

# MERRY CHRISTMAS OR HAPPY HOLIDAYS?

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What a change has come over our society in the past decade. I can remember Christmas shopping for the kids back in the early 80's, saying "Merry Christmas" to people and having them cheerily respond, "Merry Christmas" in return. Now nobody says "Merry Christmas" at all, and if you say it to them they look frightened or offended. It's now "Happy Holidays" or else! But what does "Happy Holidays" mean? From all that I can see, it seems to mean "Happy month of forking over buckets of your money to us". And what holidays are we talking about? Well, first there's Chanukah, a very minor non-biblical Jewish holiday that was elevated to its current importance in order to compete with Christmas. Then there's Kwanzaa, a synthetically invented African American holiday that most blacks don't know about and don't celebrate. Finally there's Christmas, a Christian holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, which most Christians ignore in favor of X-mas, a celebration of modern consumerism and overindulgence. Christmas, though pushed into the background in our culture, is really the inspiration for whatever other celebrations take place in December. Without Christmas the others would soon fade away. (But don't tell anybody!) "Happy Holidays" is camouflage for Christmas!

Are you tired of "Happy Holidays" and "Xmas"? Why not try Christmas? Here are some suggestions:

Observe Advent - for the four weeks prior to Christmas, step up your devotions, focusing on Christ's first coming, His coming to us now in Word and Sacrament, and His Second Coming on the Last Day. Use an Advent Wreath, possibly a creche, some Advent goodies, and the extra worship services at church during the week. Avoid Christmas carols and Christmas decorating too early. Let Advent be Advent.

Think Differently about Presents, Etc. - So often we get so involved in the presents and the foods of Christmas that we make them an end in themselves and begin to do them out of obligation. Accustom yourselves to think of the gifts given and the food shared as a celebration of God's gift of salvation to us through Christ. When a gift given is a token of something greater than itself, that is, Christ's gift to us, then the giving becomes less an exercise in consumerism and more a lesson that "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20.35).

Attend worship on Christmas Eve and/or Christmas Day - making the time to receive the ministry of the Word of God and the Holy Sacrament as the centerpiece of your Christmas observance goes a long way to putting things in their proper perspective. And, when the brightness of the light of God's love in Christ fills your heart through the Gospel, the lights on our Christmas trees and on our houses seem to shine brighter, too.

Add a spiritual dimension to your family celebrations - Sing together, not only "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer", but also specifically religious carols like "Joy to the World", "Silent Night", "O Come, All Ye Faithful", and many others. Read the Christmas Gospel from Luke 2 and talk about it. Say some Christmas prayers and focus your heart's attention on the wonder that you are the undeserving but beloved object of God's eternal love, and your salvation is assured through Christ's atoning death and resurrection. Christmas means that Christ has come into our lost situation and rescued us by His loving sacrifice. Those who believe are placed in a new situation, in which grace, mercy and peace in Christ abound.

It's not necessary to become spartan, ascetic, pietistical or glum in order to keep Christmas in a spiritual manner. We are not fundamentalists! Rather, when Christ is allowed to be in the center of things, "Xmas" and "Happy Holidays" soon fade into insignificance, and "Christmas" becomes once again "Merry". Oh, and by the way, have a little fun this Advent, and "Merry Christmas" people every chance you get. A little "Christian subversiveness" is harmless fun, and a little tweak on peoples' secular sensibilities won't kill them! Merry Christmas!