

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

322

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter is to wish you a Merry Christmas! It is a wonderful time of the year. It is a refreshing change when many people think more about others than they do themselves. We do not know, of course, exactly when Jesus was born. It was probably not in the winter, however, as Caesar knew that traveling to pay taxes would be more difficult at that time of the year. December 25th was selected by Julian I in A.D. 353. This was the day the Romans observed the winter solstice and some were eager to replace this pagan festival with something that would honor Christ. Decorating Christmas trees began in Northern Europe in the eighth century. Christmas carols date back to the thirteenth century. Exchanging Christmas cards is said to have begun in England in 1840. The Bible, however, says nothing about observing Christmas.

It is a fact, of course, that Jesus was born. Jesus is a real historical person. When Jesus was born time was counted from the beginning of Rome. Thus dates at that time were labeled as "Ab Urbe Condita" (from the founding of the city). According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Herod the Great died in 750 AUC. Jesus would have been born a short time before that time.

It was a sixth century Roman monk named Dionysius Exiguus that began dating time from the birth of Jesus. He used B.C. to represent for "Before Christ" and A.D. to stand for "anno domini" (the year of our Lord). While most of the modern world use A.D. and B.C. late in the 21st century some began using "CE" and "BCE". CE = the Common Era. BCE = Before the Common Era.

H.G. Wells was an unbelieving radical who recognized the reality of Jesus. Here is what he wrote in the July 1922 issue of the *American Magazine*: *"Jesus of Nazareth . . . is easily the dominant figure in history. I am speaking of him, of course, as a man, for I conceive that the historian must treat him as a man, just as the painter must paint him as a man . . . to assume that he never lived, that the accounts of his life are inventions, is more difficult and raises more problems in the path of the historian than to accept the essential elements of the Gospel stories as fact . . ."*

The point of this letter is not to convince you that Jesus Christ was a real historical person, many unbelievers accept that. The point of this letter is to convince you that Jesus Christ was God manifest in the flesh. Isaiah wrote 700 before Jesus was born: **"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonder Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace . . ."** (Is 9:6). Paul put it like this: **"Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory"** (1 Tim. 3:16 KJV). The "Incarnation" adds a new dimension to our contemplation of Christ. This makes the Christmas story more profound and wonderful than ever.

At the start of the 20th century most astronomers agreed with Aristotle that the universe was static and eternal. An early clue that they were wrong came from American astronomer Vesto Slipher in 1912. Some ten years later Edwin Hubble added evidence to show that the universe had a beginning and is expanding. The Big Bang Theory is a "theory" which many believe explains the origin of the universe. This "theory" originated in the 1920s with a Belgian priest named Georges Lemaitre. While there are variations, in general the "theory" states that the universe began as a hot and infinitely dense singularity. It is "believed" to have been only a few millimeters wide and similar to

a supercharged black hole. It is “believed” that about 13.7 billion years ago this small dot violently exploded and became our universe. To “believe” that our vast universe, with billions of stars and galaxies, began as a tiny singularity is a leap of faith of Biblical proportions.

As Christians, however, we believe in the “Incarnation”. This is something like the reverse of the Big Bang Theory, We recognize that God is so vast that the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him (1 Ki. 8:27). Yet we believe that our Infinite God became a microscopic life form in the womb of a virgin. Jesus is called “Immanuel” which means “God with us!” (Matt. 1:23). To believe that Jesus is God is the very essence of the Christian faith. Yet this miracle is so profound that even the disciples had difficulty accepting it. On the night before Calvary Philip said: **“Show us the Father and it will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you for such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:8,9).**

While we are not commanded to remember the “birth” of Jesus, we are commanded to remember His “death”. On the night when Jesus was betrayed, He took bread and broke it. He said it represented his broken body. Then Jesus took a cup and said it represented His blood. He told His disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup in remembrance of Him (1 Cor. 11:23-34). The “breaking of bread” or “communion” therefore became an integral part of Christian meetings (Acts 2:42; 20:7). The incarnation of Christ is not a peripheral matter but is foundational to the Christian faith. Observing the “Lord’s Supper” is just one special way to remember the miracle of the incarnation, and the incredible sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Among other things, it shows that Jesus was not aloof from suffering, but was tempted in all point like we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15).

The enemies of Christ realized that He was claiming to be equal with God (Jn. 5:18). Do you? If, and when you believe this, you will feel like celebrating Christmas every day of the year.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Grandpa Boyce