



Would you like to receive an extra copy of the “Good News Guide” each month to share with a friend, neighbor, or family member? Let me know.

“Merry Christmas”



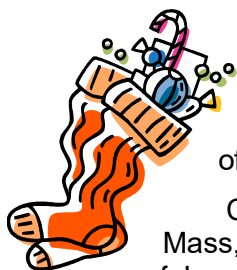
I’m writing this a few days before Thanksgiving. At this season of the year, people exchange a lot of “Happy Thanksgiving” greetings and farewells. I think have a “Happy Thanksgiving,” for many of us, means, “Enjoy yourself. Relax. Watch a football game or two. Spend time with your family. Have a nice turkey dinner and eat way too much. Hit the “Black Friday” sales. Enjoy!”

In a week or so, “Happy Thanksgiving” will be replaced by “Happy Holidays” or “Have a Nice Holiday,” along with “Merry Christmas.”

Okay. There’s nothing wrong with expressing such wishes, is there? Except that, in general, these wishes just miss the point. And that concerns me.

The original intent for Thanksgiving Day was that we, the people who live in the United States of America, would lay aside our normal pursuits and devote one day to offering sincere prayers to Almighty God, our Creator, Protector, and Provider, thanking Him for the many blessings He has given us.

So where is the *Thanks* in “Happy Thanksgiving”? It is sadly missing. Most folks in our society give little thought to thanking God, either on Thanksgiving Day or (as we ought to) every day. We can say “we’re thankful” for the gifts we have, and give little or no thought to the Giver of those gifts. We take His blessings for granted. Sometimes we are upset that we don’t have as many of them as we think we should. That’s just the way we are.



“Merry Christmas” has also become a phrase that has lost all spiritual significance, if it ever had any. It has become almost as empty of meaning as “Happy Holidays.”

Christmas started out as “Christ’s Mass,” a worshipful celebration of the birth of Jesus, to praise God for His goodness and loving kindness in sending His Son to be our Savior.

Somewhere along the way it became less of a worship time and more of a “feel good” season — a time to focus on getting and giving gifts, enjoying cute songs and colored lights and glitter, and indulging in food and drink. Over the centuries, Saint Nicholas (who in fact was a very pious and devoted servant of God) has been transmogrified into Santa Claus, a make-believe giver of every thing that little hearts desire. And Jesus —



God incarnate — has been transformed from the Savior of the world into merely a newborn baby lying placidly on a bed of hay in a manger. A special Babe, to be sure, but still ... if we worship Him at all, it’s as a sweet baby who never even whimpers, let alone needing to be changed. He has become unreal, almost as unreal as Santa Claus — someone we can feel good about but not take seriously.



That’s the way it is in our culture today. For the most part the only difference between the rich and the poor is in the degree to which they are able to indulge themselves while “having a nice holiday.”

So what’s wrong with having a good time? What’s the problem?

There are two problems. First, not everyone is in a situation where they are able to have what we think of as a “nice holiday.” You who are incarcerated, how meaningful would it be for you if I told you, “Have a Merry Christmas”? You’d probably answer, “Yeah, right,” or something less polite. Let’s face it, your Christmas won’t be especially merry. How could it be?



And you who are in jail are not the only ones to whom those “Merry Christmas” and “Happy holidays” wishes sound hollow. There are many people who are imprisoned in other ways — too sick, too old, too poor, or too lonely to find much merriment in their lives, even

on Christmas. In fact, for many people Christmas is the saddest time of the year. Many others are suffering — those families who have lost loved ones in recent or current wars, or have lost their homes, will find it hard to be “merry” this holiday season.

But the second problem, and the one that bothers me more, is that in forgetting the true meaning of Thanksgiving and Christmas, we miss out on the blessings we should be receiving from each of them.

Think about it. If on Thanksgiving Day you focus on thanking God for the blessings you have been given, (yes, even in jail, you have many!) you will be aligning yourself with the truth of God’s goodness and mercy. You will be obeying His word, which says we should always give thanks to Him in all circumstances (1 Thess. 5:18) — and you will gain the benefit of obedience, which is joy! Jesus had joy in His heart because He obeyed God. You can, too!

The Apostle Paul said, *“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* (Phil. 4:6-7) The peace of God in our hearts and minds — how wonderful!

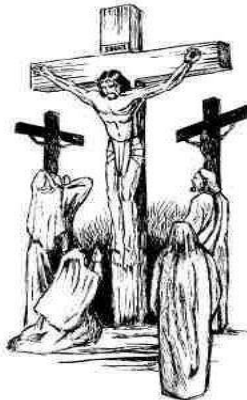
So what about Christmas? How should we celebrate this “happiest of all holidays”?

My answer is, go ahead and have a Merry Christmas, if you can. If you can be with your family, then have a good time with them. If there are gifts to give and receive, while being sensible about money, then enjoy them, by all means.

If you cannot do these things because of your circumstances, then your Christmas will not be merry in the same way — perhaps not at all. But you can still celebrate it. You might not have a Merry Christmas — or you might — but, either way, you can have a Joyful Christmas!

How can you do that? Try doing it this way:

1. Turn your focus away from yourself and your circumstances, or even from your family and their circumstances, and put it on Jesus. Look away from all the commercialism, the emphasis on gifts and pleasures, and look to Jesus. Christmas is not about you; it’s not about anything other than Jesus. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to*



condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17)

If Jesus had not come to earth to die for our sins, we would have nothing to celebrate, now or at any other time. Think about Jesus — what it cost Him, what He gave you (eternal life — a priceless Christmas gift!), and what that means to you.

2. Pray for yourself this prayer that Paul prayed for the Colossian Christians: *“May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from His glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.* (Col. 1:11-13) Let your Christmas be a time of joyfully praising and thanking God for the gift of Jesus.

3. Ask Jesus to help you love others — especially those who are not very lovable. Jesus said, *“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.* This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:10-12) Jesus wants to give you His joy. Ask Him to help you love others with His love.

Don’t let your circumstances, good or bad, distract you from the real meaning of Christmas. Don’t let any pleasure or any hardship make you miss the opportunity for Christmas joy.



As Paul said in Romans 8:18, *“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.”* As you spend time in prayer, and study your Bible, and try to live out Christ’s commandment to love others, and invite and allow the Holy Spirit to guide you and empower you in every way, you will find Jesus is revealing His glory in you, day by day.

The real blessing of Thanksgiving is the joy we receive when we give heartfelt thanks to God for His loving gifts. The real blessing of Christmas is that God sent His Son to us, to change our lives forever, and that through the Holy Spirit Jesus now lives in us.

Hallelujah! Christ has come! I wish you the Peace and Joy of a blessed Christmas.

Brother Roland

Christmas Traditions

*Christmas Messages by Evangelist Larry Wolfe
December, 1997*

Tradition: The Wise Men/Magi visited the Babe Jesus at the Manger

Truth: The Wise Men/Magi visited the Young Child Jesus in a House

The Biblical record of the visit of the Magi is found in Matthew 2:1-12. In (v.8, 11) Jesus is described as a "young child". This description is repeated in (v.13,14) when Joseph was spoken to in a dream by the angel of the Lord



immediately after the visit of the Wise Men/Magi. Matthew's term "young child" differs from Luke's

description "the babe" in Luke 2:12 which describes Jesus on the night He was born.

"When they were departed...Joseph...took the young child and His mother by night, and departed into Egypt."(v.14) Joseph moved his family to Egypt, leaving "the house" (v.11) not the manger, and "was there until the death of Herod" thereby literally fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy: "Out of Egypt have I called My Son."(v.15)

Tradition: Santa Claus — the god of Christmas

Truth: The Lord Jesus Christ — the God of Christmas

In the half century or so that I have observed and celebrated Christmas, Santa Claus has increasingly moved to the forefront. Although he is probably not the "Triple-Threat" some would make him out to be, he is given three very important attributes that only God possesses.



The first of these is omniscience. Everybody knows that he knows "whether we've been naughty or nice" right? Wrong, only God can and does know if

we have sinned against Him or whether we have obeyed Him. To tell our children otherwise is not right!

He is also said to have the power to be in every home in the world on Christmas Eve. This might not be considered omnipresence, but it is close enough to replacing God in the mind of a child.

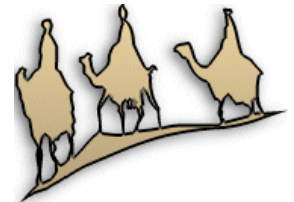
Santa Claus is also given credit for being the provident one who can supply the needs or wishes of any child, all they have to do is ask. Sounds like the same relationship we all should have with our Lord.

He, Santa Claus, in essence, is the counterfeit god of Christmas and thereby replaces the real need of every empty-hearted child, the need to receive and know Him whose birth we celebrate, the Lord Jesus Christ!

Tradition: There were three Wise Men/Magi

Truth: The Scripture does not number the Wise Men/Magi

In every extra-Biblical account of the Christmas story, three is the usual number of the Wise Men/Magi. However, the Bible never tells us how many there were. Because of the three different gifts: "gold and frankincense and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11)



presented to the young child Jesus, it is assumed that three different Wise Men/Magi came to visit and honor the King of Jews the Lord Jesus Christ. But, there could have been two, twenty two, two hundred or maybe there really were three. In reality, there just had to be more than one because plural forms of the word magi are used (Matthew 2:1,7). Regardless of the number, they surely were men who knew the importance of the star of the King of kings and rightly responded: "They saw the young child ...and fell down and worshipped Him"(Matthew 2:11), the Lord Jesus Christ the One Who alone is worthy!

And it came to pass in those days ...

Words and phrases from the accounts of the birth of our Lord Jesus given to us in the Gospels. Enjoy!

Puzzle:

N V G O O D W I L L T L D D O G F O N O S I Y Q Z H I G O B W J
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D B E N T S M E S S I A H C G S T A B L E U R K N I I A T H T V
L Y K E B S H G A U C U Z A Q O D E S N E C N I K N A R F B W M
R E B T H R O N E O F D A V I D T I L Z W N V X C P S H Z P J J
Y E C W G S O H H M E T B Q H G J Y A N G E L S P U U B Y A I W
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O C S Z A G R T W C J E G N E B R J X L B G E J A N N A B K U E
Z T B Z W L Y E L D O E V P R U E F X D L M E B Z H Y H X G J A
K B I T B Y N T F Z R L H A H L A D G Y P S R S T R D G Y K O C
X L V Q S D W I H P Z E F U E R S I G E U A K D A O F Q D W M E
E I H O O G M H G G R S J M I H P Y R S I Q Y M P A N I M H F O
J D S O P M T Q O D I E H C E R C O B E Q D N O D C B O G F B N
Q H G T A E R L S X F M T Z R D R A G W T I T F N N X J D A A E
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L Q U A X G N I C W C P S X U H M R N R Q L Y G C W F I D A O R
Q E Z X A F K Q O T E D E G G O Z U I A K F O U E R V L E P W T
L A V O I Z I U T J R I U A B E J V T Q G L S J Z Y N P M R O H
N I O E N S N G L E E S B V M P V A Z S D Z R R Z X F L A O V W
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S A M F U J E R S E Q R B M D N I H A I R A H C E Z R Y F E Y V
X A S A C M R Q L Q D I L Q R E P E E K N I N O D R F M R C S Z
C Y P D E M O X G X X L D I V A D F O Y T I C Z Y H W B F Y G W
V Q L R K S D B S C J P Z A F Q I L B R R U I M G H X S T A R A
G M J X H O L Y S P I R I T I X K F V P U W H E J J K M Y R J D

Words:

ANGELS
ANNA
BABY JESUS
BETHLEHEM
CAMELS
CITY OF DAVID
CRECHE
DONKEY
DO NOT BE AFRAID
DREAM
ELIZABETH
EMPEROR AUGUSTUS
EVERLASTING FATHER
FLEE INTO EGYPT
FLOCK OF SHEEP
FRANKINCENSE

GABRIEL
GLORY TO GOD
GOLD
GOOD NEWS
GOOD WILL
HEAVENLY HOST
HOLY SPIRIT
IMMANUEL
INKEEPER
JOSEPH
JUDAH
KING HEROD
MANGER
MESSIAH
MIGHTY GOD
MYRRH

NAZARETH
PEACE ON EARTH
PRINCE OF PEACE
PROPHECY
REDEEMER
REJOICE
SAVIOR
SHEPHERDS IN FIELDS
SIMEON
SON OF GOD
STABLE
STAR
THRONE OF DAVID
VIRGIN MARY
WISE MEN
ZECHARIAH