehem, there was a former military watchtower that was called in Hebrew, Migdal Eder, which means “tower of the flock.”

The lower level was used for birthing lambs which would be closely examined and later be used for sin offerings in the temple in Jerusalem. This structure contains stalls for sheltering ewes who were about to bear their lambs.

We are told there was one particular stall where the newborn lambs were placed and wrapped in swaddling clothes to protect them from damage and/or blemish in order for them to be acceptable.

“And thou, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee it shall come, even the first dominion; the Kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem.” – Micah 4:8

So, at the direction of the angel, these shepherds, who knew, raised, cared for, and closely examined sacrificial lambs, understood exactly where to find and examine the newborn King. It was in the tower of the flock, lying in a stall where the lambs that were to be examined for sacrifices were located.

God arranged the perfect birthplace for His only begotten Son, the perfect Lamb to be sacrificed for the sins of the world (John 1:29).

In conclusion: What was to commemorate? Christ's death, not His birth.

It seems that the more carnal a person is, the more they will make much of his birth, and the less they will make of his death.

People love to celebrate the cradle. Yet, they, somehow or another, hate the cross (Philippians 3:18-19). That same giddy crowd that will be dancing around the cradle on Christmas evening will be the same giddy crowd that will be in a drunken stupor on New Year's Eve singing the devil's songs (John 3:6).

These people don't see that this baby Jesus is the sovereign King. They don't see Him as the sinless deity, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. They don't see Him as the sacrificial Savior who was going to die a death, an ignominious death on the cross, and shed His blood as the propitiation for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2). This is scriptural what we, as Christians, should be commemorating and memorializing.

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E-Mail Bradlee Dean: [Bradlee@SonsOfLibertyRadio.com](mailto:Bradlee@SonsOfLibertyRadio.com)