

# It's Show Time; Is it?

## What's Does Christmas mean to You?

Christ Love Assembly (RCCG), Barton, Oxford

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At this time of the year, with all the glittering lights and shopping frenzy all around us, it is always important to ask ourselves an age-old question: 'What's Christmas to You and I?' I am not talking about the story we know. Yes, it marks the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Yes, the Bible records it that He was born in a manger in Bethlehem? Yes, God took flesh and dwell among us? (John 1:1&14; Col 2:9). Yes, we know that the child in the manger was no ordinary child; the wise men from the East knew that; Herod knew that too.<sup>1</sup> With gold, the 'child in the manger' was acknowledged as Ruler (Matt 2:6; Is. 9:6); with frankincense as Priest; with myrrh as Our Purifier, the Anointed Holy One (Ex 30:23; Esther 2:12).<sup>2</sup> And what a night! What with the angels heralding His birth; the shepherds joining the mass choir; and the 'professors' from 'the East' going the extra thousand miles to be by His cradle and there was the distinct star in the night sky to guide them. What a night!

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

***But, what is Christmas to you and I?***

### What's the Christmas..: to the world?

- For many people, '***It's Show Time***'; *it's shopping time*. Christmas is **BIG BUSINESS**. Think about it: this year, an estimated **£53 billion** will be spent during the Christmas shopping season; 64.3% of that will be by those swiping the plastic cards, and 10% by those making online purchases. In 2006, Christmas season spending was £50.8 billion.<sup>3</sup> To put the amount in perspective, the Gross National Income (GNI) of Senegal in 2005 was US\$8.1 billion (£4.05 billion) or 7.6% of UK Christmas season spending; Jamaica's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2006 was US\$9.3 billion (about £4.65 billion). You have to get to Nigeria, whose GDP for 2006 was US\$119.4 billion (or £59.4 billion)<sup>4</sup> to come close to the value of Christmas season purchases in the UK alone. Christmas is big business!
- Christmas is also a season of family reunion and big feasts.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the Bible never said 'Three Wise Men'—simply The Wise Men or The Magi. The tradition of numbering the Magi seems to have been from the number of their recorded gifts; but for all we know they could be more than three.

<sup>2</sup> Myrrh is one of the ingredients mentioned in Exodus 30:23 for producing the oil of holy anointing, and in Esther 2:12 as a fragrance for purification, and for embalming the dead.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. APAC, 'UK consumers expected to spend £53 billion over the Christmas period' Press Release. [http://www.apacs.org.uk/media\\_centre/07\\_11\\_15](http://www.apacs.org.uk/media_centre/07_11_15). (Accessed 15 Dec 2007).

<sup>4</sup> GDP refers to the total market value of all the goods and services produced in a country during a specific period. GNI is GDP plus all 'income received from other countries (notably interest and dividends), less similar payments made to other countries' ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gross\\_National\\_Income](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gross_National_Income)).

- Then, of course, Christmas is also a season for the usual jibes at Christianity—the *Christmas controversies*. A colleague said recently: “Of course we know Christ was not born at this time of the year. Which shepherd in his right mind will be out in the fields at night during winter?” Well... except that Christ was born in the Middle East not Europe and the temperature today is a high of 14 and a low 5 degrees Celsius in Bethlehem. Still he is probably right.
  - But Christmas is *commemorative of the birth of our Lord not a question of precise date*. In any case, how many of us celebrate our ‘Birthdays’ rather than “Birth Dates”? And are you 20 years old on the 20<sup>th</sup> occurrence of the date you were born or much earlier? Still it does not stop us from commemorating our ‘birthdays’ on our ‘birthdates’, does it?

### **But that’s others: what’s Christmas to you and I?**

#### **What’s the Christmas...: to the redeemed of the Lord?**

1 Peter 2: 9 says “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, and holy nation, a peculiar people...” Why? “That ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

A chosen generation, alright; a royal priesthood, yes; a peculiar people, yes. You actually don’t need Christ for that—you could be royalty without being a Christian and you could have being the head of a religion thrown in for good measure. That will make you a chosen, peculiar, priestly royalty and not be for Christ. We are all that Peter described because ‘the child in the manger’—God taking flesh—as the myrrh among the gifts indicates is the Holy One. And His coming, we all agree, was for our redemption. When we turned our lives over to him, His work of grace purchased our salvation—taking us from the darkness of sinful nature into the marvellous light of God. In other words, all that bit about being chosen; being royal priesthood; all of that rest on our being a ‘holy nation.’

- The Call, is a call to holiness. The One who knew no sin, took upon Himself our sins, so that we can, by His sacrifice, by His work of grace, “become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Cor 5: 21). Paul started that exhilarating revelation by saying “we implore you on Christ behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20b). Was he writing to unbelievers? Of course not. And it was not a poor Church either (2 Cor 8).
- It is about a daily living in sanctification—something the Body of Christ does not speak much about these days. 1 Thess 2:12 enjoins us to “walk **worthy** of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” For several weeks now our Bible Study sessions have focused on sin and sinfulness; the work of the flesh and fleeing “from all the appearances of evil.” Again, while we are implored “to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, we know this is not something we do or can do by our own power.”<sup>5</sup> We can relax in the hands of the Lord, because the same passage (Phil 2: 12-13) gave us this assurance: “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” Or as the Weymouth Bible puts it: “For it is God Himself

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<sup>5</sup> The ‘fear and trembling’ is not physical; it is about the need for daily sanctification in full awareness of the enormous pain that sin causes the One who gave up His glory to die a criminal’s death on the cross so that we can be declared righteous in God’s presence.

whose power creates within you the desire to do His gracious will and also brings about the accomplishment of the desire.”

- But as the Psalmist (Ps 119: 9-16) asks: “how shall a young [person] cleanse his [or her] way?” By diligently seeking, through the enabling grace of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, to do the desires of Him who brought us out of darkness into His marvellous light; by constantly dwelling on the Word of God: “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I may not sin against You”! (Ps 119: 11-12). This is the work that the Holy Spirit in our lives as we daily surrender our lives daily in prayer and obedience; as we seek a closer walk with Him and to do of His ‘good pleasure’.
- Did I hear someone say, deep in your soul, “But what about my needs?” Okay, what about your needs? Phil 4:19 gives the assurance that He will “supply all your **need** according to His riches in glory **by Christ Jesus**. But what exactly are our needs? Our **wants**? How are needs met in the body of Christ? What happened to the sharing and collective provisioning that so defined the 1<sup>st</sup> Church? I don’t mean simply the handout we give to the ‘deserving poor’; I mean the ‘collective provisioning’ so that no one is in want (Act 4: 34).
- A daily increase in our walk with the Lord is also an experience in learning to trust Him.

***So what does Christmas, the coming of the Lord, mean for you and I?***

### ***Obedience and Provision: Is this about reciprocity?***

As the Lord admonished us, we should first seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness and everything else will be added to us (Mat 6: 33). Is this about reciprocity or instrumental relationship? If we serve the Lord with all diligence, and the provision we asked for does not come, will He be any less the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords? Is our material comfort a measure of our diligence and faithfulness? Are those less materially endowed among us less blessed of the Lord? Will the measure of our giving “force” the hands of God? As the Weymouth version puts it “*make His Kingdom and righteousness your chief aim, and then these things shall all be given you in addition*. Actually, a life steeped in pleasing the Lord will know that when, as the song says, we cast our eyes upon Jesus; when we ‘turn [our] eyes upon Jesus’; when we ‘look full in His wonderful face’ the ‘things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.’

When we give, it should be cheerfully and generously (2 Cor 9: 6-7); when we share, it should be generously so that there should be “no needy person among” us (Act 4: 34; We give because ALL that we have, we received from Him. We love him because **He first loved us** (2 Cor 9: 9), so no one among us should boast.

As the body of Christ has grown increasingly focused on personal wealth the propensity to selectively quote the Bible has never been more dramatic: *for Christ was made poor so that you through His poverty might become rich* (2 Cor 8: 9). We do this often forgetting what Paul’s point was in 2 Cor 8. It was not that Jesus became materially poor. It is more profound: He gave up His glory (his poverty—Phil 2: 5-8) so that we can be presented blameless before the Father (our riches)! Specifically, the Church in Corinth, who are quite materially rich folks and good Christian people (Act 18, 1 Cor 1: 4-8), had been making promises to give; it’s been over a year now that they’ve made the promises. Paul’s point was: you folks are rich materially; make good your pledge. More importantly is the parallel

that Paul drew with the Macedonian Church—deep in material poverty; objects of grave afflictions/persecution. Yet having so little, they gave generously; even while facing grave persecution they were full of rejoicing (2 Cor 8: 1-2). They gave freely, they gave cheerfully (2 Cor 8: 3). Above all, beyond material giving, Paul said, they first gave of themselves to the Lord. This was the example that Paul was giving to the Church at Corinth.

Our God is the God of the Church in Corinth and the Church in Macedonia. A life of holiness and surrendering to the Lord, will be so driven with making the heart of God glad that in riches and want, our *chief aim* will be the Kingdom of God and righteousness. It is a life steeped in daily abundance of joy of what it means to be a beneficiary of the work of redemption wrought for us on Calvary. As the song says, we'll never know how much it cost to see our sins nailed upon the cross.

Christmas should be a reminder of that: He who was without sin, took upon Himself our sins that we would be declared righteous in the presence of The Most High. The enemy may remind you, perhaps constantly, that your sins were so grave “you sure can't expect a Holy God to overlook them. In any case, we'll see; you'll be back in your sin.” Well, remind him that the Lord to whom you have committed your life tells you, you are a new creation; all things are new; the old is the past.<sup>6</sup> Those He redeems are redeemed! That is the meaning of Grace—*oore òfé*: ‘unmerited favour! ***It is a privilege to serve the Lord; that should be the meaning and the message of Christmas***

- Jimí O. Adésínà

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<sup>6</sup> Henry T. Blackaby & Richard Blackaby. 2003. *Experience God Day-by-Day*. Cape Town: Strink Christian Books, p.27, Day 21.