

## Advent 3, 2009

“Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

NIV Luke 3: 15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. 16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." 18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.

**Introduction:** My Christian friends and family, everyone wants the Christmas Spirit. But how do you get it back once you lost it? Christmas is supposed to be a time of peace, love and goodwill to all. But sub-zero temperatures, frozen car doors and icy road conditions can make you feel more like Mr. Scrooge than Santa Claus.

So, how do you reclaim the Christmas spirit?

Step 1 Shop early. Nothing takes away the Christmas spirit like fighting for parking and struggling through crowds.

Step 2 Wish people that you meet in stores and other casual environments a Happy Holiday. Say it with a smile.

Step 3 Drop spare coins in the Salvation Army collection buckets.

Step 4 Do something nice for someone. Offer to baby-sit so a friend can do her Christmas shopping. Take cookies to your neighbors, or shovel an elderly neighbor's walk.

Step 5 Volunteer your time to a worthy holiday cause. Even if you are busy, you can spare an hour or two to help people less fortunate than yourself.

To Scrooge, the “Christmas Spirit” was a ghost. To the liquor industry, the “Christmas Spirit” comes in a bottle. To Hallmark it comes in a card. To the toy industry, it comes in a box, and to many Christian churches the Christmas Spirit is the search for people that live and act like Jesus Christ. What is the true Christmas Spirit and how do we get it and keep it?

### **Fill your heart with the True Christmas Spirit!**

Let His Powerful Presence Be Your Joy

Let His Good News Bear Fruit Everyday

#### **1) Let His Powerful Presence Be Your Joy**

John the Baptist did such a wonderful job of preaching and teaching the people with God’s Law and Gospel that the crowds thought he was at least an O.T. prophet reincarnated, or even the Messiah himself, promised to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. But John the Baptist wasn’t the answer to the people’s heartache over their sins, protection for today, or hope for a better tomorrow. John the Baptist pointed the people to the one and only place for sinners to find peace, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness and hope for eternal life, escaping the heavy guilt of our sins, and the ultimate punishment before God: the Son of God born in Bethlehem, Jesus of Nazareth, and Son of Mary.

John the Baptist told them he wasn’t even fit to untie the Messiah’s sandals – the lowliest job in the house. We might say “even fit to take out his garbage.” That’s just how great the Messiah will be John told them.

In speaking about his power, John told the people that the Messiah would baptize with His Spirit and with Fire. John the Baptist’s baptism had the power of the Spirit as well as the forgiveness of sins, but he didn’t have the Spirit’s fire. When Jesus came, He baptized no one until after He ascended. At that time, He sent His Spirit with Fire to His disciples in that room at Pentecost. Tongues of fire rested on the heads of His disciples as they hear the sound of a rushing wind, but no shutters moved and none of their hairs were blown. John the Baptist was a servant for His master, Jesus Christ. It was and still is today the powerful presence of Jesus Christ that brings joy, peace and hope to our hearts at Christmas time and throughout the year.

Throughout our neighborhoods and even among our families, people are still searching and seeking for peace, joy and hope. Sadly even among Christian people. Listen to this little poem I found: "The spirit of Christmas is indeed the Christ spirit."

I wonder, what does Christmas mean,  
With its stars and shiny balls?  
Is Christmas more than Christmas trees  
And toys and games and dolls?  
Of this I'm sure: There's something more,  
For I've heard many say  
That in a strange and far-off land,  
A child was born this day.  
And Christmas is to celebrate  
His coming from above.  
He showed us how we all should live  
And told us we should love.

This is the spirit each true Christian seeks. (*The Church of Latter Day Saints*)

When I hear these words it breaks my heart and I feel as if a heavy weight is pressing down on my chest. There is no true Christmas spirit without the birth of the Son of God in that manger in Bethlehem. It is not that people didn't know what God demanded before the virgin birth. It is not that people didn't know the trick to entering God's family before Jesus Christ changed water into wine. It is not that people didn't know how to love and forgive until Jesus died on the cross! The requirements of the law have been known since the beginning of time. The sad fact is that sinful people are unable to do those requirements. Find me the person walking the mall shopping for gifts at this time of year that doesn't want to have peace with their past sins, joy in living today and hope for a better tomorrow? We all want it! But we seek them in the wrong place and work toward the wrong things! There is no special prayer that will bring you the Christmas Spirit. There is no candle to light, no good deed, no charity, no promise of future performance that will bring you peace with your Creator, joyful living today and guarantee for an escape from death.

John the Baptist prepared the people by proclaiming the Lord is near! The Lord has come! He has lived for us. He has obeyed for us. He has died for us. He has been risen from the grave for us! We through the baptism of Jesus Christ have been joined to him. Immanuel, which means God with us, has given us His Spirit. We believe. We are forgiven. We have the peace of knowing our past is forgiven, the joy of knowing we have a loving Father in heaven, the hope of knowing a better tomorrow is ours in heaven forever! Fill your heart with the powerful presence of our Savior – that is the true Christmas Spirit of peace, joy and hope! Look to the manger and see Immanuel, the Lord is with us to live and die and rise again for us!

## **2) Let His Gospel Bear Fruit Everyday.**

Did you know Bob Dylan has come out with a Christmas album? Yep, it's entitled, *Christmas in the Heart*. Not so fast with the snickering. Mr. Dylan is reported to have become a Christian about 30 years ago. He was born a Jew and grew up in the Jewish faith. On the CD, he sings O Come All Ye Faithful and O Little Town of Bethlehem among other well known Christmas Carols and secular Christmas tunes. If there's anything weirder than Dylan releasing a Christmas disc, it's that he avoided doing so during a recording career spanning 47 years. Christmas albums, lucrative for their perennial sales potential, have become an all-genres staple. Dylan will donate his royalties in perpetuity to three charities that aid the hungry: Feeding America, the U.K.-based Crisis and the United Nations' World Food Program. If that isn't *Christmas in the heart*, what is?

I'm no music critic, but I'm sure his Christmas vocals aren't for everyone's tastes. The reason I point it out to us all is that Mr. Dylan gives a perfect example of John the Baptist's preaching to the people for the true Christmas Spirit. The order is important. John the Baptist didn't tell the people clean up your act, share what you have with those in need, whatever your job is do it well, treat others fairly, and be content with what you are earning and then you can have forgiveness of sins, peace, assurance of a loving

Father and hope for an eternity in heaven. No. First the people heard the law. They looked into the law as a mirror and saw that they were sinful. Then John the Baptist reminded them of their Savior and the promise of forgiveness in Him. They believed the message, repented and were baptized. Now part of that believing in God as their Savior was believing everything he said about their lives. The people then naturally wanted to say thank you and respond to the great gift of forgiveness.

Others thought they were fine and needed to change nothing in their lives to meet their Maker and Savior. John the Baptist told them that without fruits of faith, you are not believers. He warns them that the Judge, Jesus Christ who was born in Bethlehem, died on Golgotha and rose from the dead out of Joseph of Arimathea's tomb will return on that last day, find no fruits of faith, no repentance evidence and will send them to the fire of hell like a tree that is cut down after bearing no fruit or the chaff that is useless after the harvest.

The True Christmas Spirit produces fruits of faith. If we, believers in Jesus Christ, remember what he has done for us then it will show in our life. We will have the fruits of the Spirit more and more as our faith and understanding of God's love in Jesus Christ grows. So as your bond to Jesus Christ, the Babe of Bethlehem grows, so does your Christmas Spirit.

Confession of our sins and a changed life are inseparable. We must watch out for saying all the right things and yet doing none of them. The people John talked to in the wilderness, as well as many of the people Jesus talked to while he lived on earth, wanted to be known as religious followers of Jesus, but wanted to hang on to their pet sins and would not change their life according to His Way.

John the Baptist message was the same as Jesus message for hypocrites and fake believers. There is no good news for sinners who live careless and selfish lives with no regard for what God wants or no concern for God's people. Think today with a heart filled with the peace, joy and hope of the true Christmas Spirit, think today what you can change in how you share what you have with others, with the Lord, with your fellow believers, with the needy around you. Think today how well you are working at your job and being content with your income and earnings.

**Here are the last 6 points to getting the Christmas Spirit:**

Step 6 Organize a drive at work or in your neighborhood. Collect food and personal items and donate them to a local shelter for the homeless or for battered women.

Step 7 Play Christmas music.

Step 8 Watch Christmas movies. "It's a Wonderful Life" is a good one for reviving a flagging Christmas spirit, as is "How the Grinch Stole Christmas".

Step 9 Read "A Christmas Carol" and "A Child's Christmas in Wales".

Step 10 Decorate your house for the holidays.

Step 11 Don't spend more money than you have. Anxiety over after-Christmas bills can ruin your holiday. I will add just one more, which will bring the true Christmas spirit into your hearts and homes -- read the Christmas account from Luke 2 and the account of the Wise men from Matthew 2. Let His powerful presence be your joy and

**Let His Good News Bear Fruit Everyday!**