

# This Christmas Is Different

Our recycle bin overflowed for weeks with an endless flood of Christmas catalogs. The sheer volume amazed me. Evidently the previous homeowner was on every imaginable mailing list in America!

The catalog mountain was a reminder that the marketing of the American version of Christmas was in full swing. Apparently, manufacturers hoped to capture an even bigger share of Christmas buying than they had in previous years. Normally, I would have joined those thumbing through the pages, but my perspective on the Christmas season changed after September 11.

After that day, the catalogs continued to arrive in record numbers, but I no longer cared. I found them meaningless and intrusive. Who could think about the latest fashion, expensive jewelry, educational game or fancy doll? Thousands of innocent people had been murdered.

At first, I just tossed the meaningless mail in the trash. But later, emotionally exhausted by the news reports and looking for relief, I aimlessly flipped through a few catalogs. Maybe, I thought, I should pay attention to what the retailing of Christmas looked like before our lives were so dramatically interrupted that September morning. Maybe I will notice something.

So every day, I looked. There were pages devoted to Santa Claus, snowmen, angels, tree decorations, candies packed in beautiful boxes and unlimited toys—so much from which to choose. How many of the products were actually related to

Jesus? A few nativity items.

Traditionally, Americans spend millions of dollars on seasonal “stuff.” And a common response among my therapy clients to all the shopping and entertainment is holiday exhaustion and credit card excess. Multiple sighs of relief can be heard when the buying season ends.

Sadly, we have all been obsessed with the unimportant. The “Christ” in Christmas has been hidden under the marketing madness. And most of us have been too busy buying, pulling out boxes of decorations, scheduling parties and hosting friends to notice. This year I had to repent—and determine things would be different.

Oh, I still decorated the tree, wrapped the gifts and will cook the turkey dinner. We will still go to our Christmas Eve church service. But when our family reads the account of our Savior’s birth, the conditions surrounding that event will take on new meaning.

Why? Because Christ’s birth is a story of hope relevant for today.

Think about the modern-day parallels. God chose to send His Son in a time of political unrest. Herod the Great, ruling king of the Jews, had a reputation for terrible violence. After hearing reports of a potential threat to his kingdom, he invoked Roman rule and ordered a state-sponsored act of terrorism—an edict for all male children under age 2 to be killed.

His plan? Eradicate the political threat of a baby

Messiah—innocents included.

But in the middle of such evil, the Magi, the original reporters of Jesus' birth, were warned in a dream not to return to Herod to tell him where Jesus was. And Joseph was warned in a dream to flee to Egypt with his wife and infant son. In the middle of the terror and mayhem, God spoke, and the baby was miraculously protected.

God's plan will not be thwarted by any evildoer of the day.

Comforted by this reflection, I look away from the tree and the cute little snowman declaring, "Let it snow," and my eyes become riveted to the olive-wood nativity set purchased in the town of Christ's birth. My heart is calmed, and I am filled with gratitude.

God was willing to send His Son into such turmoil for us. Jesus left His place of comfort and began and ended His time on earth at the hands of violent men. Far from the seat of Roman power, a Savior was born in a lowly manger. The powerful forces of evil unleashed in an act of terrorism could not prevail.

When the mail-order catalogs kept coming, I had hope—not because America was getting back to "normal" but because a child was born more than 2,000 years ago. Jesus' birth was the beginning of His plan to once and for all defeat evil. What hope for the future! Now, that I can celebrate.

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