

A Rediscovery of Christmas

“To perceive Christmas through its wrappings becomes more difficult with every year.”~E. B. White

Some think that Christmas is about Santa Claus, gifts, and Christmas trees. It is, to a certain degree, but it is much deeper than that. Somewhere, beneath all the glitz and glamour, behind the secular creations of writers and the neediness of merchants who see it as a way to make money, we can find out what Christmas really is.

When Pope Julius I authorized December 25 to be celebrated as the birthday of Jesus in A.D. 353, who would have ever thought that it would become what it is today. That was three hundred years after Jesus was born. We appreciate that, Pope Julius, and we must know more.

Our country was born in 1776, and the story of how it came to be is inexorably mixed together with faith. One Christmas Eve, when the Hessian mercenaries were celebrating Christmas with Christmas trees, the tradition they had brought from Germany, and the whiskey they got from their employers, American general George Washington and his army crossed the Delaware River in dangerous, icy conditions to achieve a victory that turned the tide of the whole war.

Would that it also had turned the tide of what Christmas has become for us today! Christmas is so far from its beginnings that God must marvel at what we humans have made it.

Our founders prayed to God for guidance in taking a stand for right, and in establishing a place where we could worship live free from the dictates of a king far away. People who were persecuted for their faith came to our shores to live in freedom and joy. Christmas trees with stars and angels were raised, and houses of worship came to be in expectation of what God would do.

For many retailers today, Christmas is when they get two thirds of their income each year. Christmas decorations enter the stores now in October, and sales and blitzes of deals to be had hit the airwaves at the same time to make us think we need to give billions of dollars of things to one another to celebrate Christmas.

For many, it is a time to return to church temporarily, as many are elsewhere the entire rest of the year. It is my prayer that Christmas this year will be so magical that it will be a new beginning for many, so much so that God now becomes the focus of life all year long. As church bells ring, Christmas parties begin, times for worship and giving abound, and the Hallmark Channel puts on story after story of Christmases happy ever after, that God's plan for all of us would finally come clear.

Our country is rife with those who take instead of give. Extreme beliefs are taking over the world, as people retreat to false suppositions that things are most important, and that God is a myth rather than fact.

God has in mind new beginnings this Christmas. Christmas began as a way for God to bring us together with him and each other. There was such a great divide between heaven and earth. Morality and decency was in short supply. The Roman Empire had taken over the world and ruled with an iron hand over those who could acknowledge that. Their ruler Caesar was declared a God, and those who did not bow to him could be executed.

God changed all that with Christmas. He declared, in the midst of corruption and war, that peace was the way for his people. He sent Jesus as a lamb and a servant to show us how to live. And when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the calendar and the world began again.

Perhaps you can really rediscover Christmas this year. The magic of Christmas is real for those who believe that God has sent us a Savior. The beauty of Christmas can sparkle anew when we realize that it is not about packages and bows but love in action. We can return to the beliefs that college professors and worldly thinkers have tried to take away.

We cannot understand our way into faith. We must accept the gift of God, the greatest gift ever given, Jesus of Bethlehem as Savior and Lord, the Beginning and the End, the one in whom all things make sense.

Then and only then can we walk with the living God through the Christmas season and beyond. We and our families can live in hope and love, not fear and hate. We rediscover the reality we once thought was fiction. We can see Christmas for what it really is—an eternal gift from the God who loves us and can do all things.

May the churches be filled with seekers and servers this Christmas, and all year long. Consider again the baby in the manger, the God who sent him, and the peace that only he can bring. And you will find what you have been searching for.