



NON-PROFIT

The Good News Letter

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TAX-EXEMPT

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" MARK 16:15

December 2022

FROM US TO YOU

It seems like this year has gone by very quickly, and here we are at the Christmas season again. It's a happy time of year for most Christians as we remember God's most precious gift to us; the gift of *"...His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16 KJV). However, if you listen to the nightly news, death is always just a breath away as we hear of murders, accidents, and suicides that often tend to increase during the holiday season. However, because of God's gift to us, for the true Christian (Matthew 7:21-27), there is no death (1 Corinthians 15:53), just a quick trip home (John 14:2), leaving behind an earthly body (Genesis 2:7) that is not fit for the glories of Heaven (1 Corinthians 15:50). Without God's gift we would have no hope, just an eternity in the fires of Hell (Matthew 5:29) and the Lake of fire (see Revelation 20:15). But we are not of those who reject God's gift of salvation. *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God"* (1 Corinthians 1:18 NIV). *"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels [flesh and blood bodies], that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us"* (2 Corinthians 4:5-7 KJV).

What is your greatest Christmas desire? Do you want to be rich and successful in this temporary, evil world? Or do you want to be a success in the Kingdom of God? You can't be both. Jesus said, *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money"* (Matthew 6:24 NIV). This current world is under the control of Satan. Originally God gave it to mankind through Adam when it was a perfect world. However, when Adam sinned against God, he forfeited his authority over the earth and became Satan's slave. *"Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin'"* (John 8:34 NIV). That meant all of Adam's offspring would become slaves to Satan and sin as well. That's all of us. That's why *"we all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"* (Isaiah 53:6 NIV). The "Him" of course is Jesus, God's holy Son, who left the Father He loves and all the peace and beauty of Heaven to come into this decaying world as a baby and, as a grown man, die an agonizing, shameful, death in order to purchase us back to God. That holy birth is what Christmas is all about! *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23 NIV).

It's not about Santa Claus, a fictional character, or reindeer, or

snowmen, or gifts, fancy food, parties, drunkenness, or toys. At Christmas time, we don't worship carnal creation. We worship the holy Creator who gave us the greatest gift of all, the opportunity to receive eternal life! Christmas is about Jesus Christ. And when we choose to turn from the ways of our past, and repent of our sin, we accept Christ's sacrifice of eternal salvation. Unlike popular thinking, we were not originally born children of God. *"Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God"* (John 1:12-13 NIV). That's why, the experience is called being "Born Again" (John 3:3).

Sadly society drifts further and further from Christ every year. We are old enough to remember when department stores played Christian Christmas songs during the season. All such Christmas

hymns of past years are hardly ever heard these days. They have been replaced with songs about Santa Claus, reindeer, and snow.

A few years ago the television news had a story about a house in the suburbs that was so full of fancy lights and Christmas decorations that the neighbors complained that it had become a tourist attraction. One neighbor was interviewed. He said, "Well, I'm Catholic. But what does this have to do with the birth of Christ?" Our sentiments exactly! Christmas songs like "I'm Dreaming Of A White Christmas" and "I'll Be Home For Christmas" sound pretty to the ear, and there is nothing wrong with them per se. However, they should not take the place of songs that glorify God at Christmas time.

Another problem is that Christmas has been watered down with so many other religions. The Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, the Moslem day of Ramadan, and the African-American day of Kwanzaa, often fall around the same time of year as Christians celebrate Christmas. For many people, "Merry Christmas" has been replaced with "Happy Holidays." For a Christian it should always be "Merry Christmas." Only Jesus Christ paid for our salvation! For if you love and serve Jesus, *"...you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ..."* (1 Peter 1:18-19 NIV). *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under Heaven given to men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12 NIV).

Therefore, we say, "Joy to the world! The Lord has come. Let earth receive her King! Let every heart prepare Him room, and Heaven and nature sing." "Hark the herald angels sing. Glory to the newborn King." And "Oh, holy night, the stars are brightly shining. It is the night of the dear Savior's birth."

Merry Christmas everyone! *Eric and Anne Kaestner*



Merchandising of Christmas

By Anne Kaestner

It's Christmas time and bells are ringing! No, not from reindeer pulling sleighs through the snow. That's fantasy. It's the very real ringing of cash registers. Shopping mall parking lots are filled with cars. People are getting home with sore feet, aching backs, and bags filled with unwrapped gifts. It's a ritual every year. Advertisements are everywhere. And children insist they must have the latest Christmas toy. Last year there was a problem with the supply chain and American children who couldn't get their toys were devastated! Is this what Christmas has come to in the United States? A "give me" holiday? It never used to be this way before the twentieth century. In those days it was a holy holiday. It's the Santa Claus influence that has changed it. Contrast this with a television movie I saw based on the book "Little House On The Prairie" by Laura Ingalls Wilder. The book was a memoir of her childhood in the nineteenth century. After an exhausting and perilous journey across open land, the Ingalls family finally built a little house on the prairie. Laura spoke of the joy she and her family had on Christmas day. If I remember correctly, she said she and her sister each got a cookie and a shiny new penny.

The influence of a fictional Santa has taken all the attention away from God, who gave us the most amazing, priceless gift of all. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him" (John 3:16-17 NIV). In other words, God who designed this whole universe, loved us so much that He had compassion on us. Because our original parents, Adam and Eve, allowed sin to enter the human race, giving control of this world over to Satan, the devil, thus enslaving all of us, through sin, to spiritual separation from God. That eventually causes death in each person and eternity in the fire of Hell and the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14-15) in the center of the earth. That's where Satan and his demons will end up (Mathew 25:41). And if our sin is not paid for, that's where we will go forever.

All our good works will not pay God back for our sin. For our sin makes us slaves to the devil (John 8:34), and we don't understand how evil we are compared to God. Only Christ was able to pay God back for the price of our sin. And that only occurs if we repent of our sin, ask God's forgiveness and accept Christ's atonement for our sin. Only then are we Born Again (John 3:16). To the church, Paul wrote, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV). This commitment cannot be taken lightly. Jesus left His Father, and the joys of Heaven, to come into this evil world and take our punishment for us. He knew ahead of time, how much agony, humiliation, and abuse He would endure for us. Isaiah prophesied what God's only-begotten Son would later suffer for us. "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led

like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth" (Isaiah 53:3-7 NIV). But He left His Father and the love and peace of Heaven and entered this world as a baby for us. Christmas is the time we set aside every year to honor His holy birth.

Now compare that to the Santa Claus spirit. How does this popular intruder fit in at this one time of the year that we Christians celebrate the birth of our Savior? Do you remember the poem called "A Visit from St. Nicholas"? It starts out:

"Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there..."

It was written in 1822 by Clement Clarke Moore, a wealthy Manhattan resident, and the son of the first Episcopal Bishop of New York. He was devoted to his family, and a dedicated church man. So he should have known better.

As for St. Nicholas, he was supposedly born in Patara approximately 270 years after Christ. Patara is about 350 miles northwest of Bethlehem on the shores of the Mediterranean, in Lycia, which is today part of Turkey. He was said to have been a Greek bishop in the Eastern Orthodox Church. From his own period not one shred of historical evidence exists to prove that St. Nicholas ever existed. In fact, in 1969, after many years of deep historical investigation, a report by the Roman Catholic Church approved by Pope Paul VI, revealed doubt as to whether many of the church's saints, including St. Nicholas, were saints or just revered legendary heroes. To those with spiritual discernment (see 1 Corinthians 12:10), early sketches give the appearance of St. Nick as a sinister, demon-like character, grinning, with a long face, sack over his back, and mischief in mind. But that eventually changed, and Santa Claus began emerging in a different appearance. He aged, gained weight, grew a few inches, and now wore a beard.

The first painting of St. Nicholas by an American artist was by Robert Walter Weir in 1837. It showed an elf-like fixture without a beard, dressed in high Dutch boots, a brown suit, and a red cape. He also wore a rosary. In 1848, Henry M. Onderdonk, a New York printer and bookseller, published Clement Moore's poem for the first time as an illustrated book for children. The small eight-page pamphlet had seven woodcuts depicting sleeping children, stockings hanging, and the Christmas elf driving his miniature team through the streets and over the rooftops of a quaint old-fashioned Dutch New York. Clement Moore's Santa was fur clad. Bearskin and other fur coats and hats were common winter attire for men in the nineteenth century. Santa's boots were contributed by the Dutch settlers in New Amsterdam. The association between St. Nicholas, Christmas, and children was started in the Middle Ages. It is believed that the gift giving in the name of St. Nicholas began in France, where nuns in the thirteenth century began leaving presents at the homes of the poor on the eve of this saint's day, December 6. The custom spread across Europe.

It was about the time of the Protestant Reformation that St. Nicholas first began to be disguised as something other than a Catholic saint. In Protestant homes he was made to appear ridiculous and frightening to children. Clement Moore's Santa was fur clad. Then another New Yorker named Thomas Nast, continued the Santa Claus legend. In 1863, this German immigrant was working as an assistant illustrator at Frank Leslie's Magazine. The Gregory Company of



New York approached him with an offer to do the illustrations for a book of Christmas poems, including Moore's. When his work appeared under the title "Christmas Poems," it was so successful that Nast was able to get a better job. He moved over to Harper's Magazine and his first Harper's Santa Claus appeared as a small part of a large illustration entitled "A Christmas Furlough" in the December 26, 1863 issue. For 23 years, each Christmas, Nast set aside his regular news and political coverage to do a Santa Claus drawing. The first edition of "A Visit From St. Nicholas" that showed him in a red cloth coat appeared around 1870. The artist is still unknown. Through the years, advertisers, book illustrators and magazines have added to the mystique of Santa Claus.

So subtle are the methods of the devil that these days few Christians even notice. They come in the form of complacency, false doctrine, churchianity instead of Christianity, compromise, and worldliness. Keeping this in mind, I've become more aware of just how much ingrained into our society pagan religious practices and customs have become even to the child of God. Few Christians today see anything wrong with such things as Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. How sad this is! This complacent attitude is especially troublesome now when the world, and especially America, is being pulled apart. This once Christian nation is rapidly becoming a land filled with warring factions wrestling against each other (Ephesians 6:12). Satan has been gaining strength because Christians have become lukewarm (Revelation 3:15-19) and political, instead of seeking holiness (Matthew 6:33) before God!

The merchandising of Christianity has been going on since the days of the apostles. Paul wrote, *"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness"* (1 Timothy 6:9-11 NIV). So while you're shopping for Christmas presents, keep in mind the sacrifice God made for us, and the most holy, priceless gift of all, the gift of God's own Son. Consider how much love, Jesus, who made this universe (John 1:1-3), must have had for us in order to endure such pain, humiliation, and abuse in order to pay for our sin. Think of it. The one who put the planets in the sky, and all the stars in place, came to this earth to die at the hands of His own creation, for His most prized creation, mankind. Think of the excitement and love God the Father and God the Son had for each other during the creation of this planet for us. As Jesus said through the writings of Solomon, *"I was there when He set the heavens in place, when He marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when He established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when He gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep His command, and when He marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was the craftsman at His side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in His presence, rejoicing in His whole world and delighting in mankind"* (Proverbs 8:27-31 NIV). And don't confuse God's holiness with carnal statues and icons.

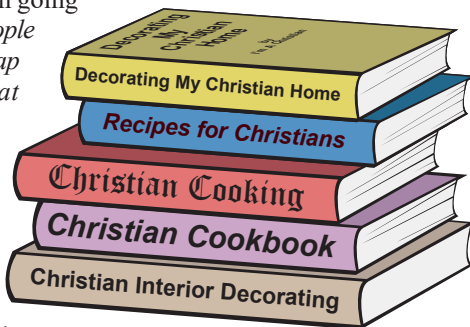
This reminds me of a sermon an American missionary to Italy told a church we used to attend when he was back in the United States years ago. I'll call him George, but I don't think that was his real name. He recalled an episode in Italy where a woman called him into her house. Her husband was having a tantrum. The woman looked shaken. Apprehensively, George entered the house. Spaghetti was hanging from the ceiling, and her husband was fuming. The woman

wanted George to calm down her husband. George asked him what happened. He responded, "I came home from work, and my dinner was cold. I work hard every day. Is it asking so much for me to have a hot dinner?" "No. That's not too much to ask," George answered him. "Signor George," the woman replied. "I make a hot dinner for him every night. But he doesn't come straight home. He stops off at his friend's house. And I don't know what time to expect him." "Do you know what your problem is?" George told the man. "You need Jesus in your life. Then you will not fight like this." The man grabbed a hold of George's hand and took him from room to room in the house. He pointed out little statues of Jesus as he went. "Look, here's Jesus. And in this room, look here's Jesus again. And here in the bedroom, there's Jesus over there" the man told him. George replied, "You don't need Jesus in your house. You need Him in your heart." This story illustrates the problem when people use man-made symbols to replace Christ instead of taking Him into their hearts.

Those who want to get rich selling religious items are especially prevalent at Christmas. You will see such items at the store, online, and in catalogs. They are things like nativity scenes on china, pillows with Christian symbols on them, and bath towels with holiday scripture. There's nothing wrong with these items as long as you don't confuse them with reverence to Christ. However, when Christians try to get rich selling such things, they are cheapening God's sacrifice and straying off of the "straight and narrow" (Matthew 7:13-14) into lukewarm territory (Revelation 3:16). I used to belong to a book club.

One day I received a book in the mail. It was about interior decorating. The subject alone had nothing to do with Christianity, but the book was promoted as being written from a Christian perspective. But the more I looked at it, the more angry I became. It was just an ordinary decorating book except for a scripture verse here and there. Obviously it was sold as a "Christian" decorating book in order to increase sales. Christians would be more willing to buy it. The anger inside of me wasn't my anger. It was coming from the Holy Spirit. The better you get to know God, the more you will really know just how angry He can become at times.

Have you noticed how many cookbooks there are in Christian book stores? They all have the "Christian" label on them. And they are guaranteed to sell! After all, why buy a cookbook from the "world" when you can buy one by a fellow Christian? But then how do you know that the woman or man writing the cookbook is really a Christian? Jesus said, *"Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity"* (Matthew 7:21-23 KJV). Jesus also said, *"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits..."* (Matt. 7:15-16 KJV). They use the name "Jesus Christ" or "Christian" to sell their cookbook, or advice book, or whatever it may be, but they really don't know Jesus at all. Because those who know Christ, feel His emotions. We feel His concern for His lost sheep. We feel His desire for correct Biblical teachings, and Christian growth. We feel His anger at those who are giving Him lip service, just to promote their own books or records, or tapes or services, and yet set themselves up as great men or women of God! They don't even know Him! Because if they knew Him, they would fear Him. And the same Jesus who took a whip and chased the sales people out of the temple because they were trying to merchandise God, **(Continued on Page 4)**



and profit from the gospel, is just as angry at those who would use His name to sell goods and services today. They might look appealing to the eye, and have a wholesome wrapping around them, but that shouldn't be surprising since, "...Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:14-15 KJV). And the sad part about it is that many of these people who are writing books and selling records all under the label "Christian" are believing their own advertising. Many of them don't even realize how the devil is using them. They think they are doing God a service! And they are thinking it all the way to the bank!

By now you may be saying, "What's wrong with a cookbook, or exercise book, or a book on interior design anyway? Why can't it be Christian?" First of all, they are giving you a false sense of security. They are adding to the "Santa Claus" notion that God is just a happy well-meaning do-gooder. Just be a good parent, and cook nice family meals, and do your exercises to look trim and muscular, and that's what Christianity is all about, right? Jesus died on the cross of Calvary for us so that we can all live in the happy world of the Born Again Believer (John 3:3). And all it takes to be a good Christian is regular church attendance, and good moral values, and a happy family life, right? Really?

The Moslems, the Jews, and the cults all attend their religious services, and believe in the same good things. So what's the difference? The difference is Christ. And He said, "*Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men*" (Matthew 5:13 KJV). In ancient times salt was used as a preservative for food. And Jesus, the Bread of Life (see Matthew 26:26) is that spiritual food that you are supposed to be preserving. How are you going to get a drug addict to repent of his sins, and ask Jesus to come into his heart and clean him out? Hand him a "Christian cookbook?" How will you get the wife beater to stop attacking his woman before he puts her in the hospital or kills her? What help can you offer him for his raging temper? Hand him a "Christian" book on interior decorating? Yes, I'm being sarcastic, but I need to shock you in order to get your attention. It's gotten so bad that my husband got up early a few years ago on a Sunday morning, and saw something he couldn't believe. He told me about a so-called Christian preacher who was selling videotapes of his young, pretty wife dressed in a tight leotard outfit doing her figure exercises. How many people do you think will be saved from the eternal fires of Hell by watching this preacher's wife doing her calisthenics?

Now please don't misunderstand me. There's nothing wrong with a Christian wanting to have a nice house and pretty furniture. I used to buy decorating magazines myself. I also go out for fast food sometimes. But just because a Christian eats a hamburger, that doesn't make it a "Christian hamburger." Frankly, I wouldn't be surprised if some enterprising person got the idea some time of putting up a sign on his restaurant, "Christian Hamburgers." I'm sure that he'd have church people from all over congregating at his door. But what would make them Christian? The Bible tells us, "*Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it...*" (Psalm 127:1). And this ministry isn't blessing so many people because Anne Kaestner has a talent for writing, and Eric Kaestner is very good at computers. The Holy Spirit is working through us from beginning

to end. And that's why hardened prison inmates from Florida's Death Row to California's San Quentin, write to us and tell us how much they have been helped by what we have written. Because we're not trying to flatter our own ego's, or profit, from the gospel of Christ. We're just trying to please Jesus. And giving you cake recipes isn't going to help you get to know who He really is, and how much He loves you!

It's not psychology or the wisdom of men (and women) that will melt the heart of a rapist or serial killer. And telling you how to decorate your home or cell, isn't going to do a thing for the cause of Christ! The job of a Christian is to do the will of God. And Jesus made this very clear to Simon Peter in John 21:15-17. When Jesus asked Peter, "*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?*" He was getting to the root of the matter. Peter assured Jesus that of course he did. But Jesus asked the same question three times. And each time that Peter responded affirmatively, Jesus said, "*Feed my lambs... Feed my sheep... Feed my sheep.*" When I said, "Yes Lord. I'll give you my everything," I took a book I'd been working on writing for over a year, and dumped it all down the incinerator, because I knew it didn't give God glory. Oh, I know I could have changed it around a bit, and added a few scriptures here and there, put something cute about a baby or a puppy into it, and a few ethical and moral values, and marketed it as "Christian." But I didn't do that. I tossed it all in the garbage to be burned into ashes. It would

be easy for me to write books or articles on all types of topics; Christian novels, poetry, etc. I could even write my own

cookbook, as I am a very good cook, and have developed many of my own recipes. But how is that going to give Christ glory, or teach people what it really means to be a Christian?

As for the "Christian" decorating book, I noticed pretty fast that despite all the little Bible quotes, and neat little passages about having a Christian home, the book was filled with photos of the author's own houses. And, although he was promoting himself as a great man of God in order to sell his book, the house actually had little ethnic idols around one of the rooms, and rugs and other items of furniture that had distinct pagan symbols on them. Most people don't realize that

every culture that has not been Judo-Christian has incorporated religious symbols into its art objects. A statue that looked like an oriental "god" sat over the fireplace in his house. And yet he was telling other people how to put a Christian influence in their homes! I get used to seeing that type of thing in secular magazines. The world doesn't know any better. But too many so-called Christians are far more interested in making money, and lecturing other people on how to live for God, than they are in learning how to humble themselves before Christ (see 2 Timothy 3:7).

This Christmas, when you open your presents and eat your fancy dinner, consider the cost of your salvation, and how great a sacrifice it was to God. Do not dwell on the carnal things of the flesh. But remember the most precious gift of all. And give God the glory He so richly deserves. Remember the reason for the season. The only reason baby Jesus came into this world was to die in our place. And, even during the times of hardship, remember God's love for you. "*And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:5-8 NIV).

