

Interfaith Voices GT Column: Catching the Wonder of the Season

By Alice Henderson Rampton

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The holiday season is upon us. Many faith-based congregations will celebrate various traditions over the next couple of months including Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and others.

As a Christian, I look forward to the traditions and rituals that signify the birth of Christ. There will be gift making and buying, decorating the tree, singing carols, baking goodies, and gathering with friends and family. But the commercialization of the holiday and pressures to complicate this simple birth day will cause stress and overload in our lives, also.

If I were to stand on a soapbox at this time of year, my message would be, "Let's put Christ back in Xmas!" Whomever invented the term "Xmas" may have created a nice abbreviated tool for marketing and today's texting generation, but it's disheartening to see the name of Christ replaced with an "X."

The name of Jesus Christ has been used as a human justification for wars, murders, and destruction, but the main thrust of his teachings was about love, forgiveness, and acceptance. The innumerable acts of kindness and sacrifice throughout the world because of Christ's teachings and example continue to outweigh the negative. The world is greatly in need of love, forgiveness, kindness, sacrifice and acceptance, especially now, at this time of discord and upheaval.

As we celebrate Thanksgiving next week and move forward into the Christmas season, how can we catch the true wonder of the season? How can we quietly reflect on a birth of one, more than two millennia ago, whose life changed the face of civilization throughout the world?

Meditation is one way. Reading the New Testament verses found in the second chapter of Luke is another method. Read the entire chapter. One of my favorite verses is Luke 2:19, where we read how Mary pondered the miraculous birth in her heart. Can we take time to ponder, also? Isaiah, in the Old Testament, Chapter 9, Verse 6, prophesies of Christ's birth with these powerful words, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Listening to these words in the beautiful music of George Frideric Handel's Messiah is an additional way of starting the season off in contemplation.

May I offer another way: twenty-one years ago, the local congregations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began a Christmas tradition in the community by hosting a Nativity Festival, free of charge and open to the public. This year, from Dec. 4-8, Friday-Tuesday, the church building at 4141 N.W. Harrison Blvd. will be transformed into a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

With this year's international theme of "Joy to the World." 700-800 nativities, on loan from community members, will be on daily display surrounded by decorated trees, lights aglow and quiet music. Community choirs will perform in the evening. Check out the website www.corvallisnativityfestival.com for hours, concert times, and information on how to share your nativity. It's a time to stroll through the tasteful and beautiful display of nativities and focus on what Christmas is really all about.

You won't find me on a soapbox down in Central Park, but, if you so choose, I hope you'll join with me in speaking and writing out the word "Christmas" and not replacing the reason for the season with an "X." Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas.