

Christ in Christmas

As the well-known song puts it, "It's the most wonderful time of the year!" I believe the lyrics of the song miss what is wonderful about it, yet I totally agree with the opening line. It is wonderful because of the One whose coming we celebrate. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Yes, many of the traditional trappings of the season are pretty wonderful as well. The sounds, sights and the smells of these weeks before Christmas touch our hearts and for many of us evoke memories of joyful times. Enjoy it all!

I confess that I find it embarrassing that each year about this time in some quarters there are people who begin complaining about a "war on Christmas." They seem to look around for reasons to be offended. Someone somewhere is not giving Christmas the cultural place of honor they believe it is due. A crèche is not being allowed on some public square or cashiers in certain stores are saying "Seasons Greetings" instead of "Merry Christmas" or expressly religious Christmas songs are not being sung in public schools. So some Christians who have a sense of religious entitlement get resentful. The attitude is ugly and does nothing to honor Christ.

What deeply matters about Christmas is not what the broader society does or doesn't do with it. It is not our job to impose our Christmas expectations on others and insist that they "keep Christ in Christmas." Yes, "Jesus is the reason for the season." That's true for us who follow Him. But not for everyone else. And it is pointless to be incensed. While I believe many are missing the richest meaning of Christmas, there is nothing positive in ruining the experience of those who enjoy the colored lights, the gifts, special foods and songs like "Jingle Bells" but fail to "keep Christ in Christmas."

But those of us who call Jesus Lord need to do our best to keep our attention on the wondrous story of the coming of Jesus. His birth is worth celebrating. Though born into a humble household in a humiliated, occupied nation and never holding any official position of honor, the impact of the coming of Jesus is astonishing. His presence on the earth changed the course of history. All the popular external sights and sounds of the season are secondary. For Christians Jesus is not just "the reason for the season," he is the reason for our very being.

In the coming weeks our consumer society will inevitably distract us from the real meaning of Christmas no matter how many times we hear -or don't hear- "Merry Christmas" at a store checkout counter. It will take effort to maintain our proper focus in the midst of the shopping and the cooking and the decorating and the greeting card writing and the rest of it. This is one of the reasons attending church is so important. We can't -and shouldn't- expect the world around us to keep Jesus at the center of the season. But you can count on the church to do so. If you are truly interested in "keeping Christ in Christmas," I hope you'll plan on being in worship each week.