

How You Can Avoid Allowing the Familiar To Steal Your Christmas

“... having their understanding darkened, excluded from the life of God through the ignorance that is within them, due to the hardness of their hearts” (Eph. 4:18).

You’ve likely celebrated Christmas most of your life. More than likely, you’ve heard the Christmas story before too. You know all about Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus. You’ve heard about the shepherds and the wise men. You’ve sung songs about them. You’ve watched them in Christmas plays.

It’s familiar.

It may not inspire or amaze you anymore.

You’re not alone, though. During the very first Christmas, there was a group of people who missed the birth of Jesus because of familiarity—the religious leaders in Jerusalem.

You’ll notice in the Christmas story that when the Son of God was born, not a single religious person was invited. The people who should have known the most about the birth of Jesus, the spiritual and religious leaders of Israel, didn’t have a clue.

Wise men who had studied the Hebrew Scriptures came from the East (not Israel) because they had seen the star. They knew the Savior of the world had been born. They just didn’t know where He would be born.

When they asked King Herod of Israel, he didn’t have any idea. He asked his religious scholars. They knew exactly what he was talking about. They’d been waiting for this for hundreds of years. They had discussed it, debated it, detailed it and

dissected it.

The Bible says, *“And when (King Herod) had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where Christ should be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote’”* (Matt. 2:4-5).

The three wise men—foreign dignitaries—came a long distance, maybe as far away as China, to witness the birth of Jesus. The king was so concerned that he called a special meeting. Yet his religious advisers, who were already in Israel, didn’t want to even check out the claim. Israel’s religious leaders had waited for centuries for Jesus to come. Over time, they started paying more attention to traditions than waiting for the Messiah.

That sounds familiar, doesn’t it? We have so many Christmas traditions. They just keep adding up: Santa Claus, Rudolph, Frosty, and Elf on the Shelf. We have new tradition after new tradition, but no one is talking about *the real reason for the season*.

None of those traditions will make a real, lasting difference in your life. But a relationship with God will.

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day knew every religious tradition by heart, but they wouldn’t walk five miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to witness the birth of God’s Son. People today will put up lights, have parties, give gifts and send out cards. They’ll participate in every single Christmas tradition they can squeeze into December.

Don’t be like the religious leaders who were more concerned with tradition. Follow the example of the wise men, and seek God this Christmas. It’s the reason we celebrate Christmas—God wants to connect with you!

Talk It Over

- What Christmas traditions tend to keep people from experiencing the true meaning of Christmas?
- How can you experience the Christmas story in a fresh new way this year?
- What are some ways you can break free of your usual holiday routine so you can more fully experience Jesus throughout the season? {eo}

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