

CONSIDERING THE BUSINESS OF CHRISTMAS

By Robert J. Tamasy

What does Christmas mean to you?

This question is often asked this time of year, and answers are remarkably diverse. Some focus on the fun part of the season – parties, family gatherings, gift giving, good will toward others and happy music. Others think of endless preparations, such as cooking meals, preparing the home for visitors, putting up Christmas trees and decorations, the challenge of finding the right gifts and wrapping them. For millions, the real meaning of Christmas is to remember the birth of Jesus Christ, for whom the holiday is named.

For much of the business world of course, particularly in retail, Christmas means profits and the bottom line. Retail establishments of all sizes – department stores, clothing stores, children’s and jewelry stores, toy stores, even drug stores and grocery stores – anticipate sizable boosts during the year-end Christmas season. The same applies increasingly to online businesses, poised to ship goods of all kinds to meet the holiday needs of their customers. For both physical and virtual businesses, this season often serves as the boundary between black and red ink on the balance sheets.

For business and professional people, Christmas can mean one thing at work, while from a personal standpoint it can mean something different. So again the question: What does Christmas mean to you?

For those that believe the Bible, the answer must involve the Christ child, whose birth is celebrated at this time of year regardless of when it actually occurred on the calendar. The gospels of Matthew and Luke describe this birth in detail, but perhaps the gospel of John, without referring specifically to the events of Jesus’ arrival in Bethlehem, explains its significance most clearly:

"In the beginning was the Word (Jesus Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness did not understand it.... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us... (John 1:1-5,14).

As authors Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey wrote in their book, *In His Image*, when Jesus entered the world He became “the visible, finite expression of the invisible, infinite, inexpressible God.” Jesus told His followers that to see Him was to see God. Many religious leaders of the time viewed such a statement as an outrageous heresy, but that was what Jesus claimed.

At Christmas, followers of Christ commemorate His birth, but it doesn’t stop there. Jesus spent 33 years on earth as a teacher, mentor, model for living, and finally, the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of mankind. “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Without Jesus’ death on the cross – and His resurrection – this holiday we call Christmas would be meaningless. The world of commerce might have invented a similar observance to boost annual sales, but without Christ there truly could be no Christmas.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What does Christmas mean to you?
2. How does the perspective of Christmas that you observe in the business and professional world compare to your personal view?
3. When you think of the biblical accounts of the birth of Jesus Christ and his life, what reactions do you have?
4. Suppose Jesus had not been born, and there in fact was no Christmas – or any reason for it. What difference do you think that would make for life and work today?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to review some other passages that relate to this topic, consider the following verses:

Matthew 1:18-2:18; Luke 1:26-56, 2:1-20