

Merry Christmas!

What image is in your head when you think of Christmas? Let's see . . . let me guess.

Families coming together for a day of eating, football, and fun stuff. At Thanksgiving, we had your parents over. For Christmas, it's my parents. And then the aunts and uncles and step-relatives and half relatives and all the kids from multiple relationships. . . and pretty soon you're up to 40 or 50 people.

Then there are the presents everyone is expecting, and you yourself look forward to. Wow, that special morning when you surprise the kids with the wrapped mysteries under the tree, soon to become colorful pa-



per strewn everywhere, a big but fun mess.

Do you bake a ton of goodies for this and that event, and plan the meal and prepare for your part in it? Are you exhausted just thinking about it?

Maybe you go to church, where there's a bigger crowd that Sunday, due to the Christmas/Easter crowd. And this year, Christmas Eve is on Sunday night, so those who go on Sunday evenings get a two for one break!

I remember loving the season and the anticipation of that big day when I got (or didn't get) what I was hoping for. At school, before God, prayer, and the Bible were eliminated, we put on a Christmas program, with all of the music groups performing wonderful Christmas music, not the trashy mindless stuff on our PA system at the store. (Sorry, I don't like it and I remove my hearing aids when I can so I don't have to hear it!) We started the program with a candlelight procession down the aisles of the large auditorium (it was a large high school), singing "O Come, All Ye Faithful" as we walked.

After each of the music groups performed, all of us would come to the stage together and sing "Glory to God", "For unto Us a Child Is Born", and the "Hallelujah Chorus", from "Messiah" by George Frideric Handel. How many lawsuits would be filed if we were to do that today? Yet it was a highlight of my high school years and a wonderful, warm memory that has lasted all this time.

We have been robbed of so much color and depth and spirit in our American lives over the past few decades, and we've let it happen. It seems that many, if not most, of the institutions that taught us kids morality and good behavior, consideration for others, self-discipline, and skills for living, have been compromised or destroyed. Boy

Scouts and Girl Scouts, Campfire Girls (do you even remember them?); healthy activities; great television shows with foundations of principle, strength of character, unashamed heroes and heroines; teaching us right and wrong, good and evil, with the good guy winning.

Back to Christmas and away from nostalgia that paints an unrealistically rosy picture of our past. Israel has its high holy days in the fall and winter, including days of repentance (Yom Kippur), celebration of the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah), and Hanukkah, an interesting celebration with a riveting history. Likewise, we in "western culture" have our "high holy days" at about the same time. It begins with Halloween, our celebration of evil spirits (really, that's what it boils down to!); then, Thanksgiving, which is founded upon a feast shared by Pilgrims and the local Indians after surviving a terrible winter and enjoying a great harvest in the New World.

We barely call it "Thanksgiving" anymore. Instead we substitute "Turkey Day" and flip-pantly remark about the overeating we did. Isn't it about time we honor our God and Father who has showered so much abundance on this nation and all of us in it?

Finally, of course, there is Christmas and our New Year of Jan. 1, separated by a week. A week to have fun, fun, fun, amid all of the running around to buy, cook, and bake stuff. A week for nervous breakdown and mega-stress. A week when some try to remember "Jesus is the reason for the season" (I'm sorry, but I really, really, really dislike that phrase!) as we totally forget it in the running around. Nowadays, we are made to feel guilty for calling it Christmas, since it contains the dreaded word "Christ" in it! Oh, no! Someone over here is triggered! Someone else over there is offended! Aaugh! Cancel me for even thinking it!

Maybe it's time to face the truth about Christmas: all the warm and fuzzy feelings, and the stories of the sweet little baby lying in a manger, and the decorations and the music are fun and maybe inspiring, but they are not what Jesus' coming signifies. We rarely look past our funsy traditions and dig out the deeper things of God at this time of year. Should it not be a time when we reflect on the only gift that matters, the gift God is offering to you and me? Should we not fall on our knees before Him in humble repentance, gratefulness, and recommitment?

This year especially, we celebrate our Christmas season to the background "music" of terrible wars in many places, not the least of which is Israel and the Gaza

Strip and Ukraine, causing terrible human suffering. We should be appalled at what is happening to people and remember them to God in prayer.

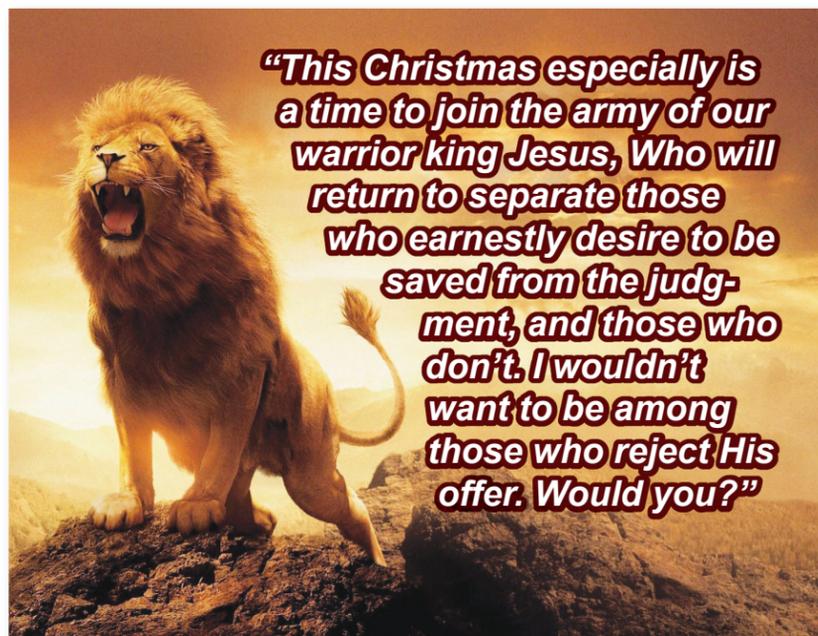
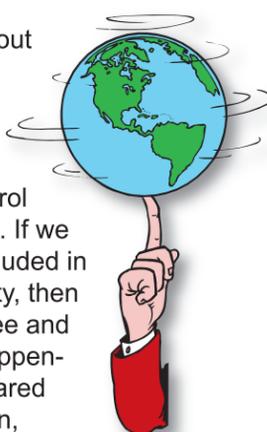
What IS going on in the world? Why does everything seem to be spinning out of control? Why does God allow such things as these awful wars to happen? (My opinion: He doesn't "allow" it. He knows the hearts of us corrupt humans and knows what evil we create, and certainly knows what's coming.)

As to why the world seems to be spinning out of control, there is no "seems to be" about it. It IS spinning out of control, or it's spinning right into the control of God's enemy Satan. If we have chosen to be included in God's family for eternity, then He gives us eyes to see and understand what is happening. Thus we are prepared when things do happen, since we've been warned, and we are not surprised and dismayed.

What does this have to do with Christmas? Everything! The true Christmas is the story of God reaching out to us by taking on the body of a human, coming to earth, and providing a way for us to reconcile with Him. The cute little baby in the manger story is really a diversion from what matters. And guess who is the chief liar-deceiver behind the diversion? You got it! Satan, God's enemy.

This time of wars, violence, murders, and atrocities signifies that our time on this earth, and Satan's time in control of it, are coming to an end. God's judgment on each one of us, and on Satan, draws near.

This Christmas especially is a time to join the army of our warrior king Jesus,



Who will return to separate those who earnestly desire to be saved from the judgment, and those who don't. I wouldn't want to be among those who reject His offer. Would you?

So I say again, MERRY CHRISTMAS! That is, if you choose to let it be Merry!

Linda Gimmel



On The Lighter Side . . . from the Web

