

NEW

Horizons

Vol 8 No 6

November/December 2004

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

**With around two thousand
Christian denominations
vying for your attention, it's
easy to miss the important
issues of life and religion.
It's our hope that through
New Horizons our readers
will come to understand
the true meaning of the
Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

**The Gospel was proclaimed
by Jesus and by his apostles
in the clearest of terms - and
recorded for us in the Scrip-
tures. Over the centuries
that truth has been buried,
dug up, buried again. Our
desire is to restore the sim-
ple apostolic message. We
hope you will be excited
by what the Scriptures re-
veal about life, and the
horizons beyond**

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Churches of God Outreach Ministries
P O Box 54621 Tulsa
OK 74155-0621 USA
e-mail: information@cgom.org
1-800-611-8080
Editor: James McBride
e-mail: coguk@aol.com

The Churches of God, UK
PO Box 2525
LINCOLN LN5 7PF United Kingdom
Regd Charity No 283358
e-mail: coguk@aol.com

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries
100 Northcote Street
Aberdare NSW 2325 Australia
e-mail: icg.aust@netcentral.com.au

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries
PO Box 476 Don Mills Station
Don Mills Ontario M3C 2T4 Canada
www.canadianchurchofgod.com

or from:

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new **Horizons**

Issue No 48

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parental care for our children is a safeguard of the future

A potential 750,000 members of 'the next generation', in the United Kingdom, are conceived annually—though one in four (185,000 last year) never see the light of day -- deliberately destroyed in the womb.

The death of a *desired* new-born, however, is agony for the parents. The infant has been carried for nine months in the mother's womb—a living part of her. Then gone—a perpetual memory. Happily, the vast majority live on, sometimes causing heartbreak but almost always a joy, certainly as a babe. Then what? Let's focus on those live births.

Born With Purpose

Gaze on that new-born 'bundle of joy' and you envisage—what? Certainly you picture health and happiness for the infant, success in one field of endeavour or another. A great artist or musician or scientist. Some might even see a future politician! But what of the precious formative months and years? Which child guru do you follow? Or, is folklore best—the way grandmother recommends? There's a supermarket of ideas of child-rearing out there. Yet every sane new parent knows guidance is necessary; children cannot simply be left to their own devices.

The excitement of watching your child grow is almost unbearable. That first toothless smile. The first crawl, the first mumbling of 'ma ma' and 'da da' or 'pa-pa', the first stumbling attempt to walk. The aware parent doesn't want to miss

those unrepeatable milestones—events often accompanied by joyful parental tears. But those days end, and life marches on.

The Bible has a curious expression: '*Better the day of one's death than the day of one's birth*'. Few of us achieve much in the first couple of decades of life. It's a time of preparation. It's a time for laying the foundation on which is built your contribution to civilization. You are not remembered for being born but for your legacy. Beyond your genetic inheritance you don't, in your early years, add much to that foundation. *But your parents do.*

children...the best job in the world

The most important job is not that of the President or the Queen or a brilliant scientist or top military commander. The most important job is *the next generation. Yours.*

In those early years you instil the habits for a lifetime. Why you don't torture the cat or pull the legs off a frog. How to deal with anger and disappointment, and to interact with your peers. What's right, what's wrong (*your values*). What is greed and how to share. When not to interrupt a conversation. Patience. Grooming. Good eating habits. Consideration and respect for others. Self-respect, too. Together with self-discipline and personal responsibility. All essential for a civilized and

successful human being who can positively contribute to society. And all can be taught—mostly by direct parental example.

That, in part, is a road-map for every new-born—and the parents are responsible. The alternative is wild growth—a tree unpruned and grotesquely distorted.

Cuckoo's Nest

It has been said that the best experience, sometimes, is someone else's experience. And there are plenty of horror stories to learn from. Our media highlights the abuse, the neglect, the teen and pre-teen gangs, the promiscuity. Talking heads express their abhorrence of feckless parenting. Government imposes law upon law. And then 'respectable parents' hypocritically dump their precious offspring on strangers—and not always from 'economic necessity'.

Birds in general lay their eggs—and then jealously guard their young. Most other creatures follow suit. Yet babies barely dry from the womb are farmed out for a price. They crawl the nursery floor along with a dozen other squalling infants and toddlers. Staff, often half-trained, are at their wit's end seeking to control the noisy mayhem. Older 'inmates' run wild, learn to swear and spout street talk, add new 'naughtiness' to their own, pick up every snuffle and tummy bug.

Can you be sure that what you are told about the 'high quality of service' is what actually happens when you have left—for your workplace? And, above all, that the staff will reflect your personal values? 'Group socialization' has a powerful effect

on behaviour—indeed, is considered by some psychologists to be more powerful than either nature or parental influence. Nursery behaviour will tend towards the lowest common denominator.

Increasingly, psychologists emphasise the need for continuity of care. And care that is best provided in the home and by the child's mother. Many experts believe the increase in childhood dysfunction arises from deviation from this norm.

In the United Kingdom, nearly seventy percent of working women are mothers of younger children. Financial pressures—and, too often, career—drive many out of the home and into the work place. To keep the bills under control often needs a double wage—especially when that wage is, for both, the minimum. We might ask why that's the case.

A major cause - spell that 'curse' - is the present UK Government's appalling ideology of encouraging mothers into work in the name of sexual equality and liberation, and 'helping the economy'. Generous tax-funded financial support for nursery fees is one such measure—driving up public expenditure and necessitating increased taxation. And that's more pressure on the family finances. The need for a second income is understandable. Or, if you are a single parent, the need for an income. (Here, too, we might ask why that situation has arisen.)

Concern for your child's well-being should drive a family to exert every effort to care for their children at home—despite the cost in lowered material standards. It's a calamity that Government and society in general undermines what has been the safe and proven human experience for millennia

Teach At Home

The foundation principles of life are laid in the home, and as stated, direct

parental example is the key. Sound training is not, of course, a guarantee your child will never trouble you. (Peer pressure is powerful.)

The Creator informed our first parents that the consequence of their stupidity would be : "...in sorrow shall you bring forth children" If, however, you prepare yourself the chance of success increases. Vandalism, anti-social behaviour, week-end wasters, drug taking—and teenage problems—are less likely when these principles have been actively taught and encouraged and exemplified in the home. Sadly, in all levels of society they are neglected. Few of us grow up in the perfect

Blessed is the mother who can confidently expect her chosen nursery to be as effective in accomplishing these challenges as well as she could personally. On your way to work plonk your three-month old baby—and he or she is still a baby—in a nursery. It's not unusual, believe it or not! Will the staff, however skilled and dedicated, duplicate your expertise, your compassion, your capacity to comfort? Perhaps most important will they consistently instil those vital spiritual values you desire for your precious child?

The Most Important Job

It's possible, of course, that

- 67% of UK mothers return to work before their child's first birthday
- By 2008 about 1700 state-funded children's centres are planned
- A study at Birkbeck College (London) found that children sent to nurseries or child-minders were more likely to grow up disobedient and badly behaved
- An Oxford University study indicates that even as little as twelve hours a week in child-care, for under-2s, is harmful
- A recent US study suggested that group care was more damaging for under-3s than other forms of care

'financial pressure' is self-imposed. So—a few questions. Why do you need extra income? Do your 'basic living costs' include expensive purchases—new car, jewellery, plasma television, luxury holidays, keeping up with fashion? *Etc.* Are you a shopaholic? Perhaps wrapped up in the 'good life'? The Bible pinpoints excess desire for the material as a cause of poverty: '*You should not covet*'. Greed, avarice, acquisition - they are a curse of our era. But poverty may also be measured in terms of how your child is raised.

Another 'reason' for leaving your child in a nursery is career. *Career* becomes 'the most important job', and your personal care for your child is secondary. A sense of guilt is often reported as a mother deposits her child at the nursery—especially the worry if there are possible signs of impending sickness. It's very much 'you can't serve two masters'. Which, to you, is most important?

The most important, indeed the best, career of all is that of personally training your own flesh and blood to become a civilized, well-adjusted teen and a civilized adult. That takes time and patience and self-education. It takes intense focused effort. It takes, for most, personal sacrifice.

Although it will at times be exhausting, caring for a young child need not be a banal mind-numbing passing of time at home. With proper forethought it can be a rewarding, even exciting, joyful experience - with some tears.

It's the most important career on earth for most parents **ش**

request the free related articles

**University of the Home
Spend a Lifetime—Together
The Edge of Divorce
Born With a Purpose**

WHAT'S THE TIME?

Is this 'the end-time'? Many believe it is. Have we got it right?

Throughout the Christian centuries Bible students have asked that question: *What's the time? Just when will Jesus return? Are we now in the end-time?* Often, dates are set - and presented with 'infallible proofs' of their correctness.

So - unless the set dates are yet future to the winter of 2004 they have all so far been wrong - and how correct future dates may be remains to be seen. Whole denominations are spawned as sectarian interests squabble, and separate to rally round a specific date. Time and again particular dates set for the return of Christ or some other prophesied end-time event have come - and gone - without fulfilment.

Is This the End-time?

The end of our present civilisation and the beginning of the reign of Christ is set in stone. *It will come.*

The Scriptures paint a vivid picture of the 'state of the world' we can expect at the end. And sure enough virtually all can be discerned in today's world.

But does that mean *this* is the end? Fuelled by chaos in Africa, the AIDS epidemic, war in Iraq, suicide murders and vile terrorism, hurricanes, drought - there's a frenzy of speculation that 'the end is nigh'.

Many Christians certainly believe so. But as always, there's dissent. Many say it is now 6008 years since Creation, give or take a very few years. That's based on the work of Archbishop Ussher's calculation: creation, he figured, was in 4004BC.

As it is expected by many that mankind would have self-rule for a 'prophetic week' of six thousand years, then Jesus 'should have' returned by now to complete the week with a 'seventh-day rest' for mankind. The delay could be explained, of course, if there was a discrepancy in the calculation of the passing years. Or by Jesus' own parable to the effect that his coming may be 'delayed'. Which is fair enough, and we could speculate on the reasons.

Perhaps as a caution, the Jews calibrate this present year as 5764 years since Creation. A couple of centuries yet to go!

The setting of specific dates for prophetic fulfilment isn't new. Back in 999AD the notion of a millennium after Christ stirred a frenzy of activity. Then again the terrible events of the twelfth and again the fourteenth century convinced Christians in Europe that the end was near. Twenty million, in Europe - including half the population of England - died of 'the Black Death' in the three plague years 1347-1349. The continent was on the edge of anarchy. That the 'Day of Judgment' had come was a view widely held. In recent memory are World War II and the worldwide Y2K fears surrounding 1999-2000.

Whether 1844 was chosen, or 1975, or many specific years before or in between or after (dates are still being set!) - Jesus has still not returned. False expectations are induced about our imminent resurrection and an end to life's pain. And those unfulfilled expectations, sadly, have helped turn some Christians aside from faith.

request the booklet :

Key to the Book of Revelation
It helps put end-time events in order

Timely Warning

It's unwise, then, to apply specific dates to Biblical statements. Time periods are indeed prophesied (eg the 'Seventy Weeks' or the 'Times of the Gentiles') - though in such a way that they are open to interpretation. Witness the various views promoted in myriad books and articles down the centuries!

Yet various pundits continue to assign specific dates to imagined 'eras' of church history. This notion helped lead to a great 'falling away' from one church denomination, the *World-wide Church of God*, when expectations failed of a 'flight to a place of safety' in 1975. Some corporate descendants of that church didn't learn the lesson and continue to this day to raise false hopes. A recent one is January 16, 2010 for 'the beginning of the Tribulation' - some 'hope'. We await the date with interest. Others posit that the 6000 years have not yet expired.

Unshakeable Prophecy

Bible prophecy *will* be accurately fulfilled. Judgement Day *will* come. Jesus *will* return. *And right on time* - but in the Father's time - a time concealed, so far, from humans.

It is for Christians of every age to personally learn the lessons that Jesus outlined for all seven of those first-century churches in Asia: *"Whoever has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"*.

However long each of us may live our efforts are to be three-fold:

- become Christ-like in character (a mammoth all-consuming personal challenge)
- keep the faith; hold firm to sound teaching, seek God's Kingdom above all else
- and in co-operation with brethren in other assemblies be witnesses for him in the world, making disciples everywhere

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Christian - and Alone?

Finding a suitable husband or wife often proves elusive for Christians. How can 'Christian singles' cope?

Increasingly, dedicated Christians intent on 'doing the right thing' often find a shortage of suitable life partners. Even in churches which include many who are 'free to marry', suitable partners can be hard to find. Factor in the view that it is desirable that beliefs should tally - 'don't marry outside the group' - and the problem is compounded. What can the single person - widowed, unmarried - do?

We crave companionship, and for most, but not for all, that means marriage. Built into the human psyche is God's statement: *"It is not good that man should be alone. I will make for him a suitable helper, completing him"* (Genesis 2:18). Experience bears this out, with but a minority able to live life a full and complete life without such an intimate companion.

But for most there's a desire to marry, to engender a family. And when 'mister or miss right' comes along we think - physically and spiritually : *'this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'* (v.23). As in God's original purpose : *'...a man shall leave father and mother and shall cling to his wife'*. We enter a process of becoming *'one flesh'* - physically (through offspring), emotionally, spiritually.

Sadly, for all too many Christians the opportunity for such a team either fails to arise, or is never seized.

How, then, can individual single Christians, those desirous of mar-

riage, face their situation?

Fundamentally (and it's a bed-rock principle) your life, as a Christian, is in His hands - whether married or single. *"...we know that for those who love God, for those called in agreement with his purpose, he co-operates in all things for what is good"* (Romans 8:28). The Father, in other words, wants what is best for each of His beloved children. Records the Chronicler: *"For the eyes of the Lord flash back and forth over the whole earth to display his strength on behalf of those whose heart is full of integrity towards him"* (II Chronicles 16:9).

The implication here is that your life is dedicated to the service of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself said: *"...seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added on for you"* (Matthew 6:33). Our real needs are met when we 'walk in the light of God's Word'.

The Celibate Life

Do you have a passion for marriage? That's perhaps the first question you need ask yourself. Most, but not all, do. Jesus, in the context of marriage and divorce, addresses the question of abstinence from the married life - celibacy. The background, of course, is that in the divine economy and as understood by all his hearers there must not - contrary to perverse modern practice - be any sexual relationship outside marriage.

If you are still single or divorced or widowed but if you choose the single life, says Jesus, you must have the spiritual strength to contain sexual desire. We should here recall Jesus' words regarding the very harbouring of sexual thoughts directed outside

marriage (Matthew 5:27-30).

The apostle Paul is on the same wavelength. He personally (though by then single - divorced or widowed) chose to stay single. But he emphasizes that if continence is not your scene then you should marry (I Corinthians 7:7, 32-34). But *'only in the Lord'*.

The erosion of sexual responsibility in our day reflects the situation prior to Noah's flood. It is recorded: *"When the earth began to be populated, and daughters were born to the people [ie the ungodly line of Cain] , it developed that the sons of God [descendants of Seth] took notice of the daughters of men, admired their looks and married all those of them whom they chose"* (Genesis 6:1-2). It was a time when *'the sons of God'* - in modern terms, Christians - *"used to cohabit with the daughters of men, who bore them children"* (v. 4). This rampant sexual license is cited as 'wickedness', and God allotted 120 years for mankind to change course - before divine judgment would be exercised. The modern world may not have so long.

Wise Choice

So God's people in Noah's day faced the same challenge as do single Christians today: the number of potential godly partners were few. They had a choice, a dilemma - marry in the faith - or into 'the world'.

The human need - and desire - for intimate companionship can be overwhelming. But the consequences of the wrong choice are dire - unhappiness, unsuitable compromise, even a loss of zeal for the spiritual.

The spiritual element is vital. Christians alone have the opportunity to live forever as part of the God Family. Who would compromise that? In marriage *faith*, mostly, not race, is fundamental. What you believe touches every aspect of life. When

and how you worship and when you celebrate the faith in festivals. Even what you eat. What you teach your children. How you allocate your resources. All are affected

And when both of you are at loggerheads watch the sparks fly. Too often such conflicts blight the Christian's life, hinder God's purpose for him or her and cause unhappiness to the partner. *Who you marry is a momentous decision affecting all aspects of life.*

A Valuable Resource

In too many churches singles are largely

sidelined, their talents ignored, their potential contribution to the life of the church despised. It's a challenge to every church and it's leadership to cater for and fully integrate the unmarried - of whatever age, single for whatever reason. Too often they are seen as having little to contribute to the work of the church.

Every Christian - married, unmarried - has a responsibility to work diligently for the Kingdom of God within the limits of their gifts and ability, contributing their spiritual gifts and their natural talents and their energies to promote it. The unmarried, however, are positioned to contribute uniquely.

Here's how the apostle Paul sums up: *"The single person is concerned*

with the Lord's affairs, how to please the Lord, but the married person is concerned with the things of the world, how to please the wife; he has divided interests. As for the wife and the virgin [young, unmarried women, in those days, were virgins!], the unmarried woman is interested in the Lord's affairs, to be dedicated in body and spirit; but the married woman is concerned with the things of the world, how she may please her husband" (I Corinthians 7:32-34). Domestic pressures and tasks consume much time and effort for both husband and wife.

who you marry is a momentous decision affecting all aspects of life

Married life is not, of course, a barrier to dedicated service. Apart from Paul, the other apostles were married to dedicated and supportive wives. (I Corinthians 9:5, Matthew 8:14). Given their experience, family men are often more suited to pastoral care, rooted as they are in the community.

Paul, however, was free to roam the Empire. Likely, his companions - eg Timothy, Titus - were also single and free to up sticks and troubleshoot in many areas. The unmarried Christian

related articles, free of charge, are available from any of our addresses. Or, they may be viewed on our web site: www.cgom.org

**Spend a Lifetime - Together
University of the Home**

is therefore free to serve in ways from which a family man is restricted, even excluded, by virtue of his family commitments. In this respect perhaps more is expected of the unmarried. Without domestic ties they are free for unique dedicated service - evangelists, church planting etc.

What You Can Do

As noted, not all singles want to remain single. What can they do while waiting for the right partner?

- decide whether or not you are suited to marriage
- importantly, leave the timing in God's hands (Romans 8:28)
- be patient (Romans 8:25)
- be focused and diligent in your work for God (Matthew 5:33)
- prepare yourself for marriage (Proverbs 24:27)
- believe God will fulfil your need (Philippians 4:19)
- be diligent in prayer (Philippians 4:6-7)
- avoid and resist sexual temptation (Acts 15:20, I Corinthians 6:18)
- don't be tempted to begin a relationship with an unbeliever (II Corinthians 6:14)
- check a potential partner's background
- list the qualities you look for in a life partner - and wait
- ask: are your essential beliefs compatible? ف

DIVORCE - is it for Christians?

Even to non-Christians divorce is a matter of grave concern. The statistics are disturbing. Not just the numbers, but also the pain, the guilt, the disruption to the family circle, the horrendous financial burden on both individuals and on the State.

Children, especially, are deeply affected. The marriage-go-round confuses them with several 'daddies', all those half brothers and sisters, and

a surplus of 'grandparents'. Even if they live in a single parent home - between marriages - for but a short time, there are health, education, behaviour problems. Then there's interference - often acrimonious, sometimes violent - from the separated parent.

The simplistic answer is '*don't divorce*'. That, for many, simply isn't an option - they have reached the end of the road, and don't have the tools to help through the inevitable

challenges of marriage. Christians - who also divorce - do have those tools.

We have prepared several articles which address marriage and divorce. They are available free from any of our addresses. They are:

**Spend a Lifetime - Together
The Edge of Divorce
Divorce - is it for Christians?**

The Feast of the Nativity

An intensely spiritual observance? A secular holiday? A pagan festival? Here's some light on the celebration of the birth of Jesus

Christmas-time has etched itself into our calendar. For some it's an intensely religious experience. To others a welcome mid-winter break. And an opportunity, for some, for a good knees-up! Overall, it has become an almost universal festival observed even by non-Christians.

Most 20th century Western Christians, however, realize that the trappings of Christmas are transferred from ancient pre-Christian worship. It's common knowledge in our sceptical age. Whether it's the tree, or "the holly and the ivy" or the trinkets inside the pudding, or the over-indulgence in food and alcohol, or even the cheery "Merry Christmas" - all are in direct descent from pre-Christian practice.

How on earth could such elements have been grafted onto the pure religion of Jesus Christ? Those who oppose the celebration of Christmas point to the medieval compromises of the Church: bring the heathen into the church by Christianizing their customs.

Make it easy for them to convert. And multitudes did.

the birth of a Saviour was announced to man soon after he rejected God's rule and guidance

It's certainly an important reason. But is it sufficient to account for the universal distortion of this much celebrated of festivals? Could there be some hidden grain of truth around which gathered the mythical pagan practices?

It's a recognized historical fact, confirmed by all treatises on the matter, that the early Christians did not have Christmas celebrations in late December. It entered the calendar only around the 5th century. But does this mean that there was no recognition of this momentous event? Could the "becoming flesh" of the Creator God go unnoticed, uncelebrated? Of course not!

Nativity Festival

In fact, the time of the birth of Jesus Christ was a festival observed, in anticipation, possibly from the beginning of human existence!

Notice what the noted author John Brady had to say back in 1815. Having explained that the Roman calendar calculations were seriously adrift in the time of Christ, he writes:

Hence arose the inaccuracy, which has been so often and so pathetically lamented, in keeping the day of our Lord's Nativity; which it is now settled, by arguments incontrovertible, did not take place on the 25th of December, but at the time the Jews kept their Feast of Tabernacles

[*Clavis Calendria*, v.2, pp. 340-341]

The scholarly Dr Bullinger confirms this: "Without the shadow of a doubt...[the Saviour's] birth took place on the 15th Ethanim [or Tishri - the first day of the Festival of Tabernacles]" (*Companion Bible*, Appdx. 179).

You will find an exposition of this ancient Festival in Leviticus 23. It was one of the three annual harvest festivals celebrated throughout the ancient world, and very likely instituted by the Creator in the time of Adam.

Foretold In The Stars

The birth of a future Saviour was announced to man even before he was ejected from the Garden of Eden because of his sin! Notice Genesis 3:15-16: "*I [God] will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman; also between your offspring and her offspring; he will bruise your head and you will bruise his heel*". A human descendant of Eve ("*born of a woman*") would be injured by Satan. But ultimately would be the Victor.

That offspring was Jesus, the longed-for Messiah, the "*desire of all nations*". He was temporarily "*bruised*" in his death. But he rose triumphantly from the grave to conquer and destroy (yet future) the Devil! The birth of a Saviour was in the mind and plan of God before even the foundation of the world!

Indeed the very configuration of the planets was arranged with this in mind. During the week of recreation, God said "*Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years*" (Genesis 1:14).

Let's look more closely at that statement. The "*... seasons [Heb moed]*" is the very word used to describe the festivals listed in Leviticus 23, including, for example, the Festival of Tabernacles. Written into the very fabric of the heavens is the magnificent plan of God for a Deliverer to come to mankind!

Truly "*The heavens declare the glory of God!*" As the psalmist continues: "*Day after day pours forth speech, and night after night declares knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not*

heard. Yet their line [voice - LXX] goes out through all the earth, their words to the ends of the world" (Psalm 19:1-4).

We are here told that although the heavens are silent - yet they carry an eloquent message to discerning man. Included in that message of the stars, and transcribed into the annual round of agricultural festivals, is God's plan for a Saviour of mankind! It is God's unwritten *torah* [instruction] (vv. 7-9).

An Unlikely Story

But as John Brady states, and as confirmed by numerous others, December 25 is perhaps the most unlikely time for the birth of Jesus!

Given the Palestinian climate which dictated agricultural practice, no sheep are likely to have been out on the hills at that inclement time of year. Nor would the authorities impose a census in mid-winter. Nor was a young full-term woman likely to tackle a ninety-mile journey through wild hill country.

That very time of year, however, did have great significance for the majority society of that era. Again, the heavens had a part! For towards the end of December the sun reached its lowest point, and visibly began once again to climb daily higher in the sky. The cycle of nature was being renewed! A time for celebration indeed.

And what better time for the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2) to first become flesh - as a fertilized ovum in the womb of His mother Mary!

It is also significant that nine months later as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), Jesus visibly entered our world - as a baby - in the very Festival, the Festival of Tabernacles, which portrays the future reign of the Messiah over a world at total peace!

WHO WE ARE

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries is an international association of independent local assemblies - Christians who meet together for worship, instruction in the faith and fellowship. Each assembly is self-governing according to Bible principles, but co-operates through our Conference with other like-minded assemblies to work towards agreed evangelistic goals.

These goals are within the framework of the commission set for his church by Jesus: "going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptising them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). He further commanded that we "Shepherd...[and] feed my sheep".

To these ends we publish Bible-based literature (eg our quarterly *Newsletter*, *Fountain of Life*, a bi-monthly outreach magazine *New Horizons*, the *Bible Basics* home study course). The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships and scattered brethren.

We cordially invite all independent fellowships of whatever size - or individuals - to associate with us in this worldwide ministry. Our Statement of Beliefs and a Publications Catalogue is available from any of our addresses. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications

Request: The Truth About Christmas

unsigned articles are by the Editor

God With Us

Follow this. Since Jesus was born at the Feast of Tabernacles - which was always in September/October - when would He have first become flesh? John tells us that "*The Word became flesh*" (John 1:14). Human gestation the time from conception to birth - is about forty weeks. Jesus gave up his heavenly status as a part of the divine Family to become flesh - '*Immanuel, God with us*' (Matthew 1:23). He took on human life as a male sperm cell, at that moment prior to conception becoming human flesh. Nine months later, at the beginning of the Festival of Tabernacles (late September) Jesus was born in Bethlehem, near Jerusalem.

John completed his sentence: "...*the Word became flesh* [at the latter part of December] ... *and dwelt* [Gk = tabernacled"] *among us*" (ch 1:14). Two separate events - conception, and birth.

Clearly, it would be impossible to be specific about the time of conception. Who could prove it! How could the specific day be pinned down for observance! For example, over the past ten years the conception of Jesus (working on the assumption of forty weeks gestation leading to the first day of Tabernacles) fell on the same day only twice. It varied from December 17 to January 11 on our present calendar.

And never once on December 25!

Observed Today!

But the birth of a child is obvious to all - and a time for celebration. Especially, the birth of the Son of God is certainly a time for the greatest rejoicing, in company with all the heavenly angels. The pagan Saturnalia feast, now called Christmas, serves to befoul the beautiful plan of God, and to obscure the most momentous event in history - the Word of God becoming flesh (in His hu-

man conception) at that time of year. And nine months later, at the Festival of Tabernacles, his birth as the Saviour of mankind (Luke 2:8-14).

The Church of God has long observed this festival. Indeed it was observed annually by the apostolic church. Notes John Brady: "The first Christians...on the day of the Feast of Tabernacles ornamented their churches [ie, long after the era of the apostles - there were no "churches" as such for many decades after their death!] with green boughs, as a memorial that Christ was actually born at that time" [*Clavis Calendria*, v.2, p.341].

In fact, this is how ancient Israel observed this Festival some fifteen hundred years before the time of Jesus (Leviticus 23:40)! This body of research is today studiously avoided by most church leaders!

Modern Saturnalia

The apostle Peter may have had the Roman Saturnalia - the pagan feast at the same time as the modern Christmas - in mind when he wrote: "*Let the time that is past suffice for doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing and lawless idolatry. They are surprised that you do not now join them in the same wild profligacy, and they abuse you*" (I Peter 3:3-4).

Christians avoided those celebrations. But what an excellent portrait of modern Christmas celebrations! And of the abuse meted especially to Christians who refuse to "join in" the dissolute festivities!

Many dedicated Christians, of course, avoid the excesses of the Christmas season. They quietly celebrate it as the birthday of Jesus. How much more satisfying, more authentic, to note this vital historical moment in the way God prescribed, and at the time He appointed.

INVITATION TO HELP!

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*Your prayerful consideration
of this request will be
appreciated.*

Peace On Earth

God has given the perfect time to honour the birth of His Son into our world - at the Festival which He long ago appointed for His people. But like ancient King Jeroboam (I Kings 12:32), Christians have shifted the observance to an inappropriate time of year.

The Festival of Tabernacles, however, celebrates what Christians daily pray for - the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth. A time of "*peace on earth among men in whom he is well pleased*". It was the beautiful song of the heavenly angelic host who announced the birth of the Saviour (Luke 2:14) on that quiet early autumn night in ancient Judaea!

Hear the prophet Isaiah:

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the House of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains... For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more

Isaiah: 2:1-4

That longed-for era is coming! Let's not "*learn the way of the heathen...*" (Jeremiah 10:2) by keeping "*the [feast] days of Baal*". Let's keep the Feast (of Tabernacles) in celebration of that momentous event - the nativity of mankind's one and only Saviour. ش

Bible Basics

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Mini-study

Will You Go To Heaven?

Blessed are the gentle for they shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5)

Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not at all enter into the Kingdom of Heaven (v.20)

Some Bible students find difficulty in reconciling these two sayings of Jesus. What is it to be - heaven, or earth? The average Christian's expectation is that upon death he or she goes to heaven. After that it's a bit fuzzy. Endless adoration of God. Listening to angelic choirs. Playing a harp for eternity. Talk to non-Christians and the reply is even fuzzier, ranging from a vacuum to a vague hope of 'something nice' - but again certainly not 'the other place'. What, then, is the reward of those who are 'saved'?

- for most in the Christian tradition - whether or not a committed Christian - death is the divider. When that inevitable event overtakes us, they believe, it's either *Heaven* or *Hell*, or for some, an intermediate state - *Purgatory*
- the Scriptures have a different take. When anyone dies (Christian, atheist, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, animist), they teach, *we are dead*. No conscious thought. No communication with the world left behind. No pain. Just 'at rest in peace'
- but there's more. For, said Jesus, everyone in their graves will be restored to life - resurrected. Every man, woman and child who does not, at death, have in them God's holy Spirit will wait - sometimes dead for thousands of years - to come to life again in the flesh
- those in whom is God's Spirit - and that is available only through Jesus - will be raised from the dead when Jesus, as promised, returns to earth as King of kings. They will be raised in a new spirit body - immortal - to work with Christ in his ongoing plan for mankind
- '*...returns to earth*'? Will he then take you back to Heaven? Or is there some other plan up his sleeve? In fact, his work on our planet is far from finished
- in the decade before his return earth will be in turmoil. The disaster movies haven't told the half. Millions - perhaps billions - will die from war, famine, disease, natural disaster. Few will survive. But beginning with this few Jesus and the resurrected saints will establish - *here on earth*, and for a thousand years - a new world order of peace, justice and prosperity for all their descendants. God hasn't given up on His creation!
- it's here on earth where the problems are - not in Heaven. It's here on earth God will fix them - not in Heaven. The Kingdom is now in Heaven. It will, in God's time, be on earth

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