

Whose Birthday Are We Celebrating?

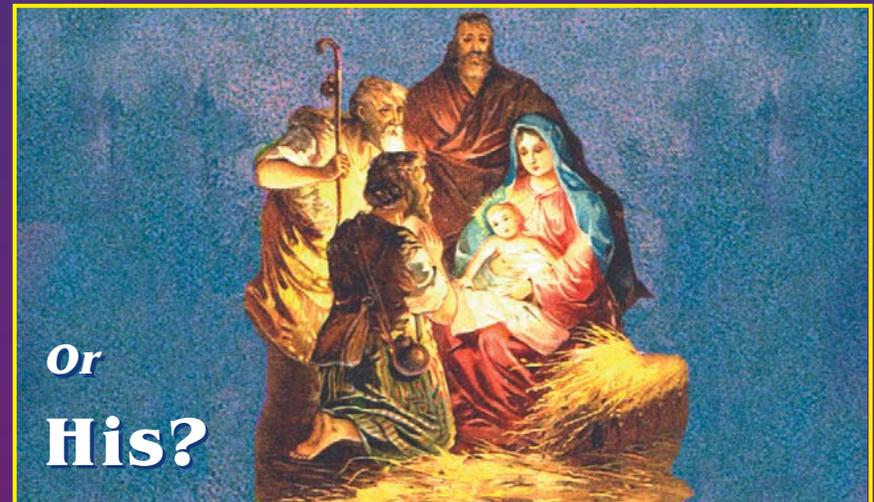
Suggestions

- Remember that the Magi gave gifts to Jesus, not to each other. Take this thought with you when you shop!
- Consider giving to charity an amount at least equivalent to that spent on personal and family celebrations at Christmas ('50/50 Giving', as in Lk.3:11).
- '50/50 Giving' could be achieved by determining, in advance, a total budget for Christmas; and donating half to charity at the outset. It could also be achieved by donating to charity £1 for every £1 of personal expenditure; by spending the same amount in charity shops or on alternative gifts, etc.
- For families with children and teenagers, a gift-wrapped IOU under the tree may help restore any imbalance between Christmas Day frenzy and Boxing Day blues. Go shopping for their gifts in the post-Christmas sales and donate the amount saved to charity. Use stockings for small, fun gifts from fair trade outlets or charity shops. And have a quieter Christmas Day with more time both for reflection and for enjoyment.

See also: 'From Advent to Epiphany' leaflet available at www.casc-aid.org.uk



A Christmas gift is for life, not just for Christmas!



'The Magi opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and myrrh' (Matt. 2:11)

CASC-aid suggests ideas to help churches and individuals enjoy Christmas more. Here are some thoughts:

Do you dread Christmas?

Every year, the Christmas shopping season seems to begin earlier. Many shops put up their decorations in September, and some catalogues and advertisements appear as early as June. This puts enormous pressure on us, the public, to spend more than we intend to, and over a longer period. The various Christmas savings schemes have a similar effect and reinforce the belief that we cannot enjoy Christmas without spending a lot of money. Then there are all the cards to send, the parties and extra activities that dominate December. The result is that Christmas Day itself - even in Christian households - is often an anticlimax and may be followed by a period of boredom, recriminations, and hefty bills too.

The most conservative estimates indicate that the average adult in the UK spends over £300 at Christmas on gifts and other items such as food, drink, travel, and entertainment (£1000 per family). Christmas is the largest single contributor to personal consumer debt and its repercussions - in terms of human misery, relationship breakdown, depression, other illnesses and even suicide - can be appalling.

But we do not need to spend a lot of money to enjoy ourselves at Christmas.

Whose birthday is it anyway?

Why do we do it? The tradition of exchanging presents on December 25th originates from a pagan festival totally unrelated to Jesus' birth and which Christmas was meant to replace. And Advent, the four weeks before Christmas, was originally intended as a period of fasting in preparation for the Second Coming of Christ, not as a countdown of the shopping days left before Christmas Day.

Things could be very different, if we accept that there is no scriptural or theological basis whatever for the individual exchanging of gifts at Christmas. We would do well to reflect that the Magi in Matthew 2:11 were presenting gifts to God, not to each other. Should we not do likewise? Just as we give gifts to a person whose birthday we are celebrating and not to the other guests at the party, Christmas gifts should first and foremost be for Jesus and not for ourselves.

Take away the commercial aspect of Christmas, and we will be left with a truly Christ-centred festival which we can both enjoy ourselves and share with others.

