

"The Christmas Communion Connection

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us." The Gospel According to St. John, 1:1, 14a (NIV)

Jesus, for all of the eternities before He received the Name "Jesus," was the "Word of God," and that Word "was God," the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. This eternally begotten Son of God was always God, but He wasn't always man. He assumed a human nature . . . He became one of us . . . when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born in Bethlehem. God the eternal Word stooped to being made man, with a true human body and true human blood, so that He could sacrifice that body and shed that blood on the cross, and thus atone for the sin of the world. That is what Christmas is supposed to celebrate.

The Christmas holiday, sadly, is claimed by two different religions: the Holy Christian Faith, and the religion of Materialism. Materialism being the sort of creature that it is, it keeps wanting to make the Christmas season longer and longer. More often than not, the Materialists now refer to it as the "happy holidays" season, since their syncretistic nature invites them merrily to bow to other religions, and the religion of Political Correctness currently seems to be the one that produces the most sales. This year, the holiday jingles and the store overhauls began even before Thanksgiving.

For those who still let the traditions of the Church speak, the pre-Christmas season of Advent began last Sunday. Advent focuses on the three "comings" of Christ, i.e., that He came once bodily, He comes now bodily, and He will come again to us bodily. That is, He came once as a baby to die on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, He will come again in glory on the last day to take His forgiven ones to heaven, and He comes to us now in the Sacrament of the Altar to give us His body and His blood to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of our sins.

So how should one observe Christmas? I really do not expect Materialists to act like anything other than what they are. I certainly join with the faithful Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in calling on Materialists to repent and receive the true Christian Faith, but until that happens, I can hardly expect unbelievers to feign sainthood (unless they discover that it is profitable).

My concern, rather, has to do with the many, many people who consider themselves Christians, but who nevertheless find themselves confused about how to celebrate Christmas. And I suspect that a large part of that confusion stems from a misunderstanding of what that day really is. Many Christians, reacting to the encroachment of the Materialists on our sacred day, have reacted with the slogans, "Jesus: the reason for the season," and "keep Christ in Christmas!" That last one recaptures the "Christ" half of Christmas. But there is another half! To my knowledge, never in the ancient history of Christianity has the church called Christmas "the festival

of happy birthday Jesus." It is Christ-MASS. And there, in the name of the holiday (holy day), is the answer to how one best celebrates Christmas.

Now that word "mass" scares some folks. It is an ancient word; we are not even sure of its derivation, but it means basically a communion service . . . a church service where Holy Communion is celebrated. Historically, the church has always had a communion service on Christmas morning. What a travesty, when churches stray so far from the original meaning of Christmas that they do not have church on that day! Some even try to excuse it by saying it is a "family" day! No, it is not! It is a church day, it is Christ's day, and frankly, I cannot think of anywhere I would rather have my family be than in church receiving Christ on Christmas morning!

When Jesus instituted Holy Communion, He said "this is my body" and "this is my blood." A person can take Jesus at His word on this or not, but it does not depend on "what your definition of 'is' is." "Is" means "is," and Jesus says it "is." He also said that it is "for the forgiveness of sins."

Put it all together, and it makes sense: How does one best celebrate that the eternal Word of God assumed a human body and blood so He could be crucified and save us? One does that best by going to church on Christ-mass morning, and receiving the true body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. The meals and the presents and the singing are great, but from a Christian perspective, they are peripheral. What matters most is receiving Jesus Himself, in the body and blood way that He came to us once, and offers Himself to us now, and will come again for us in glory.

Dear ones in Christ: this year, keep Christ in Christmass, but keep the mass in Christmass too. Understandably, Pastors who know that Holy Communion really is the body and blood of Jesus are going to be careful who they give it to, out of respect for Jesus. So talk to your Pastor soon about your desire to commune on Christmass Day, and give him a chance to prepare you to receive communion correctly. A blessed Christmass to all of you. See you in church!

Rev. Kent A. Heimbigner, Ph.D.
Pastor, Charity Lutheran Church
Burlison, Texas"