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Rejoice

You'll probably think I'm crazy, but I enjoy going shopping at Christmas time. I like the crowds, the screaming kids, and most of all I like the endlessly repeating Christmas music that every store plays over and over. To understand why, you need to know two facts about me: I was raised in a puritanical Christian sect that forbid the celebration of Christmas and my parents' wedding anniversary is December 23.

These two facts meant that every year when I was growing up I found myself shopping around Christmas time, not for Christmas gifts but for an anniversary present. Every year, in my effort to be a "good kid" and shun the commercialization of Jesus' birth, I fought my way through crowds of happy Christmas shoppers while struggling to not think about the holiday or listen to the cheerful music.

Now, when I join the crowds at Christmas, I can join them with all my heart. I can be happy about Jesus' birth. I can enjoy and sing along with the songs. Like anyone who has been deprived of what other take for granted, I always enjoy it.

These life experiences have gotten me to thinking in recent years, what is it that everyone is so happy about at Christmas? Even non-believers enjoy the season, give presents, and hum along to tunes with words they say they don't believe, words like "veiled in flesh the God-head see; hail the incarnate deity."

I think the answer is to be found in what Jesus' birth really means. It is the moment when the whole human race was adopted into the life of the Father, Son, and Spirit. The Holy Spirit is speaking to all humanity - believing, non-believing, happy and scrooge-like - and saying "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music!" (Psalm 98:4) Notice the Spirit calls the whole earth to sing, not just believers. I can tell you from experience, it is hard to fight the tidal wave of joy and celebration that sweeps over humanity at the news that the Son has become flesh and made his dwelling among us. Especially when the Holy Spirit is telling the whole earth to sing!

That's why I'm not too critical of all the singing, partying, and shopping that goes on at Christmas. Sure, there are many excesses, and a lot of people don't know what or why they're celebrating. But there is a reason to rejoice and the Spirit is calling humanity to do so. When I see the world celebrating I want to celebrate too, and pray that they will come to believe the truth of what we are all so happy about.

Merry Christmas!

~ Jonathan Stepp