

### Giving Thanks

Thanksgiving as we know it was officially recognized as a holiday by President Lincoln following the Civil War. What better time to be thankful for peace, following such a time as that? Our little ones learn about how the Pilgrims and Indians held a feast together after a successful harvest. As individuals, especially following the Covid pandemic, and many personal trials for all, this Thanksgiving will be the perfect time to pause and give thanks for what we have come through, and how blessed we truly are.

I know not everyone believes as I do, but as you cherish your family and friends, enjoying your own traditions, favorite foods, and hopefully, lots of laughter, I ask you to think about to whom you are giving thanks. I am pretty sure the Pilgrims who came to this land endured their unspeakable hardships for the purpose of seeking religious freedom. And President Lincoln's speeches are quite clear that we owe all we have to Divine Providence. It just might be nice that when you sit down together during the holidays, really ponder the purpose of the celebrations, and the One who gives you breath.

### A Year Without Christmas

These thoughts led me to think about Christmas as well. So many countries have their own way of celebrating this beloved holiday. I don't even want to try and attempt to explain the why's and how's of Christmas traditions in other countries. I simply want to touch on how we in America have come to know Christmas. I fear it is becoming forgotten, but we have traditionally celebrated Christmas (Christ-Mass) to commemorate the miraculous birth of our Lord, Jesus.

No, we don't know if Jesus was born on December 25<sup>th</sup>. Very possibly it could have been in the spring. More than likely Jesus was about two years old when the wise men came to see him. Not as an infant in the stable. Yes, many of our symbols and traditions originated from pagan rituals, but early Christians, just as modern-day Christians do, did what they could to point the lost to the real heart of the matter. Jesus Christ; the Way, the Truth, and the Life. (John 14:6)

As I was driving to work today, I wondered what our lives would be like if there was no Christmas to celebrate, or no holiday season, period? Religion aside, really try and think about that! We trace childhood memories to Christmases in the past. As children our calendar begins and ends with December 25<sup>th</sup>. We can't wait until Christmas rolls around again! As adults, we start to panic in June and July because Christmas is just around the corner! We make travel plans specifically for the holiday season.

What if it didn't exist? Besides the obvious devastation of there being no hope for mankind without a savior. Just pretend everything remains as it is, but with no milestone or celebration to mark the year's end. We work hard all year. We raise our families. We experience the joys of new babies, graduations, and marriages. We suffer the grief that comes from sickness, and death comes without warning, to steal away our loved ones, young and old. Yes, there will always be a December 31<sup>st</sup>, giving way to January 1<sup>st</sup>, but would it be the same?

Many of us crave the holidays, because it gives us an opportunity to shake off the stresses of the year. We are given full permission to eat, drink, and be merry. Ringing in the New Year brings with it a new hope, a fresh start, a do-over. No matter what you believe about how Christmas has changed, I believe this time of celebration is ordained by God.

### **Ecclesiastes 3:11-13 (ESV)**

***He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.***

Yes, many forget about the birth of Christ during this season. Many forget why they should thank God for the abundance of His blessings. I know there are so many hurting in this world, but folks, it isn't God's fault. Sin is in the world, and that is what has spoiled so much of what God intended to be beautiful. Despite ourselves, God loves us all. He loves you, and me, the hurting, and the hungry. He loves the thief, the beggar, the unlovable. His gift of life is intended for all and to be celebrated by all.

When you're waiting in line for an hour to buy that gift, or if you're the poor young mother with little hooligans running around the store and you just want to fall apart, remind yourselves that this season truly is God's gift to us. He loves YOU! He loves us all more than anyone else ever could. That's why He sent to us the ultimate gift, His only son, Jesus.

### **For God So Loved the World - John 3:16-17 (ESV)**

***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."***

I pray that above all, you will discover the love of Christ and will experience the God-made joy only his love can bring.

Wishing you lots of joy, laughter, and love. Enjoy each, and every beautiful moment this season brings.

Merry Christmas,

Lisa Jo

