

The True Meaning of Christmas
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Today, we assign the Christmas holiday a variety of true meanings. For some, Christmas is about being unusually charitable. Others feel the Christmas spirit is discovered when we are moved to express neighborly love even to strangers. Many insist the essence of the holiday is found in the joy received from giving, not only materially, but of ourselves. I do not know of any other holiday that has such varied meanings as does Christmas. This wide range of “true meanings” compels one to ask, “What is the true meaning of Christmas?”

Stories vary as to the origin of Christmas as a holiday. Yet, most people agree Christmas is related to the birth of the person identified in the Bible as Jesus. The commonly referred to “Christmas Story” of Luke chapter two details the angel’s report of Jesus’ birth to local shepherds with the familiar words: “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”

This historic proclamation revealed the most awesome and unfathomable expression of God’s infinite love, grace, and mercy toward mankind: the birth of Jesus. His death and resurrection are equally crucial to man’s redemption, but before God the Son could die and be resurrected, He had to become that which could be killed -- a man.

Jesus often referred to His imminent death as His “hour.” The first time is in John chapter two when He attended a wedding. It was a joyful, festive time. Everyone was of good cheer and happy hearts. Yet, in the midst of that celebration, while the wedding party rejoiced, Jesus quietly pondered the reason He was there in the first place. His life, yes, His birth, was meant for one thing -- to ready Him for death.

Like the guests at that wedding long ago, many people’s attitude during the Christmas holiday is one of happiness, family closeness, and festivity; and rightfully so. But we must never forget the reason this baby was born in Bethlehem; it was the first of many steps down a lonely path that deliberately led Him to the cross.

Christmas these days seems to be about everything except Jesus. Beginning the day after Thanksgiving we are inundated with reports of the shopping rush, shopper frustration and anger, escalated parking lot crime, stress management and debt counseling. Observe the themes of Christmas lighting and decorations; fewer and fewer include anything about Jesus’ birth. Read the “happy holidays” advertisements in the newspapers. There is little mention of the One who truly makes life happy and joyful.

Where is Jesus in all this? It seems He has been systematically purged from the very holiday intended to celebrate His birth. This year we are witnessing a growing effort to not only remove Christ from Christmas, but to forever remove the word

Christmas from the holiday. Many passively join this effort by substituting the politically correct greeting “Happy Holidays” for the traditional “Merry Christmas.” Our schools no longer call it a Christmas break, but a winter break.

If our Christmas holiday was established for the purpose of honoring the birth of Jesus, then, it must have a singular, central meaning. In John 18:37 Jesus clearly states the purpose for His birth: Pilate therefore said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth.” What is this truth? It is that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son; that whosoever believes in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life. The means by which He bore witness to this truth began at His birth, which led to His hour; when He bore upon the cross the penalty for our sin.

What is the true meaning of Christmas? I believe it is a celebration of the birth of Jesus, our Redeemer and Lord.