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Politically Correct Christmas

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Politically Correct Christmas

“Merry Christmas” has returned; we do not have to use “Happy Holidays” in every public situation. We neither offered nor intended offense of any kind to Jewish, Muslim, or any other of our friends. The season has roots in the Christian tradition that is cherished by those who believe, and fosters acts of kindness and generosity, not proselytism. Recently, some businesses have discovered that the word “holiday” does not carry with it a strong motive for buying gifts. Christmas and other occasions revered by families, cultures, and religions usually does move us to show care for one another, often through the sharing of meals, sending of notes, and giving of gifts.

Christmas is celebrated with material signs and celebrations that naturally follow from the belief that God loves us. God became “family” for those who believe in Jesus as Son of God. But for those who do not believe, Christmas still has positive resonances because of the way Christian neighbors have celebrated their beliefs through inclusive sharing of love and fellowship. Whether others might be celebrating Kwanzaa or Hanukkah or nothing, we can greet them with a “Merry Christmas” that is open to all.

The first Christmas was not a party, though Jesus’ birth was an occasion for celebration. The Roman Emperor who imposed his will on a captive nation had not the least concern for the great inconvenience he caused Joseph and Mary when they had to leave family and friends at the very time Jesus was to be born. The same circumstances are repeated in many places in the world: in refugee camps, in nations where there is war, in all the places where mothers and fathers want to celebrate the gift of new life, but worry about having a safe place for giving birth and raising children. Christmas is a time to connect the plight of those who are disadvantaged with that of Mary and Joseph and to share what we can, even if it might seem to be “only a cave” in which to celebrate new life. Christmas is a sign understood by both believers and by many non-Christians: one of the most certain ways of meeting God with love is by caring for people who are in need.

The Christmas story elicits joy and peace, not because we can afford expensive gifts, but because we are willing to make efforts and little sacrifices for the sake of others. Celebrations at home, at work, or in church take planning and effort. Writing notes to friends and family takes some of our valuable time. In small ways, we enter into solidarity with the inconvenience of Mary and Joseph in bringing God’s love into the world. The Christmas story has supported generations of

people in caring for the plight of those who are mistreated by the powerful and rich, but favored by God. If we are favored, we want to favor others; if we are poor and oppressed, we identify with God who chose to be with us. All of us can be touched by the story.

"Merry Christmas" is not for Americans only but for Israelis and Palestinians, for citizens of Darfur and El Salvador, Mexico and Serbia... Christmas is not "politically correct" because it is not about nations, power, or control, but about the value of human persons in God's eyes. God, in Jesus, did not come to favor one people with their particular form of government over another people with theirs. God favors all people.

What manifestations of love are we led to make as we look in on Joseph, Mary, Jesus, and their visitors? The scene is inclusive and open to all. Come and see. Notice the experience of heart, recognizing that God is with us. When we go about our daily work, we can more readily act as though God is indeed among us in the ordinariness of our humanity. We have much cause for saying "Merry Christmas."