

Expecting Christmas: The Spirit of Truth

1 John 4:1-6

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All of us have expectations at Christmas. Many of our expectations are centered around being with family. All of us enjoy the time together, the food, the gifts and the opportunities to laugh. That is one of my expectations, to be with family.

1 John 4:1–6 (NLT) Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. This is how we know if they have the Spirit of God: If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in a real body, that person has the Spirit of God. But if someone claims to be a prophet and does not acknowledge the truth about Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard is coming into the world and indeed is already here. But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world. Those people belong to this world, so they speak from the world's viewpoint, and the world listens to them. But we belong to God, and those who know God listen to us. If they do not belong to God, they do not listen to us. That is how we know if someone has the Spirit of truth or the spirit of deception.

Celebrating the birth of Jesus is a testimony that our faith stands on the truth. Macy's, of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, is a huge retail store. Their slogan for a number of years was a single word: believe. They wanted people to believe in the magic of Christmas. That is whatever you believe you will receive as a gift for Christmas. They wanted people to believe that Santa's gifts are all available at Macy's. That means come shop at Macy's and we'll get you to believe you need to buy our items. Is that too cynical?

Believe is a verb, it's the action that takes place in the brain that results in the actions we take every day. I believe, everybody, believes in something. All of us believe in something that gets us out of bed each day.

I believe God loves the world, all of His creation specifically the people. This love of God moved Him to become a person, a baby born to a woman named Mary. This baby grew to be a man whose name is Jesus, and He faithfully trusted all of God's promises. I believe this man spoke the truth, called people to turn from their sins, was beaten and killed for speaking the truth. I believe that on the third day this man named Jesus rose from the dead. I believe that He took away my sins, empowers me each day, and one day I will be in heaven with Him. I believe this because the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit revealed it to me.

You can believe whatever you want. But if you don't believe what God did you aren't believing the truth.

So, we give our testimony every December that God gave us His Son as a gift. That truth has been around longer than the myth of Kris Kringle, Santa Claus, and eight reindeer. Even though Christmas has become a season of gift giving, parties, and family gatherings the truth remains the truth.

For some people the truth revolves around their situation, their ideas, their desires. That isn't truth, that's personal experiences and personal preferences. When we tell ourselves enough stories we start to believe they're true. I'm not saying adults believe in Santa Claus, but they don't believe in Jesus.

You and I have a testimony about Jesus. Christmas is an opportunity to share the truth. The truth is God became a person like you and me. He entered the world like you and me. He faced temptations like you and me. The truth is God as a human being remained true to Himself. He faced the temptations that come with being a frail person. We're all frail, no matter how strong we are. We can't, regardless of our determination, will-power, or stubbornness, overcome the temptations.

God, the person named Jesus, did overcome every temptation. He never sinned. He never failed the morals or ethical test. He never did what was bad or wrong. He never looked at the situation, the ideas of people, or the desires of people as being more important than being faithful to His nature as God. God, the person named Jesus, always did what was right. He always took the time to care about people, their troubles and their joys. He always demonstrated His mercy, grace, and love.

Go ahead and believe what you want, but I know what I believe about Christmas. It's the celebration of God becoming a person like you and me.

1 John 4:1 (NLT) Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world.

Far too many people don't have their focus on Jesus. I just talked about what we believe. Many folks say they believe, but their focus isn't on Jesus. They don't trust Jesus first and foremost. People are believing the lies they are told.

During the Christmas season so many people believe the lies. Although people don't believe Santa is real they believe he represents Christmas. I'm not talking about Christians, but about those folks who haven't heard about the love of God in Jesus Christ. Santa Claus is their representative of Christmas.

I'm not saying we're going to change the culture in just one year. I'm saying we're going to impact the lives of people who cling to the Santa myth. Santa doesn't represent Christmas. He's a fictitious character. He has never saved anyone. He can't get anyone to heaven. People need to know the truth.

Yeah, that's bold. Don't get in an argument over Santa. Let the name of Jesus be on your lips.

For lots and lots of people putting up decorations is the goal of Christmas. I have to be honest about two things. I don't put up too many decorations anymore. It's not the same without kids in the house. I put out on the front porch two different nativity sets. I like to look at Christmas decorations. I think they're entertaining. I see more and more houses covered with blow up decorations every year. So, I'm not against decorating for Christmas.

The focus needs to be about Jesus, God's Son coming into the world. I am on my soap box. We all know people whose lives revolve around giving gifts as the way to happiness. Too many people believe they can buy friendships or love by giving the perfect gift. The biggest lie is making your spouse happy when you buy a new car. I know if it weren't for car advertisements there would only be

beer commercials. But, my wife's happiness with a new car only lasted about as long the new car smell. You don't have to think too hard to identify the lies about buying happiness. When the focus moves away from gifts and happiness to Jesus we not only find the truth, we find hope, joy, and peace.

This is going to make me sound like a grumpy old man if I don't already, but having a party is not the reason for the season. I enjoy getting together with family. It's one of my expectations at Christmas. Laughing and playing games, eating cookies and snacks, being together is a big deal. Christmas is often the time when we are able to get together. But, so is Mother's day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving day. Christmas is the only one that we celebrate God entering our world to save us.

People are allowing the lies to dictate how they live. I'm on my soap box. A preacher better be on soap box about Christmas. Consider how much time and effort is put into decorating. Neighborhoods have contests, officially or unofficially. If only one of you had invited blow-up lawn decorations. Think about the stories we've told children about Santa. Young parents worry some crazy uncle is going to destroy the illusion. Then consider the billions of dollars spent every year trying to make somebody happy with a gift. I still love the look on a child's face when they open the perfect gift. But, it doesn't always happen.

Christmas is about God becoming a person like one of us. That's the truth. My Christmas expectation is for the truth to be heard.

1 John 4:2 (NLT) This is how we know if they have the Spirit of God: If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in a real body, that person has the Spirit of God.

Putting Jesus first at Christmas requires us to speaK His name. Happy holidays is an expression that could apply to February and May along with October and November. There are two holidays in February: Valentine's Day and President's Day. But we don't say happy holidays. May has two holidays: Mother's Day and Memorial Day. But we don't say happy holidays. We could say happy holidays from October through November. There's Halloween, Veterans' Day, and Thanksgiving Day.

The reason people say Happy Holidays during December is they're too lazy to say Merry Christmas or they're afraid of offending someone with the word Christmas. People are afraid of keeping Jesus in Christmas. It's the celebration of His birth: God becoming a person. The Bible says this is a big deal. It's the litmus test to determine if you have the Spirit of God or the Spirit of deception.

Am I being too critical? Should I just let this slide? Am I on the wrong soap box? There are people every day who use the name Jesus and they aren't preaching or praying. They take His name and toss it around their conversations like He was their best friend. But, they have never met Him. They use the name Jesus more than good church attending people. They aren't embarrassed when they say it.

People will say, "I didn't know you were a pastor." My thought is I'm offended by your use of my Savior's name, but think about how He feels. Just consider how you would feel if every time something went wrong people would yell Randy? You can substitute your name for Randy.

Can you use the name of Jesus in your greetings and your conversations? When you're talking with someone be sure to say Merry Christmas before they do. Just look at their face when you say it. People are surprised in a good way. They want to hear it. They want to hear about the birthday of the Savior of the world.

I can tell that you're doubting me. You don't think it's true. This week say Merry Christmas to every person you see outside of your own home. While your shopping say Merry Christmas to all the store employees. Look the people in the eye, forget about what you do after they hand you the bag and say Merry Christmas. Watch their expression. It's a great gift.

This is the test to determine if a person's spirit is believing the deceptions or if they have the Spirit of Truth, they will proclaim Jesus as the only God who became a person in order to save the world. Now, I know you want go up to people and ask the Christmas question. I'm not going to ask strangers if they've passed the Christmas test. However, what if during our conversations we started saying, thank you Jesus. Just imagine dropping the name of Jesus when someone shares about good things happening in their lives. You know, "I'm glad it's Friday." "Thank you Jesus." "This was the best meal I've had in days." "Thank you Jesus." "My granddaughter called today." "Thank you Jesus." "I almost got run over by a reindeer." "Thank you Jesus." That is the Spirit of Truth.

1 John 4:6 (NLT) But we belong to God, and those who know God listen to us. If they do not belong to God, they do not listen to us. That is how we know if someone has the Spirit of truth or the spirit of deception.

Speak the truth this Christmas season: Jesus is the Son of God. You and I can be the Spirit of truth in our conversations. John wrote these words in a time of great deception. People would say anything. The majority of people were sinners headed to hell. They didn't believe the truth. They didn't know Jesus as God who became a person. They didn't trust that His death and resurrection could take away their sins.

Does any of this look familiar in our world today? Do you see the connection? We are surrounded by people who believe the lies about having a happy holiday. They believe the lies because Jesus isn't in their lives. They don't know the truth, they haven't heard the truth. In all of our conversations let the name of Jesus be present. Be willing to speak the truth: God's love compelled Him to become a person. His name is Jesus, Hebrew for the Lord saves. Jesus the living, breathing person always trusted God's promises, always remained true to His nature in the face of joy and sorrow, happiness and pain, fun and temptations. Jesus, God who became a person never sinned. Jesus is the person who died and rose from the dead taking away the sin of every person who trusts Him.

This the truth. This is the only truth. When we speak the truth we comfort, encourage, and hold people accountable. People who are Christians need to be comforted by the truth as the world faces one chaotic moment after another. People, regardless of their beliefs need to be encouraged by the truth while the world struggles to find meaning. People everywhere need to be held accountable for their beliefs, their words, and their actions.

We are people of the truth. We know the truth about Jesus. We can speak the truth concerning Jesus. The truth not the lies will set people free. Until they believe the truth they will be held captive by the lies.

Jesus is the truth. Speak the truth. Speak the name of Jesus.