

How to Celebrate Christmas

by Didi Marañon

Slowly, warm tears gather in smiling eyes and drop, as if on cue, as my sister, PY de Guzman, sings the chorus of “Nandito ang Pasko.” It was a November pastoral visit to Elim Hong Kong where most of the dwellers are overseas Filipino workers. This time of the year, our Elders, Bro Willy and Sis Luli Nakar, make it a point to deliver Christmas greetings and blessings to our dwellers in Kowloon, Tsing Yi and Tai Wai.

This November, it is Christmas in this school auditorium in Hong Kong. There is no Christmas tree, no exchange of gifts, no luxurious banquet. Still, it is Christmas. And as we finally sing “Silent Night,” no doubt the spirit of Jesus is truly present in our hearts.

What does it take to celebrate a meaningful Christmas? Commerce rams down our throats expensive gifts to be bought. Worldly celebration entices us to get drunk and engage in loud, sometimes vulgar, party games. And fewer people consider going to Church, thinking that the Church isn’t exactly a place of celebration.

I suggest five ways to make our Christmas this year more meaningful; ways that will help us get into the true spirit of the season.

1. Reflect by Research. Before you attend your first party for the season, research the reason for our celebration. Read Luke chapters 1 and 2. Even if you have read these chapters dozens of times, read them again. They will help prepare your hearts for a whole period of celebration. It will keep you focused on the Celebrant rather than the merry-making. You can also order audio teachings with Christmas as the topic. Or read books about celebrating Christmas the godly way. Another way is by watching movies about the birth of Jesus. This will give you a vivid presentation of what transpired that first Christmas. Browse the Internet for articles about Christmas. Research past Christmas messages of the saints and the popes, and you will be the better for it. These messages will give you new insights as to how you can celebrate Christmas with value and substance.

2. Spread the Good News. When the angels appeared to the shepherds on that first Christmas, they turned to one another and shared what they had seen and heard. Thereafter, they hurried to look for the Baby Jesus so that they might give Him homage. We would do well to follow their example. This is the best time to spread the Good News. So find ways to share the Word of God. Give gifts that contain God’s Word. Books are the best in this category. You may also inscribe passages in your presents and cards. Christian CDs are also carriers of the message of Jesus. Be bold in giving these kinds of presents during Christmas. After all, it is the theme of the season. When asked to say something at a party, take the opportunity to share the Gospel. The celebration demands that you give a spiritual message. So give it! This is the one month in the year that people will be open to hear words from the Bible and reflections about the Lord.

3. Be Amazed. Joseph, Mary, the three wise men, the shepherds — all celebrated the first Christmas by being amazed. They were in awe. Their eyes glistened with wonder. In one Christmas message, Pope Benedict XVI said, “Today the Angel repeats it to us, to all who dwell in our world: ‘The Savior is born; he is born for you! Come, come, let us adore Him!’” Every year, the message is the same. We should be amazed at the salvation that God brings to us year after year. We should stand in awe of His presence which we could enter if we seek Him with all of our hearts. Let us become like little children during Christmas by perceiving with wonder the spirit of the entire holiday season. Adults tend to be jaded during Christmas. Others even surmise that Christmas is just for kids. But how wrong could those people be! Christmas is for all because Jesus was born for you and me. This very message should keep us in amazement our entire lives. But especially during Christmas, let us open our eyes, our ears, our hearts and be amazed.

4. Spend Time Quietly. Christmas is a time for thanksgiving. It’s good to spend quiet times where you can personally thank the Lord for all His blessings. The morning is a good time to do this. A quiet time. Just you and the Lord. In silence you meet Him. In silence you can feel His presence. Enumerate all the blessings you can think of and thank God for each one of them. I assure you, you will feel instant joy. And the spirit of Christmas will fill your heart. St Louis IX of France said, “Give thanks frequently to God for all the benefits He has conferred on you, that you may be worthy to receive more.”

5. Invite God to Celebrate with You. The most important way to celebrate Christmas is to invite God to celebrate this season with you. Ask Him to be with you as you decorate so that your decoration may reflect His joy and beauty. Ask Him to be with you as you shop so that you may be generous in your giving. Ask Him to be with you in your parties so that all that you do may glorify Him. Ask Him to be with you as you give to charity so that you may be aware that you’re actually giving to Him. An invitation requires a deliberate intent to extend a request. You must ask God. You must pray everyday for Him to be in your celebration. And in so doing, you will be more aware of His presence in this entire season.

They say that in the Philippines we celebrate the longest Christmas season. And that holds true for Filipinos everywhere. For in Hong Kong, November was as good a time as any to experience Christmas because Christ was present as we greeted each other “Merry Christmas!”

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