

## Christmas 2022

Dear Family and Friends:

Ah, family banter. Don't you love it! Recently, Dottie surprised me when, out of the blue, she commented on how much she underestimated me when we were first married. I began to think—what a sweet comment, until she continued. “I had no idea how big a nut case you would become.” Touche!!!

Getting to know one another is a long-term project. Time seasons both our understanding of the other person and of ourselves. Through the panorama of experience, we come to see who the other person really is, how they think and why they think that way, and how they feel about so many things. We're increasingly able to approximate their point of view and meet them on common ground. We come to realize that so many things said about them miss who they are by a rather wide measure.

I come to Christmas with that reflection. For years, I had such a paltry view of the Lord Jesus. Really, it was not my own at all. It was assembled from different voices in the surrounding culture. Part of it was sweet Jesus, this ethereal, sentimental, namby-pamby character, who wrung His hands over the evil and pain in the world, but who always understood that “boys will be boys” and made generous allowance for anything that anybody did.

Then there was the other side of things, the Judge and fearsome Lord. A celestial, austere, and stern figure, placated only by the intercession of his mother. His standards were so unattainably high that whatever you did was wrong, at least in thought or intention. My childhood fears were about how that would play out in the confessional each week.

Then it was my oh-so-wise college-age version. He was the well-intentioned crackpot who thought he was God and died believing that. What balderdash! He thought that his death had something to do with redeeming humanity. He was a convincing nut case. Those closest to him, who were with him constantly for years, only grew in their estimation of him, came to embrace his view of himself and his role, preached that far and wide, and gave their lives for him and for his message. One crackpot spawned a whole slew of crackpots.

How my thoughts have changed! In a certain period in my life's journey, it occurred to me that Jesus Christ was indeed a significant figure in world history. I had done almost nothing to discern the truth about him. I had allowed a cacophony of voices to frame a confused view of who he was and to mitigate his importance in the eternal scheme of things. Why was I convinced by voices 2,000 years removed who pooh-poohed Him as either a tragically naive figure, or loony tunes, or a deceptive fraud? I should read the original documents and see what those closest to Him thought and observed.

Funny how getting to know a person up close, rather than what is said about Him by people far removed, changes your opinion. I am still on the journey of getting to know this person—the Lord Jesus—this person like no other. Currently, I am studying the New Testament book of Hebrews, where the author discusses the significance of the Lord's person and ministry built on an exposition of Old Testament texts. We can forget just how central and vital Jesus is to every aspect of the Christian faith. The book of Hebrews is a strong antidote to such forgetfulness. The writer cannot get enough of thinking through who Jesus is and what he achieved in his death and resurrection.

This awesome person was certainly no crackpot. How silly I was! But it was not “awesome” that drew me. There was a deep sympathy for my oh-so-human dilemma combined with a robust strength available to me without being condescending. An anchor for my soul, which is tethered to His incredible sacrifice for my welfare and salvation.

So, this Christmas, I find myself perusing Christmas creches through a different lens. Oh, the reindeer and all the other secular paraphernalia are usually there, cluttering the scene. As I gaze on the child, this tiny infant, God in the flesh. I find myself overcome once again by the wonder of it all and renewed in my heart's desire to look to the Lord Jesus and to keep going on in the faith.

This Yuletide finds us well and gratefully so. We hope this past year has been a blessed one for you and that the upcoming year will continue in that grace. From our home to yours, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.