

## The Spirit of Christmas

Seventh Day Adventist  
Pastor Bill Robison

Dear Friends,

Christmas is the time of the year when we think about gifts. Jesus said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' Our God has given His Son to the human family. This is the greatest gift to humanity. It was through giving that God has redeemed us when Jesus came to live among us and die for our sins. It is our desire and prayer that the 'Gift of Jesus' and His love will continue to be experienced in each life in our community.

Ione United Church of Christ  
The Rev. Isa Brown

Christmas is a season which evokes every conceivable emotion, dependent upon our own memories and experiences of that yearly event. A friend of mine finds it a very sad time. He says that someone in his family or circle of friends always seemed to die around the holidays. Another friend who was a nurse in Bellevue Hospital in New York City once told me that Christmas Eve was very busy at work. Lonely people without family ties or close friends in the city would drink too much 'holiday cheer', ending up in bar brawls which led to the emergency room.

This is a season of intense feeling. The eruption of love upon the world's scene was a shattering experience. It is often difficult to accept or understand such a power. And yet without it, our earth might have stopped spinning long ago. It is the power that moves the stars and planets in their courses. It is the power that creates out of chaos.

This power, manifested extremely in Jesus the Christ, has appeared in the many saints, both known and unsung, who have kept us altogether like glue. This power is here for us now. Plentiful and available for the taking and the giving. We celebrate this power, this love which is the Christmas gift to the world. May our celebration continue and spread through all the earth in the New Year, bringing peace to the nations.

All Saints Episcopal  
Father George Izzett

'Fear not: for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy' Luke 2:10.

Christmas has charms all its own. It is the great high day in the world as well as in the Church. No burdens of care or grief, no experience of disastrous fortune, no newly made graves, can totally shut out its sunshine. Somehow the multitudes delight to turn toward the stable of Bethlehem. Explain it as we will, the Christmas Baby is simply so irresistible. This event generally triggers family memories and traditions both of which are warming to us. My family has such traditions...Handel's Messiah is played daily during Advent and Christmas. Those stirring Biblical texts accompanied by thrilling inspired musical notation...never cease to inspire me, to humble me, to impress again on me the magnitude and wonder of this 'Birth Event'. Also during this

season I read again Dicken's 'Christmas Carol'. It becomes more wonderful to me with each reading...perhaps even more profound in the teachings it expresses. 'Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatsoever about that.' And Dickens continues to make certain in the reader's mind that indeed...Marley is dead, as Dickens continues to emphasize the point in the paragraphs that follow the opening line.

I suspect that one of the reasons I appreciate this story so much is because it suggests that if we don't examine our lives from time to time...if we are not careful in our life's journey, we can become as dead as Marley in regards to this wondrous Birth Event. Finish reading the Christmas Carol. Scrooge changed. 'A Merry Christmas, Bob Cratchit!' said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken. 'May we too change where needed and present Christ with a joy and earnestness that cannot be mistaken. And so, 'God Bless Us, Every One.'

United Methodist Church of Christ  
The Rev. Gerry Etchison

Christmas is such a busy time of the year for all of us. It is a time to buy and wrap presents for family members and also friends, to bake cookies and make fudge, in addition to sending cards that contain "Holiday Greetings" to people we know and love.

We should also remember why we are doing all of this. We can find the answer to this contained in Luke 2:1-14, where, among other things, we are told the following: "And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn... And the angel said to them, 'Be not afraid: for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord...' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!'"

The birth of Jesus Christ is why we are so busy during the Christmas season, and why Christmas is such an upbeat and festive occasion. We share God's love with people by doing things that express the love we have for these same people. God expresses divine love for us not only through other human beings that are a part of our lives, but also through God's great gift of Jesus Christ. We need to remember God's love for all human beings during this Christmas season, and also throughout all the days of the coming year. God Bless.

St Patrick's - St. William's Catholic Church  
Father Gerry Condon

Thoughts of Christmas bring to mind Santa Claus appearing in myriad places, gift-wrapped packages, and carols of peace and joy. Yet this year there is also the sombre realization that our country may be on the brink of war. How sad that the real message of Christmas - Peace on Earth - is not a reality for all. There are even some for whom the very spirit of Christmas seems to be the occasion of dejection and depression. So it is good to take time to be aware of the real spirit of Christmas. It is a time to be joyful for the gift of the Savior. He can be reborn in our lives.

He, and not mankind, is the hope of the world, and our hope. He, and not mankind, can give us joy, as He gave joy to the shepherds; He can give us courage, as He gave courage to the Magi.

This Christmas season may the infant Savior be for each one of us our light, our courage, and our hope.

Heppner Christian Missionary Fellowship  
Pastor Linda Crane

'Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.' Psalms 33:12. America was founded on Christianity and because of this we have been blessed indeed. As a nation and as a community, as a people, let us not turn away from Him. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." This holiday season, let us turn our eyes to Jesus. We have much to be thankful for. Truly, Jesus is the reason for the season.

Hope-Valby Lutheran Parish  
The Rev. Stan Hoobing

When we think of Christmas, we want to focus our attention on Jesus the babe. Jesus the divine son of God frightens us. His inexpressible majesty may crush us. But Jesus the babe came in our humanity to save us from sin, and also came in love and grace that he should console and confirm us.

That is why we can look at Christ lying in the lap of His young mother. What can be sweeter to look at than the babe? What can be more lovely than a mother? And look at the babe, why He knows nothing at all. Yet in a while He will take all our sins away through His death on the cross. Take comfort in the babe. Do not doubt Him, but just watch and enjoy Him. Watch Him suck at His mother's breast, and play on her lap. Laugh with Him. Look at Him as the Lord of Lords, Prince of Peace. See in Him the power, majesty of a loving, caring God, who places before us a babe to take refuge in. Are you frightened of the babe? Come closer and look at Him lying peacefully in His mother's lap. Do not despair. Trust Him. Here is Jesus the Christ Child in whom God brings forth salvation. There is no greater consolation given to people than the gift of this gentle babe who is the Christ. A babe who will become a child, a teenager, then a man. A man who has overcome the power of sin, death and the devil by humbling himself and becoming 'obedient unto death, even death on a cross.' (Philippians 2:8b)

So come and look at the babe and believe that He has come not to terrorize us nor frighten us, but to save us.

Christian Life Center  
Pastor Tim VanCleave

Christmas is a joyous time when we especially praise God for sending us a Savior. It is also a story wrapped up in a mystery. The Bible says, "Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh." A further mystery is how God, who was embodied in Christ, can also be embodied in us today.

Let me ask two questions. What does Christmas mean? It means the birth of a Savior. Christ came into the world to save sinners. Though He was born to die for our sins, He came also to show us what God is like, and to teach us how to please

Him. Christ came not because He had to, but because He wanted to. Incarnation means God coming and dwelling with us. This is a mystery beyond human understanding.

My second question is this: How is Christ born in us? In a sense, when a person becomes a Christian this too is an incarnation. When we ask Jesus into our hearts, He comes and dwells within us personally. In that same sense, each Christian's spiritual birthday becomes a personal Christmas. The Bible states this marvelous truth: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." A mystery though it may be, Christ lives in each one of us who believes in Him.

It has been said that a Christian is one who is passionately in love with Jesus. Going to church alone, or even being very religious cannot make anyone a Christian. You must invite Him into your heart and ask Him to be Lord of your life. Why not accept the most valuable gift you could this Christmas, God's Son, Jesus?

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

What gift can I give you for Christmas this year? What gift can I give to bring love and good cheer? What gift can I give to tell you I care, a gift you'll remember, a gift we can share? The gift that I'll give can't be bought in a store. It doesn't cost money-it's worth much, much more. The gift that I'll give doesn't come from a shelf. The gift that I'll give is the gift of myself.

There is yet time this year to extend your helping hand and loving heart to some of our Heavenly Father's children. As we serve Him in this way, we are surely following His Son, Jesus Christ.

May the Christmas season find in each of us a love and a desire to help others. And, when the Christmas season is over and we are filled with the spirit of Him, whose birth we celebrate, let us continue to follow Him.

In conclusion, may we assure you that our Savior and Lord was really born and He lives. He wants us to give gifts of ourselves by extending a helping hand and sharing a loving heart so that those around us will hear His message and do His will. May we show Him our love is our prayer and hope for us all.

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