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AT CHRISTMAS, DON'T FORGET...?

I discovered this year that, at least with regard to Christmas, I'm becoming cynical.

- I realized this when I heard one person ask another, "What's the first sign for you that Christmas is coming?"
  - The first thing that popped into my mind was, "Jack-O-Lanterns."
    - You see, the Christmas decorations were out even before Halloween this year.
    - And I get that it has been a hard time for retail sellers of late, but before Halloween?
      - When does this season start and what's it really about?

Maybe you can help me tonight.

- Because it seems like it is becoming easier to let it slip aside.
- But at Christmas, don't forget...CHRIST.

Did you know that the Twelve Days of Christmas as in the song are about the twelve days that start tomorrow,

- and not the twelve days that end tonight?
- And yet, though there are radio stations that have been playing Christmas music for more than a month,
  - after tomorrow, you probably won't hear Christmas songs at all,
    - well, except for in church, and maybe not even there.

I watched a Christmas special that was supposed to be filled with Christmas songs.

- They did fourteen songs in an hour, but only two were about...CHRIST.

And I know that there just aren't that many ways to make a story about the birth of JESUS, but all these Christmastime movies are about Christmas romance, or saving Christmas, or rescuing Santa.

- If you think about it, you wouldn't have all these specials and movies and songs if it wasn't for...help me...CHRIST.

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I talked about it a couple weeks ago, that Santa Claus is based on a real person from history—St. Nicholas.

- Nicholas was the bishop of the region of Myra which is in modern-day Turkey.
- Nicholas would do all that he could to help the poor and especially children.

The legend goes that on one occasion, when Nicholas tossed a bag of gold through the window of a needy family,

- it landed in a shoe sitting beside or a stocking hanging by the fireplace at night.
  - Thus, the practice of hanging stockings and Santa coming to fill them.

As the tales of St. Nicholas spread throughout the world, the name sort of changed.

- In the Netherlands, he is called Sinter Klaus, and when the Dutch brought the stories to America, he became Santa Claus.

But, as I mentioned, Nicholas was the bishop of Myra, a church bishop.

- He wore a red pointed hat called a miter, and wore a red cape called a cope, and he taught people about JESUS.
  - So, there wouldn't be a St. Nicholas or a Santa Claus if it wasn't for...CHRIST.

In 1822, Clement Clarke Moore wrote a poem for the entertainment of his children called “A Visit from St. Nicholas.”

- The poem told of a jolly man in a sleigh pulled by reindeer landing on the roof and coming down the chimney.
  - What’s ironic is that Clement Moore was a seminary professor, and while his poem has become the basis for much of our legends about Santa Claus,
    - Moore’s life work was to study and learn about...CHRIST.
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A few years ago, four-year-old Spencer, his mother, and grandfather were Christmas shopping in a large mall.

- Seeing a long line of children and parents, Spencer asked, “What’s that?”
    - “That’s the line to see Santa Claus,” his mother told him.
    - “Oh,” he said.
  - They continued shopping, but all the while, the little boy kept looking around.
    - His mother asked him, “What are you looking for?”
      - Having been taught from the time he was a toddler that Christmas is about the birth of the CHRIST child, Spencer asked, “Where’s the line to see JESUS?”
  - His grandfather, Steve Haupt, was inspired and, upon arriving at home, sat down and wrote in two hours a song based on Spencer’s question.
    - He sent the song off to Nashville, but received no responses.
      - So, Steve gave the song to his other daughter, Spencer’s aunt, Becky Kelley, who recorded the song.
  - Spencer had been well taught and knew that this season was about...CHRIST.
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A company that sells fresh fruit is running radio ads that say:

- *“Christmas is about more than getting presents. It’s about sharing the joyous decadence of the sensations of this time of year with others.”*
  - “Joyous decadence?”
    - It’s Christmas and at Christmas, don’t forget...CHRIST.

Retailers aren’t the only ones.

- Freed-Hardeman University is a private Christian college in Henderson, TN.
  - A few year ago, they sent the following email message to their alumni:
    - *“Seasons greetings from Freed-Hardeman University family and friends. May this holiday season bring you cheer and hope as you celebrate your family, your blessings, and the love you have for one another. May the peace and joy of the holiday season be with you throughout the coming new year. Best wishes for a wonderful holiday and a happy New Year.”*
  - Didn’t something seem to be missing? It seems they forgot...CHRIST.
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It’s easy to lose CHRIST from Christmas, though, isn’t it?

- It’s easy to get lost in the maze of shopping and decorating and parties.
- It’s easy to get swept up in the buying and wrapping and giving and getting.
  - But at Christmas...don’t forget CHRIST.

Did you know that even this season, Christmas, gets its name from the church service—the mass that is held to honor the birth of CHRIST?

- It’s CHRIST’S mass—Christmas.

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We need to remember this and we need CHRIST.

- Certainly, the world 2,000 years ago needed CHRIST.

Between the pagan gods of the Middle East and the gods of Rome including the emperor (you didn't get to be emperor without being a god), there were plenty of things to worship.

- There was a clear distinction between the privileged and those who were not.
- Kingdoms vied against each other for control of the world politically, geographically, and financially.
- People ignored the needs of others and looked only to their own wants and desires.
  - And the worship of the one GOD—the GOD of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—was getting lost.
  - The world needed CHRIST.

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Not that much different in our world today, is it?

- Our world needs CHRIST just as much as the world of two millennia ago.
  - At Christmas...(say it with me) don't forget CHRIST.

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Remembering CHRIST starts in a manger where lowly shepherds come to worship the SAVIOR. Remembering CHRIST begins in a house where astronomers and astrologers and scientists and kings come to worship the CHRIST child.

Remembering CHRIST continues on the beach and in the villages where fishermen and tax collectors and the stubborn and the impulsive and the outcast and the sinful become HIS disciples.

Remembering CHRIST happens on hillsides and in villages where the curious and the desperate and the unsure come to hear HIS words.

Remembering CHRIST is at the foot of the cross where the faithful come to stand watch over HIS great sacrifice.

Remembering CHRIST is at the empty tomb where the sorrowful are filled with joy and go out to announce the good news of JESUS' triumph over death.

Remembering CHRIST begins in the Bible where the story of GOD'S grace and mercy and unconditional forgiveness are recorded so that all may know.

Remembering CHRIST endures in churches around the world where worshipers go week after week to celebrate the good news of GOD'S love for all people.

Remembering CHRIST occurs in the dark places where the faithful go and offer words and hands to bring the LIGHT of the world to brighten the gloom.

Remembering CHRIST can happen in homes where prayers are spoken before meals and at bedtime and the stories of JESUS are told.

Remembering CHRIST is what we're doing here tonight where believers have gathered to hear the wonderful story CHRIST'S birth and to sing praises to the PRINCE OF PEACE.

There is no doubt that our world needs CHRIST!

There is no doubt that our nation needs CHRIST!

There is no doubt that our community needs CHRIST!

There is no doubt that our neighbors need CHRIST!

There is no doubt that our family and friends need CHRIST!

There is no doubt that we need CHRIST!

So, tonight, help me, help all of us to remember that it is Christmas and at Christmas...DON'T FORGET CHRIST.