

Merry “Christ”- mas

Dan Nelson - pastor

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My wife and I had a chance to do some Christmas shopping recently. Perusing the aisles of potential gift opportunities made my heart jump with excitement. It’s fun to give Christmas presents. I am not just speaking about choosing the gift, but the whole thing — watching the kids shake a wrapped gift they found under the tree, weigh it, determine if there is a rattle, if it is hard or soft, and the various tests that are done to solve the mystery of what’s inside. We did it when we were children and now it is their turn.

It is fascinating to me how easy it is to take Christ out of Christmas. There is so much cheer and good will during this season that even non-Christians feel quite comfortable celebrating Christmas. But it is important to remember what Christmas actually is — a worship celebration of Jesus Christ. And, the story starts long before Bethlehem.

Sparkling lights, decorated trees, nativity sets, Santa Claus at the mall, festive parties with gift exchanges, these are some of the signs of the way we tend to do Christmas. Maxed-out credit cards, crammed parking lots, and grouchy store clerks strung out on Starbucks are a few more cues that our “Holy-day” is here. But for the most part, people miss it, even Christians. After all, what makes Christmas “holy”?

We do well when we remind ourselves of fancy phrases like “Jesus is the reason for the season.” This simple truth does refresh our focus. But there is more. It is with good intentions that cards are sent with scriptural reminders, Christmas carols are sung professing the message, and gifts are given in honor of God’s love and the very first gift of all: Jesus. Yes, it’s true that we don’t give gifts to honor the “wise men” with their gold, frankincense and myrrh, but to reflect God who “gave His only begotten Son.” And yet there is still infinitely more.

The passage that is read every Christmas in many children’s pageant holds the key that is so often overlooked. “Then the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’” (Luke 2:10-11) A Savior? C’mon, a Savior? If we read everything fast and don’t pay attention to the words, all remains status quo. But as we acknowledge the angelic proclamation that came from heaven to earth, that a Savior is born, someone needs to ask the question: Do

I need to be saved?

In the midst of twinkling lights, shiny ribbons, and lots of tasty cookies, rarely does anyone want to mention sin and separation from God resulting from our self-centered choices. But without the reality of our need, there is no point in celebrating a Savior. Unless one acknowledges they are dying, they will not reach out for help. Therein lies the paradox. For so many, Christmas cheer is but a trite excuse to take a break from 24/7 selfishness and get a glimpse of something better; an amusement park for the soul. Intentions are genuine, but take Christ out of Christmas, and depression and suicide skyrocket and a lot of what is done is ultimately meaningless. Even Disneyland closes by midnight. But when we admit we have need, and a hand is stretched out to reach us, one is willing to accept the salvation offered, and “Christ”-mas celebrations become eternal.

May God bless you with a Merry “Christ”-mas that lasts forever.

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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