

Liberating Secrets to Make Every Facet of Christmas Point to Jesus

Now that I'm retired I have had a little time to catch some of the "Christmas" specials and movies. The theme is always the same: someone needs love and is facing a sad Christmas or has decided not to celebrate Christmas because of some disappointment or loss they experienced, and the season is filled with pain and bad memories. Then a "miracle" happens and they meet their soul mate or someone that brings love into their lives, they are filled with joy and discover the "true meaning" of Christmas. However, Christ is rarely mentioned and the only spirit they experience is in the clinking glass of bubbly. It's all about love, family and friends, but where is Christ? Since God is love, we can only truly find unconditional love, real joy and perpetual peace in Him. He is what Christmas is about.

Some see the secularization of Christmas as an offshoot of its pagan origins when Christians merged the celebration of Jesus' birth with pagan practices and the winter solstice. As a result, and as a matter of conscience, they won't celebrate it at all.

What's a Christian to do? We're surrounded by the sights, smells and sounds of the season. Are we to be like Scrooge, "Bah, Humbug?" Are we to teach our children that the season is really of the devil? Let's face it, we can't escape the holiday season with its bombardment of music, decorations, lights, wonderful smells and get-togethers. And neither can the world.

When I was a child I was so excited at this time of year! I could hardly wait to see what surprise Santa had left for me.

I associated all the fun of Christmas with the jolly round man in the red suit. This myth was much more enticing than the real Christmas story, with its drab colors and gruesome details about Herod sending Roman soldiers to murder babies because he wanted to kill Jesus.

Years later, as a teacher in a Christian school, I pondered my childhood memories and wondered how I could relay the wonder, joy and beauty of Christ to the children. I wanted them to experience the Father's indescribable love toward them. I wanted them to know that Jesus is the reason for the season and we celebrate because He came to give Himself for us. We give gifts because the Father gave us His greatest gift, His Son, for our redemption. Far from being drab, it was the greatest announcement ever! (see Luke 2)

However, I also knew that I could not keep my students from being influenced by the culture, decorating trees and visiting Santa at the mall, so I asked the Lord how I could help them learn to focus on Him in spite of the worldly emphasis.

In response, Holy Spirit began to show me how to use the very things that sometimes turn people away from Him as a means of pointing them to Him. As we decorated the classroom He gave me insight about Jesus related to every item we used.

"Children," I said. "Everything about Christmas points to Jesus." Then I shared what God had shown me.

I told them that the word "Christmas" means a celebration of Christ. He's the greatest gift! A Christmas tree is shaped like a triangle with its top pointing toward heaven—where Jesus came from and where we will go someday to be with Him. The tree's shape also speaks of the Trinity—Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

The lights on trees and in neighborhoods speak of Jesus being the Light of the world. The candles remind us to be a light to others just as He is the Light.

The round shapes of the ornaments and wreaths remind us that God is eternal, with no beginning and no end. The holly wreaths with their prickly leaves are reminiscent of the crown of thorns once placed on Jesus' head.

The colors of Christmas are red (the blood of Jesus) and green (everlasting life). Gold reminds us of His majesty and that the streets in heaven are paved with gold. The glistening snow, pure and white, is a symbol that "though [our] sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Is. 1:18, NKJV).

The angels are as real today as they were on that first Christmas when they visited the shepherds. Christmas carols enable us to join the choirs of heaven in adoration of Him who is worthy to be praised. Candy canes look like shepherds' staffs and remind us that He is the good shepherd who gave His life for the sheep. The dove stands not only for peace, which God extended to the earth through the sacrifice of His Son, but also for the Holy Spirit who is our friend, counselor and teacher.

When we taste appetizing holiday foods, we can rejoice in the goodness of the Lord: "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good" (Is. 34:8). When we smell sweet fragrances, we can reflect on the wonderful aroma of His presence—and the fragrance of Christ that we as believers carry in the world (2 Cor. 2:14-15).

Yes, we can see the secularism—even paganism—in this season. We can shun it and say, "Bah, Humbug." Or we can choose to turn the symbols of the world around and see in them a reflection of the glory of our God. As my students and I learned, looking at them as an expression of His goodness helps to make the season a truly wonderful celebration—not of Santa and gifts, but of Him whose name is truly called "Wonderful" (Is. 9:6).

Prayer Power for the Week of Dec. 10, 2017

This week thank the Lord for sending His Son, Jesus, to reveal the Father and provide forgiveness, peace and reconciliation. Pray that hearts will be opened to receive God's love and the provision He has made through Christ for the whole world. Continue to pray for worldwide revival beginning with our own nation. Ask for sound counsel, protection and wisdom for our president and those serving with him. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, our military and their families, and those suffering tremendous losses. Ask God to make you a blessing this season (John 3:16; Is. 9:6).