

THE CHRISTMAS GIFT

You've heard people comment about the commercialization of Christmas, usually criticizing how a spiritual holiday increasingly becomes a weaponized marketing phenomenon. It certainly does involve a lot of getting and giving. Researchers report that in 1940 the average person spent \$205 on holiday gifts, up to around \$1,000 in recent years. This amounts to trillions of dollars over the holiday season. So how are you coming with your shopping list? Maybe you'll be checking it twice...

1- Good shoes? Perhaps you heard the news about "Palessi" shoes. Last month a new store opened in a former Armani location in upscale Santa Monica. It was filled with trendsetting shopping influencers. They were invited to the new Italian-themed store as part of a market research event. They were also there to purchase. Some spent up to \$645 per pair, as they commented on the quality and elegance in design and construction. That was before they were told these were really \$20-\$40 Payless brand shoes, marked up as much as 1,800 percent. Their money was refunded, and they were allowed to keep what they bought. But the point was made!

It demonstrated "aspiration inflation" of consumers paying more for a name. A company spokesman said the marketing stunt shows "the right cultural codes can completely transform the perceived value of just about anything." Perhaps you've never been fooled by fake shoes or fake news? But what if you found out you had been fooled about Christmas? What's your perception of its value? It's not just lights and glitz and gifts. It's not just beautiful music and TV specials. It's not just get-togethers with family, friends, special food, traditions. But you know that. It's about the babe in the manger, right?

2- Good news? Despite clear religious protection in our Constitution, it seems every year someone tries to remove Christ from Christmas. Perhaps you heard about schools in Virginia and Nebraska who censored anything to do with Christ from concerts and school assignments. One school banned candy canes because the J-shape might remind someone of Jesus. Secularists seem to think that Christians are spoiling their holiday by making it about Christ. Who needs a history lesson?

Celebrating Christmas as a civil holiday may lead some people to miss the good news about Christ. A recent Pew survey spells it out. While 95 percent of Christians and 90 percent of Americans say they celebrate Christmas, only 46 percent observe it as a religious rather than cultural holiday. Only 75 percent believe Jesus was laid in a manger, and only two-thirds believe He was born to a virgin, that angels announced his birth to shepherds, and that wisemen guided by a star brought Him gifts. Only 57 percent believe all four of these things happened, and 19 percent believe none of it did. But don't let these dismal statistics spoil your Christmas. It means lots of people need Good News!

3- Merry Christmas! Don't let some survey or some marketing meme skew your thinking. God gave us the Bible as a reliable historical record of His great plan of salvation. We read about the responses of Mary, Joseph, shepherds, wisemen and more. God invites your response to Luke 2:11, "*I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*" We say Merry Christmas, because this is truly good news and cause for great joy!

For thousands of years, God had promised 'the Christ' would come to deal with the great problem that mankind could not undo. You may be an intelligent, successful, really nice person. But what you have in common with lowly shepherds and traveling magi is your need for a Savior. And God's promise came true that first Christmas. The baby that was born was the Savior, Christ the Lord. These are three titles of Jesus, whose name means Jehovah is salvation. Jesus came to save us from our sins. He came to fulfill all the prophecies about the Christ, the anointed one, the Messiah. The eternal Son of the Lord God came to earth to take human form, and be exalted as Lord of Lords.

4- Receive God's gift of Jesus! Are you undervaluing Christ? Have you put Jesus in a Payless box? When actually He is priceless? "*Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift, indescribable, too wonderful for words*" (2 Cor 9:15). If your perception of cultural codes of Christmas never go beyond a baby in a manger, you've missed the point. All you'll get is transient gratification of the season. But God announced the Gospel, His eternal Gift to you. Many people approach believing in Jesus as an economic transaction, as if you could make a deal with God, "I'll say I believe in Jesus, and You give me forgiveness of sins and eternal life." It doesn't work like that. Christmas cost God His only Son. Given for you, to pay for sins. God invites, commands, you to receive His gift of Jesus Christ. Because He is love, joy, peace, salvation incarnate, God with us, in the flesh. To be your Savior and Lord.

God's gift has eternal value. Does this cost you? You lose only your old earthly life that was destined for everlasting destruction. You receive the eternal spiritual life of Jesus Christ. Because when Jesus is born in your heart and mind and will, as you believe in Him, and you become a new creation, the life of Jesus now lives through you, by the power of the Holy Spirit. That's Good News! Life-transforming good news. Receive God's Gift, and you'll want to let everyone know that Jesus is Savior and Lord! Believe in Him, receive Him, and live for Him, by His power within. That's really Good News! □