

What about Christians and Christmas?

“Christ Mass,” Sounds Catholic. Doesn’t it? Indeed, Christmas is first and foremost a Catholic liturgical celebration. We should think of it that way. It is so Catholic that early American Protestants often forbade the celebration of Christmas. After all, they found no command for feast days in the New Testament. They considered the observance of any kind of liturgical year as Papist error. Today the majority of baptized Christians observe Christmas, if not liturgically, at least as a reminder of the historical birth of God among us. For others of western culture it is primarily a child centered holiday promoted by the business community.

Christmas is not, of course based on the actual birthday of Jesus. We don’t really know the actual date for that. The date for Christmas is about four weeks after the beginning of the Church year. It comes as light at the darkest time of the year. At Christmas we mystically live through the entry of our Creator into His physical creation. God comes to invite us to the eternal banquet He has prepared for us. We call this miracle the incarnation; the becoming flesh. The uncreated Creator of the universe humbles Himself to be part of His creation.

For the rest of the Church year we listen to His invitation and his travel directions. Jesus not only invites us to the banquet, but gives us the tux or formal to wear, the ticket to get in, and He sends the limousine to get us there; Gospel, Baptism, Grace, and Church.

Christmas is the start of the incarnate mission of Jesus, and Holy Week / Easter is the accomplishment.

On the practical side, we Catholics are called to be the leading example to the rest of the world about the meaning of Christmas. It is not a winter festival celebrating together the solstice, Santa, Kwanzaa, Hanukah, and what-not, along with the birth of Jesus. Christmas is not even just about a loving concern for the corporal needs of others, although that is important. Christmas is first of all a festival of our everlasting salvation coming only through the God-man Jesus. This is the only foundation of *Joy to the World*. Let’s not be shy about expressing this.