

Christmas: Should we *celebrate it or cancel it?*

*Rooted: 7-8pm, Sunday 7 December
Teaching, then Q&A
All welcome. All questions welcome.*



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Bible Reading: Luke 2.25-38

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God



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Christmas:
Should we
celebrate it or
cancel it?



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Tonight:

- The case to *cancel*
- The case to *celebrate*
- A third way? Being Christian at Christmas
- Q&A



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Vote!



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The case to *cancel*

- Christmas is a cover for greed. It damages people. It obscures the gospel. Thus, it dishonours the Lord and we should have no part in it.
- Christmas is a cover for greed:
 - *“we are gearing up all our energies to help our wider communities celebrate Jesus’ first coming in incarnate humility, as a baby born in insignificant poverty, a homeless refugee – an embarrassing contrast to the over-indulgence and materialistic hedonism that our culture prefers in celebration of His birth.”*
(Rob Munro, the Bishop of Ebbsfleet’s, Christmas letter)



The case to cancel

- Christmas damages people.
 - *62% of mums say Christmas is at least “fairly stressful” (YouGov)*
 - *Family arguments peak between 1-3pm on Christmas Day.*
 - *The cost of Christmas causes significant financial stress.*
 - *Domestic abuse increases over Christmas:*
 - *“Dad’s drinking always gets worse at Christmas. Then the drinking leads to arguments and the arguments turn into him hitting mum. I wish I could protect her, but dad is so much stronger than us both. I want to call the police, or social services, but who will come out at Christmas?” (a boy, speaking to Childline)*



The case to cancel

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 - *Family arguments peak between 1-3pm on Christmas Day.*
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 - *Domestic abuse increases over Christmas.*
 - *The first working Monday in January is often dubbed “National Divorce Day” by legal professionals.*
 - *Christmas exacerbates loneliness for the increasing number of people who live alone.*
 - *The expectations of a “perfect Christmas” leave huge disappointment.*



The case to cancel

- Christmas obscures the gospel.
 - *In practice, the central character of Christmas is not Christ, but Father Christmas or Santa Claus.*
 - *When we teach baby Jesus and Santa Claus are real people, why are we surprised when both are then left behind in infancy?*
 - *The heart of the gospel is not the manger, but the cross.*
 - *We don't celebrate mass – so why Christ's mass?*
- This is the case for cancellation: Christmas is a cover for greed. It damages people. It obscures the gospel. Thus, it dishonours the Lord and we should have no part in it.



*An Ordinance of the Lords and Commons Assembled in
Parliament for the better Observacion of the Feast of
the Nativity of Christ.*

Die Jovis, 19 Decembris, 1644.

WHereas some Doubts have been raised, whether the next Fast shall be Celebrated, because it falleth on the Day which heretofore was usually called the Feast of the Nativity of our Saviour: The Lords and Commons in Parliament Assembled, do Order and Ordain, that publick Notice be given, that the Fast appointed to be kept the last Wednesday in every Month ought to be observed, until it be otherwise Ordered by both Houses of Parliament, and that this Day in particular, is to be kept with the more solemn Humiliation, because it may call to Remembrance our Sins, and the Sins of our Forefathers, who have turned this Feast, pretending the Memory of Christ into an extream Forgetfulness of him, by giving Liberty to carnal and sensual Delights, being contrary to the Life which Christ led here on Earth, and to the Spiritual Life of Christ in our Souls, for the Sanctifying and Saving whereof Christ was pleased both to take a Human Life and to lay it down again.



It's been tried
before ...

THE
STILL-BORN
NATIVITIE,

OR

A Copy of an Incarnation Sermon, that should have been delivered at *St. Margarets-Westminster*, on Saturday December the five and twenty, 1647. in the afternoone, by *N. B*

BUT

Prevented by the Committee for Plunder'd Ministers who sent and seized the Preacher, carried him from the Vestry of the said Church, and Committed him to the Fleet, for his undertaking to Preach without the License of Parliament.



We could lobby our MP to force shops to open on Christmas Day, close the churches and arrest the clergy!

Vote!



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O Come all you Unfaithful
Sovereign Grace Music

www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-QHbpYjuIg

The case to celebrate

- How could we *not* celebrate Christmas?
 - *The problem is not Christmas, but our wayward hearts: and the Lord Jesus came into the world to seek and to save the lost.*
 - *Those whom Christmas breaks and disappoints are the very ones that Christ was born to heal, comfort and renew.*
- In the temple, in Luke 2:
 - *Simeon was “waiting for the consolation of Israel”; Anna spoke “about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem”.*
 - *Christ comes to console those mourning a broken world, and to redeem those held captive by sin.*



“my eyes have seen
your salvation” (v30)



The case to *celebrate*

- Sin, not Christmas, reveals our greed.
Sin, not Christmas, damages people.
- It is only Christ who can heal and forgive:
of course we must celebrate and proclaim Christmas!
- Does Christmas and its customs obscure the gospel?
 - *If it does, speak the truth!*
 - *Don't fret over the name: "Monday" is more objectionable than "Christmas"!*



The case to celebrate

- But the centre of the gospel is Easter!
 - *All the Christmas accounts agree.*
 - *“a sword will pierce your own soul” (Simeon to Mary)*
 - *How else does Christ redeem and console, except through his cross?*
 - *“You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1.21)*
 - *There is no Easter without Christmas!*
 - *1 John 4.9-10: “⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away our sins.”*
 - *v9 is Christmas, and v10 is Easter*



Vote!

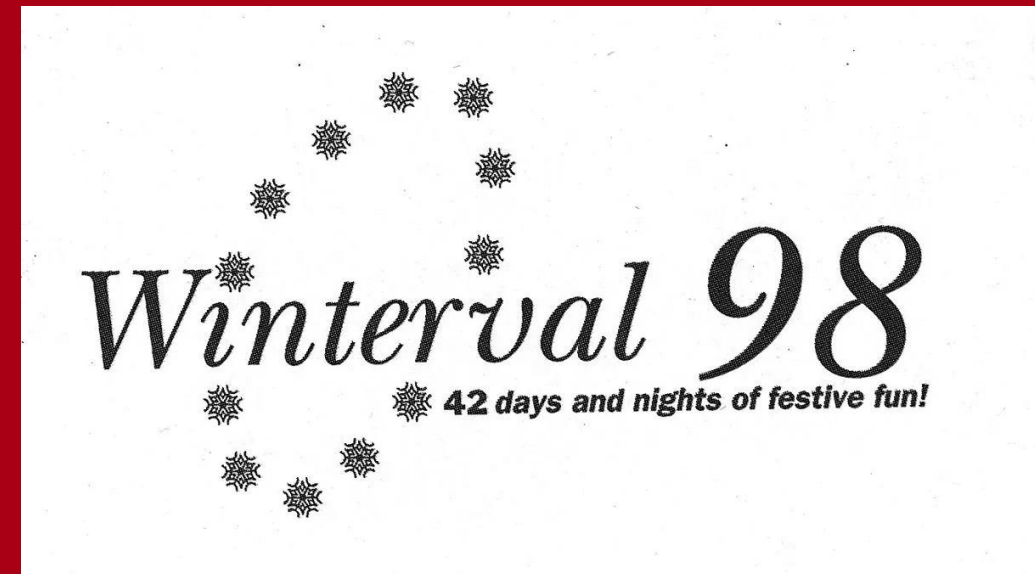


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Being Christian at Christmas

- Putting the *Christ* back into *Christmas*!
- Negatively, don't condemn the world for being worldly!
 - “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3.17)
 - *Winterval!*
 - *Xmas*
 - *We shouldn't condemn the world either: but rather point people to the Saviour.*
- Positively ...



Being Christian at Christmas



- It's our biggest mission every year:
 - *And it has been for about 1700 years, apart from some Puritan interruptions!*
- We need to be intentional about it:
 - *For example, we quietly insist that every school Christmas carol service includes a Christian message from one of our ministers.*
 - *Will you think about Christmas FIRST as a mission event your church is privileged to run, and only then as a time of family, rest and holiday? How will that change your plans and prayers?*
 - *Evangelism is always hard: but inviting someone to church at Christmas is probably about as easy as it gets!*

Being Christian at Christmas

- As individuals and families, how can we celebrate Christmas in a Christian way?
 - *The reality can be tough*
 - *Most of us are in “mixed” families.*
 - *We inherit various traditions and expectations. Often, those vary as a new family is formed – and can be a cause of conflict.*
 - *The opportunities are huge ... but don't be afraid to start small!*
 - *Say grace before Christmas dinner.*
 - *Try to arrange a family gathering that naturally opens the way to invite non-churchgoing family members to a Christmas service.*
 - *Include a paragraph about your faith and church life if you write a “round robin” Christmas letter.*





You don't
have to be
this unsubtle!

Being Christian at Christmas



- Building a Christian family culture
 - *You don't have to follow the crowd: our children lost absolutely nothing by never believing Santa was real!*
 - *Prioritise church in your Christmas planning.*
 - *How can we include those who won't have a family to celebrate with?*
 - *Present giving is a great time to teach that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20.35).*
 - *Ponder how you make Jesus central in your family traditions.*
 - *Here's one of ours from 2016 – all the children's idea!*



Question Time

Resource Examples

The origin of Christmas trees (What's in the Bible?)

whatsinthebible.com/video-archive/the-history-of-the-christmas-tree/

Santa vs. Jesus (Glen Scrivener)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmS_s23TL1k



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The Advent Blessing

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you,
scatter the darkness from before your path,
and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you, and remain with you always.
Amen.



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**Four Eyewitness Accounts.
One Story.**

LIGHT



14 December, 7.30pm

Traditional Carols

21 December, 10am

Christingle

24 December, 3pm & 5pm

Family Carols

24 December, 9pm

Holy Communion

25 December, 10am

All-Age Service