

# Celebrate the time after Christmas

We Christians get a pretty good deal at Christmas time. We get two Christmas seasons! We get the retail Christmas, the time before Christmas, with all the lights and decorations and songs. This is the season to get people to buy things. It's sort of a secular season of Advent, but, rather than focusing on the preparing for the coming of Christ, it focuses on buying things.

(As an aside, a friend of my sister, Helen, once exclaimed: "Oh, those Wise Men! If only they had taken Mary and Joseph out to lunch instead of bringing gifts. We wouldn't have all this shopping.")

Let me hasten to say that I am far from condemning shopping. I've done a fair amount of it in my time. It's good for the economy. It provides jobs for people. Anything that inspires generosity and giving is a good thing.

However, there are limits to the retail Christmas. Celebrating the coming of God into the world as a human being, by buying ourselves a flat screen television, does not exhaust all possibilities.

That's why we Christians celebrate the Christmas season - the time after Christmas! It's the time during which we watch the baby grow to adulthood. Christmas is more than just a sweet day to celebrate the birth of a cute baby into the world. There are a lot of cute babies born every day. Most, however, don't grow up with an understanding that they are God.

So I would like to use this opportunity to invite you the reader to invite anyone you know who comes to church only on Christmas to come with you in the weeks following Christmas. Invite them to celebrate the true Christmas season. The church will look familiar. It will still be decorated. But they will experience some new things.

Invite them to watch the arrival of the Magi (Epiphany, Jan. 8), the growing of Jesus into adolescence (Dec. 30 marked the Feast of the Holy Family) and his growth into an adult (The Baptism of the Lord, Jan. 9). You see, as we watch the Lord grow into adulthood, there is the opportunity for all of us to have our faith grow into adult

faith. If we just celebrate Christmas as a one-day holiday, we risk making Santa the equal of Jesus – a one-night wonder who disappears into the night until next year.

Yet, while Santa can embody the virtue of selfless giving for one day, Christ embodies the reality of eternal selfless giving. Santa has attained an annual immortality. Christ invites us all to be one with our immortal God.

The ultimate meaning of Christmas was captured by St. Augustine, who said: “God became human that humans might become God!” The baby Jesus grew to adulthood with an awareness of the divinity within him. When we grow up in our faith, we become aware of the divinity within us. The God who came once in history to dwell in our world, wants to come every day to dwell in us. He wants to make his home in us. This Jesus gave us his Father as our father, his Spirit as our Spirit. We are empowered to live the life of God. If only we believed God! If only we accepted God at his Word.