

Why I celebrate

Read Luke 2:8-20

I know I speak for countless others, when I say that Christmas is my favorite time of year. The Christmas lights and trees, the trimmings, presents and decorations, the concerts and parties, the hustling and bustling and last minute shopping – I love it all! I love the sights and sounds and tantalizing aroma of baked goodies mixed with the smell of freshly cut Christmas trees. I love the special foods and drinks, the unhurried visits with family and friends, the local festivities, the special church services, the Christmas carols and jolly music, the smiles and cheers and good wishes that come even from strangers. But more than anything else, the real reason I love to celebrate Christmas can be found in the story of Christmas.

It's sad that Christmas for many is lost in all the commercialism. What should be the most joyous time of year becomes instead the symbol of debt, anxiety, stress, exhaustion, headache and emptiness, as people focus on materialism, overspending and all the wrong things. That's why it can't hurt for us to each take a journey back to that first Christmas when angels announced Christ's birth to the poor humble shepherds. Later they found the Christ child in a lowly stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. The King of all kings had deliberately and carefully chosen to stoop down to the level of the lowliest of men on that very first Christmas day, just so that He could make salvation accessible to all.

It doesn't matter to me that no one knows for sure the exact date of Jesus' birth, neither do I care that December 25 was centuries ago observed as a pagan feast day. What does matter to me is that on that first Christmas day, Jesus God's Son chose to experience a human, earthly birth just so He could make a way to save lost mankind from their sins. He's the author of joy, the light of the world, the lifter of the fallen, the giver of peace, the restorer of hope, the Savior of all who believe; and long after the fanfare dies out, the sounds fade and the dazzling lights grow dim, just knowing Him will still be reason enough to celebrate Christmas.

I've known Christmases in good times – times of abundance when there was plenty of everything to go around; I can also recall Christmases when things were tough and we had to content ourselves with what little we could afford. But times of lack do not have to lessen our celebration of Christmas. Through good times or bad, I've discovered that once we know the Christ of Christmas and have experienced the miracle of His birth in our hearts, we can rejoice and be glad, as we celebrate Christmas with a joy that comes not from the external things around us but from the reality that lives deep within us.