



Have Yourself Merry, Merry Christmases

There is more than one Christmas. Folks who get upset about the meaning of Christmas being lost in all the hoopla haven't quite figured that out.

Not necessarily in the order of importance, the Christmases are family, cultural, commercial, and religious. I suspect we could easily multiply the number by dissecting any one of these and pulling yet other Christmases out of its cells.

The starting point for many of us is the *family* Christmas. There are precious few opportunities in our mobile and often rootless society for families to get together. If we don't want to wait for the next wedding or funeral, it is nice to have an occasion for regrouping. Families need reunions in order to strengthen bonds, affirm relationships, and frequently to intensify roles. Hence, one will find in a few weeks folks traveling, as one song puts it, "from Pennsylvania... to Dixie's sunny shore... from Atlantic to Pacific." All this has nothing essential to do with anything spiritual or religious. Families will be gathering at Christmastime who have long since lost interest in a Judean birth two millennia ago. Yet Christmas will be in a real sense "sacred" to those same families, who wouldn't miss it for anything.

The *cultural* Christmas brings us The Nutcracker, scores of concerts, and an endless round of holiday music, office parties, gaily decorated trees in country clubs and hotels, one or two showings of "Miracle on Thirty-fourth Street," performances of "A Christmas Carol." Did you ever stop and wonder why we do all these things? Every society needs occasions to celebrate, and will surely find them. If we did not have Christmas, we would certainly invent something like it. We need a blow-out at least once a year. Can you imagine every day being the same? Or the year without any punctuating festivals? Of course we have others besides Christmas, but this is practically the one celebration that moves across all lines and barriers to provide some cohesion to a culture that yearns to celebrate something.

Commercial Christmas hardly needs defining. If you are in retail, you know how important it is that people shop at Christmas. The entire retail economy depends upon a spending □ page 2

Christmas Service Schedule

Christmas Eve:

- 5pm: **Bilingual—In English and Spanish!**—and especially for the young at heart
- 10pm: festive eucharist, followed by a Christmas party (please bring food or drink to share)

Christmas Day:

- 8:00am
- 10:30am

Dec. 11, 2005

The Third
Sunday in
Advent

Number 1538

□ *page 1* spree in December.

And there is Christmas the *religious* holy day. It has evolved over the centuries from a relatively minor festival to one which provides the hinge on which half the Church Year depends. Indeed Christmas is not just a holy day, it is a holy season of twelve days. In the popular mind, it is at least as important as Easter, if not moreso. Others of these Christmases have co-opted elements of the religious Christmas, as when crèches form part of the decoration in stores and when hymns celebrating the Incarnation of Christ provide a little background music at McDonald's.

Are we to lament the multiplication of Christmas? Are we to sally forth on the defensive, trying vainly to convince each other and the rest of the world that Jesus is the Reason for the Season in hopes that this year the world will not only get whipped up for a big party but might in fact convert to the cause of Immanuel?

"I like all of it, the whole thing," my older daughter said to me last week. "I like the hustle and bustle, the wrapping of presents, the feeling in the air, the decorations, the smells."

I agree. I can't think of a better reason to throw a planet-wide bash than that a peasant girl gave birth to a baby in a stable, with him of sometimes doubted paternity standing by to lend his aid. I can't think of a reason for more rejoicing than that one human being changed the direction in which we were heading, and regularly repeats the change of hearts and directions when we listen and heed him.

It makes me want to run out and give away something, or sing about a queer little left-out reindeer, or tell a story to my grandchildren, or deeply inhale the odors of cinnamon and cloves. I feel

like dancing. And I have this curious sensation of starving for a taste of bread and wine that will remind me that this festival of flesh celebrates the fact that Immanuel lives in me and I in him.

-The Rev. Frank Dunn, Senior Priest

BREAD

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Pray for Peacemakers Taken Hostage in Iraq

On Saturday, November 26, four members of a Christian Peacemaker Team were taken hostage in Iraq. One of the four, James Loney, is connected with the Catholic Worker community and has slept on St. Stephen's floors during the three-times-a-year Faith and Resistance Retreat that Catholic Worker members hold here. Another of the four, Tom Fox, is a resident of Northern Virginia; new parishioner Marie Stevanus has participated with him in various peace activities.

A statement circulating via the internet says the four "are in Iraq for the sole purpose of bearing witness to the love of God as it is expressed through the sacrificial presence of the Prince of Peace. Because of their lifelong commitment to Jesus and the holy calling of peacemaking, these our brothers live to bear witness to the fact that violence is a sin against God. Indeed, they have consistently carried that message to the Coalition forces, first by condemning the political decisions to make war and later by expressing horror at the degrading violence the war begets."

Jim Stipe and Christina Way Do Relief Work in Pakistan

After many months of waiting in Sri Lanka, Jim Stipe and Christina Way arrived safely in Islamabad, Pakistan in mid-October.

Soon after, Christina went to the earthquake-damaged town of Mansehra in the Northwest Frontier Province, taking a UN helicopter and driving 2 hours into the mountains, then walking up a ridge into four villages. Speaking through Pashtun-speaking translators, the team worked to determine how much of the villages had been destroyed in the earthquake, and what they needed in terms of housing, water and sanitation.

Jim has been in the Kashmir area of Pakistan (also travelling by UN helicopter) to take photos of some relief work by the American Refugee Committee. Many of Jim's stunning photos from Pakistan and Sri Lanka are on their web site (www.jimstipe.com/asia/jimandchristina.htm).

Jim has been hired for a 6-week position with Catholic Relief Services to help

with earthquake programs, so Jim and Christina are both working for CRS.

On their website they write, "What we saw on our trips to the earthquake areas is almost beyond belief, but a few things stand out— people making shelter from plastic sheets and scavenged wood, a woman who gave birth on the day of the earthquake, skin diseases on the rise because water sources were damaged leaving people without a way to keep clean, tons of relief trucks with Pakistani military escorts, houses and roads destroyed, participating in the Ramadan fast during the day and breaking fast with dates and batter-fried veggies at 5:30 pm each day.

"Back in Islamabad, things continue as before the earthquake. We are staying in a large two-bedroom apartment; there is room for anyone who would like to visit! We are starting to settle in and explore the city. Christina has found the local flower market and Jim found the impressive 'Saeed Book Bank' so we anticipate being content here."

Make the Stock Market Work for You and St. Stephen's

Some stocks are making a healthy comeback from their 2001 downturn. If you happen to own one, consider giving some shares of your "appreciated stocks" to the church. You will have a nice charitable tax deduction for 2005 (the full value of the donated stock), the church will have a welcome gift as we close out the year, and you will pay no capital gains tax on the appreciated value of the stock. To arrange a stock gift, contact your broker and give him the church's brokerage account at Smith Barney to which the stock will be transferred (account #179-31347-17-368; broker James Lee, 202-

861-5030). To learn more, contact Treasurer Anne Heyniger (202-483-7312).

An Ordination!

The Rev. Sarabeth Goodwin, a deacon and our Latino Missioner, will be ordained a priest by The Rt. Rev. John Bryson Chane, Bishop of Washington, on Saturday, January 21, at 10:30am at Washington National Cathedral. Sarabeth extends a warm invitation to all parishioners to attend the service, where a number of deacons will be ordained priests.

WORSHIP at St. Stephen's

Sundays

8:00a—

Holy Eucharist,
Rite I

10:30a—

Holy Eucharist,
Rite II with
Children's
Spiritual
Formation

Celebrants and
Preachers

12/11: The

Rev. Kathy
Grieb
(Celebrant);
The Rev. Linda
Kaufman
(Preacher)

12/18: The

Rev. Frank
Dunn (8:00);
The Rev. Linda
Kaufman
(celebrant); The
Rev. Frank
Dunn
(preacher)

LECTIONS

3rd Sunday of

Advent
(December 11)

Isaiah 61:1-4,
8-11

Psalms 126

1 Thessalonians
5:16-24

John 1:6-8,
19-28

4th Sunday of

Advent
(December 18)

2 Samuel 7:
1-11, 16

Luke 1:47-55

Romans 16:
25-27

Luke 1:26-38

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THE SAINTS

Sunday, December 11

*Birthday: Jacques
Hadler, Cosby Hunt*

Tuesday, December 13

*Heavenly Birthday:
Ruby Long, 1981;
John P. Murchison,
1984*

Friday, December 16

Birthday: Kimi Lawrence

Tuesday, December 20

*Heavenly Birthday:
Jewell Tutt, 1988*

Wednesday, December 21

SAINT THOMAS THE
APOSTLE

Thursday, December 22

*Heavenly Birthday: The
Rev. William Keys,
1997; Mac McFarland,
2002*

Friday, December 23

Birthday: Anne Heyniger

Sunday, December 25

THE NATIVITY OF OUR
LORD JESUS CHRIST

*Birthday: Liane Rozzell,
Michelle Sinkgraven*

ON THE COVER...

Isabel Muffett
(who will play the role
of Jesus during our
5pm Christmas eve
service)

THE PRAYERS

Here's who we've been praying for recently:

•Jennifer Blackman, Carla Crocheron, Millie Fenwick, Shepard Graves, Arrina Hermonstine, Lucille Jeffers, Ruth Murphy, Elizabeth Palmberg, John Phillips, Daphne Piper, and all who desire to be restored to health; those who are home-bound; and all who care for aging relatives, the sick and the homebound;

•Bill & Evelyn Andrew, Roger Beach, Duane Bonds, Bob Broadwater, the Brown family, The Bright/Veneklasen family, Martha Carty, Judy Clark, Romel Dick, Katie Finley, Doreen Granum, Lloyd Terril Hermonstine, Lloyd Nkomo Hermonstine Jr, Carol Hermonstine, Asanti Hermonstine, Stephanie Holodnak, Daphne Hunt-Clement, Sunny Jackson, Susie Johnson, Maia Lawrence, Robert Dean McClellan, Melissa and Wil Mefford, Joe Midgeley, Carroll Muffett, Barbara Oldland, Haywood Owens, Karl Palmberg, Marisella Ruiz Ibarra, the Schmidt/Melchar family, Edith Soko, Christina Way & Jim Stipe, Willard Webster, Astrid West-Harrington, Ellen Williams, and all those who have been commended to our prayers, and

•for the repose of the soul of Robert Bonds (Duane Bond's father), and all who mourn him.

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