

Remembering The Story of Christmas

On a Christmas morning nearly five hundred years ago, Martin Luther ascended the pulpit in Wittenberg. Looking down upon the people there assembled—peasants, citizens, students, and noblemen—he read the words of Luke 2:1-14. He then said, “This Gospel is so clear that it does not require much explanation. It must be looked at, pondered, and taken to heart; and no one will have greater benefit from it than he who simply lets his heart be still and permits the story to work on him.”

But have we forgotten The Story?

I searched for “Christmas” on the Internet, and the first thing I found was Wikipedia’s definition: “Christmas is an annual festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ, observed most commonly on December 25 as a religious and cultural celebration among billions of people around the world.” Not a bad start, I thought. Then I noticed that most of the other pages focused on retail shopping projections, gift ideas, decorations, and recipe advice. I even found one Canadian-based website that proclaims itself “The Official Website of Christmas,” without once mentioning Jesus (and I’m still wondering who had the authority to proclaim them “Official”).

What happened to The Story?

Now I’m not trying to convince people to keep their wallets closed instead of giving generous gifts to those whom they love. I’m not trying to pop the inflatable lawn ornaments of those who enjoy decorating. Celebrations, parties, decorations, and gifts are wonderful! And I know (perhaps better than most people) the origins of Santa Claus. But I’m still puzzled as to what inflatable penguins and Frosty the Snowman have to do with the story of Christmas.

Do you remember The Story?

Most people who go to church probably remember the basic story of Jesus’ birth. Mary, Joseph, Bethlehem, stable, manger, shepherds, angels—we can probably put all those things in the right places. After that, though, we might start confusing things, like forgetting why Joseph was going to Bethlehem in the first place (see Luke 2:1-3), or putting the Wise Men alongside the shepherds in the stable (which they weren’t—see Matthew 2:11). So a little ‘brush up’ by re-reading Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2 can be helpful to refresh those memories.

But do you *remember* The Story?

It’s not just a matter of reciting or repeating words from the Bible. The celebration of Christmas, with its Advent ‘pre-game coverage,’ involves remembering what God actually did all those years ago. The Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, was born in human flesh! He came into this world that he created, to live, suffer, die, and rise from the dead to rescue his creation from destruction!

Indeed, the celebration of Christmas is even more than that! For this Son of God, this Jesus, came into this world to do all this *for you!* He came to give *you* the free gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation. He came to give *you* hope for this life and promise for the life to come. He came to take *you* out of your sad and sorry story of life in sin, and bring *you* into his grand and glorious Story of everlasting life with His Father.

So amid all your busy holiday plans, read, remember and rejoice in The Story. Let your heart be still and permit the story to work on *you*. That will bring *you* a *true* celebration of the *real* Christmas! So, during this Advent season, let us prepare, and then let our Christmas celebration begin!