

The Gospel According to St. Nicholas

Will The Real Kris Kringle please Stand Up?

One of the most unfortunate aspects of modern society is that the most openly Christian holiday on the calendar, Christmas, is rapidly becoming the most secular holiday on the calendar. Media references to the birth of Jesus Christ are seen as a quaint feature of small town radio stations and rural newspapers. An article on the Christian nature of Christmas is much more likely to appear in a small town weekly than in the New York Times. The American Civil Liberties Union and other secular 'progressives' have taken it upon themselves to remove all reference to Christmas in the public square as an unconstitutional blend of Church and State (1); nativity scenes at public schools, post offices and other government facilities are grounds for legal action. The classic hymns of the faith, whether the beautiful "Silent Night", the bombastic "We Three Kings", the melancholy "O Come Emmanuel", or the ethereal "O Holy Night", as part of school Christmas programs are little more than a fond memory for most people. Public school Christmas programs have become "Holiday Festivals" or the even more bland "Winter Festivals". Christian radio stations feel the need to emphasize that they play *Christian* Christmas music. Heroic efforts by some in the conservative community notwithstanding, even the Christmas greeting is a victim of this secularizing trend. While the traditional "Merry Christmas" is still occasionally seen, it has been nearly completely replaced by "Season's Greetings" and the more modern "Happy Holidays".

The actual method of celebrating Christmas has changed, as well. Instead of Christmas cantatas and worship services to honor the God Who came and made His tabernacle with men, Christmas is primarily a holiday for children and families. Newspapers burst with glossy advertisements for the latest gadgets, and retailers anxiously await the "holiday season." Few if any retail stores actually turn a profit before the last month of the year, and during that last hectic month shopping malls can become scenes of deplorable violence as customers fight over limited supplies of the toy of the season. Mary, Joseph, and the Baby Jesus have been supplanted by Rudolph the Red-Nosed

Reindeer, Frosty the Snowman, and Santa Claus. Such things should not be.

Christmas is much more than a day or two off from work to sit at home, eat large meals, and watch movies and sporting events on television. It is more than heavy traffic, extended hours for retail businesses and free toys for "good little girls and boys." Rather, the term "Christmas" is a compound word. "Christ" is from the Greek *Christos*, literally "the Anointed One" and His Anointing. *Mass* is an old word for celebration. Christmas (or Christ-Mass) is a celebration of Jesus Christ the Anointed One and His burden removing, yoke destroying Anointing (Isaiah 10:27). It is a remembrance of the greatest Sovereign Miracle in the History of the Universe. The Holy Ghost overshadowed the Virgin Mary and she conceived a Child (Isaiah 7:14). Israel's Blood Covenant Jehovah became their Emmanuel, their God With Them (2).

Given the current world situation with various nations' service members deployed fighting Al-Quaida and the threat of global terrorism, it seems proper to comment on the shepherds keeping watch in their fields in Luke's narrative of the Nativity. The very first words out of the angel's mouth were "...Fear not..." (Luke 2:10), and this is God's message to man throughout History. Jesus Himself tells people this seven times in the New Testament, and it is also used numerous other times in Scripture. Each time, the phrase "Fear Not" always precedes a miracle or some other form of divine deliverance.

The angels further said, "On earth peace, goodwill toward men." (Luke 2:14, KJV) and the word order in the King James version is VERY significant. There is a modern tendency to depict Christmas as a holiday of world peace, and while there is some truth to that, the idea expressed by the angels is more accurately rendered "Good will toward the earth, peace between God and man." While Jesus still had roughly 33 years before He became our Peace through His death and Resurrection, (Ephesians 2:14-15, Colossians 1:20-see note 3 below), the angels were declaring God's victory over the devil in advance. To redeem his fallen first Adam, Jehovah BECAME the last Adam! By voluntarily coming to earth in human flesh, the Son of God became a son of man so the sons of men could become Sons of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). In the days of the Old Testament priesthood, the High Priest had to enter the Holy of Holies and make an atonement, or covering, for sin once a year. Jesus, by His own Blood, put sin away forever (Hebrews 9:24-26). In those days, the

Presence of God resided in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. We sing songs about God dwelling in the midst of us, and how God inhabits the praises of His people, but God no longer dwells IN THE MIDST OF His people. He now lives IN His people (1 Corinthians 3:16).

In light of this wonderful truth, it is important that we keep our holiday observances in proper perspective. More specifically, I am referring to more secondary Christmas symbols, such as Santa Claus. Should children in Christian families believe in Santa Claus? The answer to this question would be a qualified "yes". For Christian parents, intentionally misleading children to believe that a man in a red suit brings gifts to children all over the world over the course of one night presents some serious integrity issues (Psalms 15:2, Ephesians 4:29, Colossians 3:9; James 5:12). There are certainly more Christ-centered, as well as honest, ways to celebrate Christmas. However, this should not be taken as a rejection of the beautiful symbolism behind the Santa Claus myth, especially considering the fact that it is based on a real person.

The pop culture Santa Claus legend has its origin in Saint Nicholas, a priest that served as Bishop of Myra in the 3rd Century. He had a ministry of the miraculous, was known for secret gift-giving and aid to the poor, and was a staunch defender of children. Over the centuries, stories of St. Nicholas spread; by the 4th or 5th Centuries, anonymous gifts to the poor were considered to be "from St. Nicholas." Patron saint of sailors and pawnbrokers in the Catholic tradition, this generous man of God eventually became known as Santa Claus who, riding in a sleigh borne by eight tiny reindeer, brings toys and gifts to children all over the world (4).

There are parallels between St. Nicholas and Tennessee's own David Crockett. A prolific hunter and passionate foe of Andrew Jackson, Congressman Crockett generally wore fashionable clothes and only went to Texas due to defeat in the Congressional election. As time passed and stories of his exploits spread, he eventually became Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier, a fearless defender of the oppressed who invariably dressed in fringed buckskin hunting shirts and a coonskin cap and went to Texas to defend freedom. Just as Congressman David Crockett of Tennessee's Ninth District became the legendary Davy Crockett, so St. Nicholas became the legendary Santa Claus.

How children see their parents is to a good degree how they will see God. The Bible teaches that wisdom is justified of her children (Luke 7:35); that is, you

can tell how wise a thing is by the results it produces. We are familiar with a family whose (now teenaged) children are not currently serving God and cite the main reason for this as the parents' use of holiday icons such as Santa and the Easter Bunny. After all, if their parents mislead them in these areas, why should they believe what they say about God? We are familiar with another family where the children understand Santa is "pretend", and these children anxiously and joyously look forward to church. While any of the standard holiday icons may seem harmless on their own, Christian parents are commanded to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4) and for us to intentionally misrepresent anything to our children is to misrepresent God, Who in the Person of Jesus said He is the Truth (John 14:6).

The Apostle Paul tells us that all things are lawful, but not all things are expedient (1 Corinthians 6:12). Nonetheless, there are prudent ways to make use of these things to help Christian parents train their children in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6). St. Nicholas was, by all indications, a Godly, compassionate Christian whose life can teach us many wonderful lessons. If he were with us today, he would no doubt exhort us to direct our attention, not to him, but to the Jesus he so passionately served. If you do not have a relationship with this Jesus, there is no time like the present to start (5)!

In conclusion, we here at James and Dave's Bible Page want to take a moment to wish you and yours a Christ-centered, very Merry Christmas, and the happiest, healthiest, and most prosperous of all the New Years you have yet lived (Ephesians 3:20)! Remember the true Reason for the Season:

God is exalted,

The devil is defeated,

and Jesus (that Baby in the Manger) Is Lord!

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NOTES & BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1- See **The Separation of Church and State** by David Barton;
<http://www.wallbuilders.com/resources/search/detail.php?ResourceID=9>

2- For a detailed look at the Christmas story, see our previous article
Bethlehem's Treasure: A Christmas Meditation <http://www.james-dave.com/bethlehem.html>

3- See our articles **The Cross: Violent Grace**, <http://www.james-dave.com/violentgrace.html>, and **Resurrection Realities: The Miracle of Easter** , <http://www.james-dave.com/easter.html>

4- For more on this, see Jack Hayford's excellent article, **Santa, Saved and Sanctified**, <http://www.livingway.org/library/Articles/SANTA.html>

5- If you need more information on a relationship with Jesus, see <http://www.james-dave.com/born.html> If you would like to talk to someone one-on-one about your decision, call toll free 1-888-NEED-HIM (633-3446).

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