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# A Legal Christmas

*by: Ronald L. Dart*

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I'm beginning to worry that Americans are losing their sense of humor. A law school in Indiana removed a Christmas tree from its atrium because of complaints. Some folks felt that this Christmas tree sitting there made them feel excluded. Now, apart from the fact that I don't have a clue what that means, since when did everyone have to feel *included* in everything that goes on. Does the mere sight of a Christmas tree make you feel excluded?

I'm absolutely amazed at how thin-skinned atheists are. They are offended by the very word 'God'. In the words of Shakespeare though "Me thinks the lady protests too much" I wouldn't have thought so. But it's beginning to appear that atheists are insecure in their beliefs. Otherwise why are they so offended, why are they so afraid of God, Christmas, the presence of Christmas, anything having to do with God, the Ten Commandments in the courthouse? Why are they afraid of this? They seem to fear not God but the idea of God.

## **The Christmas Tree**

Now this law school replaced the Christmas tree with two evergreen looking trees, fake snow and a sled. One of the trees has lights on it. Now there's an idea: we take down the Christmas tree and we put up an evergreen tree, hang lights, tinsel, colored balls and put snow around the base of it and call it a "tree for decoration." We just don't call it a Christmas tree.

Now what's funny about all this is that the Supreme Court has ruled that Christmas trees are legal. They ruled that the Christmas tree, unlike the Menorah, is not itself a religious symbol. Although Christmas trees once carried religious connotations, today they typify the secular celebration of Christmas. Oh really, that's interesting. Now I submit this as exhibit one to demonstrate that we are losing our sense of the ridiculous. One, that the Supreme Court of the land should be wasting time on issues like whether or not we can have a Christmas tree on public property. Two, did no one notice that Christmas, the word, is a form of Christ and mass. Christ being the God of the Christian faith and mass is a purely religious ceremony. And yet the Christmas tree is not a religious symbol. It couldn't possibly be because the Supreme Court said it was not.

Now I agree it really isn't, but it's hard to call it a Christmas tree and utterly ignore the meaning of the word. And what is the holiday all about anyhow. Isn't it about the birth of one named Jesus, who is called the Christ?

There is something odd going on here. It's the proverbial "elephant in the living room" that no one wants to talk about and yet here it is. How is it that the Constitution does not permit the display of the Ten Commandments in the atrium of a court house but will permit the display of a Christmas tree? Not only at the court house, but we have a national Christmas tree on the grounds of the White House that I presume is paid for by tax payer dollars, at least the land is that it's sitting on. Now I know someone said the reason why the Ten Commandments had to go out of the courthouse is because it includes prohibitions against lying and bearing false witness and stealing. These words they said create a hostile work environment for lawyers and judges and it had to go.

### **Christmas is a Legal Holiday**

But what's the real reason we can have one and not have the other and why are government offices closed on Christmas Day? It's not like closing on a President's birthday. Christmas is a religious day, and it's all religion from the get-go. And why isn't court in session and why are the kids allowed to skip school on Christmas Day—it is a religious holiday! Now, I'm just one voice in all this, but it seems to me we have a giant example of hypocrisy in the courts. It also seems to me that I know the reason why. Christmas will be with us for a long time to come for the simplest of reasons. Any person who tries to outlaw Christmas will be burned at the stake by the merchant class who will put the first burning fagots into the sticks at his feet. The abolition of Christmas would probably destroy our economy.

### **Christmas Business**

What is the rationale in giving billions of dollars of gifts to people that don't really want them anyway, if we take the wise men and their gifts out of the picture? Never mind they gave their gifts to Christ and not to each other. How many retail businesses in this country would survive if they lost all of their Christmas business? Most of them are in the red until they hit the Christmas holiday season and only then do, they go into the black and start making any money. How many people would be out of business in the retail sector alone? And then there's the fallout, because of all these people are out of work in the retail section are not making any money; they don't make any money to go out and buy new cars. And that means the auto industry and people would be out of work in the auto industry because nobody's making enough money to buy their cars. And with those people being out of work—well it's the domino theory that runs back up the line to where the people who buy the yachts can't buy the yachts anymore because they're not making any money. Actually, this domino theory is real, and it would eviscerate our economy.

So, Christmas is safe. Not even the all-powerful Supreme Court would dare take it on. It would generate the second American Revolution and the people would burn down the court house. And it wouldn't be so much, I think, from the love of Christmas or of Christ, it would be to save the economy. There's just a whole lot more to this that's important than the smell of evergreens and the tinkle of bells and eggnog and wassail bowls and mistletoe and Christmas parties. This is a matter of economic survival. So, I look for the ACLU to take a pass on any really big Christmas issues. I don't think we are going to be playing games with that for a long time to come.

## **Put Christ Back into Christmas?**

But all this opens up another can of worms. Should anyone really try to put Christ back into Christmas when He was never there in the first place? No, no, I'm sorry, Jesus was not born on December 25<sup>th</sup> or anywhere near it. No one ever really thought He was. And most of the symbolism we connect with Christmas isn't Christian at all, it's pagan, and nearly everyone knows it. Can you make it through a Christmas season without someone seeing a newspaper article or something somewhere in the press or on television that reminds us of the pagan origins of all the symbolism around Christmas? Everyone knows it. Is there nothing we can do about this impasse?

So, what are we going to do about Christmas? What can we do to keep it legal, so we don't have to quit observing it? Well, what the government could do—Congress could change the name of the holiday on December 25<sup>th</sup>. to the "Saturnalia." That's what it was originally. That way there would be no Judeo-Christian overtones to the holiday. We wouldn't have people running down to sue to hopefully put a stop to Christmas. There could be no objection based on the name any longer. It would not be a Christmas tree; it would be a Saturnalia tree. George Will, writing, said "That God works in mysterious ways is not new, but it is particularly puzzling that the birth of Jesus occurred when Romans, who then set the tone of the times, were celebrating Saturnalia."

Think of a Wal-Mart at 6 am, plus wine, women wearing less than those little Wal-Mart vests, and songs that are not, well not carols. The drunkenness and revelry about Saturnalia need not offend by taking place in connection with a "Christian" event. Does that sound reasonable? Let's just go ahead and make the whole thing a pagan celebration like it was to start with.

## **A Fly in the Ointment**

But there's a problem, there's a fly in the ointment as it were, as there always is. If we're going to be a secular society then we can't observe the Saturnalia either, because it's part of an ancient religious observance in honor of Saturn. It's a given that the pagan feast called "The birthday of the invincible sun" was held on December 25<sup>th</sup>. December for the Romans was the month of Saturn. Samuele Bacchicchi, in his remarkable book, "From Sabbath to Sunday" notes "that Augustine and Leo the Great strongly reprimanded Christians, who at Christmas worshiped the sun rather than the birth of Christ." And another author, John Ferguson who concluded "It appears certain that the commemoration of the Nativity was placed on December 25<sup>th</sup> because the winter solstice celebrated the rebirth of the invincible sun. By adopting this date, the ecclesiastical authorities purified, somehow, some pagan customs which they could not suppress." That's really interesting. What he's saying is simply this; that they could not stamp out pagan observances in the church and so they purified them. So, I guess we're out of luck on this issue. We can't celebrate the Saturnalia on December 25<sup>th</sup> either, because that's a religious custom. Albeit, a religious custom of pagan Rome. Although the courts don't seem to have the same bias against pagan religions that they display against Christianity, and I'm not entirely sure why that is so. But not to worry, politics will win in the end and the merchant class will save Christmas. And the Supreme Court, anyway, is beginning to look overseas for guidance and they will find no real problem with Christmas over there either and that might be easier than looking at the Constitution.

## When Was Christ Born?

If, as a Christian, you want to step aside from the fight and the nonsense and all the revelry, let me make a suggestion to you. Let's accept the fact that Jesus was not born anywhere near December 25<sup>th</sup>. It's a given, just write it down somewhere and let's say, "All right, we'll accept that." Why not look at the Bible to determine the holidays that one might observe and how the nativity of Jesus might somehow relate to or fall within any of those days. The fact is there is evidence right in the pages of the Bible that tell you the season of Jesus' birth. It's odd, it takes just a little bit of research to find it, but it is there. The early church did not have a separate day for celebrating the nativity. If they had, you would have found it plastered through the pages of the New Testament. Think about it. Think about how important Christmas is in the Christian calendar nowadays.

Is it possible that you can read all of Acts, all of Paul's Epistles, all of the general Epistles of the Bible, all the gospel accounts and no one ever says anything about Christmas in the process? Now, it seems evident to me that the nativity of Jesus, His birth and all the events surrounding it were extremely important to early Christians, because this is the 'Word of God' becoming flesh and dwelling among us. It is the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It's an important day and yet the church did not have some separate day for celebrating it. Now this suggests to me that the nativity of Jesus fell within or in connection with one of the great holiday seasons of the Bible.

Now I know it sounds revolutionary to think about dropping out of the Christian madhouse. But it isn't necessary to forget the central event. Christmas may be commercial and pagan, but the birth of our savior is absolutely not, and it is the event that introduces us to the Savior of the world.

## Mary

There was a young woman, she was Jewish, we could even call her a girl, because she was really quite young, and her name was Mary. It's in the book of Luke (1:26-35) that we encounter this woman. It says, {26} *"In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said "Hail, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women." Mary was greatly troubled at the saying and wondered what kind of greeting this might be."*

It's hard to imagine, I don't know how this angel appeared to her, and I don't know what he looked like. We aren't told any of these things, but this remarkable young woman who hears him casts around in her mind saying, "What in the world is he talking about?" Verse 30, *"But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. And you shall conceive in your womb and bring forth a son and shall call his name Jesus." The name Jesus means "Jehovah saves." He is a savior. {32} "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."*

What a stunning thing to say to this young woman. Remember, she was Jewish and the awareness of a Messiah, that is one who would be a son of David, who would come to the throne of David, who would rule over Israel, who would liberate them from their enemies, who would establish an everlasting kingdom, was something very much in her belief system. And the idea that she, of all people could be the mother of the Messiah, well it's hard to imagine what an effect it would have on her and yet she seems calm enough to have said, verse 34, *"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "see I know not a man?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."* Not Joseph's son, not the son of your husband, the Son of God. How in the world this young woman got her mind around this is beyond my understanding? It must have been incredible for her, and yet at the same time, I think she must have been a very remarkable young woman.

The angel continues and said in verse 36, *"Behold your cousin Elizabeth has also conceived and she has conceived a son in her old age and this is the sixth month with her who has previously been called barren."* Now that story is told in the first chapter of Luke and it's an important part of the dating of the birth of the Messiah. (I discuss this more in the article "Too Late For Christmas" that you can request free of charge.) This expression "the sixth month of Elizabeth" is the sixth month he was talking about when the angel came to Mary.

Mary, having heard this, said {38} *"Behold, I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her."* It's hard to imagine this young lady, with this poise and strength. This was not some flighty kid, who having a vision from God, would have gone out screaming in the streets and telling everybody about it. This was a different kind of woman entirely.

Verse 39 *"At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth."*

### **Elizabeth**

Now Elizabeth had already had her visitation from God and she was carrying a boy child herself. His name would be John and we will come to know him as John the Baptist. Verse 41 *"When Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and {42} She spoke with a loud voice and said "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb and {43} how can this be that the mother of my Lord shall come to me {44} for Lo, as soon as the voice of your salutation sounded in my ears the baby leaped in my womb for joy {45} and blessed is she who has believed for there shall be a performance (fulfillment or accomplishment) of those things which were told to her from the Lord").*

### **When is a Fetus a Child?**

My, what a staggering thing to consider is happening here! To realize that this six-month-old fetus that Elizabeth was carrying is a real, identified person to God. And this fetus, if you must call it that, instead of where Elizabeth called it the "babe" recognized the presence of the mother

of his Lord, the Messiah, when her voice was heard. Kind of sobering isn't it, when you think about abortion and whether these fetuses are real people that we are killing in the womb.

### **The Nativity**

The nativity. The story is told in the second chapter of Luke and verses 1-20, *"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city."* One wonders why they couldn't be taxed where ever they lived, but never mind, the Romans were in charge. I guess they did it their way. {4} *"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child."*

Now you know, it's funny the things that catch your attention and make you think, and I think of poor Mary, having ridden down here on a donkey all the way from Nazareth down to Bethlehem. And the poor woman getting off, being hugely pregnant, holding her back, as pregnant women are often prone to do, and managing to waddle her way into wherever they were to stay. A very uncomfortable woman who is carrying the Savior of all mankind. {6} *"And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."*

Sounds terrible in a way doesn't it? But I imagine it was a clean place with a relatively clean stable and they had clean straw and they laid the baby there.

### **Why Was Bethlehem So Crowded?**

You know, you have this image of people going to Jerusalem to keep the festivals of God and you begin to ask the question, "Why was Bethlehem so crowded that they couldn't even get a room at this time? Why didn't they just come in and pay their taxes and go home?" Well what was happening is, it seems quite apparent to me having studied it, that this is in the autumn season of the year and the Jews who came to keep the holydays didn't fly in on El Al and fly out after a couple of days. They actually had to come long distances; it takes a lot of time to get there and so when they came, they came oftentimes for a season and stayed awhile.

### **The Fall Holy Days**

The autumn season starts with the holy day called the Feast of Trumpets or Rosh Hashanah, otherwise known as the Jewish New Year. And then, two weeks later comes the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles; in between, the Day of Atonement, one of the most solemn days of the entire year, known as Yom Kippur. And so, the chances are that they were there for this entire season of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and then finally the Feast of Tabernacles, when it was all over.

And when these holy day seasons came, Jerusalem was crowded with people. It's hard to imagine how many of them were there. And you would think, well this is Bethlehem, isn't it? Yes, but if you get your Bible map out and look at it, Bethlehem is about a half-day walk (about 5 miles), at a brisk speed, from Jerusalem and I have very little doubt that people spilled over into Bethlehem, observing these festivals when they came. And when you put the whole picture together, you know, the time of Jesus' conception, and the time of His birth, the time of the beginning of His ministry, all of this going together, leads one to the conviction, that He was born sometime in the autumn, between the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Tabernacles, if not perhaps on one of the very days itself.

So here they are, in a crowded time, a time of festival. And that may be why the New Testament church shows no sign of an observance of the nativity is that it was a part of and fell on one of the other major holidays that they observed. *"And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night"* (Luke 2:6-8).

### **A Bunch of Sheep Herders**

Now these are the fellows in this whole story that I envy the most. A bunch of sheep herders, sitting around at night by a campfire keeping warm, telling stories, chatting with one another under a beautiful open sky. And then, suddenly, out of nowhere, there is an angel standing in front of them, who came upon them, and there was the glory of God that shone round about them. And they were scared half to death. *"And the angel said, 'Don't be afraid, I'm bringing 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'"* (vs 10).

Now this wasn't just Greek to these guys, they knew what this angel was talking about. When he said there is born to you this day, in the city of David, they knew that David's son would be the Messiah. They said the one who is born is Christ, that is, the Messiah, the Lord, the Messiah is born.

My, what a time that must have been for these men, and then, all of a sudden, they didn't need anyone telling them, you're going find this baby in a manger. Then there was an incredible host, in the heaven, singing and praising God and saying, *"Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace and goodwill toward men."* Wow, just to think about that sound, I mean, it gives me gooseflesh just to think about being out there in the open sky and having a heavenly host appear and singing that song and it must've been even more impressive than Handel's version of the same thing. So, the shepherds after all of this, got excited and said, "Let's go see," and so they went, and they came to Bethlehem and they found Mary and Joseph and a baby, lying in a manger.

And that baby would grow up to be the one that you and I know as Jesus the Christ, who died for the sins of all mankind, and who was the Lamb of God, and who was the Word of God become flesh.

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*The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit [RLDEA.com](http://RLDEA.com) where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.*

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### **Discussion Questions**

1. How would you answer Mr. Dart's question of why are atheist so afraid of God?
2. How would you answer Mr. Dart's questions about why a Christmas tree is allowed but not the 10 Commandments?
3. Why are government offices closed on Christmas?
4. Why is it that supposedly this day is all about Christ, yet the world will never do away with it because it is the most profitable time of the year for business?
5. How do profits and Christ go together?
6. Do you agree with Mr. Dart that Christmas really has nothing to do with Christ?
7. It is very easy to study the origins of Christmas and find out that it is a pagan holiday. So, why do Christians try to make it a Christian holiday?
8. When do you think Christ was born?
9. Why do you think so many pagan based holidays got into Christianity?
10. What do you think would happen if all of Christianity started keeping God's Holy Days rather than the mainstream holidays?