Merry Christmas 2020 **[1]**

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For many people, Christmas 2020 is not going to be merry. Where there used to be happy family gatherings with delicious Christmas lunches or dinners, there will only be solitude. The chatter and laughter of a jolly crowd will be replaced by silence and quietness. Christmas, as some would say, has been cancelled.

A year ago, people were preparing for these very festivities. Flights were landing, families were reunited, Christmas dinners were nearly done cooking on the stove. It is incredible how within a year entire social structures can change so dramatically. A year ago, COVID-19 was only a distant boogieman in China. Since then it has become a global pandemic and disrupted every aspect of life all across the world. Yet we are social creatures; we have a need to see people, to hug, and to interact face-to-face. But this year we are without the means for those needs to be met.

At the same time, much of this is not unique to Christmas 2020. For years, Christmas has been a time Where there is a spike in suicide rates or calls to suicide prevention hotlines. Many people find themselves at this time without family and without the relationships which they need. Perhaps they lost it through death or divorce; whatever the reason Christmas time brings out the heartsore of loneliness more than any other time.

What was previously experienced in isolated pockets of individuals, is now being felt worldwide. Now, the exceptions are those individuals who are able together with their family and feast and be safe and have good health.

Even many churches, which many people only attend at Christmas or Easter, will be shut up in 2020. As has been the practise of churches which adapted to the challenges of 2020, services will be streamed online, but that is no substitute for the community and the personability which these Christmas services, or even the carol services, afforded.

Overall the outlook is bleak, and the situation is depressing. However, that does not need to be the case.

Three things come to mind which we can do to survive Christmas during a pandemic lockdown.

The first is to embrace the quietness. We can put on Christmas music—not about reindeer—but which call to mind another quiet Christmas: one which was also quiet, with a baby sleeping for the first time outside the womb, an exhausted mother resting after the ordeal of giving birth, and a father figure quietly contemplating the future. As we listen, we can think about in wonder and recall

that incredible time when God became incarnate, and entered into a world of sickness and loneliness. He entered it not only to show that He does not shun those who are sick and lonely, but to experience these things Himself, so that He is the God who stands by His creation and does not reject it.

> Silent night, holy night
> All is calm, all is bright
> Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child
> Holy Infant so tender and mild
> Sleep in heavenly peace
> Sleep in heavenly peace

The second thing we can do, is to be intentional with others, whether near or far. Not only with family, but with friends and neighbours; those whom we know are lonely or otherwise have a difficult time now, we can remember. We can phone them, and encourage and listen to them, grieve with them if they grieve, and strive to inspire joy in them. While we may be sick of video or voice chats and instead crave in-personal interaction, if it is all that we can do at this point, then that is our highest calling.

Lastly, we work hard to keep the vulnerable people around us safe. That is the sacrifice which we endure for their flourishing. We do so in the continued hope that as we understand the virus better over time, we one day will be able to come together, to commune, and to joyfully celebrate in each other's company. Until that time, we show our willingness to endure hardships for the sake of others.

The tragedy of Christmas, is that it can become about ourselves: our expectations, our desires, our wants. The glory of Christmas is that it is about Jesus. If we think about His purpose in coming to earth, the example which He set on earth, and the responsibility which He passed on to us to build out God's Kingdom here on earth, then that is a Christmas well spent. For those who think that Christmas is about Christ, Christmas cannot be cancelled.

Have a merry and blessed Christmas! May your hearts be filled with joy. Joy is not always the same as happiness, but it is a deep containment, and the ultimate contentment can only be found in Christ.

PS I am currently recovering from surgery where I had a ligament in one of my hands repaired. This means that I am not able to write as I would like. That is part of the reason why the I have been I have not been posting articles regularly. Once my hand has healed from the surgery, I intend to post more new articles.

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