

THE HERALD

Newsletter of the Orrville Grace Brethren Church

3 Tips for Sharing Jesus with Others this Christmas

By Adam Ramsey

Even while our culture continues its acceleration away from Christendom, Christmas still remains one of the most likely time of the year for non-Christians to consider matters of faith. Here are a few tips to help you step out of your comfort zone and talk to non-Christians in your world about Jesus.

It was a Christmas Eve service in 1992, and I had been recruited to play the role of one of the young shepherd boys. With typical 90s seeker-sensitive flair, the night retold the birth of Jesus with skits, carols, praise banners, and awkwardness. Yet the gospel was preached and some who had been invited by friends responded by trusting their lives to Jesus.

Why is any of this important?

Well, because one of the people that

night who responded to the gospel, was my dad.

You're probably aware that Christmas is that magical time of the year when lights are up, stores are full, and millions celebrate the angel's declaration of "peace on earth" by stressing out over the perfect gift or their imperfect family members.

But what you may not be aware of is that Christmas is also the most likely time of the year for non-Christians to consider matters of faith. From the carols that are sung to the nativity scenes that are set up to the imagery on the front of Christmas cards, over the next few weeks Jesus will be placed front and centre in our cultural eye. Like my dad, many people are more open to Jesus during the Christmas season.

While it is certainly true (and curious) that there are those in our culture who consider it an offensive social taboo to talk about Jesus during his birthday celebration, the bottom line for Christians is that Christmas comes with more opportunities to give people the gift of the gospel than any other time of

the year.

As we prepare to celebrate the incarnation of Christ into the world, here are a few tips to help you step out of your comfort zone and talk to non-Christians in your world about Jesus.

1. Redeem Santa Claus

Whether you like it or not, Santa Claus is a part of the cultural landscape of December. And he's not going anywhere. Apart from a few troubling stalker tendencies ("He sees you when you're sleeping, he knows when you're awake"!?), he seems like a pretty nice fellow who genuinely wants little boys and girls to try their best to be good. If they behave, they'll have earned themselves a place on the nice list and be showered with presents instead of punished with coal.

Come to think of it, Santa would have been right at home with the Pharisees in Jesus' day. Santa, like the Pharisees, has a fondness for rule-keeping, good behavior, and rewarding high performers.

However, the message of "try harder, do better" is not good news, and it's not Christianity. It's a depressing cultural distortion known as moralism, and is about as liberating as being chained to a treadmill and instructed to run to China. No matter how hard you try, you will find yourself in the exact same place—just more tired and cynical.

But instead of seeing Santa as an opponent to be protested or a myth to

naively endorse, Christians should see him as one of our greatest opportunities to astonish people with the gospel. Santa is not the enemy. Santa is an opportunity.

Christian, you don't need to condemn Santa. Just contrast him with Jesus.

The gospel shows us that the true gift-giver is Jesus. The gospel turns the Santa-narrative on its head. In Ephesians 2:8, Paul reminds us that the unfathomable joy of salvation is the undeserved gift of God.

Santa says, "Earn it."

Jesus says, "Receive it" (John 1:12)

Santa says, "If you're good, you'll get my love."

Jesus says, "Only my love can make you good" (1 John 4:10, Romans 4:5) Santa makes a list and warns, "I'll be checking it twice."

Jesus fulfilled the list and declared, "It is finished" (Colossians 2:13-14, John 19:30).

The message of Christmas that every child and adult's heart longs to hear is not "be good, for goodness sake!", but that Jesus was good for our sake!

The gospel is an explosion of hope that brilliantly outshines the dull moralism of Santa. By living the life we couldn't live and dying the death we deserve to die, Jesus gives sinners on the naughty list (if you're human, you qualify) the gift of God's love. That's news worth telling someone over the next few weeks.

2. Redeem Religion

While Christendom may be dead, it has left in its wake some quasi-religious cultural traditions. For many non-Christians, attending some sort of church service during the holiday season is as much a part of their family tradition as putting up a Christmas tree or hanging lights on the front of their house. It allows them to tick the “spiritual” box (at least until Easter). This kind of thinking is nothing more than dead religion, devoid of the life-altering power of the gospel. But it does come with one redeemable caveat: the opportunity for people to encounter the life-altering power of the gospel.

That friend or family member of yours who doesn't know Jesus is far more likely to attend a Christmas Eve or Christmas service with you than any other time of the year. Thom Rainer, president of Lifeway Research, has pointed out that “if there is a given day where more unchurched non-Christians are likely to attend church, it would be on Christmas Eve.”

So go ahead and invite them! Your neighbors will say ‘no’ to 100% of the invitations that you don't extend. Your odds can only go up.

3. Remember The King's Promise

Christ's command to move beyond “comfortable conversations” and be his witnesses, often leaves us feeling like Peter stepping out of the boat into the waters of the impossible (Matt. 14:26–

33).

Don't get me wrong; I totally get it. The fear is real. It's just misplaced. We all experience those moments on mission where we seem to be sinking like Peter under the chaos of the storm. But that is only because we have taken our eyes off the One who rules the weather (Mark 4:41).

The key to living out the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) is in the verses that surround it. In verse 18, Jesus reminds us that he is the King and possesses all authority. He may have humbled himself to a manger, but now Christ reigns once again from his throne. Then in verse 20, King Jesus makes a game-changing promise: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The most important four words you can remember this Christmas season as you step out and give the gift of the gospel are the same four words that Jesus gave to put steel in the backbone of those who loved him: “I am with you.”

Here are the very words that God has spoken to breathe courage into his people again and again (Josh. 1:9; Isa. 41:9; Jer. 1:8). Here are the words at the very heart of the Incarnation that is celebrated at Christmas time every year. Immanuel; “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

“I am with you.”

The true message of Christmas. And the means by which we boldly declare it.

FUNNIES

A little girl was talking to her teacher about whales.

The teacher said it was physically impossible for a whale to swallow a human because even though it was a very large mammal its throat was very small.

The little girl stated that Jonah was swallowed by a whale.

Irritated, the teacher reiterated that a whale could not swallow a human; it was physically impossible.

The little girl said, 'When I get to heaven I will ask Jonah'.

The teacher asked, 'What if Jonah went to hell?'

The little girl replied, 'Then you ask him'.

A Kindergarten teacher was observing her classroom of children while they were drawing. She would occasionally walk around to see each child's work.

As she got to one little girl who was working diligently, she asked what the drawing was.

The girl replied, 'I'm drawing God.'

The teacher paused and said, 'But no one knows what God looks like.'

Without missing a beat, or looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, 'They will in a minute.'

A Sunday school teacher was discussing

the Ten Commandments with her five and six-year-olds.

After explaining the commandment to 'honor' thy Father and thy Mother, she asked, 'Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?'

From the back, one little boy (the oldest of a family) answered, 'Thou shall not kill.'

One day a little girl was sitting and watching her mother do the dishes at the kitchen sink. She suddenly noticed that her mother had several strands of white hair sticking out in contrast on her brunette head.

She looked at her mother and inquisitively asked, 'Why are some of your hairs white, Mum?'

Her mother replied, 'Well, every time that you do something wrong and make me cry or unhappy, one of my hairs turns white.'

The little girl thought about this revelation for a while and then said, 'Mummy, how come ALL of grandma's hairs are white?'

The children had all been photographed, and the teacher was trying to persuade them each to buy a copy of the group picture. 'Just think how nice it will be to look at it when you are all grown up and say, 'There's Jennifer, she's a lawyer,' or 'That's Michael, He's a doctor.'

A small voice at the back of the room rang out, 'And there's the teacher, she's dead.'