



A DIFFERENT CHRISTMAS FOR 2008

How do you celebrate Christmas? If your family is like mine, this is probably the time of the year when you spend too much time and money shopping for gifts for family members and friends. If your household is like mine, you will probably end up overeating and then dieting after the yuletide season. If you're like me, you're probably tired of the way people observe this world-wide holiday.

I'm sure that there are things about Christmas that you enjoy and look forward to (such as family reunions, cards and letters from friends, and great food), but for most of us, it has become an unavoidable burden. What we remember as the most awaited day of the year from days past has been ruined by commercialism and crass materialism. The holy day has become a holiday. But of all the holidays that we celebrate Christmas has become the most burdensome.

The idea of giving gifts to others in order to celebrate God's greatest gift to humankind probably had a noble purpose and beginning. Even if the exact birthday of Jesus is unknown, there is nothing wrong with setting aside a special day to honor His birth. A special day to memorialize the first advent of Christ is a good way to tell the world that Someone gave His life for humanity's salvation. That Someone is God, but He was born as a man to become one with us – Immanuel – God with us!

Christmas is supposed to be the celebration of Christ's birthday. But how often have we wondered how Jesus Christ would want Christians to celebrate His birth? How often have we asked ourselves why we – Christ's followers – spend an inordinate amount of time and money every Christmas season on giving gifts to each other and to ourselves. While it's customary to give presents to the birthday celebrant, we celebrate Jesus' birthday not by giving to Him, but to our family, our friends, and ourselves.

It is not wrong to give gifts to each other in order to express our love and appreciation for each other. But we can do this everyday or on a person's birthday. What the world promotes on this holiday is not really true generosity, giving to the least of society – the ones least able to fend for themselves, but conditional giving. This way of giving only benefits those who can give in return. In such a

culture there are really no true gifts. Conditional giving will never honor God's greatest act of giving – the birth of Jesus Christ as a man.

At Gospel Life, we are learning that we are part of the Kingdom that Christ came to restore. We have a Kingdom culture which we have the privilege of sharing with the world. We are in the world in order to transform it, not to imitate it. Christmas – the celebration of the birth of Christ – should be observed within the context of our Kingdom culture, not in the way that it has become in the world culture. In the world's celebration of the Christmas season, Christ has disappeared and has been supplanted by vacation, shopping, parties, and credit card debts. These days, even the word "Christ" has become noticeably absent in the greeting cards that people send to each other.

How can we, as citizens of the Kingdom and ambassadors of Christ, truly honor and worship Christ as we celebrate His birth? How can we observe a Christmas that is different from the way it is observed by the world? For starters, we can give Jesus our gifts. Instead of spending our time and money on shopping for gifts for our family, friends, and ourselves, we can use our lives and assets to honor Christ in a meaningful way.

How do you give to Jesus? Christ said, *"I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!" (Matt. 25:40)* When we give to those who need our help – people who can't give us anything in return, we give to our Lord.

To celebrate Christ this year, we can give special gifts to one or more of the ministries of Gospel Life and our special projects that minister to "the least" in our community and other places. In addition, we can also give directly to people and other charities that need our assistance.

Let's all try to celebrate a different Christmas in 2008. Instead of celebrating Christmas as we have in the past, this year, let's celebrate CHRIST! He's the greatest gift of God to us and the only true gift we can share with others.