

Happy Holy Days! I know some of you would prefer I say Merry Christmas – but in case you have forgotten, I’m Jewish.

So I certainly don’t want to forget my distant relatives celebrating the marvelous eight days of Hanukkah – which begins for them this year this very night/day – December 24<sup>th</sup>/ December 25<sup>th</sup>. How special that your holy days are in exact alignment this year!

However, since so many of you are so concerned about keeping me as the reason for the season, I thought I might weigh in on the matter. . .

Let’s start by recognizing that there is nothing exactly special about December 25<sup>th</sup>. This day was chosen for the day of my birth to compete with ancient Roman holidays—

and because some thought it was 9 months after the angel Gabriel announced the news to my Mother, Mary – that she was chosen from all the women in the world to be my mother.

However, for centuries my birthday was celebrated on January 6 – the feast of the Epiphany – when the magi from the east visited my family.

Slavic nations, using a different calendar, still do their celebrating on January 7<sup>th</sup>.

Regardless of the day – I’m just grateful when you remember me!

Now some of you think that those who fight for political correctness and who are worried about offending others --- are taking me out of Christmas. While I am grateful for expressing your concerns, I must admit I have a few concerns of my own. . .

Even if you choose to say “Merry Christmas” instead of “Happy Holidays” -- you weren’t really honoring me too well on the day after Thanksgiving when you knocked over the person in WalMart trying to muscle your way to the front of the line.

I know you didn’t see her – but that’s my point. You needed to see her – and to see that in knocking her over – you knocked me over!

And while that was a very nice letter of protest you wrote to the editor when the city removed the manger scene from the front of city hall – do you really think you are keeping me the reason for the season when you spend more money on Christmas than King Herod ever thought about!

Come on, you spend more than 250 billion dollars a year on Christmas!

You could provide clean water for everyone in the world for a mere 10 billion – and still have 240 billion left for presents. That’s a lot of dollars and a lot of presents!

Speaking of Herod, he killed a lot of kids hunting me down. Now I’m not trying to be rude, but I think you need to hear this. You kill me, the Son of God, every time a child dies from a lack of food or shelter.

Every time someone dies because they did not go to the hospital because they did not have any health insurance – that’s me who died.

Every time you spend billions on the defense of your country and very little on meeting the basic needs of the most vulnerable in your society – there is something out of whack.

It’s time you realize that I spend more time worrying about other things than what is politically correct in what you call the holidays! And so should you.

While you haven’t asked, I do have a Christmas list this year. Well, why not? It’s my birthday so of course I get to ask for presents. . . so here it goes. . .

I want you to relax. While there are things to get upset about in this world – I don't think the secularization of Christmas is your biggest fish to fry. If you're upset that there is no manger scene in a public place – then put one in your yard. And by the way, I know I am being picky – but the magi didn't arrive the night I was born. . . so why are they already out???. They come on the feast of the Epiphany – January 6<sup>th</sup> – it's okay to leave things up until then!

Make a visit to a nursing home or a Hospice house sometime soon. Spend some time with someone who doesn't have anyone. This can be your own special Christmas journey – which won't be as difficult as making it to Bethlehem on the back of a donkey – like my mother had to do.

Give your children your presence – and worry less about the presents. I came to earth to be with you – the least you can do is actually spend time with your children and those who love you.

The fourth thing on my wish list for my birthday is for you to -----

Practice random acts of kindness and forgiveness. Since these are both contagious – you may just start a kindness & forgiveness revolution right in your neck of the woods. That would be an incredible thing!

Sometime soon, buy a gift or provide a meal for someone you don't know. And guess what, don't make it the cheapest thing you can find. Splurge on a total stranger. Again, this type of behavior is contagious – like a rock thrown into a pond -- the ripple of generosity will continue to spread.

And last on my list, at least for this year --

Don't be rude. The salesperson you just snapped at – just got a divorce. The person you just honked at because they were driving slow – just found out their dad has cancer.

The person you just cussed out in line – considered suicide recently.

Since you don't know what's happening with others – try treating them all like you would treat me. And how about just smiling every once in a while – so everyone can wonder what you are up to!

I guess what I am trying to say – is that the best way for you to remember me – is to try to be like me: Work for justice. Show kindness to those on the fringes. Be gentle and understanding to those you love, and those you don't even know.

You are, after all, my representatives, my personal ambassadors -- the only Christ some people may ever meet. So please, let them know by your words and actions – who I am and what I stand for.

And if you forget, and it pains me to say this, but a bunch of you will forget --- then just love.

The answer, the solution, the action --- is always love.

I am so glad you came to this place to spend some time with me today. But remember, Christmas cannot be contained in a time or space ---- so go out and continuing spending some time with me – I can be found in every place you go, because I am in every face you see, every day of the year.

Remember – because I love you – you can do incredible things!

Gracefully yours, Jesus: the wonder-counselor, God-hero, Father-forever, Prince of Peace.

