

THE SPARK

In case you haven't noticed, it is Christmas time. []

Stores and commercials have been in Christmas mode by mid November, or earlier. Most of us join in, by at least the end of November.

It IS Christmas time, and in the ecclesiastical domain, we call this season Advent. Simply put, Advent means the coming..... of Christ's birth.

There is a real push in church circles to **not** recognize Christmas until the 25th. Which means no carols and such, until then.

Traditionally, the Christmas season starts on the 25th and lasts 12 days until Epiphany, which is the **big day** for the orthodox church.

This year, we did both— recognize Advent and our culture's Christmas season.

And, why not? Why try to ignore what is all around us?

Why not accept it?

Especially for children, this is a time full of wonder, dreams, fairy tales and sugar laden excitement.

Of course, we adults know better; we are more prudent..... **or are we?**

We adults see the commercialization. We've seen Rudolph and Frosty too many times. We feel the financial pressure and the expectations.

And, for some of us, Christmas reminds us of loss and of lost hopes.

Moreover, Many of us get perturbed up with the irony of a nation singing "Peace on Earth".....while spending billions dollars on the military and ignoring the extreme crisis the environment is in.

Is Christmas out of control? Is it mostly shallow fluff? Some think so.

Many years ago the Puritans thought that they were ruining Christmas with all the pagan rituals. They especially objected to the fact that the holiday usually came on a week day which distracted people, they thought, from the Lord's Day of Sunday. But, they did more than annually complain about it as we do. They took action and got rid of Christmas altogether.

In Puritan settlements, in the 17th century colonies, a law was passed forbidding the celebration of Christmas. The market places were ordered to stay open for business as though it was no special occasion, and all violators were prosecuted. AND, it was against the law to make plum pudding on December 25th.

The celebration was not referred to as Yuletide but as "**fooltide**".

With that in mind, do we really want to reform Christmas and clean it up, and to what extent?

If we were to get rid of all the frills, Then will Christmas, as the Puritans thought, be saved from us and our sinful ways????

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We spend lots of money each year on Christmas presents. CBC reported that the forecast this year is for the average person in Canada to spend \$600 dollars. That works out to over 20 billion dollars spent. That's a big submission to consumerism,..... yet.... there is hopeful side of this, too. We are talking about gifts – participating in “good will” / in giving. Perhaps, a culture in giving mode,..... isn't all bad?

And, so what if all the lights and tinsel fabricate a contrived fairytale atmosphere? At the very least, people are engaging in an uplifting / outreaching sort of dance..... to make things / life better.

There is something very special about Christmas, maybe part of that specialness is our investment into the celebration..... and ...our receiving the celebration. We call it the Christmas spirit.

There **is something special** / something magical about Christmas.

For example, and this is a sneak preview of our Christmas Eve service, in 1914, the world was leaping into the horror of the First World War, and there was a terrible battle on December 17th between the British and the Germans. Yet, on Christmas eve, the British could see, across the barren and corpse covered “no man's” land, a lighted Christmas trees that a German had erected on top of their embankments. The lighted tree was a daring venture by someone who had the Christmas spirit, daring because it could draw enemy fire, but it didn't. In fact, the sight of “Christmas” in the midst of war deeply touched the British troops, and they began singing carols. Soon, they could hear the Germans joining in, and before long, one by one they left their trenches, both armies, and came together in the middle of no man's land to sing carols and meet each other.

A fluke, a passing sentimental moment?
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Well, on Christmas day, the two opposing armies again left their trenches and came together in peace, and this time they brought gifts to one another.

This **spark** of compassion/ of Christmas spirit / of divine grace was life changing because it endured..... In the following days, when ordered to shoot at the enemy, the soldiers would aim high in the sky.

They refused to harm each other.

Finally, the generals on both sides had to remove those transformed soldiers from the front lines, because their spirit of **peace on earth** was not conducive to war, **and it was contagious.**

Sadly, other troops were brought in and the war resumed.

Christmas is special..... It is a big deal.

Over one hundred years ago, in December 1903, on the barren sand dunes of the North Carolina coast, after many attempts, the Wright brothers were successful in getting their "flying machine" off the ground. Thrilled, they telegraphed this message to their sister Katherine who was back in Ohio: "We have actually flown 120 feet. We'll be home for **Christmas.**"

Katherine hurried to the editor of the local newspaper and showed him the message. He glanced at it and said, "How nice. The boys will be **home for Christmas.**"

He totally missed the big news—humans had flown for the first time! ----He totally missed the big news..... OR DID HE???

Did his response actually **note** what was really important??

Daily Bread, December 23,

1991.

Christmas is very special.

Christmas is more than the celebration of Jesus birth. It is also an invitation to suspend disbelief. It is time: to admire a fat man in a red suit, and let your children sit on his lap; to be dazzled; to decorate and be creative. It is a time to be challenged to give and receive, and to receive the **Spark!**

Goethe, the enlightenment philosopher, suggested that some people had the Spark of life—that zest for living/ that vitality/ that creative vibrancy, and that others did not. According to Goethe, those without the “Spark” were dull, selfish and not really living.

I think Goethe was right; however, he never explained the source of the spark.

The Spark:

I think the Spark that can ignite life in us is from the TOUCH OF GOD.

And, that is what God did so long ago—God touched the earth/ touched us..... with the birth of a baby called Jesus.

And, since God is love, God’s touch must surely be the touch of Love.

John writes in the parameters of the Greek culture, and he called this redeeming touch of God LOGOS—THE WORD.

In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, we are told that the word is life and light, and that it became flesh. It could be felt and experienced. It became Jesus; God was touching creation in a very special way.

*It was **light** in the darkness that brought life; a light that could not / can NOT be extinguished!*

The touch of God, the light that illuminates, that opens eyes, that transforms us and sparks us into livingis love..... agape love!

The word love used in John 3:16 is **agape love**.

The word for love in the first chapter of John is **agape love**.

For those not sure what agape means: The Greek word agape (love) seems to have been virtually a Christian invention -- a new word for a new thing (apart from about twenty occurrences in the Greek

version of the Old Testament, the word is almost non-existent before the N.T.). Agape draws its meaning directly from the revelation of God in Christ.

It is not a form of natural affection, however intense, but a supernatural fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

It is a matter of will rather more than feeling. This plays out for believers in that we strive to love even those we dislike. Agape love is more than a feeling.

Agape love is the basic element in **Christ-likeness**—it causes a person to seek to be as Christ.

God's gracious, outreaching love is Agape love. And, the truly amazing thing about this love is that when we allow ourselves to be touched by it, it can transform us and set our hearts on fire. It is like a spark that brings us to LIFE; it causes a new birth / a soul renaissance.

I think the timing and frills of Christmas, that has split out into secular culture,.... spark, prompt all of us to consider and to be open to "The Spark"... the light from God – the Logos.

THE Light illuminates the darkness,..... and so does Christmas.

Jesus was born in the Springtime, but Christmas is observed this time of year for a reason.....

Because we NEED the celebration to mitigate the onset of winter and the winter solstice.

Many Northern pagan cultures had winter festivals.

We need the festivities, just as we need the touch of God in our lives.

And, if sugar plum fairies, elves, flying reindeers and Christmas decorations bring light into our lives,... then wonderful..... for maybe we are hearing the Good News..... in a secular, modern language.

We need to catch the Christmas Spirit. We need the light, God's light.

There IS too much darkness in the world.

There is too much "bah humbug"

There is too much sorrow and sadness, and there is too much **Dullness!**

Too many people have NO joy. They do not have Peace, and they have lost HOPE.

They drag themselves through the day, searching for a release that does not come. And, their only consolation is the TV or an another form of escape.

We need Christmas..... we NEED the Spark that brings life!

WE NEED LOVE.....love that inspires and illuminates. We need love,..... and love is God. God is love.

Tennessee Williams told a story of someone who missed his chance for love; who did NOT have the spark.

It is the story of Jacob Brodzky, a shy Russian Jew whose father owned a bookstore. The older Brodzky wanted his son to go to college. The boy, on the other hand, desired nothing but to marry Lila, his childhood sweetheart -- a French girl as warm, vibrant, and ambitious as he was contemplative and retiring. A couple of months after young Brodzky went to college, his father fell ill and died. The son returned home, buried his father, and married his sweetheart. Then the couple moved into the apartment above the bookstore, and Brodzky took over its management. The life of books fit him perfectly, but it cramped / confined her.

She wanted more adventure -- and she found it, **she thought**, when she met an agent who praised her beautiful singing voice and enticed her to tour Europe with a vaudeville company.

Brodzky was devastated, yet he refused to join her. At their parting, he reached into his pocket and handed her the key to the front door of the bookstore.

"You had better keep this," he told her, "because you will want it some day. Your feelings are not so much less than mine that you can get away from it. You will come back sometime, and I will be waiting."

She kissed him and left.

To escape the pain he felt, Brodzky withdrew deep into his bookstore and took to reading as someone else might have taken to drink. He spoke little, did little, and could most times be found at the large desk near the rear of the shop, immersed in his books while he waited for his love to return.

Nearly 15 years after they parted, at Christmastime, she did return.

But when Brodzky rose from the reading desk that had been his place of escape for all that time, he did not take *the love of his life* for more than an ordinary customer. "Do you want a book?" he asked.

That he didn't recognize her startled her. But she gained possession of herself and replied, "I want a book, but I've forgotten the name of it." Then she told him a story of childhood sweethearts. A story of a newly married couple who lived in an apartment above a bookstore. A story of a young, ambitious wife who left to seek a career, who enjoyed great success but could never relinquish the key her husband gave her when they parted.

She told him the story she thought would bring him to himself.

But his face showed no recognition.

Gradually she realized that he had lost touch with his heart's desire, that he no longer knew the purpose of his waiting and grieving, that now all he remembered was the waiting and grieving itself.

"You remember it; you must remember it -- the story of Lila and Jacob?"

After a long, bewildered pause, he said, "There is something familiar about the story, I think I have read it somewhere. It comes to me that it is something by Tolstoi."

Dropping the key, she fled the shop. And Brodzky returned to his desk, to his reading, unaware that the love he waited for had come and gone.

Tennessee Williams's 1931 story "Something by Tolstoi" reminds us how easy it is to miss love when it comes.

Either something so distracts us or we have so completely lost who we are and what we care about that we cannot recognize our heart's desire.

*Christmas may be the prompt to bring back the love in your life.....to bring you back to life.
Christmas maybe the spark.

Look around.. []..... IT is Christmas time..... It is a season of wonder and miracles.

The children know it. Perhaps, it is true: we should became as children.
Catch the spirit! Enjoy the lights..... see the light!

Leap into the frills.

Go home, light a candle and listen to some carols..... and sing with them.

And, Remember..... remember..... remember.....want passion it is that stirs the soul.

We must not let this season pass us by.

We must not close our eyes to the light, the spark that brings life.

God is reaching out through the haze of consumerism or with brightly wrapped gifts..... God is reaching out.

For God so loves the world– you and me.....and here’s some oxygen for the Spark: It’s Christmas time!

May we allow God to fill us with love.. / to set our hearts on fire!

It’s time. It’s Christmas time.