

REFLECTIONS ON CHRISTMAS PREPARATIONS

by Rev. Thomas Soltis, SELC Stewardship Director

Advent Time

December is “Advent Time”, the season from Advent Sunday (Nov. 30) to Christmas. The word is derived from the Latin, “adventus”, meaning “a coming of any important event or person.” Advent is preparation time for the Christmas celebration of the first coming of Christ. Historically, it is a season of repentance. For many Slovak Lutherans, Advent was a quiet time. Secular music was forbidden. Radios were silent. It was a time for Scriptural meditation and personal spiritual reflection.

Hectic Time

December for many is a hectic time. So many things to do - gift decisions, shopping, decorations, planning dinners, cooking, parties, etc. Instead of a quiet time for reflection, it has become a stressful time of rush, rush. Gotta do this! Gotta do that! Go here! Go there!

Gift Time

December is gift time. A forerunner of gift giving was St. Nicholas, a Greek Bishop in the 4th century. He was known for his generous gifts to the poor. During the Middle Ages, children were given gifts in veneration of St. Nicholas. Martin Luther later propagated the idea of gifting children at Christmas in honor of the “Christkind” (Christ Child) instead of the veneration of saints such as St. Nicholas. After all, Christ is God’s perfect gift to mankind. He is most worthy of being venerated with gift sharing in His name.



St. Nicholas
13th c. depiction

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Santa Claus Time

The name, St. Nicholas, evolved into Santa Claus. The current concept of Santa was influenced by an 1823 poem, “A Visit from St. Nicholas”. A 1934 song, “Santa Claus Is Coming to Town”, perpetuated the notion that Santa kept a record of children being “naughty or nice” and then giving toys to well behaved children and coal to those naughty. The principle of being good to obtain something is basically selfish. Some religions

encourage good works in order to obtain a favor or forgiveness from God, which, again, is essentially sinful selfishness. Wrong motive! Good deeds should flow from love to God for His perfect love revealed in the free gift of redemption through Christ Jesus. As a child, I personally never believed in Santa as the Christmas gift giver to the great dismay of my school mates. My parents told me my Christmas gifts came from God through them, his instruments, and other family members and friends.



Debt Time

December, unfortunately has become debt time for many. Pumped up by constant, vigorous advertizing, some end up in a spending craze, abusing credit cards beyond their means. The aftermath of beginning a new year heavily in debt is certainly not in the interest of a “Happy New Year”. Debts are discouragingly troublesome.

Tips for Eliminating Debt

- > Place the cost of Christmas into the family budget at the beginning of the year.
- > Make your Christmas list as early as November. Write down what you want to get for whom as well as an affordable cost.
- > Begin looking for sales on gift items selected.
- > Feel free to eliminate some gift recipients by focusing on those most important to you. If possible, lovingly arrange not to exchange gifts with someone agreeable to the idea.
- > Don’t buy presents for yourself before Christmas. Look for bargain opportunities in post-season sales.
- > Shop alone. Others may divert you away from your budgeted list of gifts and costs.
- > Don’t let your credit cards tempt you to spend more than you can afford.
- > If talented, create your own gifts and cards.

RELATED RESOURCES

“Holiday Expenses Budget Forms”

www.MomsBudget.com - (Free Printables)

“Credit Card Control” - “Budgeting”

www.selc.lcms.org - (Personal Stewardship)