

Column

Unfortunately, that thing called the Christmas spirit often goes flat not long after presents are opened, dinner is eaten, the dishes are cleared from the table and Christmas Day draws to a close. All this preparation and expectation, and what is left? A pile of crumpled wrapping paper, a refrigerator full of leftovers and for some a mound of debt.

But how might we keep the momentum going? I am not thinking now about gift buying and gorging on rich foods leading to an ever-expanding waistline. Rather I am thinking about the spiritual reality that should be present in this season, but which often gets crowded out by frenzied preparation in the days leading up to Christmas Day.

One technique I learned from a godly woman in our church over a quarter of a century ago is to revisit the Christmas cards you receive. Today, paper cards might be expanded to include greetings received by way of electronic means.

This dear soul would take one or two cards each day post Dec. 25 and read them and pray for the person who sent them. And, if the sender had expressed some concern about health or anything else, she would contact that person either by telephone or letter and offer encouragement.

She said this yearly practice enhanced her appreciation of the coming of Christ. As He offered Himself for us, so she offered herself in His service. For her, it took the pictures off the front of cards and placed them on her street and beyond.

I think her approach was right. What we celebrate is not so much the birth of a baby, though that itself is full of wonder. Rather, it is God taking human flesh and coming into our messy world, a world of intrigue and war, a world where many still lack adequate shelter, a world where many are still on the move.

Of course, the story must not end with Jesus' birth. The One who was born in Bethlehem's manger and was held close to His mother's breast came for a purpose, to stretch out His arms on the cross and die for the sins of the world and bring life.

The exact mechanics of how this great exchange – one dying on behalf of many – took place we shall probably never fully understand in this life, but its realness and power continues to be seen in the lives of those changed by it. “In him was life; and life was the light of men,” the apostle John would go on to write.

The story is not over. The light of which John spoke continues to shine. It shines through such people as the woman I spoke about who prayed her way through her cards after Christmas Day was past. It can shine through your life. All God requires is an open heart and outstretched hands. Hold up your torch, or better still, be that torch!

May the spirit of Christmas continue in your life and my life, not primarily in sentimental remembrance of the coming of Jesus as a babe, but in positive, active and glad acknowledgement of Him as Lord of all of life.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us thy only. begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit ever, one God, world without end. Amen. (Collect for Christmas, Book of Common Prayer)

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Church, Blue Ridge.

