

In Other Words...

A RESEARCH SERVICE OF FACTS & HUMOR FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERS

December 2023

CHRISTMAS: Dr. David Jeremiah has noted, “All the Christmas presents in the world are worth nothing without the presence of Christ.” *HomeLife, December 2018, p.61*

CHRISTMAS: Believe it or not, there’s actually an average time people wake up on Christmas Day. It’s 7:35 a.m. in America...but 9:09 a.m. in Brazil. *Beaumont Enterprise, 12/25/15, p.144*

CHRISTMAS: Just days before Christmas in 2020, Boris Johnson announced to the British, “It is with a very heavy heart, I must tell you: We cannot continue with Christmas as planned.” The world was changed by COVID and we grieve the loss of those who died in that pandemic. Now three years removed from the former Prime Minister’s words, the impediments of that virus seem dated, yet what he said should remain. Christmas celebrates God’s gift of eternal transformation so we should never just continue with it as planned...it should change us. *TheBriefing.net, 12/21/20*

CHRISTMAS: Matt Tullos masterfully wrote about the challenges & difficulties that Joseph and Mary experienced and then concluded with these words; “Christmas reminds me that you can have everything go wrong...and still be in the center of God’s plan.” *HomeLife, December 2018, p.65*

CONTENTMENT: Each year, Americans return \$309 billion in merchandise and 5 billion pounds of merchandise goes to waste - stuff we “needed.” *Fast Company, September 2021, p.16*

INCARNATION: John explained that Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14) while Matthew reminded us that Immanuel means “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). The game of Hot & Cold is that familiar adventure of hiding something and then offering temperature hints about the seeker’s proximity. Before Jesus’ birth, humanity was ice-cold in its attempts to find God. But after He came, we were all given the opportunity to be boiling-hot-close. *Editor’s Perspective*

JESUS: Dr. Jim Denison felt a tug at his heart while setting up a nativity scene in their home. It was a beautifully crafted set made of olive wood and purchased in Bethlehem during one of his many trips to Israel. As he positioned the pieces, he was struck by the reality that they keep Jesus in a box up in their attic for eleven months out of the year and then set him up on the coffee table for a few weeks before returning him to storage. He pondered that metaphor wondering how often we treat Christ the same way. May we never try to box-up the King of kings. *DenisonForum.org*

JESUS: “The early church didn’t say, ‘Look what the world is coming to!’ They said, ‘Look what has come into the world!’” Carl Henry (Evangelical theologian 1913-2003) *AZQuotes.com*

MATERIALISM: Amazon is now the biggest delivery business in America having overtaken FedEx in 2020 and UPS in 2022. It will deliver 5.9 billion packages in 2023 – roughly 18 “presents” for every single American. *Wall Street Journal, 11/28/23, p.A1*

MONEY: Money flows during the Christmas season more than any other time of the year. The National Retail Federation has forecast that Americans will spend \$960 billion on holiday shopping in November & December. To put that in perspective...\$1 million in \$100 bills weighs 22 pounds and would fit in a large backpack. \$1 billion in \$100 bills weighs 22,000 pounds and

requires a lot more space. To transport the amount of money Americans will spend this Christmas season would take 265 fully loaded 18-wheeler trucks...each packed with \$100 bills. That's over 21 million pounds of \$100 bills. Max Anders has quipped, "Money is not the most important thing, but it's way ahead of whatever is in second place." And it's obviously a stronghold among many Christians as 1 in 5 evangelical Christians in America don't give a single penny to the church...and half of professing Christians in the U.S. give less than 1% of their income. Uniquely, over 75% of tithers give more than 10%. Augustine wrote, "To discover the character of people we have only to observe what they love" (Matthew 6:21). As we rack up credit card debt for Christmas gifts, it's wise to remember the words of Benjamin Franklin, "Many a man thinks he is buying pleasure when he's really selling himself to it." *NRF.com, 11/2/23; Holman New Testament Commentary, I & II Timothy, Max Anders, 2000, p.239; TheBriefing.net; Editor's Calculations*

TRADITIONS: Most families have special Christmas traditions but few can rival that of Fidelia Ford's family. Each year she made a fruitcake for Christmas but always let it age a year before serving it. The fruitcake she made in 1878 was for Christmas in 1879 but she died before the cake could be served. Rather than eating the cake, Fidelia's family cherished it as her legacy. It was passed down from generation to generation and her great-grandson Morgan Ford became the curator of the tradition for six decades until his death in 2013. He showed it off at church, relayed the story to younger generations, and even showcased it on The Tonight Show in 2003. Now, nearly a century & a half later, the cake that was made the same year the Edison Electric Light Company was founded and 18 years before Henry Ford built his very first car, the family continues the tradition of preserving this culinary relic. Before his own death, Morgan Ford noted that it doesn't smell or look like a fruitcake anymore...he said it "smells like old people." Traditions can morph into a life of their own and that doesn't mean they need to be shelved...we just need to work at keeping them from smelling old. *USA Today, 12/16/19, p.4B; Examiner, 1/1/20, p.13C*

EVERYDAY HUMOR

CHRISTMAS GIFTS: Research shows that 1 in 4 American adults admit to being competitive when it comes to giving Christmas presents to family and friends. *USA Today, 12/11/18, p.1B*

CHRISTMAS GIFTS: In the comic strip *Garfield*, Jon's girlfriend Liz said, "I hope you didn't spend too much money on me this Christmas." Jon turned to his cat with fear & bewilderment and asked, "How much is too much?" The cynical feline answered, "Just a hair more than not enough." Gift-giving can be a tenuous balancing act. *Houston Chronicle, 12/19/16, p.D5*

CONFLICT: During this season of peace & goodwill, everyone is mindful of potential conflict when extended families come together. Encouragement might be found in knowing this isn't a recent development. The verb "unfriend" appeared first in 1659...long before a Dickens-like Christmas was conceived or social media "re-invented" the word. *Mental Floss, July 2015, p.66*

EMOTION: Carolyn wrote about a kindergarten teacher asking one of her students if he'd ever had chicken pox. The little boy replied, "No, ma'am. But I've had goose bumps!" Christmas is a wonderful time to get goose bumps all over again as we reflect on the love of God that's been demonstrated through Christ. *While Shepherds Washed Their Flocks, Liz Curtis Higgs, 1998, p.70*

EXPECTATION: Randy Frazee wrote about an elementary school Christmas pageant where the Innkeeper changed his line into a much better response. The young boy couldn't imagine turning away Mary & Joseph so when his big moment arrived, he threw open the door and shouted with a smile, "Come on in...I've been expecting you." *The Heart of the Story, Randy Frazee, 2011, p.194*

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