

Christmas Eve, December 24, 2009

I love Christmas! I love the lights and decorations. I love the music. I love the giving and receiving of cards and presents. I love the way Christmas presents us with an annual opportunity to travel back through all the Christmases of our lives. I love the expectation of little children, especially my own little children.

I love the fact that the culmination to 4 weeks of frantic activities includes beautiful church services filled with young and old. But most importantly, and sometimes nearly lost amidst all those activities, I love Christmas because I love the Lord Jesus, whose birth gave rise to all these celebrations.

We all have things we love about Christmas, but as I have rushed around these past few weeks, and tried to watch some of my favorite Christmas programs like Charlie Brown and the Grinch, it struck me that each year we struggle to reconcile all this holiday has come to be compared to its simple origins in a stable in Bethlehem.

And nowhere was this more apparent to me than in the rich visual images that jumped out at me from the Christmas cards we received this year. I also love Christmas cards, and I love them more and more each year as our usual mail is reduced to bills and junk mail. Christmas is the one time of the year when people still write to each other, and I'm always as interested to see what kind of card someone selected as I am to read about how they're doing. Isn't it great fun to come home and see whom we've received cards from? So this year I decided to conduct a little study on the meaning of Christmas by looking at the pictures on the cards we have received.

The cards easily separated into 3 categories: religious images, seasonal images and family images. Religious images include a nativity scene, the 3 wise men, and a church, and we have received thirteen of these religious cards.

Family cards are the latest trend, whose pictures of children or the entire family is made into a card, and we received 9 of these.

Seasonal cards include pictures of Christmas trees, snow scenes, or even Santa. We have received fourteen of these cards, which make them the winner, beating out religious cards by the slimmest of margins.

So what do we make of this little study of mine? I suppose I could get bummed that the religious cards came in second, but that's not actually what I take from it. The message I take from these cards, is that Christmas is the day when God's story becomes intertwined with our stories, just as some cards are about Christmas and some about us and that, I think, is exactly what God intends the Christmas message to be.

For God's story is that he created the heavens and the earth and all that dwell therein, that he created us in his own image out of love, but that, like all children, we

prefer our independence and tend to do things our own way, and thereby get lost. But God, like all good parents, never rejects us or abandons us, but rather became one of us in Jesus to show us the way back to the Father.

Our stories vary, of course, but the outlines to our stories may be similar. I was born the youngest of 3 children and I remember many sleepless Christmas Eve's in my childhood. Then came the years when Christmas lost its childhood meaning; it became a time of food and family, but lacked the joy and anticipation of earlier years.

But the time came in adulthood when I realized that I needed help; help from God; and I realized sitting in Church one Christmas Eve that Jesus is the help that God sent for lost children like me.

In Jesus God became one of us so that we might become one of God's. And while Christmas day always feels like the end of a long push for us, if we see Christmas as the intertwining of our story with God's story, then Christmas is always the beginning of something far more important than the consumption of huge amounts of food, Christmas then becomes an opportunity to integrate God's story more and more into our own story.

A story of healing, a story of forgiveness, a story of eternal life. And so on this holy night I invite you to bring your story; with it's joys and trials, and bring it to the crèche. And allow God's story of love through his Son, to be woven more deeply into your story, your life, and your heart. Amen.