

We Give up Christmas, We Give up Christ.

A Sermon by Fr. Orlando J. Addison

Holy Faith Episcopal Church

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Christmas is a festival! A time of celebration! A day of joy and peace, a day of salvation! Christmas is the day Christians around the world celebrate the birth of the Messiah, the one who was promised to the world through the prophets. The one who was born on a night like this; the one who is king, who humbled himself to become one of us. Born of a Virgin, a direct descendant from the throne of David through Joseph.

Christmas is a time to remember the Word that existed with God. It is a celebration of the one who came into this world of darkness to bring us light, to light up our world, our life, to clear the path that leads to his eternal kingdom. Christmas is the celebration of the most wonderful event ever experienced by human beings in the history of human kind. It is a celebration of hope, of a promise kept, and of a prophecy fulfilled.

The Christian world has been celebrating Midnight Mass for centuries in anticipation of the birth of Christ. Millions of believers all over the globe gather in their local churches to prepare themselves spiritually and emotionally to greet the newborn child. This has been our tradition for centuries; this is our heritage; this is part of our identity. We celebrate this special night, this special event because the one who was born over two thousand years ago came into this world to do one act of kindness, to save us from our sins through his death on the cross!

Tonight we are proud to call ourselves Christians because we believe that the child that was born on a night like this in a small town called Bethlehem; the child Mary carried in her womb for nine months, is the Messiah, God incarnate, the anointed one, the redeemer of the world, our savior Jesus Christ.

You and I know that the secular world is trying hard to change our Christian identity by telling members of our society to be politically correct. They are strongly suggesting not to call tonight's event a Christmas celebration, instead a "holiday season." They have gone to Congress and have tried to push legislators to change the Christian meaning of Christmas in order for the celebration to become more inclusive to non-Christians. Look, I have no problem respecting the celebration of other religions in the country, after all, we are living in a country that respects and encourages religious freedom.

However, if we allow the non-believers to take away this night, then we will lose our Christian identity and the efforts of all faithful believers who risked their lives defending the faith of the Church, the efforts of those who defended with their blood the humanity and divinity of Christ, would have been in vain.

If we allow the atheists to change the meaning of Christmas; the celebration of the birth of our Savior; to deny the coming of Christ into the world; if we allow their intention to take place, then we, as a nation, will give up who we are, a community of believers in God through Jesus Christ.

We should not allow anyone to take away this glorious celebration. We should not allow anyone to take away our faith, our belief in Christ. All Christian denominations under the wings of the Lord need to come together to defend our faith. We have to unite and become one voice, one church in order to protect our Christian heritage, and to safeguard the promises made to us through the one who died and who will come again.

Paul says in his letter to Titus, “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Beloved, if we act like Christians, walk like Christians, talk like Christians, live in community like Christians, then the atheists will have no case against us and their intention to supplant this festival, our Lord's birthday, will be out of order. If we do what the Lord has instructed us to do through the Gospels, to love one another, and to proclaim the Good News of Christ, then the non-believers would have no right to tell us how we should or should not celebrate this glorious night.

The people who do not believe in the celebration of Christmas and would like to call this special event a "holiday season," have not experienced the transforming power of Christ in their lives, through the Holy Spirit. They do not understand the importance of this occasion. They do not understand that the same child who was born thousands of years ago, who became man, who gave his life for the forgiveness of sins, this same Christ who came back to life and is seated at the right hand of the Father, will one day come in the middle of the night to judge the world. They do not understand that our midnight mass is not only a celebration of our Lord's birth, but it is also an occasion for all believers to prepare ourselves, to receive the one who will return like a thief in the night.

Do you know that the announcement of the birth of Jesus was given in private, first to Mary, then to St. Joseph and later to Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist? Everyone, each member of the 12 tribes of Israel knew, through the prophets, that the Messiah was coming, that God was going to send a liberator to his people. But they did not know the day and the time this event would happen. You see, Jesus was born in the night, in a stable surrounded by animals, away from the crowd, in the silence of the dark where no one expected Him to be born, surprising everyone. This is the same way Jesus is planning to return.

But right after the birth of our Lord, the announcement became public; it was given through the Angels to the Shepherds who were guarding their sheep at night. Once the Shepherds knew about the birth of the Messiah, they rejoiced and went into all the towns of Judea and Jerusalem to share the Good News.

Tonight we are remembering that night. Tonight we are celebrating the birth of God into the world, through Jesus Christ. Tonight is a night of joy, a night of festivity when we, together with the shepherds and all the angels, are rejoicing at the birth of Christ. Tonight, the message of the birth of our Savior has been delivered to us through the Word, through the Bible and we are now invited to share this great news to the world.

This is why we call it Christmas, this is why we should not permit anyone to give this day another name or another meaning. This is our night, this is the Lord's night and we should never give it up. We should make all effort to spread the Good News of Christ, so that everyone living on the four corners of the earth should know that the child we are celebrating tonight is the promised Christ! They need to know that this same child, who gave up His life for us and for them, on a wooden cross on Good Friday, will one day return to judge the world.

Over two thousand years ago the world received a great gift, the gift of the Messiah and that gift brought into the world, peace, joy, and love. As Christians we are called by God to share His peace among us and in our communities. We are called to be a peaceful congregation, to resolve, through forgiveness, any disputes, misunderstanding and heart feeling among us, so that those who intend to change the celebration of this night witness the presence of God in our hearts.

We are called by God to share the gift of joy that Jesus brought into this world. Christians and non-Christians need to see and experience through us the gift of Joy that comes through a personal relationship with Jesus. The absence of Joy in our lives and in our community, takes place when we allow jealousy, hate, envy, and unforgiveness rule our hearts. All these negative energies contribute to division

among us, lead to the destruction of our church, and cause nonbelievers to walk away from the faith. But when we begin to use the gift of joy, when we all have experienced the real presence of Christ in our hearts, then jealousy, hate, envy and unforgiveness will be removed from our hearts, from our community and we will be able to share the joy the shepherds felt, the joy Mary and Joseph experienced the night Jesus was born, to the world.

Tonight we are invited by God to share the love Jesus brought into the world. This same Jesus will say to us through John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” One of the gifts we can give Jesus tonight, one of the gifts that will please Jesus, is that you and I make a promise tonight to love one another, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Let us not make this promise with our lips but let us intentionally work hard to accomplish this promise. Furthermore, let us not wait until tomorrow to begin, if we are serious about being Christians and if we believe in our hearts that Jesus, our Savior was born on this night, then let’s start loving one another and our neighbors tonight! Once we start practicing peace, joy and love in this congregation, then the world will want to be part of this community because they will see Christ in each one of us!

Beloved, I pray that the Lord would strengthen your faith, brighten your life, and give you the courage to proclaim his Name to the world, this night and all the days of your life. May the Lord bless you and keep you and may the one, whose birthday we celebrate tonight, fill your hearts with his peace, joy and love. Happy birthday Jesus! Merry Christmas to all of you. Amen.