JESUS: BORN TO DIE by Al Diestelkamp

D**uring the recent** holiday season I took note of a few posts on social media from brethren who, while not trying to defend December 25 as the actual birthday of Jesus, are heartened that—at least for a brief time—more people are focused on Jesus, possibly leading to an opportunity for us to get them to consider the whole gospel of Jesus. While such opportunities may be available, we must be careful to not endorse untruth.

Then there are a few who take it a step further, suggesting that there is no harm in arbitrarily choosing a date on which to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The accounts of Jesus’ birth by Matthew and Luke provide ample reason for us to find joy in that blessed event *anytime* but stops short of inventing a “holy day” for such a purpose.

It is an inescapable fact that the inspired scriptures from Acts through Revelation make only two explicit references to the birth of Christ. The apostle Paul refers to Jesus’ birth being “of the seed of David” (Rom. 1:3), and to His being “born of a woman’ (Gal. 4:4). Also absent from the history and letters to the churches are instructions or any examples of the disciples (who were guided by the apostles of Christ) placing special emphasis on the birth of the Savior.

Perhaps the most significant fact is that there is no biblical indication that Jesus desires that the day of His birth be celebrated as a holy day. What other events in Jesus’ life that men have set apart as religious holy days are worthy of our imitation? There’s the *Feast of Transfiguration* on August 8; *Epiphany* (also known as *Three Kings Day*) on January 6; *The Feast of the Baptism of Jesus* on the Sunday following Epiphany, and many more.

To invent ways to worship and honor Christ other than ways authorized in the Bible reminds me of the time when King David had it in his heart to build a house for the Lord (1 Ki. 8:17). Although David’s heartfelt desire was commendable (v.18), his plan was not God-authorized. God asked, “Have I ever spoken a word to anyone from the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?’” (2 Sam. 7:7).

What Jesus desires is that we remember and proclaim His death (1 Cor. 11:23-26). *Jesus was born to die!* Matthew, Mark, and Luke all give accounts of at least three different occasions when Jesus spoke of His upcoming death: following the feeding of the multitudes (Matt. 16:21-23; Mk. 8:31-32; Lk. 9:21-22); after His transfiguration (Matt. 17:22-23; Mk. 9:30-32; Lk. 9:43-45); and as He and His disciples were on their way to observe the Passover (Matt. 20:17-19; Mk. 10:32-34; Lk. 18:31-34). John’s gospel adds other situations in which Jesus alluded to His upcoming death in more subtle ways (Jn. 12:7-8; 13:33; 14:25).

 I have no interest in judging one who chooses to “esteem one day above another,” even if he “observes it to the Lord” (Rom. 14:5-6); but I do think that he should be careful not to validate speculative elaborations of biblical events or perpetuate man-made traditions as if they are divinely ordained holy days.