

Tired of holidays, preparing for Christmas

I'm already tired of the holidays.

The season of preparation is well upon us. You've seen signs of it for weeks now, I'm sure. The decorations went up in the stores, even before Halloween in some places and that just ain't right.

The holiday doorbusters are ready for the Friday after Thanksgiving (stores open at 4 a.m.), and one retailer (which shall remain nameless, but it rhymes with jeers) has said its stores will even be open on Thanksgiving Day.

Of course, in most stores, these preparations are for the "holidays," some vaguely generic feast. Certainly, the decorations occasionally include Christmas trees and you might find a card with a Nativity scene or the Three Kings or a religious ornament somewhere in the cacophony of images.

You'll be deluged with messages to buy, buy, buy. There's jewelry, games, toys, HD TVs. Won't a new luxury car with a big, red bow on it look perfect in your driveway? Get yours during the "year-end" event that one carmaker is calling the "season of reason."

All this, despite the fact that this is not the "season of reason," but that the reason for the season is preparation for Christmas: the celebration of the birth of Jesus.

Advent begins this year, as it often does, on the weekend immediately after Thanksgiving. But so many people get caught up in the holiday shopping and holiday gatherings that they forget to take advantage of all that Advent has to offer. In this year's cycle of readings, we listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah as he foretells the coming of the Savior.

And yet, all around us, people have forgotten that this is why the stores are decorated. This is why we give gifts - because the heavenly Father gave us the greatest gift, his Son. And in an attempt to be secular and all-inclusive, in an attempt

not to offend anyone's sensitivities, we have "dumbed down" the season's greetings to "Happy Holidays" and other innocuous platitudes.

And this is the primary reason I'm already tired of the holidays. It's not just that the decorations went up before Halloween this year (heck, it seems to have even been before Labor Day in some stores). It's that no one remembers that it's the Christmas season.

I'll grant you that Christmas is not the only feast around. I have seen a few displays of Hanukkah-related items, but these have been unapologetically related to the feast. There's no beating around the bush to disguise the "holiday" to which these relate. The dreidels and menorahs are for the Jewish Festival of Lights, and no one balks at that. I don't have any problem with such displays, and I'm not offended at all.

So, why the reticence to talk about Christmas in the stores? It cannot be that the shopkeepers and corporate bigwigs don't like Christmas - they positively adore Christmas and the dollars it brings. It must be Christ, or the mention of him they don't adore.

But I like Advent and Christmas. I like to celebrate Advent, while preparing for Christmas. I love listening to the music (sacred carols and secular songs). I like keeping the baby Jesus' figure out of the manger until Christmas Eve, since until that time, we're waiting for his birth, and he has not arrived yet. I like wishing people at stores Merry Christmas - and seeing them smile and respond in kind.

So while I may be tired of the holidays already, I want to get ready for Christmas. There must be others like me.

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