

~~'Tis the season to be jolly; indeed, Christmas Day will be here in less than two weeks. While I think Christmas is the season to be jolly!~~ ^{recept} Out of respect to those who have suffered the loss of loved ones, I'd modulate to: 'Tis the season to be 'hopeful.' Here are 4 good reasons to stop being a Scrooge and celebrate the hope of Christmas.

#1. The majority of the world's population live north of the equator, and we need something to celebrate at the time of winter solstice. To light candles and pray is not only a religious act, it helps fight seasonal depression that often strikes when the days are short and nights long.

#2. Christmas gives local merchants a boost. Of late, there is much said about the crass commercialism of Christmas. I'll admit I despise the ~~gross~~ materialism of Black Friday and resent its encroachment on Thanksgiving. However, there are many shops and businesses that depend on stellar Christmas sales in order to keep their shop open the other 11 months of the year. I am glad for the business generated during Christmas and the holidays. Here, the key is to use our possessions and love people; all too often today we are prone to love possessions and use people. This Christmas step back from all the stuff, take a deep breath and express your appreciation for someone you love.

#3. Christmas gives our fragile egos a boost. How so, you ask? Christmas is at its core a celebration of the incarnation: which means God took on human flesh in the Christ child at Bethlehem. This is the miracle of Christmas and it is the core of the Christian faith. Why did he do that? A friend who writes for a leading publication points out that the meaning of incarnation is spelled out for us by Ireneaus' famous dictum: "God became man, that we might become gods." "That is Christmas in a nutshell."

People today are looking for all sorts of means and schemes to boost self-esteem, to self-actualize, feel good about the old #1. Some try the boost by making money, or winning at sports, keeping up with the Jones', getting high or low on whatever kind of chemical you need to escape the dark shadows of life ~~on this fallen plane~~. The results are nearly always the same; it doesn't work. On the other hand, I propose that what can give a lowly soul a boost is found in the Christmas message. Because of the incarnation we have the potential for real union with God and because of this, we can participate in the divine nature so that we can become like God. Now, that's a most encouraging prospect.

#4. ~~I close by mentioning,~~ ^{there is} For those who are grieving; ~~you can find~~ solace in the Christmas story. How? The founder of the Christian faith was born to a homeless family, became a political refugee who fled to Egypt before the age of two, worked hard with his hands and never traveled further than 100 miles from his place of birth. He preached against the religiosity of his day, even as he upheld the integrity of ancient Law and respect for Caesar. At the age of 33, he suffered an unfair trial and terrible abuse at the hands of Roman guards, then died a slow and painful death on a Roman cross. But his death was not the final word, and he still offers hope to millions who trust in him. ~~That is why in spite of all the sad things transpiring in our world today, it is a season to be 'hopeful,' if not downright 'jolly.'~~ ^{even}

^{lose w/} ~~Sir Walter Scott:~~ ^{poem by SW Scott:} Heap on the wood! -the wind is chill;
But let it whistle as it will,
We'll keep our Christmas merry still."

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment