

What is Christmas?

What is Christmas? A time to rest after the shopping rush, to feast, eat and recall memories of a year that is nearly spent? We have an evergreen tree as a picture of survival.

The lights shine as the symbol warmth and light. Children come home from college. Letters and cards are received from friends and acquaintances.

What have we forgotten? A game of cribbage, the showing of home movies? But then we have summed it up. Christmas has become a worldly feast. Let the winter threaten with its cold and boredom, we exchange presents, sing and eat.

What a time! We have it warm despite the energy crisis! Let it snow. The sparkling beauty of the snow blanket lends, its own serenity and splendour to what has come to be regarded as a festival of family and children.

Have I forgotten something else perhaps? The church? Alright! The gospel gives the added touch to the Christmas season. The Christmas festivities are not quite complete without a special service where you can listen to the organ play the familiar hymns and hear children and adult choirs sing as they have never sung all year.

The Christmas narrative itself is lovely. No wonder that the feast of the nativity of our Lord, the commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ is the most popular one on the church calendar. How easy it is to sentimentalize about the Babe of Bethlehem.

How do we celebrate Christmas? As a minister, I am of course very much involved in the season's activities. But somehow I find it hard to get into the mood this year. You hear the usual peace overtures by world figures. Even godless world leaders say a few polite words about the spirit of Christ, the Prince of Peace, we all must have.

But peace is always around the corner. It never seems to catch up with this tired, war-torn world. What a year we have behind us!

The Middle East crisis, strife and hatred are rampant. Plenty of peace missions, but no peace! Oh, we talk about the terrible wrongs in our world. The topic of hungry and poverty, stricken millions enters our conversation while we take another delicious drumstick from our richly laden and nicely decorated tables.

Merry Christmas! But how merry is it for the lonely, the sorrowing, the troubled? What a tragic topsy-turvy world! Merry Christmas? Before we wish each other all the best for the season, we should ask ourselves "How concerned are we about our world?" Perhaps we should place this question before our consciences.

What is Christmas? In this cynical world, hope arrived in the form of a baby born to a virgin who had journeyed with her fiancé Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The city inn had no room for the weary travellers

Young Mary and Joseph could find only a stable for accommodation. In this stable the hope of the world was born. I imagine that when the angels looked down from heaven they said something like this:

"Who is this so weak and helpless,
Child of lowly Hebrew maid?"

And there is one answer, and one answer only: "Tis the Lord, the King of glory!" That is the wondrous story of the first Christmas. Let Charles Wesley answer the question. Looking into the manger, what do we see? According to Charles Wesley

"Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail, the incarnate Deity!"

Christmas is glorious! God did not look down with icy disinterest, but He loved the world so much "that He gave His only Son, so that anyone who trusts in Him may never perish but have eternal life."

We can celebrate Christmas, when we bow in adoration and prayer before Jesus Christ, born in a stable, crucified on a cross, buried in a borrowed grave, risen from the dead, ascended to heaven, and reigning now as king!

With this gospel story in mind, I wish you a BLESSED CHRISTMAS!

Johan D. Tangelder
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