

# The Christmas Rush

*Are there blessings hidden amid the tinsel, the sales and the madness at the mall?*



**Does it bother** you at Christmastime when carols are being played in shopping malls to the accompaniment of ringing cash registers? Does it upset you when the symbols of Christmas such as the Bethlehem star and the manger scene are used to sell merchandise and cards and decorations?

There's no doubt, the commercialization of Christmas *has* been overdone. It would be nice if Christmas tinsel wouldn't appear until at least after Thanksgiving. Nevertheless, I suggest we cool it on the complaining.

It's unfair to put down people who make their living in merchandising just because they like to do a brisk business at Christmastime, and because they use the Christmas symbols and themes to help them do it. Like it or not, we are a "nation of shopkeepers"—we believe in and depend upon free business, which is a lot better than depending upon the government to feed us and tell us what to do.

When stores have a good Christmas season, we should be glad. Good sales means prosperity for the owners and the employees. I spent years in the business world before going into the ministry, and I remember how nice it was to have a Christmas season with some extra money to spend.

But a far more vital reason beckons us not to complain about the commercialization: Christmas songs and symbols are fast being removed from the public schools and municipal, state and federal properties. Suddenly the right to display nativity scenes and other biblical figures is being challenged. Shopping malls and department stores are rapidly becoming the

only public places left where it's legal to sing songs about Jesus or display Christian symbols.

"O Little Town of Bethlehem" may seem like strange accompaniment to the elbowing crowds around the sales counters, but that crowd may not hear such words anywhere else:

"O Holy Child of Bethlehem / Descend on us we pray / Cast out our sin and enter in / Be born in us today."

Words like these may have an effect on the people hearing them, even if they are not paying much attention. God is not proud; He is not offended when His name is sung among Christmas shoppers.

Jesus was not too proud to come and live among us as one of us. When He was on earth He didn't spend His time in a royal palace or with the priests in the temple. He often didn't have a house to sleep in. He kept company with ordinary people, like you and me and other Christmas shoppers. If that were not His way of doing things there wouldn't be a Christmas, because Christmas means the Father sent His Son, the beloved, to come and find us.

Christmas scenes, Christmas symbols, Christmas cards—they all are openings for talking about Jesus. Use the opportunity that the music and the decorations give; look for a chance to tell a shopper what the words in the carols really mean. While waiting in a long checkout line, you may say, "This time of year has taken on special meaning since I discovered how important Christ's birth was to me." Conversation like this may lead to praying with someone for salvation.

Think about this at Christmastime, amid the rush. Don't get uptight. Keep a pleasant look on your face and a song in your heart. Pray for the people around you. Pray that the holy words they are hearing will penetrate their hearts so that they, too, will come to know Jesus.

The real problem with Christmastime is that most people do not know what the holiday is all about. If the crowds knew the Lord who came at Christmas, shopping might become a jolly experience rather than a drag.

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