

How to Celebrate Christmas.

A little History

The English word **Christmas** is derived from the Old English Christes Maesse or “Christ Mass”, referring to 3 masses that the Roman Catholic church celebrated on Dec. 25th to honor the birth of Jesus.

A common scene is the **Nativity scenes** with Mary, Joseph and Jesus in the cradle. This scene was first used by St. Francis of Assisi in the year 1223 as part of the midnight mass on Christmas Eve. Objections to the religious celebration of Christmas by Christians have been voiced on several occasions. In the 17th century in England during the time of Cromwell the celebration of Christmas was banned. By an act of Parliament in 1644 Christmas celebration was forbidden, shops were compelled to remain open and plum puddings were condemned as heathen.

This attitude was carried over to the first settlements in America with Connecticut and Massachusetts forbidding the celebration of Christmas.

How about the use of Christmas trees in our celebrations? St. Boniface in the 7th century is identified with the use of Christmas trees in the celebration of Christmas. The triangular shape of the fir tree is supposed to represent the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The lights in the tree speak of the Lord Jesus bringing light in the darkness.

Then we have Santa Claus to help us celebrate Christmas. There may be a connection to St. Nicholas the Bishop of Myra in Asia Minor during the 4th century who became priest and bishop and was known for his kindness and giving. He died Dec. 6th.

The graphic image of Santa Claus is a robust, jovial, red-robed white bearded figure with a sack of toys. This Santa Claus is attributed to artist Thomas Nast who first drew Santa in 1863.

Some Christians disapprove and object to the use of mythical characters such as Santa Claus or St. Nicholas or Rudolph the red nosed reindeer in Christmas celebrations. They are afraid that the children will not be able to differentiate the myth of Santa Claus with the fact and reality of Jesus Christ. Yet some people fail to recognize that children need to pretend and imagine.

Children's literature is full fictional fantasy and fairy tales. Besides Santa Claus is not a violent villain like so many children's heroes today. He is mythical character who brings gifts for the enjoyment of the recipients and that is consistent with the Christmas celebration.

Gift giving tradition of our Christmas celebration has been traced back to God's loving the world that He gave His only Son to leave heavens glory and die on the cross as a ransom for our sins. In addition the wise men, the magi brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus.

We have special food items like ginger bread, eggnog, Christmas candy etc which some people feel are necessary to celebrate Christmas.

No doubt that some features of our cultural celebration of Christmas has been misused and abused. People drink too much, they eat too much they spend too much and they give for the wrong reasons. But they do that all year long as well.

So we can celebrate Christmas in many ways. There are so many positive and beautiful features of the different cultural celebrations of the birth of Jesus Christ, the lights, the tree, the sounds of the songs, the tastes of the specially prepared food. It is a time of family gatherings and reunions, of Christmas parties and banquets, of Christmas bonuses to express gratitude for job well done, of Christmas specials on TV and Christmas music throughout the stores. We accept it all as part of celebrating the birthday of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But everything that God has made is being misused and abused. Natural recourses, Sexuality, Music, Medicine, Money, and Food are being misused. Some say that this is of the devil or that is of the devil. That music is of the devil, that money from the prostitute or gambler is from the devil. For years my own sister said that the TV is from the devil. One thing I want to make clear this morning that nothing belongs to the devil. Only one item God made for the devil and that is hell. "Eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" Math. 25:41

All things belongs to God. The devil only steals, misuses and abuses. "for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things" Romans 11:36
 "everything comes from God" Romans 11:12
 "all things were created by Him and for Him" Col. 1:16

“that God, for whom and through Him everything exists” Heb. 2:10

Christmas is a time to give. God gave His Son.

John 3:16 **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

We celebrate Christmas by giving to Jesus Christ and His Church. After all it is His birth day! We also celebrate Christmas by giving to others.

Christmas is a time to love. God loves you so much that He sacrificed His one and only Son to redeem you from eternal punishment for sin. We celebrate Christmas by loving those around us.

The First Celebration of Christmas.

The account of the birth of Jesus Christ, Luke 2:1-26

“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”

Here we see the first celebration of Christmas. The shepherd glorifying and praising God for Jesus Christ they had just met and worshipped.

The most important way to celebrate Christmas is to glorify and praise God for His Great Gift. We glorify and praise God as we sing songs of worship and adoration to our Lord Jesus Christ.

We celebrate Christmas by expressing praise and thanks in our prayers.

As we close the service this morning we can take a little time to voice our praise and thanks to God as the Shepherds did 2005 years ago.

I invite several here to lead us in a prayer of worship, praise and thanksgiving to our heavenly Father...