



## **The Christmas Party 2025**

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Well, I suppose every family has their own Christmas traditions, but there are some traditions that we seem to all share, certainly in our culture. One of them is something you'll hear plenty of times tonight, if you probably haven't heard it a dozen times already today. And that's the phrase Merry Christmas. We hear it all the time. People say it all the time. You'll hear it today. You'll hear it tomorrow. And I want to make sure when you hear that traditional greeting that you make sure you know exactly what it means. Of course, it is a combination of two words. The first word is "Christ." And if I had to force you to define what it means, Christ, I hope that you could go back in your minds, if not, let me inject this thought in your minds. The basic definition of Christ is one who's had the oil poured on his head, one who has had the oil poured on his head. Now that oil was special, it was a fragrant oil that was described by Moses to be a kind of fragrance that wasn't going to be replicated in any other setting. You couldn't make it on your own. You couldn't use it for anything else. It's a very important oil called the anointing oil. Anointing simply means to pour this liquid, and it was to be poured on the head of someone who's being inaugurated or sworn in, as we might see it today, into a particular office or ordained into a particular office. Of course, the first office this picture is trying to depict is when Samuel comes and he anoints or pours the oil on the head of David.

So every king was supposed to go through this ceremony and that was a kind of a sign of them being set apart for the role of being the king. Well, also those who served at the altar, the priests were also those who were set apart for that service by that ordination of having the oil poured on their head. And there was one more office and that was the prophets who, when they joined the school of the prophets you were part of the prophetic band, they would pour the oil on your head. And if you had that poured on you then you were a "Christ." A Christ means you had the oil poured on your head. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word "Mashiah" is transliterated "Messiah." And we would say it that way today you were a messiah, a messiah, a Christ. But of course, the Old Testament prophets kept looking forward to a time when there would be one who would fulfill all three of these roles. We learn about that in the New Testament. There was one who would come, who wouldn't be "a Christ," he would be "the Christ," because every office would be fulfilled in him. That was the picture that we have of the concept of Christ.

Now the other word that is thrown in to make this word Christmas is the word "mass." Now, if you have a Catholic background you say I know what that is, that's when we do the Eucharist at the Roman Catholic Church. Well, that's how it's used today. But that is not how the word was used for a long time before it came to be used for that. Now the word comes from the Latin word "Missa," and missa was the word they used at the end of any church gathering where people gathered together, they were dismissed in the church service with the word "missa," or it came to be known as the gathering together of people in a church service. It was called the "mass." And if you were gathering together at church, of course you're gathering together in honor of Jesus Christ and so you could rightly have said at one particular time that you were going to church, you were going to "Christ-mass." Christmas. Well, later in time it became associated more and more with the birth of the prophet, priest and king. And so this



was a very important word that was set apart for the celebration of the birth of Christ. So every December 24th we have a service here where we set this service apart. We call it a Christmas gathering. It's a celebration of a gathering together of the birth of the prophet, priest and King Jesus Christ. So if you're here tonight you can check that box. You've done Christmas, at least as it was initially intended in the use of the word in Church history. And that's good and good for you. Good for me. We've done Christmas together in honor of the birth of Christ.

But many of you will go on tonight or tomorrow and you'll have a family celebration of some kind. And you might call it Christmas and you rightly should. You might say who's going to have Christmas at their house, right? Are you? I'll have Christmas at my house this year. You have it at your house. When you have Christmas at your house you can rightly say that is a gathering of your family or your friends or whoever you call together in your home as kind of a gathering, a party in honor of Christ. And if it's around Christmas time that's nicely connected to, dovetails with the usage of the word throughout Church history. So to have Christmas in your house is a good way to talk about having an honoring celebration, a party, something that celebrates the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's a good thing. And we should have no problem with that. So Christmas, that's what the word is all about.

Now we think about a gathering together of people to celebrate on this particular day. In particular, it seems this particular day gets a lot of bad press. And if you, you know, are cruising around on TikTok or Instagram or YouTube, you'll have a lot of people say well we shouldn't be doing what we're doing right now. And by the size of this crowd it looks like a lot of you aren't on TikTok. But they'll say it's wrong because this is really a pagan celebration. It has something to do with the winter solstice. It has to do with paganism. You know, it has to do with something that is associated with something that's outside of the Bible. The Bible did not tell us to get together for the birth of Christ, and they'll be quick to tell you on these YouTube videos, of course, this is not when Christ was actually born on December 25th. Well, you may make that case and you may be right, you may be wrong. This was a very early date that was chosen. There was another one in January. But these dates, you're right, we're not sure what the exact date was, although all the way back to Crīstesmæsse Day early on, this date was recognized as one. Nevertheless, the Church decided to settle on this will be a day we recognize the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. And so we have celebrations in honor of that.

And some people object on that very basis. Well, that's a man-made holiday. And you shouldn't be celebrating man-made holidays. Going to church every week, well, that's a biblical thing. We should "not forsake the assembling ourselves together." You're supposed to gather together like they did in the first century and so all that's good. As a matter of fact, there's a theology that tries to drive some of this. And even the Puritans at one point loved to, certain segments of it, love to say well that's why we don't do Christmas celebrations. They felt like they got too carried away these Christians were celebrating this Christmas festival on December 25th and a lot of the guilt-by-association arguments carried the day. And a lot of people said well we're going to pull the blinds down and not have this celebration. After all, it



is a man-made holiday. And because of its connections with paganism, at least on the calendar people posited, then we're not going to do it.

Well, let's think through that just a little bit. If you're only going to celebrate some kind of holiday or some kind of meeting that is prescribed in Scripture, there's a theological word for that that people subscribe to. You're going to have to figure out that's the right thing to do from a biblical pattern. And I would like to use Christ as the biblical pattern because he was born under the law, as Galatians says, not just the moral law, of course, which he kept perfectly fulfilling all righteousness by what he did, saying no to temptation and yes to righteousness throughout his whole life. But he also lived under the Mosaic ceremonial law and he always kept it. He kept it not only in doing the ceremonies that were required of him. Even as a baby, his mom and dad sovereignly were driven to do that. He fulfilled all of that. And even as his 12-year-old story is told in Luke, he was someone who was doing all that he was supposed to do even as a young pre-adolescent, doing what the law required. And in his ministry, if he healed a leper, for instance, he would send him back to the priest to bring the sacrifice, show himself to the priest. Everything the Mosaic law said he did.

Well, there were seven prescribed ceremonies, or I should say festivals or feasts in the Old Testament that God required for the Mosaic law. And Jesus kept them. Three of them were pilgrimage feasts where you had to travel to Jerusalem and you had to celebrate there on the Temple Mount. And that was great. And Jesus participated in those just as we would expect. He's keeping the moral law. He's keeping the ceremonial law of the Mosaic law. That's great. And so far so good. And when I think about him living life, of course we can't forget the biblical statements about his life. Of course, John 8:46, he's willing to stand in front of his adversaries and say, "which one of you convicts me of sin?" It's not a question you want to ask at your Christmas gathering tonight or tomorrow, someone will have an answer for you. But no one could answer Jesus, right? He says, who convicts me of sin? No one could. And as the Bible clearly says, Hebrews 4:15, he, "in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet, without sin." Or as it's put in First Peter Chapter 2, "He committed no sin," or Second Corinthians Chapter 5, God "made him to be sin," That was the whole point of the sacrifice on the cross, "who knew no sin." He had no sin in him. He committed no sin. Or as Hebrews Chapter 7 says he was "holy, innocent, unstained," and morally it goes on to say, "separated from sinners." That's very unique and important to say. First John Chapter 3, "In him there is no sin."

Now hopefully all of you get that right on a quiz. We know that Jesus did not sin. So his pattern of life, which the Bible says we ought to follow in First John Chapter 2 verse 6, "walk in the same way in which he walked," lived as he lived, follow his pattern, right? As Paul said, follow me as I follow Christ. We should be able to look at Jesus and see whether or not he kept to that kind of rigid schedule of only celebrating the prescribed holidays that the Bible told him to hold to. Well, the problem is we open up our Bibles and we find that he didn't. It's a problem for the people who claim that you should. I'm not one who does. Because of course, I look at passages like John Chapter 10, where Jesus is here at the Feast of Dedication, which is not prescribed by the law. It was not prescribed in the Old Testament law. As a matter of fact, it wasn't even prescribed as any kind of celebration until the second century B.C., in the



middle of the second century B.C. And this was something that if you set it in Hebrew, the word "dedication" is the word "Hanukkah." Now, if you have some Jewish friends they celebrate around this time of year in Kislev, they celebrate Hanukkah. That's the Hebrew month of the wintertime. And so they celebrate Hanukkah. And Jesus was here. He wasn't just on the outskirts of town. Look at this text in the winter, Kislev the 25th, Jesus was walking in the temple in the colonnade of Solomon. On the east side of the Temple Mount there was this colony called Solomon's Colony. It's right in the mix, right in the middle of this whole thing that was going on as they celebrated Hanukkah in the first century, the Feast of Dedication, as it's called in English. And that was something that Jesus didn't draw the shades in Bethany somewhere or in the desert and just say I'm going to stay away from this. He went right into the middle of it. And he was part of the celebration of a man-made holiday. Man-made holiday. What was it all about? Well, it started with a man named Antiochus the Fourth and Antiochus the Fourth, leader of the Seleucid kingdom up in the north. He was the king of it. He was going down to fight the Ptolemaic Kingdom down in Egypt. And he was on his way down. Rome sent ships across the Mediterranean and basically he realized he was outnumbered, outgunned, two against one in this case. And so he was mad. He turned around and was going back home, but he had his armies all geared up for war as he was going to go from up in the north, up past Syria, down into Egypt, of course, you're going to pass through Israel. And so he decided, why not? Our guns are loaded, so to speak. Let's just go ahead and take Israel down. And so that's exactly what he did.

And he set himself up as the great leader, not just of the Seleucid kingdom, but now he's the leader of the Kingdom of Israel. That's what he claimed to do. And in 168 B.C.. He minted coins which is a pretty bold thing to do to mint coins with your own face on them while you're still alive, although some people do that today. Anybody? Well, that's pretty bold. But even the boldest among us today of politicians, they may put their face on a coin, but on the back side, the reverse side of this coin, what you'll see if you look really closely is a picture of a man seated on a throne. And this picture seated on a throne was known, certainly in the first century B.C., the second century B.C., as Zeus. He connected this coin with his face on the other side with Zeus. And Zeus was sitting on this throne, this depiction of him, and this is how he saw himself. And we know that by the Greek words that are written on both sides of this throne where this person sat. And the words that are read there are of King Antiochus, that was his name, "God manifest" or "epiphany." That's why he's sometimes called Antiochus Epiphany. He was one who believed he was the manifestation of God. He saw himself as the embodiment of Zeus of Olympia. He was the great king and he saw himself as deified.

So to prove this he goes and sets up a statue in the temple, right? Because now he's going to say he's going to outlaw the Sabbath, outlaw the worship to Yahweh. He's going to set up a statue of Zeus, which he sees himself as himself. He's going to call himself God manifest. And then he's going to offer a pig on the altar. Now everyone reading the book of Daniel would see this as what Daniel called in Daniel Chapter 9, The Abomination of Desolation. And historically, the rabbis did call it that. This is The Abomination of Desolation. It made the temple desolate and it was all sacrilegious to take this unclean animal and to sacrifice it on the altar, which, by the way, Jesus said in the first century in Matthew 24, yeah, that might have been but there's one yet to come in another temple and it's going to be, and when you



see it in the future, you're going to have to identify it with what Daniel wrote in Daniel the prophet. That's another sermon, but the real one is yet to come.

But here this was taking place and certainly fulfilling a lot of what was written in the book of Daniel as a desecration of the temple. Well, that made the good Jews mad. Now a lot of them were bought off because Antiochus was making all kinds of things like public works, gymnasiums, and the Jews kind of liked that, the compromised Jews. Well, the hardcore Jews said we don't like this at all. There was a family, the Maccabean family and they said we're going to go after this and recapture the temple. And sure enough, three years later in 165 B.C., that's exactly what they do. Led by Judas Maccabeus, "Maccabeus" just means a "hammerhead." He was a fighter. And he goes out there and for his family with a ragtag team of warriors and he takes back the Temple Mount. Well, when they do that they finish this battle with something called the dedication of the temple. The Hanukkah of the temple. Now, there have been a lot of myths that grew up centuries later about that, that sometimes you'll hear if your Jewish friends talk about all the legends that surround Hanukkah. But the basic bottom line historical layout of it was that they got the temple back in the second century B.C., and they started a secular, if you will, or at least a non-religious holiday in the sense that it was not prescribed by God.

Everyone knew they were in this silent period, the 400 silent years that they wouldn't realize became unsilent with the angels showing up to Zechariah and Mary. But what happened here is they said, okay, God's not giving revelation. He's not telling us to do this, but we're going to set up a feast of dedication on Kislev the 25th, the day that Judas Maccabeus brought the temple back and they dedicated it back into the service of Yahweh. Well, that took place and here is Jesus celebrating one celebration that was big on the calendar. Like maybe you going to some huge, you know, 4th of July celebration. And here he was fully participating in a man-made, if you will, a man-made holiday, even though it related to the worship of Yahweh and the temple, it was not prescribed by the law. All I'm trying to say is when it comes to you gathering together to talk about conquering sin, Christ conquering sin for us, you can't tell me that Jesus, celebrating the conquering of the Temple Mount to restore the worship of Yahweh is somehow more important than Christ himself conquering sin and death and doing that for us 2,000 years ago. And when the Church decided to start celebrating his birth and the coming of Christ, the incarnation of the Messiah, to have a holiday, I don't care when you make it, which happens to be at the same time, by the way, Kislev the 25th or sometime near in our calendar at the end of December, it sure makes a lot of sense and it's a good thing for us to say if Christ can do it without sin then you can do it without sin to celebrate a holiday that's not specifically prescribed in Scripture. All right. Well, that's important for us to know so that you have no pangs of guilt when somebody yells at you online about this holiday because it is a time the angels rejoice and the child was born as prophet, priest and king. That's worth celebrating and we should have services about that, you should have parties about that, gatherings about that, feast days about that. That's a good thing for us to do.

Before we leave the tradition of saying, Merry Christmas this is something you probably don't say but I at least want to address it because it's related to the phrase Merry Christmas and that's when you see it done this way. Do you ever see it as Xmas? Do you ever see this? The



retailers often put it on their stuff or at least they used to. I've seen Christmas cards with Xmas on them. Merry Xmas or the Xmas sale, Merry Xmas. You've seen it, right? Raise your left eyebrow if you've seen this before. You've seen it, right? Okay, great. Well, if you listen to some people they're going to say to you I know what this is, this is an anti-Christ war against Christmas and that's what this is all about. And all I want to say is that's not exactly what it's all about even though some may intend that's what it's all about. But when you see an "X" don't think they're trying to X-out Christ or take Christ out of Christmas, or you don't need to buy a "put Christ back into Christmas" T-shirt just because you see this. Because this, by the way, is something that really is just the opposite, at least in history.

Here's P-46, Papyrus-46 in the Chester Beatty Museum in Dublin, Ireland. It's a second century copy. There are a lot of Papyrus leaves on this of Paul's epistles. This one is of Ephesians, the first page of the Ephesians epistle. And it reads here at the very beginning, "Paul, an apostle of," and then if you know the text, the next words in English are "Christ Jesus." Well, if you look closely here what you see is something that looks like an "X," which is a Greek letter with a line over the top of it. And there's a row that looks like a "P" right next to it. But what you need to understand is that this is very, very common in all the early manuscripts of the Bible. It really is under the category of what we learn as we study the languages of the Bible, the sacred name abbreviations. And it's not just any name because Paul is used a lot in Scripture too but you never see his name abbreviated like in the beginning of this verse, Paul is just spelled out, right?

These copyists are not trying to save ink or trying to get quickly through this copying process. Right? Matter of fact, they do what the scribes of the Old Testament did when they got to the name of Yahweh in Scripture. When they sang it or spoke it they would replace the word with Elohim, because this was the sacred name, the Tetragrammaton. Or when they were writing it sometimes with dashes or dots they would put dashes or dots to replace the consonants of God's name because they revered the name as holy. In the New Testament manuscripts they only abbreviated things like that. "Theos" for "God," and "Christós," Jesus' name, Jesus. They would abbreviate those in short, little, usually with a Chi-Rho in this case, or a Ch-Sigma, or with Jesus and Iota-Sigma, or with theos "Theta-Sigma." They would put these short little abbreviations, usually with a line over the top of them, all the way back to as early as we have in terms of the manuscripts of the New Testament, like this Papyrus-46 example.

Well, in doing that, I just think what you need to realize is it's just the exact opposite. They did it out of reverence. Right? Now, I may have done my seminary notes and my Bible school notes with Chi every time the professor said Christ or Theta whenever he said God, because I was trying to write notes quickly. But that's not what they were doing here. They're actually trying to revere God. The name Christós. They could have easily written that out just like they wrote out Paul or apostle. Those are very common words. They could have abbreviated those and everyone would have known what they were talking about, but they abbreviated the name of Christ. They abbreviated the name of God. They abbreviated the name of Jesus because they wanted you to realize this was a special name. So in a sense if someone's at least in the know they would take the word Christós, take the first letter Chi or Ki, depending on your Greek professor. And you would take that word, that letter, and then you would slip it



into what we know of today as Christmas or Xmas or Christ-mas. Right? Chi-mas. Right? That is at least if in the history of the word, the tradition going all the way back to the early first century probably, we don't have manuscripts there, but at least as early as the second century, we know that this was done out of great reverence for the name of Christ in the Bible. So it's not a bad thing if you're in the know. It's actually kind of a cool thing and a good thing because it's really representing a tradition of reverence for Christ. All right.

When we have times like this, we get together for Christ-mas, Christmas, and we celebrate the birth of the prophet, priest and king. We're always careful to have music as a part of what we do at any church service, but particularly at Christmas we have particular songs. We set apart our Christmas carols. You may go to your house and turn on your Sonos speakers or whatever you do, and you'll have Christmas music playing. And maybe some of you are bold enough to pull out the keyboard or the whatever, the guitar, and you may sing some Christmas carols at your Christmas gatherings, right? That is not something that's just arbitrary. This is something very specific to Christmas. Let me just give you an example. You go in your English Bibles to the narratives of Christ's birth. You'll often see the headings by the translators above some of these sections that go from prose to lyrical, like it almost looks like poetry in your text, and they'll have headings like Mary's Song, the Angel Song, Zechariah's Song, Simeon's Song. And you read that, you think, wow, were they breaking out into song? Was Mary singing a song? Was Zechariah singing a song, was Simeon singing a song? And the answer is no. They weren't singing the song.

Well, then why did the translators put that as a heading here? It certainly looks different, right? When Zechariah breaks out, it says, the Spirit of God came upon him and he prophesied. So this is an important set of words and they read more lyrically or poetically, at least in terms of how they're presented. But it doesn't mean that they were literally singing it. But what's interesting is it didn't take long in the worship of Christmas and the worship of Christ at Christmas, to take these particular sections of the narratives of Christ's birth and turn them into songs. And I know it's a bit of an anachronism, right? It's out of time, out of place. But what's happened is the reason we have these is as Mary's Song and the Angel Song, and Zechariah's Song, and Simeon's Song is because these were sung in church in Latin. And all they did was name them by the first word in Latin in each of these exclamations of the greatness of God, or the breaking out of worship that Mary does.

So this is something that's always been attached to Christmas celebrations, the singing of special songs that were all about the birth of Christ. Now that's nothing unusual as you know, you go to church and you sing songs. But if you go to a Christmas service you're going to sing a particular group of songs that are all going to focus on the birth of Christ, which of course, that is what is happening in those texts. Music is a gift from God to us. I don't know what it sounded like. I don't know what it was like at all. But in Job Chapter 38, when God talks about the creation of the world, he talks about the Ben Elohim or the sons of God, the angelic class singing as God creates the world. Of course he creates it in six days as a pattern of work and rest for us. But the picture is that these angels sit back and somehow cast out their words whatever those are, these angelic beings, they're not physical beings, but it's some kind of something that God relays to us as singing. Now, of course, you can't expect to hear



something sonically and even if you did Old Testament music was certainly based on a different tonal scale than we have. Ours is only 500 years old, approximately, and everything would have sounded weird in another time, in another place in the world. But nevertheless, the concept of harmonies or melodies or rhythms or lyrical rhyming or logical rhyming, this was all a part of something that God had gifted to mankind all the way back to the book of Genesis. Even the record of people making instruments all the way back to the book of Genesis.

And then, of course, every time we open the book of Psalms, which are psalms, or songs, we see this discussion of music, music and instrumentality. And so instruments are added and this addition of instruments is something that God says he takes great pleasure in, and there's joy in all of this. And even Jesus himself without instruments, we are assuming, although we don't know for sure and it has not been mentioned, who knows, he might have had a recorder in his pocket, but they broke out in song, at least in one recorded narrative in Mark Chapter 14 verse 26, they sang a psalm, they sang a hymn, and then they went out. And that picture of them using music of something that is always consistent with Christianity and music has always been an important part of the Church, the biggest investment in terms of composers and orchestrations and all that they did throughout Church history music was at the center of all of that. And when it came to Christmas celebrations this was where they pulled out all the stops and Christmas and music always went together in a more concentrated way, even than we saw, generally speaking, throughout the year.

One thing that'll happen maybe when your Christmas music is playing in the background and you've already greeted your guests with Merry Christmas, here is something that they're probably going to have in their hands, some gifts. Slide them under your tree. You can have some gifts. You're going to exchange some gifts. Where does that come from? That tradition of exchanging gifts? Well, of course you can go back to the beginning in Matthew Chapter 2 when we have this example of these Persian astronomers/astrologers in part probably related in some way overlapping with Zoroastrianism. They come from Persia because they've been influenced by the prophecies of Daniel some 400 years earlier where Daniel had spoken very clearly about the coming of the Messiah, the coming of Christ, who would not only be the King of the Jews but he'd be the king of the whole world, repeated throughout the book of Daniel.

So years later here are these professors. They were probably priests, maybe of some Zoroastrian sect, which was a monotheistic sect, by the way, or religion. And they probably came here because of Daniel's influence looking, of course, for the king. And they came and the text says they brought gifts. Now, of course, the old Christmas carols talk about "we three kings." Well, they weren't kings. They were probably priests. They were probably professorial types. And we don't know that there were three of them. They brought three gifts. And being of the upper class they're called Magi, which comes down to us in the word, of course, "magic," even though they're not magicians, really it's the root of the word is "greatness, like "magnificent." It has to do with their importance and their clout in Persia. Well, when they came over they were bringing gifts. They wouldn't be traveling just with three people, right? We assume this was a whole entourage of people and they show up and bring gifts at some point, probably a year to a year and a half after Jesus is born, living in a house in Bethlehem,



not in the nativity, but at Bethlehem, not in a manger, but in a home. But they bring these gifts.

Now, of course, this makes sense if you understand that the book of Daniel talks about God bringing this leader into the world, and this one that comes from the Ancient of Days and presents himself to the world is a gift from God. It's the first verse that you ever learned in the Bible, John 3:16, "As God so loved the world that he gave his only Son," and we recognize the giving of God, bringing his Son into the world, and we should understand it as a gift. And Paul, he's talking in Second Corinthians Chapter 9, he talks about us responding to that, and he says, wow, we should thank "God for his inexpressible gift." There's no greater gift than Christ being sent to live in our place, to die in our place, and to solve our problem of sin. That is a big, big deal. And Paul is basically saying in this particular passage something that seems counterintuitive. Because if you had a baby Jesus in Bethlehem then you and I every Christmas could go and take gifts to him. That might make sense. But much like it says in First John Chapter 3, God "laid down his life for us." And God says I know you can't lay down your life for me, and I know even you can't bring any gifts to me as Psalm 50 says, but you can lay down your life for each other. And this is something very common.

As a matter of fact, in Second Corinthians Chapter 9 that's Paul's whole point. There are people in Jerusalem who need something then you can give to them. We're responding to God's "inexpressible gift." Matter of fact, it's a pattern we see in the Bible. For instance, in the book of Esther when the plot by Heyman was to wipe out all the Jews, it was all reversed by Esther if you know the story and Mordecai, all that gets reversed. When the thing was over it says here in verse 19 of Chapter 9 in the book of Esther, the Jews of the villages who lived in the rural towns hold the 14th day of the month of Adar as a day for gladness. So it's a holiday. They're setting it apart, and they're saying this is the day we're going to rejoice. A day of feasting as a holiday, a holy day, as a day on which they send gifts of food to one another. Right? They're now saying we're so happy we're just going to exchange gifts with one another. Why? Because God has provided a gift to us to free us from the penalty of death that was upon us because of Haman. This is a great picture of people saying we're so happy, we're so relieved, we're going to give gifts to one another. That is such a natural biblical paradigm. God gives to us. We can't give anything back to him but we can give to each other.

That pattern we see, as a matter of fact, it's prophesied in something we just read in our Daily Bible Reading if you're keeping track with our schedule here at Compass. And that is that one day in the Time of Jacob's Trouble in the Great Tribulation the two prophets are going to so torture this world by standing up for God and being able to defend themselves it says when they die the whole world will exchange presents with one another, because they're so relieved that the two prophets have died. Well, God gets the last laugh in that passage. You can read it on your own but the bottom line is you can see where it's just something natural in us and God says this is what people do when they're really relieved. They give gifts to one another. So bringing gifts, it may be a hassle, your shopping list, your wrapping, your giving and all that. What am I going to get for, you know, my father-in-law? Listen, this is a pattern rooted not only in the Magi, but a pattern of us responding to knowing how great the gift of Christ is to us to give to one another. It's a pattern we see throughout the Bible and it is a good



tradition. It's a biblically rooted tradition. So as you go to your homes and you've got your house decorated and under the tree there are a bunch of gifts, just know there is a biblical truth that really is the fountainhead of the giving of gifts.

Speaking of you might have a tree, right? And maybe even a wreath on the wall. And if you spend enough time on Instagram or TikTok, someone's going to tell you that's wrong. And you know why they're going to tell you that's wrong to have a tree in your house, right? Matter of fact, I heard a gal this morning, I know, I was listening to social media this morning, she said if you have a tree and you claim to be a Christian, just know you're not a Christian and God does not love you and you don't love God. And I thought, oh my goodness, I put trees up on this platform of the church. (audience laughing) But then I remembered what I was preaching on and I realized, okay, I don't have to be afraid because what she said, what so many people say when they wag their finger at us, that this goes back to the Druids. And the Druids, who really even preceded the time of Christ, they were worshiping the evergreen trees out there in the forest. But when someone says that to you on social media or YouTube, or whenever you hear that, can you just stick your tongue out at them and say, I don't believe you, just stop. Just on my behalf just tell them to stop, okay? Because they don't know what the Druids taught.

Matter of fact, the Druids never left us a corpus of writing. It's an ancient, ancient religion that died out, you know, around the first century A.D.. Matter of fact, we learn about the Druids only through the Romans and their history of the Druids. And their name probably linguistically goes back not to the evergreen but to the oaks. And they did go out in the forest, we did learn that from the Romans about them, but we don't know much about them. It's folklore that has grown up about them as people look back on them throughout history, and people have made up a lot of stories about the Druids. Nevertheless, when today people claim that your tree is about worshiping the evergreen tree and the connection is you are guilty because the Druids, which they don't even really know anything about, really accurately what the Druids were about, you just need to realize there is no connection here with your tree and the Druids.

But then you may ask the question what about Jeremiah Chapter 10? Because I watched a different YouTube channel and that guy said Jeremiah Chapter 10 is all about banning Christmas trees. And if you read it, or at least you read it carefully or in excerpts as the way they do on the Internet or maybe it's your cousin Fred or whatever who talks to you and opens his Bible and starts reading this, it sounds pretty convincing, at least out of the gate. People go into the forest, they cut down a tree, they bring it back, and they decorate it with gold and silver. See there, that's a Christmas tree? Well, number one, of course, there were no Christmas trees in Jeremiah's day. This is the fifth century B.C. There were no Christmas trees then. So it is not about Christmas trees. Matter of fact, they're skipping a verse between cutting down the tree and decorating it. Do you know what they're missing? The craftsman crafting it. He crafts it into an idol. That's what he's doing. And then later on in the passage it recapitulates the idea about them gilding it and putting gold and silver over it. And what they create out of this is an idol. And God goes on to condemn people who do this as stupid and dumb. Those words are used not particularly in Chapter 10 but elsewhere in Isaiah. These



people pray to a god for protection. They pray to a god for provision. But they're the people who cut down the wood and they set it up and nail it down so it doesn't fall over. They craft it into an idol. They gild it with gold, they bow down to it, they worship it, and they trust in it for their crops, for rain to come on their crops and for the fertility of their cows. And God is saying you guys are dumb. There's a real God you should be trusting in and not your idols.

So if your Christmas tree is something that looks like an idol and you're bowing down to it, then yes, please remove it from your house and stop trusting in your idol, right? But if it's a tree and you've decorated it in honor of Christ in honor of the prophet, priest and king, don't let someone somehow rain on your parade or make you feel guilty about decorating your house with evergreen trees. As a matter of fact, if you want to know who thought of this long before Christmas was the thing, you might want to go back to Leviticus Chapter 23 when God is talking about a festival, one of the seven that you were supposed to celebrate in Israel, and this one is called the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles, the old word for it. And he says this in verse 40, "You shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of the palm trees and boughs," or the branches, "of the leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days."

So go out and collect all this stuff, all this greenery, and bring it in to where you're at and for seven days you're going to have all of this decorating your celebration of what? Of redemption out of Egypt of slavery that God did back in 1445 B.C. and he brought you out through the desert. He took care of you in tents as nomads and brought you into the Promised Land after 40 years. Celebrate your redemption from slavery into freedom. This is something you ought to do and you ought to do it with decorations that you don't normally decorate your place with. Right? So God thought of this first. If you want to talk about celebrating with special decorations. And it may be, you know, something you get tired of pulling out the Christmas decorations or whatever, going back to Hobby Lobby again to buy another thing or whatever. Whatever. All I'm telling you is it's a biblical concept to be so excited about freedom, in this case freedom from our sin that Christ came to live and die for us, that we might do something a little different with the decorations of our dwelling. That is a God idea. And really, it's not bad for us. I'm not saying you have to, but I am saying no one should rain on that parade. And that's a good idea for us to celebrate redemption by decorating our homes even with evergreens.

So that's great. You may feel better about your tree, but your neighbor's got this thing inflated in his front lawn and you're thinking, man, I don't want that. I want to go at night and deflate that thing and we can end the Santa Claus thing. Well, before you do that, let's just remember that this too is rooted in something that is godly, something that is Christian. It's not just what happened 95 years ago when the Coca-Cola company took it up as a mascot to sell their sugar water. That is not how this started. Matter of fact, for years before this, this figure was attached like it was on the Harper's Weekly cover in 1894. It is connected with Christmas and it had been for a long time in the dramatic and in European cultures in Germany in particular with Sinterklaas and the concept of this jolly person who comes and gives gifts to children. Very common. We can go through all the iterations of this all the way back to where we find the origins of it.



This comes from a biography by a man named Methodius. He wrote this in the ninth century, about a man who lived in the fourth century for whom we have independent records of. And this man is a man who was a pastor in a city called Myra. His name was Nicholas, Pastor Nicholas of Myra, on the northern Mediterranean coast of what is now today Turkey. And he was born in Patara, pastored in Myra. He was a godly man. He stood up for biblical truth. He even went to the Council of Nicaea to stand up for the deity of Christ. This particular man, as Methodius writes about him, was called to ministry early in life. He was an orphan, orphaned by parents who were very rich. So he inherited this big wealth, according to Methodius. And in that wealth he proved to be a godly man reading Scripture and teaching Scripture, a very generous man.

So he was a generous man and stories are told of him very early on, all the way back to the ninth century, at least extant copies of what we have. I mean, we have stories that we know go back to the ninth century about him being generous, in particular, generous to children. This is a biblical paradigm of a godly man exercising generosity in doing the very thing that I said gifts are supposed to reflect, right? We give gifts because God has given to us. We freely receive, we freely give. And here was a man who God kept giving money to, in particular through his own inheritance, and he kept giving generously when he saw needs. A very generous pastor became eventually, even though you may see it as a distortion, and so it may be your neighbor's inflatable Santa Claus on his front lawn. And all I want you to do is to see that and think about a pastor back in the fourth century who knew what it was to give to others when he saw a need because God had given so generously to him. That is a biblical principle and a godly virtue.

And lights. When you see the lights. And I know it's a hassle to put up the lights or you pay for them to be put up, whatever, get your lights up. That's a good thing. Why is that a good thing? Because I've been to Handel's, you know, oratory and they sing about it. And in Isaiah Chapter 9 verse 2, "people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone." And you say, well, yeah, well, why is that a messianic text? Do you know why that's a messianic text? Because in Zachariah in Luke Chapter 1, the father of John the Baptist quoted this when he knew his son was going to be the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy, the forerunner to the Messiah, he knew the Messiah was going to be, he calls him the Lord, the Lord's hand is preparing the way for the Lord, and the Lord is going to be, he says, a light that is dawning in darkness. He quotes Isaiah Chapter 9, the reason that's in Handel's Messiah and we sing it at Christmas time if in fact you do or if you've ever been to listen to it, the idea is that this text, which goes on to talk about in Isaiah Chapter 9, "For to us a child is born ... and the government shall be upon his shoulders," is the one who is seen as light.

And that's a picture that's not just in Isaiah and Luke. It's the prologue to the book of John. And John likes to see Jesus himself as light. It's a good metaphor. It's a metaphor about illumination and understanding. But more than that it's about life. And he says here in verse 9 of John Chapter 1, "the true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world." It starts with him being the creator. By verse 3 we find out that Christ is the agent of all creation.



There was nothing that was created that Christ wasn't the agent of creation. And in that he says he's the light and he gives light to all men. He gives life. He's the life-giver. And in that picture of giving light he comes and is seen as light. As Zechariah goes on to elaborate, it's like the sun rising in darkness. And so it is. And if you want to connect it to the solstice, or the darkness of winter, or the short days or whatever, to put up lights that are beautiful, shining in the darkness is the picture of the biblical model of Christ bringing light into the world not only to illuminate what we understand but where we're supposed to walk. We don't want to grope in darkness. We want to know the truth, and we want to make decisions based on the truth. And Christ, according to Hebrews Chapter 1, is the truth that God has brought into the world to not only give us the way of salvation but to articulate to us truth.

So when you go and celebrate and I've just scratched the surface, there are a lot of traditions that you might have. And if you have these traditions and you're celebrating, eventually someone's going to try to rain on your parade and mark your celebration. They're going to start talking about guilt by association somewhere. I just want to remember two passages. One of them is in First Corinthians Chapter 10 verse 26. And in this passage Paul is dealing with people going to Costco of their day in Corinth and buying meats, and the people were wagging their fingers at them saying don't you know where those meats have been? Those meats in the back room were sacrificed and dedicated to idols, and now you're buying them. It may be a good price but there's guilt now by association. Paul goes through this at great length, but eventually he quotes this passage from the Psalms and he says, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." The earth is the Lord's... Do you understand what that means? This world, from green trees to light, to roasted or baked turkeys, or whatever you do to them to get them edible. The stuff on your table with potatoes, right? God has made these things. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." And Paul's basically saying go to the meat market and eat the meat. Stop asking questions. Just enjoy it.

And let's just go further. When Paul talks to Timothy, the young pastor in Ephesus, after three verses of people that are saying, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, don't do that. Even down to, you know, if you're really godly you wouldn't be married. People who forbid marriage. Does that sound as familiar as churches today that say if you're going to be a priest, if you're going to be a leader you can't be, you have to be celibate. Think about this. The idea of forbidding marriage. He goes on to say after that this: "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected." They talk about saying no to food, saying no to certain things like the institution of marriage. Hey, "if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer." What makes it set apart as holy? Because the Lord has called it good. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." When God created the world he said after he created it, "It is good." And then we set it apart even further by praying prayers of thanksgiving. We thank God for the beauty of lights. We thank God for the beauty of your trees. We thank God for gifts in a stocking hanging by your fireplace. We give thanks to God for the celebration and everything that's a part of it.

That's a good and godly thing. And we should be thankful that God has given us that kind of freedom, and that we shouldn't be worried about guilt by association, because once you play that game you're in big trouble. Because all it needs is someone with more information



coming into your world and slamming your world because we can always find guilty associations. There are, you know, seven degrees of Kevin Bacon or whatever, you're going to eventually get, you know, to Kevin Bacon, to sin. Sorry, Kevin. You're going to get down to a place where someone's going to say that's satanic, that's demonic, because there are connections. Be careful with all that.

One more thing before I end. Maybe you're going to go somewhere tonight or tomorrow and you're going to see a nativity set. They come in all shapes and sizes. Some of them are different. They have the angels flying over or whatever. But if you got a good one, you're going to have a lot of figures of people involved. There's going to be a crowd of people around this little manger where Jesus, the baby Jesus, is lying, right? I just want to make one observation about the nativity scene. Okay? This nativity scene, if it's done right, it's going to remind you of something that John had just said in John Chapter 1 verse 9. He talks about the true light that's giving light to everyone coming into the world. Then he says this. The sad thing is that "he was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

You know the Pharisees stumbled over him, the scribes stumbled over him, the Sadducees stumbled over him, the chief priests stumbled over him. But, you know, there were people like the shepherds right out of the gate who the angels went to and drew them to this manger. And that crowd of people should remind you of the inclusion of God saying, you know what? Whoever does, whoever's going to embrace the Christ. Right? And there were some Pharisees, by the way, and I don't want to say they all, you know, rejected him. They didn't all, right? We had Joseph of Arimathea, we had Nicodemus, we had one up and coming one named Saul of Tarsus. And they turned to Christ. I'm not saying they all did but many people reject him, but those who do embrace him and he defines what that means, they "believe in his name," they trust in him, "he gave the right to become children of God." Even people like the Persians who come from another land.

Just like in the chronologies of the genealogies you see all these foreigners popping up. God is showing us his inclusive plan to bring in people from every tongue, tribe and nation, from every stratum of life in the early Church. Right? Jew, Gentile, Scythian, barbarian, slave or free, it doesn't matter. God is saying to all of us, if you would just trust while others reject. If you just believe in me while others just cast me aside then you have the right to be a part of the family. Which always reminds me what church is supposed to be about in the 21st century proclaiming the message of Christ to our generation. Right? We're saying to whoever will, whoever would respond, whoever would lean into this and say I'll embrace that. I trust that this Christ has come to save me. Right? Then you're in. You've become a child of God. You repent of your sins. You put your trust in him.

This is something that makes us a church, right? We're not a church, and we're not a family because we share all these commonalities in some other area. It's all about our embrace of Christ that makes us family. We become children of God and family with each other. So go celebrate without any guilt in your heart or any problem in your conscience. But don't miss



Christ in the traditions and just remember the preeminence of Christ, that's what it's about. Christ is to be preeminent. Make sure you see Christ. And if there are traditions, look for the truth. And when you see the truth and Christ is in the middle of it all just know it always demands a response. And the response is that you trust in him, right? Those "who did receive him, who believe in his name," right? That's what it's all about. Others are going to stick their hands in their pockets and let December just go on by like it does every year. And then there are others who are going to lean in and grab this by faith. And we invite you to do that as you celebrate tonight and tomorrow.

Let's pray. God help us all, please, as we continue to celebrate, think about our traditions which sometimes we get so focused on we miss the truth that underlie them. But we pray we would think about that more tonight and tomorrow and be able to say that we are grateful that we can see Christ's preeminence even in the things that we do, even what we eat, even what we exchange in terms of gifts and try and make each other smile with our songs or whatever it might be. And then we would always respond rightly to those truths that we would trust in you, we would draw near to Christ, we know he is our salvation and our freedom, our freedom from the penalty of our sin. And God, just make it a great celebration this year as we tie our traditions to the truth.

In Jesus' name. Amen.