

## LIVING WELL #7: DOING CHRISTMAS WELL WITH JESUS

ESV TCL 2025/11/30

Q. What do you feel when, in around July, somebody first mentions the word 'Christmas'?

Joy, horror, panic, stress, anger, laziness ...

### 1. PUTTING JESUS BACK INTO CHRISTMAS

Unless Jesus is at the centre of our Christmas, all is lost. As the angel said to Joseph:

*Matthew 1:21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus<sup>1</sup>, because he will save his people from their sins.'* NIV



### 2. IS CHRISTMAS BIBLICAL?

*Esther 9:1-2,20-22,27-28 Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's command and edict were about to be carried out, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them. <sup>2</sup> The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could stand against them, for the fear of them had fallen on all peoples. ...*

*<sup>20</sup> And Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, <sup>21</sup> obliging them to keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same, year by year, <sup>22</sup> as the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor. ...*

*<sup>27</sup> the Jews firmly bound themselves and their offspring and all who joined them, that without fail they would keep these two days according to what was written and at the time appointed every year, <sup>28</sup> that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, in every clan, province, and city, and that these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants.* ESV

Q. What new Jewish feast was invented for 14-15<sup>th</sup> of the month of Adar?

Q. What, essentially, were they celebrating?

Q. How optional was this feast for succeeding generations? vv20-21

Q. What distinguished this new feast from many others? v22

Q. Must Christians keep Purim<sup>2</sup> somehow? vv21,27-28?

<sup>1</sup> Jesus is the Greek form of a Hebrew and Aramaic name meaning 'The LORD saves'.

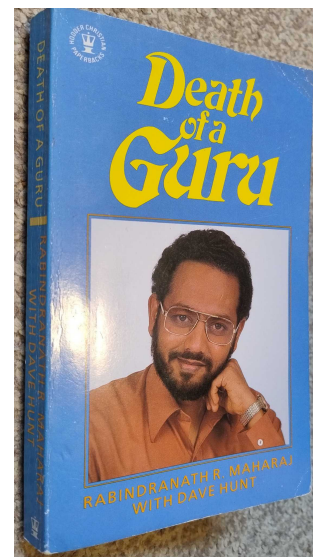
<sup>2</sup> In Esther 3:7 Some lots or dice are cast to choose the holocaust date. These objects were called 'purim' (plural).

### 3. THE SANTA DISTRACTION

Growing up as a child on Trinidad, the Hindu Rabi Maharaj was almost put off Christianity for life when, after cutting two eye-holes in a bed sheet in order to spy on Santa Claus as he delivered presents on Christmas Eve. To his horror, he found that Santa was actual his uncle Kumar!

*'The devastating news spread swiftly among the children in our household, then around the neighbourhood. Waxing philosophical, I decided that it wasn't so surprising after all. Of course the Christian gods were just myths-not real, like the gods we Hindus worshipped, who could sometimes be seen in visions during meditation, and in spirit form, too.'*<sup>3</sup>

If we lie to our children about Santa, will they also think we are lying when we tell them about Jesus?



### 4. 'EXPECTATION MANAGEMENT'

Christmas can often be a time of appallingly bad family behaviour. Not only do suicide rates peak shortly after Christmas and new year, but so do family rows, arguments and divorces. This seems to be at least partly due to people's high expectations being dashed.

Q. WHAT EXPECTATIONS MIGHT WE HAVE FOR CHRISTMAS AND NEED TO ADJUST?	AND INSTEAD ...
Receiving a certain, longed-for, present	
Receiving many presents	
Having the whole family present on Christmas Day	
Jesus being loved, trusted, honoured and glorified	
Sending all 350 Christmas cards	
Buying presents for even the most distant relatives	
Christmas dinner being vast and perfect with all the trimmings	
Being able to borrow hugely on a credit card to finance Christmas	
Leaving nobody in the church to be lonely	
ADD YOUR OWN HERE	
ADD YOUR OWN HERE	

<sup>3</sup> p63, Rabindranath R. Maharaj, *Death of a Guru*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1991 reprint. Originally 1924.

*Acts 20:35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

*2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*

## **5. CHRISTMAS EVANGELISM**

Carol services can be disappointing as a form of outreach because people come for the candle-lit christmassy feeling rather than to hear the gospel. Nevertheless, there are evangelistic opportunities around this time of year. **Q.** Name some.

Carol singers are often ill equipped, some not actually knowing the words to any carols. This simple tract (on page 4) c.1998 enabled the singing of a carol with children whilst giving them an explanation of the carol to take home with whatever sweets were also donated to their causes.

**Homework:** Create your own such tract. Re-use my words if you like.

Many other booklets and tracts are available on-line and from bookshops.

## **6. SUMMARY**

Despite its partially pagan origins, commercialisation and modern Christlessness, we can nevertheless do Christmas well for Jesus by:

- a) Keep Jesus at the centre of Christmas (Matthew 1:21).
- b) Whilst Christmas per se is not compulsory, remembering and celebrating our salvation is (Esther 9:28).
- c) Beware the spiritual traps adjacent to the cult of Santa Claus.
- d) Managing our expectations of Christmas carefully can do a lot to reduce stress, improve behaviour and keep the focus on what is important (Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 8:9).
- e) Take advantage of whatever evangelistic opportunities there are at this time of year.

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## Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Hark! The herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the new-born king!  
Peace on earth and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled"  
Joyful all you nations rise,  
Join the triumph in the skies;  
With th'angelic host proclaim -  
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

Hark! The herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the new-born King!"

(Charles Wesley 1707-88)

Would you like to be happy, not just at Christmas, but all the year round? Christmas happiness only lasts until school restarts. Unless, that is, you understand the words of 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing'. If you really understand why the angels were so happy and can sing their words for yourself, you too can be happy.

Did Charles Wesley just use the difficult word on the fourth line 'reconciled' so that it would rhyme with 'mild' on the third line? No, 'reconciled' has a very important meaning which is at the heart of what Christmas is all about. It means 'have become friends again'. Read the fourth line of the carol but say 'have become friends again' instead of saying 'reconciled'.

The problem is that we humans are bad and don't really care about God, whereas he is good and perfect. He is angry with us and will punish us forever unless he becomes our friend again.

This is why God sent his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world on the first Christmas Day. Jesus came to live a good and perfect life for us and then to die a perfect death for us as a kind of sacrifice instead of us. When he did this, he paid the terrible price of all his people's wrong-doing.

If you want to become one of Jesus' people, you must submit your life to Jesus the King, relying on him to clean up your life. Then God will be your friend forever and you can really mean the carols that you sing.

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