

1 What not to miss at CHRISTMAS

2 Christmas Dilemmas

- One of the classic Christmas dilemmas is trying to figure out what to get the person who has "everything."
- These are the people who have supposedly been there, done that, bought the T-shirt, punched the ticket and seen it all.
- You figure whatever you're going to put under the tree is going to be a real yawner for them, so you bail out and go with the gift card -- impersonal, but never lets you down.

3 Gift Ideas

- One of the hottest items for women this year is the Invicta Square Angel Diamond Stainless Steel Chronograph Watch.
- Glistening with exquisite silver accents, the Invicta watch catches the eye starting with its ornate diamond-encrusted stainless steel bezel . . .
- Water resistant to 330 feet (100 M), the Angel Diamond also boasts the reliability of Swiss-quartz movement.

4 Gift Ideas

5 At a Glance

- Even if we were the wealthiest person on the planet, we could not possibly acquire everything.
- We can't see all the movies there are to see or read all the books that have been published.
- So we have to make choices. We are going to miss stuff.
- But at Christmas, there are some things you don't want to miss.

6 The Most Important

- The good news, though, is that even if we miss almost everything, we can still catch the most important things that we should never miss -- like the really good news of Christmas.
- Whether they're lifelong churchgoers, holiday visitors or downright atheists, most people already believe they have a pretty good idea of what shouldn't be missed at Christmas.
- The following are the three things that most people don't want to miss at Christmas.

7 FAMILY

- For many people, for example, the one thing they don't want to miss at Christmas is family.
 - Getting the extended family together, remembering times and loved ones past, sharing a meal around the table, opening presents under the tree -- for many that is what Christmas is all about.

- In our increasingly nomadic culture, where extended families stretch all over the country and even the world, family is certainly a good thing that many don't want to miss.

8 Presents

- Ask a kid and those presents are likely the things they don't want to miss at Christmas.
- What would Christmas be without presents?
- Sure, the tree is nice and all, but come on, lets open the presents.
- Now!

9 Feeling of Christmas

- For many others, even those who aren't Christians, it's the "feeling" of Christmas that really matters.
 - Lots of folks who have never set foot in a church still set up a tree, put together a shopping list, maybe even sing a few carols.
 - The "Spirit of Christmas" may be just about any spirit at all, but it doesn't really matter as long as there's some sense of happiness and general good will toward man during the season.

10 Anything Else

Not to Miss?

- Something people often miss when reading the Christmas story, which is found in both Matthew and Luke is a simple phrase that is repeated over and over again.
- It is a phrase that is probably very important for our day as well—where there is so much anxiety about . . .
 - the scarcity of jobs,
 - the future of the economy and our way of life,
 - the violence and trouble that is in the world, and
 - the disease and death that seems to be everywhere.
- It is also a phrase that if we read the text 6,500 times we may miss and fail to see its real importance.
- What is this phrase? It is “Do not be afraid.”

11 Do not be Afraid

- Luke uses this phrase three times in the first two chapters, each time spoken by the angel Gabriel.
- It functions as a kind of thesis statement for the story that will follow: the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

- It's because of the newborn King that the people of Israel -- and we, too -- need no longer be afraid.
- We don't want to miss out on family, or presents or the "feeling." But Christmas is an opportunity not to miss out on being unafraid.

12 The Fear of Unanswered Prayer

- The first time Gabriel appears is to the old priest Zechariah, whom Luke uses as a kind of link to the Old Testament and the temple system of worship.
- The angel says to the old man, "Do not be afraid because your prayers have been answered" (Luke 1:13).
 - They were going to be answered in a personal sense because Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were going to have a son who would become John the Baptist.
 - But also answered in the larger sense that God was going to do something about the plight of his people, who had lived under the specter of fear and oppression for generations.

13 The Fear of Unanswered Prayer

- Wouldn't we all like to hear that our prayers have been answered?
- Wouldn't we like for God to send Gabriel to tell us that . . .
 - our business is going to be prosperous again,
 - the pain of our grief will subside,
 - a cure will be found for us before it's too late.
- We sure wouldn't want to miss that message!

14 The Fear of Unanswered Prayer

- But God's way of answering our prayers is often by doing something beyond our hopes and expectations.
- However, most of the time our prayers are not answered in ways that we want, but more often we see God at work in giving us what we really need when we need it.
- In Israel's case, God's Messiah comes as a tiny, helpless baby instead of a conquering hero.
 - Instead of taking on the Roman oppressors with military might, he would suffer and die at the hands of the Empire.
 - This is how God chooses to save the whole world -- by participating in human suffering and taking it on, not by bailing himself, or us, out of it.

- Nevertheless, our prayers are always answered by the God who walks beside us no matter where we find ourselves.

15 The Fear of being out of God's Favor

- The second time Gabriel shows up, it's in a visit to Mary.
- "Do not be afraid," he says to her, "for you have found favor with God" (1:30).
- It wasn't that Mary was especially wonderful or perfect.
 - God chooses her because God chooses to favor the unlikely, the obscure, the innocent and even the mistake-prone to do his most important work.
 - Like Zechariah, like so many others in Scripture, Mary is offered an opportunity. She will be blessed in bringing God into the world, but, as always seems to be the case, that blessing would cost her something, too.
 - As Simeon will tell her when she brings Jesus to be dedicated in the temple -- "a sword will pierce your own soul, too" (Luke 2:35). She no doubt remembered those words when she saw her son, God's Son, hanging on a the cross.

16 The Fear of being out of God's Favor

- Do not be afraid. You have found favor with God.
- Again, that's the second message we don't want to miss at Christmas.
 - God favors those He has called, loves us with an everlasting love, loves us enough to come as one of us, die for us, live with us and in us.
 - It's not favor that we earn. Instead, it is the ultimate gift -- better than all the presents under the tree. We call that gift "grace," and God offers it to us lavishly.
 - God doesn't promise us a pain-free life, but he does promise to be with us every step of the way.

17 The Fear of Uncertainty

- The third angel announcement takes place out in the fields beyond Bethlehem.
- Shepherds, who are the poorest of the poor, are watching over their flocks when the angel appears and, as the King James Bible says, they were "sore afraid."
- "Do not be afraid," says the angel a third time, "for see -- I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11 NIV)

18 The Fear of Uncertainty

- What was the Good News of a Savior?

- God’s promises to Israel would soon be fulfilled and that a King for Israel would be raised up who would rule in righteousness.
 - No longer would the poor and helpless be oppressed—true justice would prevail.
 - No longer would the Gentiles overrun the countryside.
 - Peace and prosperity would reign and Israel would be blessed by God more than any other country in the world.
- In other words, the angels were declaring that what we Christians refer to as the Millennium was at hand.
- So then, if the main event of Christ’s return was near then, how much closer is it how for us?

19 Things We Shouldn’t Miss at Christmas

- The three things we shouldn’t miss at Christmas.
 - The idea that since God did not forget the sincere prayers of his people, he won’t turn a deaf ear to our prayers either. God hears the prayers of his people.
 - The idea that since we are chosen of God and have been given grace and also adopted into his family, who can be against us. We have God’s favor and grace.
 - The idea that all of God’s promises will be fulfilled. Peace and prosperity is coming to the earth as a King is coming who will reign in righteousness and rule with equity. Peace on earth is coming, soon!

20 Conclusion

- So then, for this Christmas, let us not miss out on how we can make it a special time where we can put all fears and worries to rest.
- Let us remember,
 - God hears our prayers and cares for us.
 - God’s grace is sufficient for all our needs.
 - The fulfillment of all our hopes and dreams is on the horizon and not far away.
 - And there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.” (Revelation 11:15 NIV)
- Let us therefore declare, fear will not be our master. [Nothing] in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:39 NIV) Amen.

21