

CHRISTMAS! CHRISTMAS?

Many of us groan and moan about Christmas, how it's been ruined by commercialization, and how Santa and Black Friday sales have crowded out virtually all reference to the underlying story of Christmas that we know from the Bible. Yes, churches still sing



carols and sometimes place nativity scenes out front, and many still do try to honor the spiritual side of Christmas by honoring Joseph and Mary and baby Jesus, but mostly that's been sidelined.

But what do we know about the story of Christmas? Oh, we can recite the stories of the wise men in Matthew and the shepherds in Luke. Isn't that the story?

I would say that yes, it probably gives us the basic outline of the story of Jesus' coming and early life. But there is so much we don't know and so much locked into tradition, and so we can miss the spirit of it, and God's Spirit in it!

A recent article from C.S. Lewis Institute by Joel Woodruff, "Decluttering Christmas", gave me a new perspective on this. Mr. Woodruff describes how one Christmas their family's extensive Christmas decorations were packed away and so they couldn't decorate as usual, but they found relief that all that clutter was missing. Then he speculated about a parallel decluttering of the Christmas story that we all assume as the basis of Christmas. Some of his basic points:

1. So Joseph helps Mary onto the donkey, and they start their journey. "Cut!" There is no donkey mentioned in the biblical account. Being from a poorer family, it's likely that Mary and Joseph would have made the long, hard, three-day journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem on foot.

2. So we have Mary and Joseph now walking to Bethlehem from Nazareth. They are bundled up, as the winter month of December can be bitterly cold. "Cut!" When did they go? . . . shepherds were



abiding in the fields with their flocks by night.' In biblical times, farmers allowed shepherds into their fields after the fall harvest in October. . . . This means that the birth of Christ was probably in October, so much for our December white Christmas.

3. . . . the innkeeper of the Bethlehem Holiday Inn shares the sad news that he has no vacancies. . . . "there was no room for them in the inn." "Cut!" Greek scholars today tell us that the word translated "inn" . . . is better translated "guest room." In other words, Joseph sought shelter at someone's home, likely . . . relatives.

4. Mary and Joseph are at least given a nicely built wooden stable to sleep in. Well, we'll need to pause again. The stable or the place that the animals were kept was probably a cave.

5. The kings or wise men also come that evening to pay homage to Jesus and give him gifts. "Cut!" While it is true that the wise men, the magi, did follow the star to Bethlehem to pay homage to the King of the Jews, . . . it is likely that the wise men met Jesus as much as two years after the actual date of Jesus's birth.

I love it when something like this breaks images and makes me think! What the author writes may or may not be true, but it certainly could be, and it's most important to pry us away from mindless habits or assumptions and let God's Spirit speak to us. I love the author's final paragraph:

So we have decluttered the story of the birth of Christ. There is no donkey to carry Mary to Bethlehem, no December white Christmas, no inn or innkeeper, no wooden stable, and no wise men by the manger. So what do we have left? We still have the simple yet complex, glorious, marvelous, wonderful, awe-inspiring true story of a step-dad named Joseph and an obedient, grace-filled teenager named Mary, who gave birth to the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. As C.S. Lewis puts it in Mere Christianity, we have the story that tells

us how "the Son of God became a man to enable men to become the sons of God."

Does that not fill you with a sense of awe and appreciation at the true gift of Christmas? Does it not clear your mind of the standard Christmas clutter and open your heart for God's Holy Spirit to speak to you?

The Bible relates another Christmas story, when Jesus went to Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah, which coincides with our Christmas season. John 10:22-30 (NLT) says:

It was now winter, and Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah, the Festival of Dedication. He was in the Temple, walking through the section known as Solomon's Colonnade. The people surrounded him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus replied, "I have already told you, and you don't believe me. The proof is the work I do in my Father's name. But you don't believe me because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

I confess: I love that God reaches out to us with a solution to our being broken, rebellious humans. He sent Jesus to pay the penalty for us, and if we accept it, we become His and no one can take us from Him. God guarantees that.

Now that's the real Christmas story!!!

Linda Gimmel

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ON THE LIGHTER SIDE

Contributed. From the Web.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN KIDS' LETTERS ARRIVE AT THE NORTH POLE?

Does Kringle and Co. sell the data to online marketers? We read the fine print on Santa's website:

• **Santa's Privacy Policy:** At Santa's Workshop, your privacy is important to us. What follows is an explanation of how we collect and safeguard your personal information.

• **Why Do We Need This Information?** Santa Claus requires your information in order to compile his



annual list of who is Naughty and who is Nice and to ensure accuracy when he checks it twice.

• **What Information Do We Collect?** We obtain information from the unsolicited letters sent to Santa by children all over the world listing specific items they would like to receive for Christmas. Often these letters convey additional information, such as which of their siblings are doodyheads. The letters also provide another important piece of information—fingerprints. We run these through databases maintained by the FBI, CIA, NSA, Interpol, MI6, and the Mossad. If we find a match, it goes straight on the Naughty List.

• **What Do We Do with the Information We Collect?** Sharing is one of the joys of Christmas. For this reason, we share your personal information with unaffiliated third parties: the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy, and Hanukkah Harry. —Laurence Hughes

"Maybe Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from the store. Maybe Christmas . . . perhaps . . . means a little bit more!"

-- The Grinch, by Dr Seuss

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

Photos with Santa Saturday, Dec. 15, 1PM to 3PM at Lucerne Valley Market & Hardware. Photos will be available the following day (the printer is too slow). Sponsored by the L.V. Roadrunners and L.V. Market & Hardware. No charge for photos.

L.V. School Board Meeting

Thursday, Dec. 13, starts at 5:30PM. At the Alternative Education Center, 8560 Aliento Rd up Highway 18.

ST. MARY'S VAN will NOT be here during the entire month of December.

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LIMITS & MULTIPLE PRICING

Please, unless otherwise indicated, **ON AD ITEMS NO MORE THAN 6 TOTAL** (including all flavors or varieties) **OF ANY ITEM, PER FAMILY, DURING THE AD PERIOD, AT THE SALE PRICE**, except in produce and meat, which are limited to normal retail quantities, or which carry limits specifically stated. Sorry, we must reserve the right to further limit or refuse sales.

ON MULTIPLE PRICING, when purchasing items in quantities more or less than the multiple stated, the register is built automatically to charge the "each" price times the quantity. (Example: Price of item is 3/\$1. The price of: one = 34¢, two = 68¢, three = \$1, four = \$1.34, five = \$1.68, six = \$2.00).

"Christmas is a season not only of rejoicing but of reflection."

-- Winston Churchill

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