

MERRY CHRISTMAS

It's beginning to feel a lot like Christmas. Really. Really? Well, sort of. Maybe I can convince myself.

It depends on what you mean by "Christmas". If you mean family get-togethers, Christmas parties (in the best sense, not Christmas drunken orgies), Christmas shopping and gift exchanges, potlucks in the break

room for all the staffers and their families – well, not so much.

It's the strangest feeling. At the store, as usual, we've ordered all of the normal Christmas stuff, and of course, given the state of the supply chain, we're lucky to get between 50% and 80% of what we order. We put up our candy displays, which have sold down more quickly than in past years, because business is up and supply is down, I guess. We've put up colorful lights and other decorations as always. Turkeys were in the ad for Thanksgiving, and Hams are in this current ad for Christmas.

But nothing is the same. It feels like we have put up the framing for a building but the house being built has no walls, floor, or roof, and remains cold and empty. The traditional warmth and excitement of Christmas is missing. The specter of inappropriate, possibly unconstitutional lockdown orders hovers all around us. There is a darkness threatening to engulf us, if we let it. (I confess that I do let it get me down, far too much!)

We are following our habitual, traditional rituals, but it feels more like we are robots who are performing according to their programming, not living human beings approaching one of our

favorite holidays with eager anticipation. Will we have to "visit" Grandma and Grandpa by Skype or the newest phenomenon, Zoom, viewing 20 or 30 family members and friends on a computer screen because we are not "allowed" to have more than 10 people at one gathering?

On the other hand, if Christmas means the celebration of the coming of God into the world as a man, offering us restoration and eternal life with Him when our tour of duty on this earth is done, then yes, this is truly Christmas. It really doesn't matter whether or not it's December 25. It doesn't matter that this is "the holiday season", with all the trappings of overeating, gift-giving, and

"Peace, good will toward [those] men with whom He is pleased."

What matters is that God created us in His image (which means we are like Him in many ways), but we misused the gift of free will that was included in our gift box and chose to listen to His enemy instead of to Him. We rebelled and disobeyed His clear instruction. That broke our close relationship with Him, so we've been wandering in a spiritual desert ever since. But God. . . .

But God didn't want to give up on His marvelous creation. He created us to have a close relationship with Him, but He couldn't just let our defiance and rebel-

lion go unpunished. He also knew that there was nothing we broken creatures could do to pay the penalty demanded by the punishment.

So instead, He provided the

remedy by entering our world in our form, as the Man Jesus, Who did two big things for us. One, He came to inform us – about the work of His enemy who led us into trouble in the first place; about fake religion that traps so many of us in prisons of ritual and doctrine but keeps us separated from God as we feel good about ourselves; and about how much God wants all of us, Jew and non-Jew alike, to be members of His family in eternity.

Two, He came to take our punishment for us, pay our fine, and satisfy the death penalty on our behalf, so that we now are free to sign on with Him and restore our relationship with God! But this is not a blanket "get out of jail free" pass for all of mankind. Each of us must individually acknowledge our guilt and call upon the name of Jesus in order to rejoin His Family. And then we must let Him remake us into the person He created us to be by giving Him total control of our lives. We become free in His Spirit!

That Christmas can happen at any time, anywhere. The gift is there, in front of you, so all you have to do is accept it. That can be your personal, very special Christmas.

So, Merry Christmas! May this December, with all the stresses and challenges to divert our attention, become your personal Christmas, when you make that big decision to become a member of God's family for eternal life!

THE CHOSEN

One of the best Christmas gifts you can give someone you care about is the DVD video series of Season 1 of "The Chosen". You may remember that

I have raved about this before. It is a "TV" series, available on the internet, in their app, or by the DVDs if they are easier (as they are for me). The subject: the stories told in the New Testament Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but in an extremely relatable way since they are done from the viewpoint of Jesus' disciples and others who knew Him.

For us at our house, as long as we have been members of God's family (we hope and believe), watching Season 1 of "The Chosen" has been transformative. It destroyed the stick figure images of the Bible stories we inherited from our church and Sunday School backgrounds and has replaced it with living portraits of the people in the stories. The difference is huge, creating in us an enthusiasm, and engaging us in these formerly two-dimensional stories.

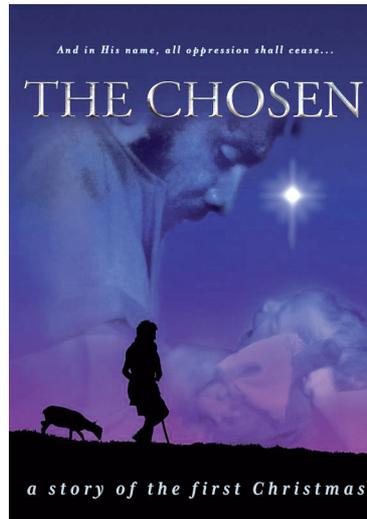
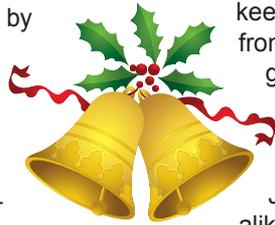
Now, as we read the Bible, we picture the scenes from "The Chosen", making the stories come to life. You've no doubt seen pencil or color drawings transformed into live scenes using video magic. That's the way it is with the Bible stories, before and after "The Chosen".

"The Chosen" is about half way through filming season 2, so just before moving to their next location, they filmed a Christmas special lasting just under 2 hours. I highly recommend it to those of you who are already familiar with it, and for those of you who haven't had the opportunity to watch season 1, it's a great introduction and teaser for the whole thing. Here's the link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5ftnTK9-3w>

(P.S. Yes, we do have copies of "The Chosen" available for sale at the store. And if you buy one, you are helping them to fund future programs.)

Linda Gammel



SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

LVEDA Meeting

(Lucerne Valley Economic Development Association)

NO January Meeting scheduled at this time.

Watch this column for any change or notice of the next LVEDA meeting.

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