

POST CHRISTMAS GIVING

If you haven't figured it out by now, I love Christmas. It is probably *"hands down"* my favorite holiday. The decorations, the music, the exchange of gifts, spending time with family, and of course_ last but, by no means least_ the celebration of Jesus' birth. The anticipation of the Christmas holidays puts me in high spirits. Yet, when it's over? Well, maybe you can identify with this short video: **"After Christmas."** So, what's left of your Christmas *"after"* Christmas? Sorry to say that for many, all that's left is a mess to clean up_ and **3** more months of winter.

Certainly there's lots of torn, if not shredded, wrapping paper, gift bags, and bits of ribbon. Did you know there are entire websites devoted to how to properly discard or recycle used Christmas cards, name tags, broken ornaments, or burnt out strings of lights. And there are few things more depressing to me than dried up Christmas trees lining the streets, awaiting trash pickup. It can be a bit anticlimactic_ especially when it comes to taking down the decorations. At our house that includes packing away the seasonal towels, curtains, pillows, clocks, dishes, etc. And of course, if we have them, we'll all be boxing up our nativity sets. My least favorite job is ***untangling the lights***.

Is there anything that we can do to keep the Christmas Spirit burning besides ***after Christmas sales***? Does it have to be *"put away"* along with the decorations until next December? Most would insist it is unrealistic to think we can keep up the momentum. Forgive me for always trying to be optimistic, but I strongly believe that believers have all we need to keep *"the heart of Christmas"* beating strongly all year long. How? Not by keeping the holiday lights on_ (rednecks) but through what I call **"Post Christmas Giving."** I suppose that will take some explanation.

Did you know that **Mary and Joseph** gave the gift of doves to God at least **33** days after the first Christmas? That's what **Leviticus 12** tells us would be in keeping with the Law of Moses. Are you aware that **the Wise Men** brought their gifts to Jesus as much as **24** months after He was born? That's what the account in **Matthew 2** suggests. Consider the timing of the appearance of the star and the subsequent visit of the Magi to a house rather than a manger_ and the fact Herod ordered toddlers as well as infants to be slain. At any rate, if that's not ***"post Christmas giving"***_ I don't know what is. What motivated it?

In the first instance, it was because **Joseph and Mary** were *"righteous"* people who wanted to express gratitude to God for Jesus, and to ask His blessing on their family. Shouldn't we follow suit? Oh, it may not be doves that we give to God_ but before we ask for a blessing shouldn't we *"give"* thanks to God for the blessing of Jesus even after Christmas? In the **2nd** situation, **the Wise Men** wanted to show honor and ascribe worth to the One they understood would be the King of kings. Is that not also an example to us? They traveled a great distance to bring Him treasures. Should we not bring Him gifts suitable for the King of glory?

Yet, the Spirit of Christmas is more than giving to God. Think about it. It's not just that we go to church an extra time or two in the month of December_ or put a little extra in the plate. Don't we find ourselves giving gifts to our family and friends? To our neighbors and to the needy? Isn't there a more peaceful spirit and aren't there more expressions of goodwill? Did you not find yourself wishing strangers *"Merry Christmas?"* There is a sense in which we are to be God's messengers to take gifts and to give gifts to others. We are His **UPS** or **FED EX** service.

Pay close attention to these excerpts from 1 John 4... ² **This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God...** ⁷ **Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.** ⁸ **Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.** ⁹ **This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.** ¹⁰ **This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.** Did you notice the emphasis on the incarnation? Did you catch the testimony about God's love in the fact that He sent us the gift of Jesus?

Now, listen closely to the rest of the chapter: ¹¹ **Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** ¹² **No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.** ¹³ **This is how we know that we live in Him and He in us: He has given us of His Spirit.** ¹⁴ **And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world.** ¹⁵ **If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.** ¹⁶ **And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.**

Okay, as I see this, **the Spirit of Christmas** is Christ in the world. And as much as we allow for Christ's Spirit to dwell in us, the more He is active in this world. When we love others_ showing care and compassion throughout the year_ the Spirit of Christmas burns brightly. When we freely give without expecting anything in return; when we find joy in helping others to find reason for happiness; when our selfishness is swallowed up in service to others; when we genuinely care more for people than for things_ the Spirit of Christmas endures. Even Scrooge eventually got it, and he vowed: *"I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year."* Dr. Roy L Smith wrote: *"He who has not Christmas in his heart will never find it under a tree."*

We may pack away the decorations and put the ornaments in storage and kick the tree to the curb_ but we can maintain the Spirit of Christmas all year long. Why He has given not only a babe in a manger, but He has given us His Spirit to live in our hearts.

One of my favorite songs of the Christmas season is *"This is Christmas"* by Kutless. The chorus says *"What is Christmas_ if there never was a Savior wrapped in a manger? What is Christmas_ if the angels never sang glory to the newborn King? What is Christmas without Christ?"* Well, quite frankly, all you'd have left is **"a mess."**

Thankfully, however, **Jesus is the heart of Christmas.** And since with the Spirit of Christ dwells in every Christian_ so does the heart of Christmas. Let us live and **love as Jesus would...**and as we do, we will give of ourselves the way He did_ and yes, the Spirit of Christmas will continue to burn brightly. For in reality **Christmas is Christ in the flesh.**