

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

425

Dearest grandchild,

I love Christmas! It is perhaps my most favorite time of the year! Our beloved Mike Pratt was killed with two companions in a tragic plane crash on Christmas Eve in 1974. One of the saddest days of my life was going through the wreckage with the FAA. Yet – I still love Christmas!

The Bible commands us to remember the death of Christ by means of the Communion Supper, but it does not command us to remember the birth of Christ. Yet – I still love Christmas!

We do not know what day of the year Christ was born, but it was probably not in the winter. Jesus was born when Caesar was collecting taxes. The rules required everyone to go to his own town to register and travel would be more difficult in the winter. Yet – I still love Christmas!

Julian I selected December 25th to celebrate Christmas in A.D. 353. Some say he did it to replace the pagan celebration of the winter solstice. Perhaps he did. The name “Christmas” comes from “Christ” and “mass”. Yet – I still love Christmas!

The decorating of Christmas trees began in Northern Europe in the eighth century. Supposedly, St. Boniface convinced the pagans to stop worshipping Odin’s sacred oak and decorate fir trees in honor of Jesus. Christmas carols date back to the thirteenth century when people danced joyously around a nativity scene. The celebration of Christmas did not come from the Bible. Yet – I still love Christmas!

The pilgrims who came to America did not celebrate Christmas as they considered it a piece of popish frivolity. On May 11, 1659 the Massachusetts Bay Colony began fining anyone five shillings who was caught observing Christmas. These laws created wide spread discontent, however, and were abolished in 1681. Yet – I still love Christmas!

On Dec. 19, 1843 Charles Dickens published *A Christmas Carol*. This was at a time when England was re-examining Christmas traditions. He wrote it in only 6 weeks and at the time was taking nighttime walks around London. The first edition was sold out by Christmas Eve. By 1844, the novel had gone through 13 printings. It continues to be a best seller. The Internet Movie Database lists more than 100 versions of *A Christmas Carol*. Apparently I am not the only one who loves Christmas!

Like other works by Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* was written as a social commentary. Dicken’s own family had gone to debtors prison forcing him to drop out of school and go to work in a factory. Praise God! His Christmas Carol has helped many rich people, like Ebenezer Scrooge, to reach out in love to those in need! The celebration of Christmas apparently helps a lot of people to be generous!

Irving Berlin was a Jew born in Russia May, 11, 1888. He emigrated to the United States at the age of 5. He lived to be 101 years old and composed over 3,000 songs. His song *God Bless America* has become a second national anthem. His song *White Christmas*, first sung by Bing Crosby in 1942, has sold over 50 million copies. Even Jews love Christmas!

In 1891 Salvation Army Captain Joseph McFee wanted to provide free food for poor people in San Francisco. He asked for permission from the city officials to place a kettle at the Oakland ferry

landing to receive donations. Today the Salvation Army Christmas kettle campaign receives as much as \$144 million each year to help those in need. Christmas really does encourage generosity!

No one, of course, has to observe Christmas. God gives us a choice: **“Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom. 14:4).** Observing Christmas is optional and does not make you more spiritual than those who do not!

I choose to observe Christmas and I am thankful our country still does! For eleven months of the year we have “our ear to the ground, our shoulder to the wheel, and our nose to the grindstone”. For eleven months we have an inward focus and struggle. For eleven months we labor to feed our families, pay our bills, and seek to survive. In December, however, the work schedule remains the same, but the emphasis is often different. Now many experience a brief respite from the doldrums of self interest and start thinking of others. Sometimes our generosity can be more emotional than practical. Christmas is a wonderful time of the year! It can be the catalyst that moderates the noxious poisons that estrange family and friends. It can heal our hearts, and put a smile on our face. It can provide a respite from resentment and revenge and help us to remember the “auld lang syne” when times were better.

There may be some profound theological implications to our observance of Christmas. If nothing else, it provides us with an interesting commentary on the way people are influenced by the life of Jesus. Regardless of your views on religious holidays, it is interesting to see how Christmas promotes an emphasis on love. Though the man on the street may not darken the doors of a Christian chapel, he still embodies the essence of God incarnate when he manifests a genuine concern for others. Napoleon, in exile, was said to have mused: *“Alexander the Great, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself all tried to build kingdoms upon force, and we have failed. Jesus Christ founded His Kingdom upon love and it yet endures”*.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Grandpa Boyce