

CHRISTMAS: THE FIRST ADVENT



The Christmas season is here again. Each year that we celebrate Christmas (the First Advent), we are one year nearer to the day of the Second Advent. The First Advent and the Second Advent relate to each other according to God's purpose. As we ponder both, the eschatological realities must come into focus:

*“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; **and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.**” – Heb. 9:27-28*

Whenever people do any work of the present, they have the future achievement in their hope. Similarly, as we celebrate the Christmas of the present, about a Saviour born to the world, there is the “near future” to think about that gives us cause to celebrate – the ensuing momentous event of the Messiah being

offered on the Cross, for our sin to be taken away by our faith in Him. Then, there is the “farther future” of His second coming to deliver His faithfuls into eternal security.

This Christmas, as we gather in the church in worship with a celebratory mood, do we think beyond the present joy to embrace the hope of future achievement (the eternal security) for which we are dedicating our work of Christian service?

Celebrating the Truth

The world turns Christmas into a carnival of merriness sans Christ. It is not a puzzle why people who deny Christ also welcome Christmas. The unbelievers have their holiday reasons, temporal expectations or commercial motives to celebrate. Yet, the greatest puzzle is that there are also Christians who embrace a celebration without adequate regard to uphold the biblical Christmas message. (*Mt 1:18-25*)

It is people’s free will to celebrate what they wish with a great merry theme around the same time. They may want to celebrate ancient pre-Christian winter-solstice moments; some dated pagan religious occasions; any other prevailing religious or secular, public or social commemorative events; etc. However, whatever it be, it would be apposite for the celebrants to do so with clarity about what they are in fact celebrating. If they claim to be celebrating Christmas joy but then light up their homes with Santa-themed lanterns and adorn their patios with all sorts of cartoon characters so overwhelmingly dissolving the nativity of Jesus Christ into oblivion, their celebration can at best be recognized as a fashionable one other than a Christmas celebration in its true spirit. It becomes befuddling to observers of

the celebration that Christmas is what the trendy secular theme purports to be.

Sometimes, stories and modes of celebrations simply become an abuse for money-making (“a great time for a gift-buying shopping spree”) objectives, with the true message of Christmas distorted or evaded. It is not too bad if kids are properly instructed that the story of Santa Claus is a legend and that an entertaining exposure to this legend sparks conversations about the true story of Christmas with Christ (not Santa Claus) as the reason for the season. Nevertheless, Christians are not wishing for more and more new artful fabrications to link children’s minds with Batman-theme, Spiderman-theme, Superman-theme ... any popular-character-theme other than the one that really is what Christmas is all about – i.e., Jesus Christ!

Celebrating with Eternity in our Heart

*“I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good **while they live**. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.” – Ecc. 3:12-13*

*“This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun **during the few days of life God has given them**—for this is their lot.” – Ecc. 5:18*

Having some joyful feast as part of the celebration is not wrong, if the feasting is indeed just a part of the celebration with true

understanding of the festive joy and not an indulgence that goes into sinful excesses.

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.” – Ecc. 3:1



We can think of Christmas as one of the seasons that God has made beautiful in its time. Importantly, in addition to the beauty of Christmas, “... *God has also set eternity in the human heart...*” (Ecc. 3:11)

This is telling people to contemplate the spiritual implications. We ought to enjoy the festivity (for to us a child of hope is born) without forgetting our hope for eternity.

Are we like Apostle Paul, pressing on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus? (Philippians 3:14)

Note the brevity of time — “**while they live**” and “**the few days of life God has given them**” (Ecc. 3:12; 5:18) — in which people can be happy and do good. In fact, life is short. Life goes by like a cloud, like a dream ... This is ever more significant a reason for us to:

**ENJOY THE FESTIVITY OF CHRISTMAS WITHOUT FORGETTING
OUR LONGING FOR ETERNITY AS WE EXPECT THE SECOND
ADVENT.**

Now is the season to celebrate Christmas. However, this season is not the be-all and end-all. There are other seasons to follow, and the finale with ultimate rejoicing for all who keep their faith in the Messiah.

Clarity on the 2 versions of celebration



Christians celebrate Christmas with Christ as the reason.

Regarding the alternative version, I would rather call a spade a spade – i.e., any celebration that does not assert the nativity of Jesus described in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke is at most merely an entertaining carnival of a holiday time. Even if it coincides with the Christmas season, it is biblically baseless to call it a Christmas celebration.

The church is the body of Christ. Within the church, we experience the fullness of God’s presence. Christians dwell in the House of God. When Christians gather to celebrate Christmas or for worship, enjoying fellowship in a life of faith, they cannot detach themselves from the whole biblical truth. If the church were to leave the biblical truth, the foundation of faith would gradually disintegrate, and the meaning of faith in Christ would need to be reassessed.

The life of the church in the strict sense is a sincere worship of the Messiah in spirit and truth. From the Messiah’s own mouth:

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit

and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.” – Jn 4:24

Christians profess that the Messiah has come. If **CHRIST** is left out, the event of mas becomes spiritually meaningless.

Biblically-inspired Attitudes



Without following rampant misconceived methods by which the world celebrates a mas without **CHRIST**, people can turn to the Bible for inspiration on the attitudes they should possess:

- Luke 2:15 – When the shepherds first heard about the Messiah’s birth, they were earnest in seeking to find out the truth. Anyone who hears the message about the Saviour’s birth should be as earnest as the shepherds to seek the truth instead of following along the wrong path.
- Luke 2:17 – After finding out the truth, follow the shepherds’ example of spreading the word around.
- Luke 2:20 – Glorify and praise God for the Advent of the Saviour.
- Mt 2:11 – Be humble in worship and generous in offerings.
- Mt 2:12 – Be willing to put up with hardship in serving Christ.

The above is just an outline of some inspiration from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. While these Gospels carry the Christmas story about our Saviour's birth, we should be more spiritually inspired if we seek the truth by going back farther into history, into the prophecy about the promised Messiah in Isa 9:6-7 and Mic 5:2.

If we are as earnest and faithful as the shepherds in the Gospel accounts, and are devoted to affirming the strong biblical foundation on which we base our celebration of Christmas, we will gain much in our spiritual formation as we enjoy the present festivity, looking forward to the second Advent, with eternity in our heart.



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