

The Torch

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WHO OR WHAT ARE YOU CELEBRATING

Experts on calendars estimate that there are may be about forty calendars in use all over the world today. Although, none of these calendars is rated to be very correct and without error, most people people all over the world still regulate their activities in relation to days and months with the Gregorian Calendar which has a twelve month Calendar running from January to

December. Though there is some disagreement with the choice of the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month on the Gregorian Calendar as the precise day on which Jesus Christ was born, early Christians chose to celebrate the birth of Christ on this day for reasons which may not necessarily be related to the birth of Jesus Christ with the

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day tagged Christmas day world-wide, with the word Christmas itself being a compound word consisting of “Christ” and “Mass”. It is implied that the day is expected to have a large gathering of people coming together to celebrate Jesus Christ.

Modern day celebration has however evolved into this celebration stretching into a season, sometimes starting from the beginning on the first day of the second month of the last quarter of the Gregorian Calendar called November. From this time of the Gregorian Calendar, many mementos which over the years have been associated with the celebration begin to appear in homes and commercial premises in addition to the airing several songs which have been composed over the years in celebration of this season. Of significance is the fact that despite the season being referred to as Christmas season and expected to be for adherents of the Christian faith, the celebration in modern times has extended and involved non-Christians alike with several people deliberately choosing that period of the Gregorian Calendar to arrange for holidays, landmark celebrations like weddings and other family gatherings. Several companies including those whose financial year does not run from January to December also choose to mark out that season as a period to assess performances and equally appreciate members of staff that have excelled over the twelve month period. In summary, it is generally a celebration period with many people in joyous mood and with huge positive impact on commercial activities as large amount of money continues to change hands. The impact of these activities on commerce is so much that over the years, the income of the Christmas season has become very significant as it contributes a major part of annual income of many businesses and so the season is highly anticipated by all.

With the exchange of gifts being a major highlight of the season, probably in following the act of the three wise men that brought gifts to Jesus and/or the act of gifting of Santa Claus who happens to be one of the several introductions to the celebration of Christmas, the commercial activity associated with the celebration of Christmas continues to grow annually with no sign of it abating. Although the Christian origin of the Santa Claus is subject to several debates, it has not stopped more people from generation to generation continuing to associate it with the celebration of Christmas with most people who claim to be celebrating Christmas having the image of Santa Claus as part of the decorations for

Christmas but with no sign of the physical or spiritual presence of the supposed celebrant who is Jesus Christ and this calls into question who is or what is actually the centre of the annual celebration called Christmas.

Celebration is the act of acknowledging the significance of someone or an event. It implies that a landmark event occurred which was positive because if it was otherwise, the event will not be celebrated even though it will always be remembered. All celebrations are not really about the day but about the event that occurred even though events occur at a point in time, so there will really be nothing to celebrate if there is no acknowledgement of a positive event. Again the question comes up which is, “who or what is being celebrated” at Christmas.

Most people may be quick to respond that the Jesus Christ is the one being celebrated and the celebration is the event of his birth, but such response will get any sane person confused if such is to examine and assess the whole preparation being made before and during the celebration of Christmas. Most if not all the mementos on sale during this season hardly have anything to do with Jesus Christ, his birth, his parents or the significance of his birth. Beyond some musical compositions and the attendance of brief services on that day, most activities associated with the season hardly involve the one in whose name the celebration was declared in the first place. New clothings are bought and exchanged, special meals like the popular Christmas Turkey are prepared with one wondering where the Turkey ever featured during the birth of Jesus Christ, office Christmas parties are held with no sign that an invitation was sent to or that the one in whose name the celebration was declared is in attendance and more significantly, the bulk of the people claiming to celebrate the season do not even know who the celebrant is or what he represents. Where the personality and what the main celebrants is known most people celebrating do not believe or accept the basis of the celebration and all these puts a question mark on the claim that they are massing together to celebrate Jesus Christ or the reason of his birth despite their being in festive mood.

Even those who carry the tag of being Christians hardly have time for the celebrant during all the activities associated with the celebration. This is not to say that an individual cannot decide on what he/she wants to do during a season that has come to be acknowledged world-

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wide as Christmas season or the specific day ear-marked for the celebration for that matter but such should be clear about who or what is being celebrated. It is simply not possible to celebrate someone who one does not know or acknowledge in anyway or someone whose actions have no significance or effect in any way on one's life. With the image of Santa Claus littering every location of Christmas celebration, it may not be too long before that image is presented as the Jesus Christ that is being celebrated.

The coming of Jesus Christ is a planned action of the Almighty God to save man from the effect of sin. The birth of Jesus Christ was the beginning of a series of events, arranged by the Almighty God, to restore man back to the Garden of Eden state and thus save man from the destiny of spending eternity in hell. Whoever desires to celebrate Jesus Christ must believe in this divine plan and acknowledge the significance of such an action on his/her life or at least on mankind even if he/she chooses not to benefit from the act. The joy becomes more though, if such is able to visualise what he/she was able to escape from with the series of events that started with the birth of Jesus Christ into the world. Such individual will only have that assurance because he/she would have accepted him as Lord and Saviour. It is simply not possible to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ when there is nothing to gain from his coming. The enthusiasm shown by all, Christians and non-Christians alike does not however suggest that majority of people who do not believe in the reason for his birth are gaining nothing which is their own reason for celebrating.

It will therefore be wrong to say that non-Christians who celebrate Christmas have nothing to gain as most people have major financial gains and other earthly rewards for celebrating Christmas and so eagerly look forward to this season. This is in no way negative either except that just as they are able to define their motives and are clear about it, it is not allowed for the Christian who also has a right to this earthly rewards to make those rewards the major reason for the celebration. For some people, they celebrate Jesus Christ because they acknowledge his greatness but there is no evidence that they intend to benefit from his gift of salvation. To this group belong the shepherds who indeed came to him but with no evidence that they came to worship. They simply came to acknowledge his greatness and arrival into the world – Lk. 2:15-18. There is however the group that those who are genuinely celebrating Christmas should belong to and that is the group of wise men. The Bible records that they told Herod that they saw his star from East and they have come to WORSHIP him – Matt. 2:2. They did not stop there as the Bible notes that they opened their treasures and gave him gifts. This is who genuine celebrants of Christmas are and what they do. They are true worshippers of him and in celebrating him, they gave him gifts. The gifts were not given to themselves like people do today in a manner that seems they are celebrating themselves. Jesus Christ may not be physically present today but he left a church that represents his interest. It is the celebrants that receives gifts and not those celebrating gifting one another. If indeed you are celebrating Christmas, how much do you know of the

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celebrant and the reason for his birth and if indeed you are celebrating him, where is your gift for him? It will definitely not be those ones that you shared amongst your friends, staff or family members. It may be acceptable if the gifts were for the windows, orphans and poor and needy. This does not eliminate the act of gifting one another but it must be borne in the minds of those massing together in the name of Jesus that Jesus is indeed the reason for the celebration.

Those genuinely celebrating Christmas will not celebrate without the celebrant around. The wise men would never have opened their treasures if they had not seen the baby Jesus, after all they were at the palace of Herod and did not give any indication that they had gifts on them. Although he cannot be physically present, ensuring that he is spiritually present is very important because there can be no genuine and recognised celebration when he is absent.

Likewise those genuinely celebranting do everything that every one who claims to be celebrating is doing and also have a right to profit from the celebration of Christmas but beyond all these is the assurance that they have the biggest reward of all which is the grace of being saved from the impending destruction that awaits the unbeliever on the last day. To access this great reward, the individual must believe that he dropped his divinity and came into the world as man, was crucified, he died and resurrected, he ascended into heaven and he is coming back to judge the world and take his own people with him. That is what those genuinely celebrating him believe and that is what they are celebrating. Deliverance from the weight of sin and restoration of the lost glory. That is the significant event that is being celebrated. The event that marks the arrival of the Saviour of the world to come and commence the divine plan of restoration of man. Assure yourself of being a beneficiary of this divine intention and it is only then that your celebration of Christmas will have a meaning.

Merry Christmas celebration to all and Happy New Year in advance. May the celebration be eternal in Jesus name. Amen.



HEAR HIS ANNOUNCEMENT

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Luke 2:10 NIV

The Saviour of the world had just been born in a manger and somehow the people that were to benefit from the redemption work he came to do have to be aware of this good news. Joseph and Mary were definitely not in a position to do so as obviously, they were not in that social class where people will be milling around them to rejoice with them on the arrival of their new baby. Had he come through the family of one of the royalties, the number of children already in that family will not matter as every arrival will be met with great fanfare with everyone struggling to belong and be identified by bringing all kinds of gifts, most of which the wealthy couple already have or can afford.

That was not the case of the saviour of the world as God arranged his arrival through the family of a man who is a carpenter and his wife, most likely just a housewife with no known social connection but then, this is God's business and it will not be deprived of all that should happen except that all that will happen will be according to his plan and not the wish and Will of men.

In carrying out this announcement, the choice of those that will know about it was very indicative of the thoughts of God. The angel did not appear in a place or in the house of a rich man, at least that way, some form of support can be obtained from such visits but the angel made the information known to shepherds whom the Bible say were living in the fields – Lk. 2:8. That probably indicates the spiritual state of those that will accept this gift of God for mankind. They will need to be humble. It is therefore not surprising that people of class hardly want to associate or hear what Jesus has to say. As far as most of them are concerned, his doctrine runs contrary to their capitalist views and until a situation happens that humbles them, they have so much trust in their wealth that they do not believe or entertain any information concerning death or possibly resurrection or another life after this one that they have, already with all its supposed successes. But the truth is that this world and all that is in it will definitely come to an end one day and there is abundant evidence, spiritual and scientific, of that. Do not be deceived by the wealth you own in this world as it will disappear as soon as you leave this world but be more interested in storing wealth in heaven where it remains safe and useful eternally – Matt. 6:19-20.

The Bible also talks about a second set of people who

may have all the wealth of this world but have added wisdom to it. With that wisdom, they are always interested in divine things so when the saviour of the world was born, they did not need any angel to announce his arrival. All they needed was to use their wisdom to decipher what they saw in the sky and seek it – Matt. 2:1-2. There will be no gain in that knowledge if all it does is to move you away from the Almighty God. Any knowledge that makes man not acknowledge the existence and plan of the Almighty God remains questionable as He is the fountain of knowledge. No matter how much knowledge you may possess, make awareness of God and acceptance of His Messiah your watchword, after all, like it has always been said over years, “even wisemen still seek Jesus”. Despite your social achievement, seek him. Things of this world will end in this world and you will need him as your advocate on that fateful day. Do not wait until that moment when he will say he does not know you. The result of such will not be positive.

By whatever source you may be hearing the news today, believe and accept the news. Leave all that you are doing and come to him. Whether you are as low as a shepherd in terms of social status or as learned as the wise men, humble yourself before him and you can be sure that he will glorify you. There were definitely many shepherds when Jesus was born just as there were many before and after, but only the memory of those shepherds remain today because of this act of theirs. There were so many wise men in those days too, just as there were many before and after he was born but only those wise men in reference here, were divinely recognise. They will definitely be identified in a similar manner on that day of judgement. Merely attending Sunday services or being very active in church activities will not be sufficient, it is the effort put into doing his Will that will indicate the level of acceptance and recognition that you place on him. May God grant us the spirit to accept and recognise him in this world so that he can equally recognise us on that day in Jesus name. Amen.

This concludes this teaching on **Hear His Announcement**. Please send your reactions to: **crossandcrownchristianministry@gmail.com** or our **WhatsApp number: +2348178342585**.

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