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Stress-Free Christmas?

Abstract

"Christmas does not need to be a time of stress and anxiety, but it can easily become one. Even in the nativity, God gave peace to Mary in what should have been the most peace-less of circumstances."

Posting about focusing on the true miracle 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/a-stress-free-christmas/>

Keywords

In All Things, Christmas, stress, peace, nativity

Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

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

A Stress-free Christmas?

 [all in allthings.org/a-stress-free-christmas/](https://allinallthings.org/a-stress-free-christmas/)

Erin Olson

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way.”
1 Thessalonians 3:16

A few weeks ago the Sunday school kids at our church sang a beautiful rendition of “How Silently/Away in a Manger” along with the church choir. As I was listening to the lyrics, I was struck by how almost every Christmas song about the nativity emphasizes the calm peacefulness of the event. Lines like “the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head” and “no crying he makes” help us envision a truly stress-free first Christmas. This peaceful scene may be so far from the Christmases we experience today that it’s hard to imagine that such an event was even possible. Every year it seems that the Christmas season gets a little busier, a little crazier, and much more stressful. You may be scratching your head wondering — is it possible to have a stress-free Christmas?

First, I must say, I feel fairly unqualified to write about trying to reduce stress levels during this Advent season. I’m a college professor, a PhD student, a wife, and a mother of three kids. At any given time, I could be considered the epitome of stressful living and yet I’m hoping by thinking and writing about this, I, too, can gain some valuable insights into making Christmas as stress-free as possible.

Mary had to have been feeling quite a bit of stress during that first Christmas and in the days leading up to our Savior’s arrival. She was a young girl who found herself impossibly pregnant and had been told by the angel Gabriel that the baby she was carrying would go on to save the world. Now, here she was very much “with child” wandering around Bethlehem with her husband-to-be Joseph because Caesar Augustus had ordered everyone to return to their hometowns for a census. Mary then goes into labor and while she and Joseph search high and low for a place to stay, the only place they can find for her to deliver her baby is a manger, an animal feeding trough.

The Bible mentions in Luke 1:34 that Mary was confused by the message she received from Gabriel about her impending pregnancy, but nowhere in the story of the nativity do we hear any mention of Mary questioning God’s plan for the birth of His son. Perhaps Luke purposely left out the details of Mary’s stress or perhaps Mary’s heart and mind were being governed by the peace Paul writes about in 1 Thessalonians 3. As we move into another Christmas season, how can we have the peace of Mary, who had every reason to be scared and stressed?

Here are some ideas for how we, too, might have the peace that passes all understanding in a season that seem inevitably un-peaceful:

Learn to say no

This may sound very selfish at first read, and if you are like me, you do not like to disappoint people, especially at Christmas. But to maintain sanity, we have to recognize that, as people, we can and should have limits. This may mean turning down Christmas party invitations so you can have a quiet night at home with your family, or maybe you choose a simpler Christmas and limit the number of gifts under the tree.

Stay focused on why we celebrate Christmas

It sounds cliché, but this might be the most important guideline of all. Revel in the mystery of God coming to earth as a baby. Praise God for this miracle and the gift of his Son to humankind. Remember that this gift of Jesus has made the ultimate difference in our broken world and sinful hearts.

Make time for what you need

This is how you stay focused on why we celebrate Christmas. What practices of your faith help you stay focused? Is it prayer, scripture reading, or music? Pray to the God who brought about this miracle of Christmas; ask him to keep your focus on the miracle and not the details of your day-to-day stressors. Listening to or playing music or singing can be a great stress-reliever and can help connect your spirit to the true purpose of the holiday. Spend time with children, read the Christmas story with them, and revisit the joy and excitement of Christmas from their perspective.

Match your Christmas to your values

Figure out what you value in your celebrations of Christmas and do not let society's values dictate how you celebrate the birth of our Savior. We can easily get wrapped up in the consumerism of the season and lose sight of the reason why we give gifts in the first place. If you value quiet celebrations with family, then make those a priority. If you like to entertain and host, then invite guests, cook, and celebrate in that way.

Give yourself (and others) much grace

Holding yourself to an extremely high standard is not helpful and can quickly cause you to lose sanity. No one is perfect and no one expects us to be, so allow space for imperfections in your Christmas and be quick to forgive.

Christmas does not need to be a time of stress and anxiety, but it can easily become one. Even in the nativity, God gave peace to Mary in what should have been the most peace-less of circumstances. If we remain focused on the true miracle of Christmas —Immanuel, Lord With Us — we, too, can experience the “peace that passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) at Christmas.