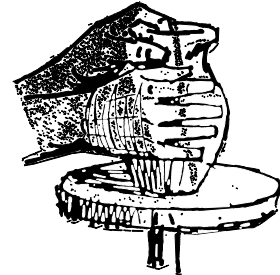


# His Workmanship at Westside

*"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works."  
—Ephesians 2:10*



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Isaiah 64:8

## The Celebration of Christmas: Should It Be a Work of the Church?

*by Mark Copeland*

Christmas is an annual American national holiday proclaimed by President U. S. Grant and Congress in 1870. Millions commemorate the birth of Jesus on this day, and they consider it as one of the most holy of religious holidays. For some, it marks one of the few times they attend church in the year. But were you aware that Christians in the New Testament did not celebrate the birth of Jesus and that most Protestant churches did not begin celebrating Christmas until the 19th century?

This may prompt questions in the minds of some: How did the yearly observance of Jesus' birth get started? Shouldn't the Lord's church be involved in the holiday? How about observing certain elements of it as individuals?

**I. THE BIRTH OF JESUS.** "The New Testament provides no clues [as to the time of Christ's birth]," Encyclopedia Britannica. The Bible simply states that it happened in the days of Caesar Augustus and while Quirinius was governing Syria, Lk 2:1-2. Most scholars place the year of Jesus's birth between 4-6 B.C., but the actual year

is uncertain, let alone the month and day. Historically Sextus Julius Africanus popularized the idea that Jesus was born December 25 in his Chronographia, a reference book written in 221 AD [see Wikipedia]. He based the date on the assumption that Jesus died March 25 and a Jewish belief that prophets died on the same date as their conception (thus if Jesus was conceived on March 25, then He was born nine months later). However, Eastern Orthodox churches celebrated the birth of Jesus on January 6 or 7. The fact is that no one really knows what day, month, or year Jesus was born.

Thus, if we don't know exactly when Jesus was born, then how did the annual celebration of His birth begin? In the Bible there is no reference to Christians celebrating the birth of Jesus. The only event of Jesus's life that was celebrated regularly was His death, observed weekly in the Lord's Supper, Ax 20:7; 1 Cor 11:20-34. Paul expressed concern about observing days, months, and years, Gal 4:9-10.

**II. CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS.** Historically, the mistaken identification of the birth date of Jesus (by Sextus

Julius Africanus) did not at first inspire feasting or celebration. It was not mentioned by early "church fathers." Tertullian did not mention it as a major feast day. But in 245 A.D., Origen denounced the idea of celebrating Jesus's birthday, and the earliest reference to Christmas is in a calendar in 354 A.D. Soon after, Christmas was introduced to Constantinople (in 379 A.D.), to Antioch (380 A.D.), and to Alexandria (430 A.D.)

Among Protestant churches, especially in the US, celebrating Christmas was condemned. During the Reformation, Protestants said Christmas was the "trappings of popery" (Christmas literally means "the Mass of Christ," or "mass on Christ's day"). England's Puritan rulers banned it in 1647, but it was reinstated in 1660. Puritans of New England disapproved of Christmas, and it was outlawed from 1659 to 1681. Christmas fell out of favor in the US after the American Revolution, as it was considered an English custom. Interest in Christmas in America was revived through novels by Washington Irving and by immigrants from Europe bringing their customs. The annual  
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**""He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end." —Luke 1:32-33**

observance of the birth of Christ was adopted only after great controversy among both Catholic and Protestant churches

So since we don't know when Jesus was born, and we do know that an annual observance of His birth did not begin for hundreds of years after the church began, what should we do today?

### **III. SHOULD CHRISTMAS BE A WORK OF THE CHURCH?**

Paul gave warnings regarding feast days, expressing his concern for the churches in Galatia, Gal 4:8-11.

Their practice was not wrong *per se*, but he was concerned. His concern pertained to *why* they were observing these days: 1) If they believed it was necessary to be saved, then Paul's gospel work among them was in danger of being in vain; 2) if they observed religious feast days, etc., in order to seek justification through the Law, then they were falling from grace and becoming estranged from Christ, Gal 5:4! Paul also admonished the Colossians not to let anyone *judge* them regarding keeping feast days, Col 2:16-17. Some were seeking to bind the Law (the feast days of the Old Testament) upon the Gentile believers, cf. Ax 15:1, 5.

Gentile Christians were told not to let any one judge (condemn) them, for salvation is in Christ, not in keeping of the religious feast days of the Law. Yet Paul himself observed certain Jewish feast days. However, he observed them on his own, apart from the church. He did not hesitate to keep Jewish customs when expedient, 1 Cor 9:19-20. For example:

1) He had Timothy circumcised, Ax 16:1-3. 2) He took a vow, Ax 18:18. 3) He sought to keep a Jewish feast in Jerusalem, Ax 18:19-21. 4) He participated in purification ceremonies, which included animal sacrifices, Ax 21:17-26; cf. Num 6:13-20. But Paul's teaching made clear: 1) religious feasts should be kept on an individual basis, cf. Rm 14:5-6. 2) they should not be bound on others, cf. Gal 2:3-5. 3) they had nothing to do with our justification (salvation) in Christ, cf. Gal 5:4-6. **Where Paul drew the line was in making such matters church doctrine or practice, in which people would be compelled to participate in them.**

Jesus warned of the danger of human traditions. He rebuked the scribes Pharisees for their use of traditions, Mk 7:1-13. They made their traditions necessary for all to observe, v. 7. By keeping their traditions, they laid aside the commands of God, vs. 8-9.

Traditions of men are wrong when they become matters of doctrine or required practice, are bound upon everyone, and displace the commands of God by the very keeping of the tradition. Feast days are like traditions; in certain situations they can be matters of personal choice, but they can also become a stumbling block to others!

The Bible is silent regarding any observance of Christ's birth. God, Jesus, and the Spirit evidently did not deem it necessary for the church. Thus, any observance is based upon human tradition, not God's Word. When we keep a human tradition, we must be very care-

ful. Cf. Mk 7:7-9. It cannot become a matter of doctrine, which is binding upon others; it cannot displace the keeping of God's commandments (do people who attend church only on Easter believe that their observance renders the command in Heb 10:25 void?). An annual observance by the church is certainly unwise, if not wrong, because it intertwines human traditions with God's commands for His church and it forces people to observe what is a human tradition.

As individuals, we have been given freedom. We can choose to esteem one day above another: it is between that person and the Lord, Rm 14:5-6. But be careful not to condemn those who differ, Rm 14:4, 10-12, and be sensitive to the convictions of others, Rm 14:13-19. As for the pagan elements which have become intertwined with the Christmas holiday, perhaps this is best left to the individual; my own understanding is that we are free in Christ to change what may have been a religious practice at one time for personal use: for example, using circumcision for hygienic purposes or exchanging gifts among friends and family.

My view of Christmas is similar to how I view Thanksgiving: I recognize that the idea of an annual observance is not in the Scriptures; as a Christian I should give thanks and celebrate Christ's birth year around. Seeking to "continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine," Ax 2:42, the Lord's church should refrain from adding human traditions to its work

*continued on p. 3*



## Discipleship Here At Home

**Celebrating Christmas**, from p. 2 and worship.

Nevertheless, I am grateful that at least once a year people think about Christ's birth. My prayer is that people will do more than think about His birth once a year—that we will be thankful for His coming to this earth every day, and that we will submit to His rule and be citizens of His kingdom foretold long ago: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given. And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this," Is 9:6-7.

Unless we submit to the authority of Jesus Christ, His birth means nothing to us. Have you been born again of water and Spirit that you might enter that wonderful kingdom of God? See Jn 3:3-5.

special case—generally changing their attractions from year to year."



Still, many misconceptions persist in the popular culture, namely, that homosexuality is genetic—so hardwired into

one's identity that it can't be changed. "The academics who work in the field are not happy with the portrayals by the media on the subject," Dr. Whitehead said. "But they prefer to stick with their academic research and not get involved in the activist side."

### Twin Study Shows Homosexuality Not Genetic, from p. 4

genetic correlation. In 2002, Bearman and Brueckner studied tens of thousands of adolescent students in the U.S. The same-sex attraction concordance between identical twins was only 7.7% for males and 5.3% for females—lower than the 11% and 14% in the Australian study by Bailey, *et al*, conducted in 2000.

In the identical twin studies, Dr. Whitehead was struck by how fluid and changeable sexual identity can be. "Neutral academic surveys show there is substantial change. About half of the homosexual/bisexual population (in a non-therapeutic environment) moves towards heterosexuality over a lifetime. About 3% of the present heterosexual population once firmly believed themselves to be homosexual or bisexual." He noted that "Sexual orientation is not set in concrete." **Most changes in sexual orientation are towards exclusive heterosexuality.** Even more remarkable, most changes occur without counseling or therapy. "These changes are not therapeutically induced, but happen 'naturally' in life, some very quickly," Dr. Whitehead observed. "Most changes in sexual orientation are towards exclusive heterosexuality."

Numbers of people who have changed towards exclusive heterosexuality are greater than current numbers of bisexuals and homosexuals combined. In other words, ex-gays outnumber actual gays.

The fluidity is even more pronounced among **adolescents**, as Bearman and Brueckner's study demonstrated. "They found that from 16 to 17-years-old, if a person had a romantic attraction to the same sex, almost all had switched one year later. "The authors were pro-gay and they commented that the only stability was among the heterosexuals, who stayed the same year after year. Adolescents are a

see column 1

### PRAY FOR healing, protection, help, and comfort here and away

**Mark Campbell**—recovering at Spruce House in Colorado Springs  
**Pat Wilkes**—recovering from knee surgery  
**Melanie Baughn** in OK with ill mother  
**Nell Free**—recovering from cataract surgery; also chronic heart; back pain  
**Vicky Keyes**, a friend of **Judy Sartin**—triple negative stage breast cancer; husband **Jim** shaken, but treatment may extend her life 10 years

### CHRONIC CONDITIONS

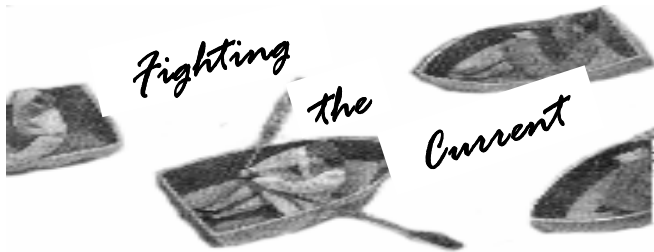
**Logan Corray; Rocco Sangellino Jr; Addison Tope; Pat Wilkes**—asthma  
**Pearl Chapman**—to move to nursing care soon  
**Autumn Hadders**—epilepsy  
**Jonathan Hadders**—RA  
**Danielle Huelsman**—vertigo, CV syndrome  
**Kirk Johnson**—worsening MS; needs help around his house  
**Menards**—aging; **Lloyd**, diabetes, weak;  
**Virginia**, worsening rapid macular degeneration; high BP  
**Sandra Perry**—neuropathy from diabetes  
**Cheryl Reames**—diverticulitis; fibromyalgia  
**Nell Free**—pacemaker, heart; back pain  
**Judy Sartin**—spinal stenosis; severe arthritis  
**Judy Sartin's** grandson **Tristen**—autism  
**Lynda Szymanski**—COPD, lung  
**Pat Wilkes**—hyper parathyroidism; A-Fib  
**Philippine brethren**—widespread typhoon damage for Christians in Leyte and Cebu

**Traveling** **Judy Sartin** with family in FL.; **Gary Boyd** visiting family in Neb; **Sarah McMurray** visiting family in IN; **Mina Gonzalez** in CO Springs.

**Job concerns** **Linda Szymanski**  
**Expecting** **Liz Kosik**, early April—blood platelets low; **Christina Adams's** daughter **Kayla**, May

"Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God."

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin



## Exposing current thoughts & trends

### Identical Twin Studies Prove Homosexuality Not Genetic *by Mark Ellis*

Eight major studies of identical twins in Australia, the U.S., and Scandinavia during the last two decades all arrive at the same conclusion: gays were not born that way.

"At best genetics is a minor factor," said Dr. Neil Whitehead, PhD. Whitehead worked for the New Zealand government as a scientific researcher for 24 years, then spent four years working for the United Nations and International Atomic Energy Agency. Most recently, he serves as a consultant to Japanese universities about the effects of radiation exposure. His PhD is in biochemistry and statistics.

Identical twins have the same genes or DNA. They are nurtured in equal prenatal conditions. The theory was that if homosexuality is caused by genetics or prenatal conditions and one twin is gay, the co-twin should also be gay. "Because they have identical DNA, it ought to be 100%," Dr. Whitehead noted. But the studies reveal something else. "If an identical twin has same-sex attraction the chances the co-twin has it are only about 11% for men and 14% for women."

Because identical twins are always genetically identical, homosexuality cannot be genetically dictated. "No one is born gay," he said. "The predominant things that create homosexuality in one identical twin and not in the other have to be post-birth factors."

Dr. Whitehead believes same-sex attraction (SSA) is caused by "non-shared factors," things happening to one twin but not the other, or a personal response to an event by one of the twins and not the other.

For example, one twin might have exposure to pornography or sexual abuse, but not the other. One twin may interpret and respond to his family or classroom environment differently from the other. "These individual and idiosyncratic responses to random events and to common environmental factors predominate."

The first very large, reliable study of identical twins was conducted in Australia in 1991, followed by a large U.S. study about 1997. Then Australia and the U.S. conducted more twin studies in 2000, followed by several studies in Scandinavia, according to Dr. Whitehead.

"Twin registers are the foundation of modern twin studies. They are now very large and exist in many countries. A gigantic European twin register with a projected 600,000 members is being organized, but one of the largest in use is in Australia, with more than 25,000 twins on the books."

A significant twin study among adolescents shows an even weaker

*continued on p. 3*



meets at  
13789 W. 8th Avenue  
Golden, Colorado 80401  
720-295-4530  
[info@thechurchingolden.com](mailto:info@thechurchingolden.com)  
[www.thechurchingolden.com](http://www.thechurchingolden.com)

#### Pastors

Larry Campbell (303) 462-4987  
DeWayne Howell (303) 973-7283

#### Preacher

Jim Reingrover (303) 973-5102

### Assembly Schedule

#### Sunday

Bible classes	9:00 am
Morning assembly	10:00 am
Afternoon assembly	1:30 pm

#### Wednesday

Bible classes	7:30 pm
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This morning: "PRAYER: a gift and a sacrifice," by Jim Reingrover

This afternoon: "Moses: God's Faithful Servant," by Jim Reingrover