

their television sets), so they wrote to her.

That's the reality of Christmas. But what do we do about it? Well, the world piles the pressure on, and makes things even worse. Happy smiling faces, happy families celebrating Christmas parties is all we see on our television screens. And if we're not as happy as they are, the problem must be with us, not them. That's all the world can do. The world hasn't got the answer, it is the cause of the problem.

So what do the churches do instead? Sadly, too many of them join in with all the frivolity, and have Christmas parties themselves.

Most churches, in Christmas week, would either shorten their sermons, dispense with them altogether, or even dispense with whole services altogether. Prayer meetings and Bible studies are cancelled. The preaching of the gospel, sermons and all the usual church activity are stopped for a week so that the regular church-goers can go and worship their families instead. Surely, Satan is so very happy with all this. It's just what he wants.

And simply inviting lonely people to parties at the church is not really the answer either. The best thing we could do is to tell them that they don't have to do all this, the pressure's off.

Yes, you can live with a clear conscience by not joining in with what everyone else is doing at this time of year. The burden is removed. Of course we can then go on to tell these poor people that the far greater burden of their sins can also be removed in Christ. That's the true message we should be proclaiming, not trying to force people to celebrate a worldly festival in the name of Christ, but telling people about the

freedom from our sins that can be found in Him. This is true freedom and true joy.

The churches themselves are under pressure to conform to the world's festival of Christmas, because, after all, isn't it a "Christian" festival? But whether we hold Christmas events or not, our greatest concern should be to make sure we too are not burdened by any pressure to conform, but rather that we should be a beacon of hope at a particularly dark time of year for many people. Then the churches could become a real light to the nations around them:

Acts 13:47

For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

Christmas

Satan's Greatest Festival?



The Incarnation is the most wonderful thing this world has ever experienced:

John 1:14

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

1 Timothy 3:16

And without controversy 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.

Luke 1:35

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

God becoming man. How can this be? Why did the Lord of glory ever see fit to bother with us, sinful men? But He did:

1 Timothy 1:15

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

God is altogether worthy of all our worship for coming into this world and saving sinners such as we are. So let's honour the incarnation. Let's speak about it and think upon it.

But Christmas is altogether different.

In the church we are continually being told that Christmas is the biggest Christian festival of the year, and one of the best opportunities for evangelism, because many people who would not normally come to church enter its doors. So, we are told to embrace it and make it as joyous a festival as possible. I'm sorry but I don't agree.

Firstly, Christmas is a mass, "Christ's mass." It was invented by the Roman Catholic church and has no place in Protestantism.

We don't know the date of Christ's birth. The winter solstice seemed like a good date to hang this festival on, so that's what they did. It is very unlikely to be the middle of winter, because we are told the sheep were in the fields at night:

Luke 2:8

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

I've heard autumn mentioned as a possible time for Christ's birth, but my favourite possibility is early spring, because Christ is the Lamb of God:

John 1:29

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

We don't really know the time of His birth, and even if we did, we are not told anywhere in the Bible to have a special day to celebrate it. On the other hand, we do have instructions to celebrate the Lord's death, in the Lord's Supper:

1 Corinthians 11:26

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

These are the basic Scriptural reasons for not celebrating Christmas. But there are many more practical ones:

There are so many people out there who absolutely hate Christmas. The suicide rate increases fivefold at this time of year. The pressure gets to some poor souls so much that they at least attempt to end their lives.

People are desperately lonely, especially around this time. Not because they particularly want to be invited to a party, but because either they have no family at all, or they have problems with the one they've got. They're just looking for one or two real friends.

I knew someone once who was thrown out of his lodgings over Christmas, because the supposedly "Christian" family he was lodging with needed his room to put up visiting family members. He ended up on Christmas Day sitting on a bench in the local bus station reading his Bible. Of course God will not forsake us like that.

Psalms 27:10

When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.

Many years ago, I remember hearing the actress Thora Hird on the radio programme Desert Island Discs, saying that she was saddened that she got so many letters from people who didn't even have, as she said, a "second cousin three times removed." Hers was the only friendly face they ever saw (on