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Hope: How Does One Live a Hope-Filled Life?

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Hope: How Does One Live a Hope-Filled Life?

Abstract

"While I don't believe it's *wrong* to give gifts to others at Christmas, I would encourage some thought and consideration of giving gifts in the name of the one we are honoring."

Posting about the real hope of Christmas from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/hope-how-does-one-live-a-hope-filled-life/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Hope: How Does One Live a Hope-Filled Life?

 [all in allthings.org/hope-how-does-one-live-a-hope-filled-life/](http://allthings.org/hope-how-does-one-live-a-hope-filled-life/)

Dave Mulder

I hate Christmas.

Okay, that's not fair. I don't hate *Christmas*. I actually just disillusioned by the way we (the North American Church) celebrate Christmas.

It seems to me that the majority of Christians in North America today have bought into the “christmas” of our broader culture. The real problem for me is all the “stuff” we *do* to celebrate “christmas” that gets in the way of *truly* celebrating Christmas. Because there really is a lot of “stuff”—Christmas parties, and Christmas pageants, and decorating, and shopping, and wrapping, and gift-giving, and pretty soon the whole rush from the day after Thanksgiving right up to Christmas morning and even beyond to New Year's becomes a blur of blinking lights and blaring carols and too much food and too much...stuff.

I think I'm just sick of all the stuff. And in the most cynical corners of my heart, I think dark and twisty thoughts about how this “christmas” isn't really Christmas at all: it isn't about celebrating *Christ*. It's about the *stuff*. The “stuff” isn't Christmas; this sort of “christmas” is actually “Stuff-mas” instead.

I'm sick of celebrating Stuff-mas.

Christmas—as in *Christmas*—is about celebrating the Hope of the World! The *real* Christmas is celebrating the miracle of God's love; celebrating God wrapping up in flesh and bones and living here on Earth with us as fully-human-while-still-fully-God. And the problem, as I see it, is that the “stuff” of Stuff-mas—even the *good* stuff—gets in the way of really focusing on *Christmas*.

If we are going to get serious about the Hope of the World as the center of our Christmas, we may have to start cutting out some of the stuff to be able to focus on what really is central: the coming of the Christ. A few ideas to help you get started on living this sort of hope-filled life:

- **Ask questions about your own motivations.** This can be hard, but I think it's the place to start. Why are you doing the things you are doing during the Christmas season? Is it because of obligation? Or is it because of joy, worship, and hope? For me, this has meant saying no to some “good” things, to make room for the best things. For example, I have said “no” to being involved in our church Christmas program. (I know, that sounds terrible, doesn't it?) I realized that there was nothing joyful about it for me; it provided undue stress, frustration, and it actually sapped my energy and joy. Saying “no” to “good” things can give you more space to say “yes” to other things.

- **Make deliberate time for private moments of worship and reflection.** One thing our family has done in recent years is to get a special devotional book that we read after supper throughout the Advent season. The one we read uses the Jesse Tree (see [Isaiah 11](#)) as a way of thinking about the genealogy of Jesus and symbols of the faith that reveal God's plan for salvation. (More information about the Jesse Tree can be found [here](#) and [here](#).) We have a small “Christmas tree” that is bare at the beginning of the Advent season. Each evening, we read a section from the devotional and add an ornament to the tree that includes a symbol connection to that member of Jesus's family tree. This quiet time as a family has become an especially important part of our Christmas celebration, and provides an opportunity for us to refocus on Christ, and not the “stuff.”

• **Make “longing for Christmas to come” an essential element communal worship during Advent.**

Advent is a season of longing. Similar to the way that the Old Testament saints longed for the coming of the Messiah, we too are longing His second coming. Communal worship with the Body of Christ during the weeks of Advent should focus on this sense of longing. One small thing that worship leaders can do to help: don't start singing Christmas carols too soon. I know, I know...I love Christmas carols too. But I think starting to play Christmas music the day after Thanksgiving doesn't give us enough time to experience this sense of longing, of *hoping for Christmas to come*. Better to save the carols for Christmas day, and the season of epiphany (*after* Christmas, when we celebrate that Christ *has* come!)

• **Be mindful about gift-giving.** I feel I'm walking on eggshells here, but at the risk of being thought to be an absolute Grinch, I encourage you to think long and hard about your practices of giving gifts at Christmas. Why do we give gifts at Christmas? The giving of gifts as part of a Christmas celebration may be attributed to following in the footsteps of the Wisemen, who gave the first Christmas gifts. But recognize this: the Magi who presented gifts were laying down their treasures at the feet of the infant Christ as part of their worship. (See [Matthew 2](#).) Is this what our Christmas giving is about?

While I don't believe it's *wrong* to give gifts to others at Christmas, I would encourage some thought and consideration of giving gifts in the name of the one we are honoring. Can gift-giving be an act of worship? My wife and I have been striving for this in our own family life for several years now. We have decided not to give Christmas gifts to each other, or to our kids either. Instead, as a family, we decide on others we might bless with gifts given in Jesus' name. World Renew and World Vision have gift catalogs for Christmas giving of this sort, and we have found it a transformative experience for our family to look beyond ourselves and the “stuff.”

We *do* still give other gifts, of course, and we do want our kids to experience the joy of giving and receiving thoughtful gifts. So we do still exchange names with their cousins, and we still give gifts to their Grandpas and Grandmas. And we don't discourage their family members from giving them gifts either, so they can learn to receive gifts from others graciously and gratefully. But looking long and hard at our own gift-giving practices has been helpful for looking for the real Hope of Christmas, which is much greater than hoping for some toy or trinket.

Truly celebrating Christmas is about seeking the Hope of the World, the real hope that brings deep joy, not just momentary happiness that might come from the “stuff” we allow to clutter up our lives. How are you refusing to celebrate Stuff-mas, and instead seeking to live a hope-filled life?