

Obama Shares Christmas Story at Nat'l Tree Lighting Ceremony

President Barack Obama spoke about the nativity story in a public address during the ceremonial lighting of the National Christmas Tree in Washington, D.C., on Thursday.

The speech that referenced his Christian faith came just one week after many in the Christian community were disappointed that the president declined to mention God or religion in his Thanksgiving speech.

"Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!" Obama said as he began his address at the ceremony, an 89-year-old American tradition. "Tonight, once again, we gather here not simply to light some decorations, but to honor a story that lights the world.

"More than 2,000 years ago, a child was born to two faithful travelers who could find rest only in a stable, among the cattle and the sheep," he said. "Christ's birth made the angels rejoice and attracted shepherds and kings from afar. He was a manifestation of God's love for us."

Obama continued: "And He grew up to become a leader with a servant's heart who taught us a message as simple as it is powerful: that we should love God, and love our neighbor as ourselves."

The president said the teaching that has endured for generations "lies at the heart of my Christian faith and that of millions of Americans. No matter who we are, or where we come from, or how we worship, it's a message that can unite all of us on this holiday season."

He also emphasized the importance of keeping in mind "the

central message of this season” and holding Christ’s words “not only in our thoughts, but also in our deeds.”

The National 
Christmas Tree is
illuminated during the
lighting ceremony on
the Ellipse in
Washington D.C.,
Thursday. (Official
White House Photo by
Lawrence Jackson)

The president—who was accompanied by his two daughters, Sasha and Malia, first lady Michelle Obama and his mother-in-law, Marian Robinson—encouraged the nation to help and give to the needy.

“In this season of hope, let’s help those who need it most—the homeless, the hungry, the sick and shut in,” he said. “In this season of plenty, let’s reach out to those who struggle to find work or provide for their families.

“In this season of generosity, let’s give thanks and honor to our troops and our veterans, and their families who’ve sacrificed so much for us. And let’s welcome all those who are happily coming home.”

Earlier this year a snowstorm knocked down the previous tree, which was there for more than 30 years, explained the president. Its replacement is a 26-foot-tall Colorado blue spruce. The tree-lighting ceremony tradition was started in 1923 by Calvin Coolidge.

Television host Carson Daly hosted this year’s ceremony, which featured artists OneRepublic, Big Time Rush, Ellie Goulding and country singer Rodney Atkins. Santa Claus and Kermit the Frog also made brief appearances.