

Joy to the World—Except During an Election Season?

On the first Christmas, the shepherds in Bethlehem learned that Jesus' birth was a cause for celebration. The angel said in Luke 2:10: "For I bring you good news of great joy, which will be to all people." It's too bad Christmas cheer is in low supply these days. I don't know if it's due to the mudslinging in this presidential campaign or the warmer-than-usual December, but people in general are angrier, more fearful and more negative than I can ever remember.

Christians should be the happiest people this time of year. But if Facebook posts are any indication of the national mood, folks aren't just mad—they're outraged. And others are so spooked by blood moons, Obama conspiracy theories and Muslim terrorists that they are ready to head for the hills to hide. It's as if the Grinch really did steal Christmas.

Personally I believe we have a lot to rejoice about during this holiday. If you only listen to *Fox News* or *CNN*, the world is a gloomy place—with plane crashes, terrorist attacks and bickering politicians. But I don't let today's alarming headlines steal my peace. I don't let angry opinions steal my love. And I don't let grumpy people steal my joy.

Here are 10 positive trends I'm celebrating this Christmas:

1. Muslims are coming to Christ faster than ever. David Garrison, author of the new book *A Wind in the House of Islam*, says something unprecedented is stirring in the Muslim world. "We are living in the midst of the greatest turning of Muslims to Christ in history," he writes—citing evidence that dozens of powerful Christian movements have started among Muslims since the year 2000.

2. The gospel is transforming China. The British newspaper *The*

Telegraph reported two years ago that Christianity is growing so fast in China that it will most likely be considered a Christian nation by 2030, when its Christian population will exceed that of the United States, Mexico and Brazil. Given China's economic power in the world, this has huge implications for our future.

3. The United States is in a church-planting boom. There has been lots of handwringing about the decline of mainline churches in America. But church growth expert Ed Stetzer says new churches are actually being planted in the United States faster than old ones are dying—and research shows that 60-80 percent of the people who join new churches are from unchurched backgrounds. That means more people are being reached with the gospel today than when dead religious churches talked and sang about evangelism but never did it.

4. Latin America is experiencing a political and spiritual awakening. Recent elections in Venezuela were one more indication that leftist governments are losing power in Latin America. Today two-thirds of Venezuela's parliament members oppose leftist President Nicolas Maduro. Similar movements against socialism and corruption are occurring in Argentina, Brazil and other Latin countries—at a time when evangelical churches are growing at unprecedented rates.

5. Spiritual hunger is rising in our nation. I'm not denying that segments of our culture have grown hostile to Christian faith. But the popularity of faith-based films such as *War Room* caught Hollywood by surprise this year. Meanwhile popular Bible teachers such as Joyce Meyer, Andy Stanley and T.D. Jakes get as much traction on Twitter and other social media than secular celebrities such as Katy Perry or Lady Gaga. And the amount of Christian content on YouTube, Periscope or other digital media today is staggering.

6. Global violence is actually decreasing. Because we have easy access to news, and we hear about mass shootings or

terrorist attacks as soon as they occur, Americans think the world is more dangerous than ever. That's actually not true. If you compare violent deaths from wars, genocide and crime over the centuries, the numbers have never been lower than today—even with 21st-century terrorists on the loose.

7. There are fewer dictators in the world. The number of authoritarian countries has actually dropped from a high of almost 90 in 1976 to about 25 now. Democracy is growing—and it's likely that authoritarian nations in the Middle East (such as Iran) will see drastic political changes in our lifetime.

8. The Bible is still the most popular book ever. The Bible ranks at the top of all favorite book lists among Americans. And according to the *Guinness Book of World Records*, it is also the best-selling and most widely distributed book in the world. Nearly 4 billion copies of the Bible were printed and sold globally in the last five decades—far exceeding any other book.

9. We can still celebrate Christmas. Don't worry about Starbucks' decision to take a generic holiday message off their coffee cups. Instead of complaining about the war on Christmas, let's be more proactive about telling people why Jesus was born. Nobody is stopping us from doing that.

10. Jesus is still on the throne. The last book of the Bible reminds me that when it's time for Jesus to come back, He will return victorious. All His enemies will bow down and acknowledge His lordship. Jesus is not worried about ISIS, Hillary Clinton, gay marriage, illegal immigrants, Obamacare or the war on Christmas.

Don't let the evening news steal your joy. Christ is born. We have something to celebrate.{eoa}