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A Birthday

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A Birthday

In 1870, President Grant signed into law Christmas Day as a national holiday. In our time, December 25 marks the end of the commercials and broadcasts of Christmas music, and marks the birthday of Jesus for those who celebrate it.

A birthday is not in itself a political or a religious statement, since people throughout the world celebrate the birthdays of public figures important to them, as we do with Presidents, with Martin Luther King, and others. Choosing a person's date of birth for a celebration is appropriate because we are glad the person we admire was born at a specific time and place. Birthdays are personal: we celebrate only the birthdays of people whom we know and respect, those whose lives are connected with ours in some positive manner.

Jesus is a historical figure. Some believe that he is the Son of God; others see him as a prophet or an especially good man, and still others as a trouble-maker. But most people who know of him acknowledge that his life has had a lasting and positive impact in our world. As with others whose birthdays are publically celebrated, some are angry that attention is focused on him. But there he is: a world-changer like no other in all of history.

Our birthdays are important to us and to those who care about us, not primarily as markers of age, however much we might joke about the number of years we have lived, but as times to celebrate that we are unique persons, sharing human life with other unique persons. We have in common with all people, famous or known only by their parents, human life. We are all related, not different from one another as birds are from cats or dogs.

Jesus of Nazareth is one of us, born as we were, into a world of both gifts and challenges. On birthdays of a family member or a friend, we might take the occasion to think of how that person is special to us. We have memories of shared events, awareness of how our particular relationship has changed or grown, and our personal reflections on the importance of that person in our life. We might also choose to express some of our care for him or her and might share with others a celebration of the birthday. Any and all of these human means of relating are appropriate for those who have a high regard for Jesus.

One day of birthday celebration is only a small part of our relationship with someone; any and all forms of love are ongoing and not limited to

a particular time and place. So great is the love of so many people for Jesus and for one another, that the celebration of Christmas continues for many days after December 25. Love is the reason for the season of Christmas. For when we observe a birthday not just of someone, but with someone, everyone who participates is enhanced in ways that far transcend the cards and gifts, the food and drink that are part of the celebrations.

Happy Birthday, for all who partake.