

What is the Christmas Spirit?

One Christmas I read a newspaper article written by a reporter who had been searching for the meaning of "the Christmas spirit." When he concluded his quest he rated this answer as the best: "It's in your heart. It feels warm and glowy. You can't buy it, and you can't get it from anybody else."

That's the popular concept of "the Christmas spirit" - it's inside us. We just have to "get" it. So, does it hit when we unpack our decorations and start playing Christmas music? Does it require a Christmas tree? One strand of lights? Two? Is it more presents? Or does it come down to out-dazzling our neighbors with a bigger outdoor display?

Going back to the beginning

I decided to re-read the Christmas story in the Bible. I wanted to study the reaction of those shepherds - working the night shift! - who were the first people to get the news of the birth of baby Jesus. After seeing him, we're told that they returned to their sheep: *"glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen"* (Luke 2:8-20).

Now shepherds in those days weren't the gentle, soft-spoken fellows that greeting cards portray. More likely they were rough-cut and hardy. When the Bible says they were glorifying and praising God, it's describing something like the last second of a playoff game when the home team wins, and the whooping and hollering cut loose! That was likely the only kind of *"glorifying"* they knew how to do...and they were awestruck!

Christ's birth, enthusiastically celebrated by hard-working shepherds, changed everything! That baby was the living proof that God really did love the world so much, *"that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16).

The real Christmas spirit

And that baby brings us back to the question, "What is the Christmas spirit?" I believe it's a deep-seated joy in knowing that the story of the Christ Child is gloriously true! Many will celebrate Christmas this year, experience gifts and excitement, but never connect the celebration with the reason for it. They're like people at a wedding reception who celebrate enthusiastically, but don't even know the bride and groom!

That's the difference between those who really have "the Christmas spirit" and those who don't. For those who have it, you could remove the trees, lights, presents, food, and music, and their joy would still be intact! That's because the story of God coming to earth as a baby is true, and they've come to personally know the Christ who was born in a manger!

How important is the baby in the manger?

Good question! An angel of the Lord supplied the answer and announced it to shepherds: *"I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord* (Luke 2:10-11).

The baby born in the Bethlehem manger was the miraculous birth of God the Son taking on humanity. Why? For what purpose? In order to do what man could never do for himself; God's Son became man in order to substitute himself for us nearly 33 years later. *"For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all"* (1 Timothy 2:5-6). Jesus came to pay off the penalty for our sins that we could never pay.

His sacrificial death on the cross paid the price for all the sins you or I will ever commit: *"For our sake he (God) made him (Jesus) who knew no sin, to be sin for us"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). On Jesus, *"the Lamb of God,"* was laid the sin of the world (John 1:29). And then, it was His resurrection that stamped on the debt of sin: *"paid in full!"* Now *"whoever believes in him is not condemned"* (John 3:18).

Nothing brings more joy, peace, or hope than knowing and receiving God's gift of forgiveness of sin, eternal life and abundant life in Jesus. It is God's amazing Christmas-gift of love to the world! This alone produces the true "Christmas spirit." May this be your "Christmas spirit" this year and every year.

[Adapted from Good-News Tracts: *What is the Christmas spirit?* by Dan Schaeffer.]