

Why Feast at Christmas?

Luke 1:39-2:40

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I. Introduction

Why did our Reformational fathers deem Christmas worthy of celebration? The 2nd Helvetic Confession (1566) states in Chapter 24:

Moreover, if the Churches do in Christian liberty religiously celebrate the memory of the Lord's nativity [Christmas], circumcision [near Epiphany], passion [Good Friday], resurrection [Easter], and of His ascension into heaven [Ascension Day], and the sending of the Holy Spirit upon His disciples [Pentecost], we do very well approve of it.

II. The Birth Narratives

³⁹Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" ⁴³But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord." ⁴⁶And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior...." ⁵⁷Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. ⁵⁸When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child... ⁶⁴Immediately [Zacharias'] mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God... ⁶⁷Now... Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: ⁶⁸"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people... ^{2:13}And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"... ²⁰Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them. ²¹And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb... ²⁷So [Simeon] came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, ²⁸he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: ²⁹"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word... ³⁸And coming in that instant [Anna] gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

- A. Announcement to Mary (Lk 1:39-56)
- B. Birth of John the Baptizer (Lk 1:67-80)
- C. Birth of Jesus (Lk 2:8-20)
- D. Circumcision of Jesus (Lk 2:27-32)
- E. Visitation of the Magi (Mt 2:9-11)

III. Application

A. The Necessity of Festivity (Rom 8:19-24; Dt 28:47f; 1 Cor 5:7f)

If we understand God's kindness, the goodness of His Creation, and the purpose of God in Christ to rescue sinners and all creation from the bondage of sin and death, then we will not be able to help but feast. The _____ is the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promised redemption of all creation.

Easter is God's great, "Yes!" to His creation and the created order.

¹⁹For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; ²¹because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²²For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴For we were saved in this hope... (Rom 8:19-24)

The resurrection (Christ's and ours') forms the backbone of Christian festivity – a reality which we celebrate week by week on the _____ (Jude 12). Every week we rejoice in God's good creation that Christ came to redeem and rescue. So what does this have to do with celebrating the Incarnation? The Incarnation is the foundation of _____. The body that was glorified in the Resurrection is the same body assumed by the Eternal Son of God in the Incarnation. Festival is a believing response to God's declaration that the created world and all it contains are very good.

Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you. (Dt 28:47-48)

B. The Nature of Festivity

1. What Characterizes Unbiblical Festivity?
 - a. Drunkenness (Pr 23:29-32)
 - b. Revelry/Lust/Strife (Rom 13:11-14; Ps 35:15-16; Pr 17:1)
 - c. Striving for Glory from Men (Lk 20:45-47)
2. What Characterizes Biblical Festivity?
 - a. Song & Poetry (Lk 1:39-2:40; Ps 42:4; 81:3)
 - b. Choice Food & Aged Wine (Is 25:6-9; Jn 2:1-12)
 - c. Presents/Giving to the Poor (Esther 9:22)

IV. Conclusion (Ps 126)

¹A Song of Ascents. When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, We were like those who dream. ²Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." ³The Lord has done great things for us, And we are glad. ⁴Bring back our captivity, O Lord, As the streams in the South. ⁵Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy. ⁶He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves with him. (Ps 126)