

Ignoring Christmas

It's almost Christmas. The time to celebrate the birth of Christ our Lord and Saviour. And although I tend to lose track of time and what holiday may be coming up next there's no mistaking this one. I can see it coming from a month away. Traffic around shopping centers becomes impassable. Road rage is everywhere I turn and as I listen to people talking I hear of families bracing themselves emotionally for the trauma of spending time with their extended families for Christmas Dinner.

This time of year I really start to notice all of the things around me that distract people from thinking about Christmas. Everywhere you look there are Santa Claus's, advertisements aimed at every demographic, and retailers selling the guilt of not getting a "good enough" gift for each person on your list. Everywhere you turn people are saying Happy Holidays because nobody wants to offend by saying Merry Christmas. I heard a statistic that claimed something like 80% of people surveyed reported Christmas has become too commercialized. I find that ironic because every year I hear how we spent more than last year during the Christmas season. Did you know that many retailers count on Christmas for more than half of their sales for the year? The accountants are waiting with bated breath to hear the inventory numbers for the fiscal year end hoping that the shelves are mostly empty to show a streamlined business for the year-end financial reports. We seem to be forgetting that we are supposed to be celebrating Christ's Birth. In all of our preparations and purchases we seem to be ignoring Christmas.

I've never been very good about birthdays in general. But I think I understand the concept. Once a year you take the time to celebrate the birth of someone you Love. I've heard many different stories of surprise parties, gifts, and events all held in honor of the Birthday Boy or Girl. What's really cool about Birthday parties "done right" is they are as diverse as the celebrated and the celebrators. I think that's what partly deters me from doing Birthdays to be honest. I never feel like I can think of something that would properly express how I feel about someone I Love. After all, the whole point is to put aside what you enjoy and focus on presents and activities that the Celebrated person will enjoy. That can be hard to do some times.

What does Christ want for His Birthday? Isn't that a doozy? I had to really think about that one. Bu do you know what I think He wants for Christmas? The same thing he wants all year round from us.

First, He wants us to Love. Mark 12:30-31 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Aside from all the frustrations and time crunch and responsibilities we feel, the one thing Christ has always tried to get into our heads is that showing Love to each other is what he says is most important. Showing Love by letting the other shopper get that last Beanie Baby or what ever today's fad happens to be is more important to Christ than you having a victorious story to share of how you ripped the toy from someone else's hand and got to the checkout first. You may laugh but surely we all still remember Christmas when Cabbage Patch Dolls were all the craze. In some ways, with knowing how stressed most people are at this time of year it seems like this is really the best time for us to show Christ's Love to each other because this is the time of year some people need it the most.

Second, He wants us to worship. When a Loved one has a birthday don't we tell them we Love them and tell them how important they are to us? It seems to me we should at least do that for Christ. What I

find interesting is that I never really understood Christmas Carols before. You don't hear Easter music playing on the radio or Thanksgiving music playing on the radio. But during Christmas there are so many songs that allow us to praise Him. We have so many songs, certainly more than I know of, just telling of his birth. What a wonderful way to celebrate it. Singing songs of worship and remembrance of Him. It certainly helps me understand and appreciate Christmas music much more.

Third, He wants us to give. But I think there's a catch here that we miss. 2 Corinthians 9:7 "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." I don't know about you, but from some of the horror stories I hear about shopping experiences I'm thinking there may be some cranky givers out there. And really, what's the point then? Besides, have you ever really considered who you are really giving that gift to? Matthew 25:40 "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." It may be purchased with the individual's likes and needs and wants in mind, but our gifts to each other are gifts to God as well. The Love and the gifts we give each other are Love and gifts shared with God.

You see, I don't think it's necessarily that we have the appearance wrong. We give gifts, we spend time with family, and we may even sing Christmas carols. The trick is to not forget who we are doing these things for and why. We're not just doing them for each other, we're doing them for Christ to celebrate his Birthday. Happy Birthday Lord!