

“Getting Ready For Christmas Day”

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Luke 3:1-6 = Christmas

Who's ready for Christmas? Who's got everything done: the shopping, the tree, the decorating, the cards, the shipping, the travel and preparation for all the parties? Are you ready to relax and enjoy the season?



But more to the point: “Who is ready for the real Christmas?” There does seem to be some confusion in our culture about what Christmas really is.

Is Christmas the parties, Santa Claus, decorating trees, homes and gift exchanging?



Under continual cultural pressure over twenty centuries, it is no surprise that Christmas has mutated ~ mutated from its original meaning of celebrating Jesus' birth to become an end-of-the year festival of drinking, feasting and gifting. Almost every culture has such a festival in some form or another ~ a gala to celebrate the

successes of the outgoing year or to manufacture an artificial air of happiness if the times are less than sweet. Thus as night follows day comes the inevitable post-holiday depression.

The hope in the season is no longer God's hope but a secularized and commercialized brand of perfectionism which has come to dominate the season ~ one last opportunity to attempt to put all the year's unpleasantness behind us in a mad spree to try and buy ourselves fleeting happiness. It never succeeds. This is what the world means by Christmas. This is Christmas without God. This is Christmas with the transcendent meaning almost completely obscured.



For better or worse and for many of our neighbors, that is what Christmas means.



Others defend a more traditional understanding of Christmas, but are still nevertheless wide of the mark. Those who speak in high decibels about “the war on Christmas” are right about wanting to put “Christ back into Christmas.” Yet to get a “merry Christmas” at Walmart is no closer to the true spirit of Christmas. In protesting commercial centers and shopping malls which advertise “happy holidays” instead of “merry Christmas,” these tactics presume their own negation. They belie themselves by presupposing that the heart of Christmas is consumerist and commercial.

As Diana Butler Bass has rightly observed:

“Did FOX get the wrong memo? According to ancient Christian tradition, “Christmas” is not the December shopping season in advance of Christmas Day; rather, [Christmas actually] is Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and the Twelve Days following that run until early January. During most of December, Christians observe Advent, a four-week season of reflection, preparation and waiting that precedes the yearly celebration of Jesus’ birth.”’



Advent is the voice of one crying in the wilderness, “**prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.**” Advent is hungering and thirsting for the peaceable kingdom, “**where the lion will lay down with the lamb, a little child will lead them, where we shall beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks.**” Advent is John the Baptizer shouting: “**The reign of God is coming!**”

It is wrong to jump past Advent straight to Christmas. We all know how the story ends, but we don’t really get there with newness of hearts, eyes and ears without passing through Advent.

Advent is pretty much the only time in the Christian year when we consistently highlight the Gospel’s most prominent theme of God’s special concern for the poor and oppressed. About the only time where consistently:



“Christians remember the Hebrew prophets and long for a Jewish Messiah to be born. The Sunday readings extol social and economic justice, and ... [the H]ymns anticipate world peace and universal harmony.”²

As has rightly pointed out in *Sojourners*:

"The Christmas story has been hijacked by a dominant culture. Places of power and positions of prestige have warped the comeuppance sensibilities of the original Christmas story. God’s vision of liberating the oppressed, the downtrodden, has been slowly replaced year after year with a story that no longer brings fear to the Powers that Be, but rather supports the big business agendas of profit and mass consumerism.”³



The world has all the trappings, but none of the meaning of Christmas: there is in the world a marked longing for the ultimate, for God ~ but a longing drowned in disorientation, disappointment and emptiness. The secular festival of Christmas is a celebration shorn of the Christ-child and while longing for God, it misses completely God’s hope for the earth.

We are each in our own way desperate to see the real Christmas beyond all the kitsch. There are so many cultural accretions that the celebration of the birth of Jesus can be obscured even to us.



Are you ready for Christmas? Not what Christmas has become, the festival of year-end madness, not the Christmas of Father Christmas and trees, decorations and cards, not the Christmas of facile “Merry Christmases” at the big box store,

not the Christmas of year-end busyness, but the Christmas of Mary, the mother of Jesus singing:

“He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from *their* seats, and exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things; but the rich he hath sent empty away.”⁴



That is what we're talking about!

Ask again, who is ready for the real Christmas? Who can pick through all the detritus and distractions? Who can see through all the worldly accretions and distortions and discern even through them the story of Jesus, born in humble surroundings, the savior of all humankind, to bring justice and peace and safety and salvation?

Who is ready for the real Christmas?



Paul Simon comes as close to getting it right as anyone by contrasting the spiritual side with the secular. In his song *"Getting Ready for Christmas Day,"* Simon contrasts the rush and tumble and jumble around Christmas ~ money matters, war, death, disappointment ~ he contrasts all that with the real meaning.

Cutting past all the glitz and commercialism, the final verse begins:

"If I could tell my Mom and Dad that the things we never had
Never mattered we were always okay"

Then the refrain at each verse draws us back:

"Getting ready; O we're getting ready;
For the power and the glory and the story of the Christmas day."

Are we ready for Christmas? At Christmas we're stalked by a mad rush of worldly distractions. Don't let Christmas be hijacked.

Yet, all the things of this world pale in comparison. Don't fall into the usual secular syndrome and the inevitable post-holiday depression. Christmas doesn't have to be perfectly gifted, decorated and coiffured ~ those things are all



right as far as they go. Christmas just needs to include Adonai's great story of what God has accomplished for each of us in the coming into the world of the Chosen One in Bethlehem so long ago.



¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/diana-butler-bass/fox-news-war-on-advent_b_2279277.html?utm_hp_ref=fb&src=sp&comm_ref=false

² *Ibid*

³ Mark Sandlin, <http://sojo.net/blogs/2012/11/30/war-christmas-sign-minister>

⁴ Luke 1:51-53, **KJV**