



Experience the warmth of Christmas through the winsome wit and wisdom of beloved writer G. K. Chesterton. This beautifully illustrated devotional includes selections of Chesterton's writings, accompanied with commentary, Scripture readings, and reflections.

Be encouraged by Chesterton's insight, charmed by the Victorian-inspired artwork, and delighted by the traditional English recipes.

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

MOODY PUBLISHERS 

AMAZON



APPLE BOOKS



BARNES & NOBLE



GOOGLE PLAY



CHRISTIANBOOK.COM 

WALMART



CONTENTS

Introduction	9
--------------	---

DAILY READINGS

Day 1: An Invitation to Walk Backwards Through History	15
Day 2: A Warning to Those in Danger of Celebrating Christmas Prematurely	19
Day 3: In Regard to Certain Objections to the Celebration of Christmas	23
Day 4: Of Paradoxes, Celestial Ladders, and Moving Wheels	27
Day 5: In Celebration of the Utter Unsuitability of Christmas to the Modern World	31
Day 6: On Christmas as a Litmus Test for Spiritual Buoyancy	35
Day 7: Concerning the Inescapable Fraternity of the Family Gathering	39
Day 8: As for Games and the Possible Invention of New Ones	43
Day 9: On Christmas as a Declaration of War	47
Day 10: On Christmas as an Antidote to a Disenchanted Imagination	51
Day 11: A Brief Celebration of the Boomerang	55
Day 12: In Regard to the Enormous and Overwhelming Everything	59

Day 13: On the Juxtaposition of Frightful Weather and Festive Gaiety	63
Day 14: Concerning Hearty Breakfasts and the Pleasures of Being Flung Headlong into the Sea	67
Day 15: A Word on the Word Made Flesh	71
Day 16: On the Significance and Insignificance of Ritual and Routine	75
Day 17: A Word of Gratitude to Santa Claus	79
Day 18: On the Association between Babies and Star-Sustaining Strength	83
Day 19: In Defense of the Material Substance of Christmas Presents	87
Day 20: With Respect to Rot, Riot, and Religion	91
Day 21: As to the Uncomfortable Comfort of Christmas	95
Day 22: Of Barbarians, Philosophers, and a Cave of Dreams	99
Day 23: To Marry, Be Merry, and Make Merry	103
Day 24: In Regard to the Ancient Symbol of the Flame	107
Day 25: Of Secrets, Divine Caps, and Celestial Post Offices	111
Day 26: Concerning the Enduring Fortitude of Christmas	115
Day 27: With Respect to Pudding, Currency, and the Betrayal of Christmas	119
Day 28: Concerning the Liberal and Conservative Balance of Christmas	123
Day 29: On Crackers, Logs, and the Winter Bath of Ecstasy	127
Day 30: After Christmas (an Afterword)	131

POEMS

“A Christmas Carol” (1922)	139
“The Nativity”	140
“A Child of the Snows”	142
“A Portrait”	143
“A Word”	144
“The Truce of Christmas”	146
“The Wise Men”	148
“The House of Christmas”	150
“A Christmas Carol” (1896)	152
“A Little Litany”	153
“Gloria in Profundis”	154

ESSAYS

“The Survival of Christmas”	159
“A Progress from England”	164
“The Rituals of Christmas”	169
“The Vast Anticipation of Christmas”	173
“The Winter Feast”	178

SHORT STORIES

“The Shop of Ghosts”	185
“The New Christmas”	190

RECIPES

Turkey	197
Giblet Gravy	199
“A Turkey Reverie”	200

Sausage Rolls	202
Wassail	203
Mince Pies	204
Brandy Butter	205
Fruit Crumble	206
Hard Sauce	207
Christmas Pudding	208
“A Word on the Wholesomeness of Christmas Pudding”	210

GAMES & TRADITIONS

Christmas Crackers	215
Sixpence in Pudding	215
Wassailing	216
Fictionary	218
Wink Murder	219
Squeak, Piggy, Squeak	220
Up Jenkins	221
Snapdragon	222
Index	225
Acknowledgments	231
Notes	233



DAY 1

AN INVITATION TO WALK BACKWARDS THROUGH HISTORY

It was in the season of Christmas that I came out of my little garden in that “field of the beeches” between the Chilterns and the Thames, and began to walk backwards through history to the place from which Christmas came.

THE NEW JERUSALEM (1920)¹

So begins *The New Jerusalem*, G. K. Chesterton’s travelogue chronicling his journey to the Holy Land. But before the destination, there is the journey. For Chesterton, it begins in a backyard in Beaconsfield, England, as the large, mustached man unlatches the garden gate and sets off on his adventure. Perhaps yours begins in a kitchen, with a strong cup of black coffee, or in a comfortable corner of the living room, the windows limned with frost. For me, it begins in a home office I affectionately call “the library,” as the fields around my house are blanketed with early morning fog. Regardless of our various points of departure, this book is an invitation to link arms

and set off together, as we “walk backwards through history to the place from which Christmas came.”

Is our celebration of Christmas not an attempt to do this very thing? Is the memorializing of an event not an effort, at some level, to relive it? Our traditions and ceremonies, rituals and feast days, are the inner workings of a psychological and emotional time machine. To sing “while shepherds watched their flocks at night” is to hum an incantation that might, if we allow it, transport us to a grassy hillside in Judea two thousand years ago, when celestial choirs filled the sky and proclaimed good news for all mankind. A box swathed in paper and ribbon is a talisman with the power to spirit us away to a humble home in first-century Palestine, at the moment when visitors from the East arrive, arms laden with gifts, eyes wide with wonder. In celebrating Christmas, we long, in some sense, to be one with it—to enter the story ourselves.

It would behoove us to remember that, as the journey precedes the destination, the season of Advent precedes Christmas. Advent, as observed by Christians for millennia, is a time of expectant waiting, an observance of a time when Israel’s prophets were as silent as their God and their people yearned for a promised (and much delayed) deliverer. As the famous hymn pleads, “O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel . . .” Advent is a desire in the Now for the Not Yet. In the coming days, we will further explore the traditional observance of Advent and Christmas and how we might recover those customs in our modern, distracted age.

Think of this book as a travelogue into the heart of Christmas, with the tall, heavyset man as our trusted guide. Let us keep our ears (and hearts) open, for I believe he has much to say to us along the way (he’s loquacious, six feet four inches tall, and nearly three hundred pounds, so he’s somewhat difficult to ignore). In speaking of travel, Chesterton once wrote,

I cannot see any Battersea here; I cannot see any London or any England. I cannot see that door. I cannot see that chair: because a cloud of sleep and custom has come across my eyes. The only way to get back to them is to go somewhere else; and that is the real object of travel and the real pleasure of holidays. Do you suppose that I go to France in order to see France? Do you suppose that I go to Germany in order to see Germany? I shall enjoy them both; but it is not them that I am seeking. I am seeking Battersea. The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one's own country as a foreign land.²

The purpose of our journey is not so much to dwell in “the place from which Christmas came,” but to allow that place to dwell *in us*, to return to our own country with christened eyes, to look upon our everyday surroundings with a baptized imagination.

As we exit the garden and turn the corner, the large man's cane clinking along the cobblestones, he mutters under his breath, “Christmas belongs to an order of ideas which never really perished, and which is now less likely to perish than ever.” Just then, he is momentarily stunned into silence by the image of a sparrowcock perched upon the branch of a tall, barren tree, silhouetted against the darkening sky. “It had from the first a sort of glamour of a lost cause,” he says with a twinkle in his eye. “It was like an everlasting sunset. It is only the things that never die that get the reputation of dying.”³

With that, he turns and continues down the street. We hasten to follow, as the first flurries of snow begin to fall . . .



SCRIPTURE READING & REFLECTION

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

JEREMIAH 33:14-16

How might you prepare space in your heart for Christ during this season?

How can you make time for silence and contemplation in the midst of an increasingly busy time of year?

Meditate on some long journeys in your life, when the promise of deliverance seemed far away. Reflect on the mercies of God that were with you in the midst of your "expectant waiting."



DAY 2

A WARNING TO THOSE IN DANGER OF CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS PREMATURELY

All the old wholesome customs in connection with Christmas were to the effect that one should not touch or see or know or speak of something before the actual coming of Christmas Day. Thus, for instance, children were never given their presents until the actual coming of the appointed hour. The presents were kept tied up in brown-paper parcels, out of which an arm of a doll or the leg of a donkey sometimes accidentally stuck. I wish this principle were adopted in respect of modern Christmas ceremonies and publications. The editors of the magazines bring out their Christmas numbers so long before the time that the reader is more likely to be lamenting for the turkey of last year than to have seriously settled down to a solid anticipation of the turkey which is to come. Christmas numbers of magazines ought to be tied up in brown paper and kept for Christmas Day. On consideration, I should favor the editors being tied up in brown paper. Whether the leg or

arm of an editor should ever be allowed to protrude I leave to individual choice.

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS (1906)¹

The celebration of Christmas, as traditionally observed by the church, does not, in fact, conclude on December 25. Christmas Day is but the beginning of twelve days of festive celebration (as expressed in the well-known carol “The Twelve Days of Christmas”). That certain ceremonies and publications in Chesterton’s day were rushing to celebrate Christmas prematurely betrayed a fundamental misunderstanding of the Advent and Christmas traditions. As he says elsewhere,

Modern men have a vague feeling that when they have come to the feast, they have come to the finish. By modern commercial customs, the preparations for it have been so very long and the practice of it seems so very short.²

If this sounds familiar, perhaps it’s because we tend to observe Christmas in the following fashion: Immediately after Thanksgiving in America, radio stations begin playing Christmas music. TV networks begin airing Christmas movies. Families begin stringing up decorations. The so-called Christmas season (a somewhat vague designation) is officially initiated. Festivities continue through December 25 (the day when families gather and gifts are exchanged), after which decorations are unceremoniously stripped away, trees are dragged to the curb to be hauled off with the trash, news anchors recap the holiday in past-tense language, talking about how Christmas *was*, how it *went*, what *happened*. In the days following Christmas Day, a general malaise hangs in the air, like dissipating smoke from a fireworks display. Christmas came and went, in grand but short-lived fashion.

Whatever it was, whatever it was for, it is now definitively and categorically over. “This is, of course, in sharp contrast to the older traditional customs, in the days when it was a sacred festival for a simpler people,” Chesterton reminds us. “Then the preparation took the form of the more austere season of Advent and the fast of Christmas Eve. But when men passed on to the feast of Christmas, it went on for a long time after the feast of Christmas Day.”³

The “austere” season of Advent, as we have established, is a time of expectant waiting. Christmas, fittingly, is its own season—a prolonged feast sustained for nearly two weeks. Chesterton reminds us that in the “old wholesome customs” Christmas would not be spoken of throughout the season of Advent. Gifts were kept wrapped until Christmas Day, when they would be opened at last—not all at once in a dizzying blur—but one at a time, over the course of twelve days (I would venture to say most people today lack the patience for such a thing). If this all sounds rather foreign to us, it’s only further proof that the modern Westernized approach to Christmas has been ingrained in us from an early age. Thankfully, we serve a God who invites us to become like children, so there’s always time to unlearn a few things.

The challenge I present to you is this: resist the urge to celebrate Christmas prematurely. Give Advent its proper due, armed with reverent patience and an expectant heart. When Christmas comes, celebrate with prolonged joy “in a crescendo of festivity until Twelfth Night”⁴ (I’ll leave the means of gift distribution up to you). Rebel against our modern culture by joining the ranks of the church, which outlasts all cultures. Or shall Chesterton tie you up in brown paper as well?



SCRIPTURE READING & REFLECTION

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

2 THESSALONIANS 2:15

Consider how you might allow the traditions of the church to influence your celebration of Christmas this year.

Consider how you might “unlearn” some modern holiday traditions in favor of a more traditional observance of Advent and Christmas.

What would it take for you to sustain a “crescendo of festivity until Twelfth Night”?





DAY 3

IN REGARD TO CERTAIN OBJECTIONS TO THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS

It is the greatest glory of the Christian tradition that it has incorporated so many pagan traditions. But it is most glorious of all, to my mind, when they are popular traditions. And the best and most obvious example is the way in which Christianity did incorporate, in so far as it did incorporate, the old human and heathen conception of the Winter Feast. There are, indeed, two profound and mysterious truths to be balanced here. The first is that what was then heathen was still human; that is, it was both mystical and material; it expressed itself in sacred substances and sacramental acts; it understood the mystery of trees and waters and the holy flame. And the other, which will be a much more tactless and irritating assertion, is that while a thing is heathen it is not yet completely human. But the point here is that the pagan element in Christmas came quite natural to Christians, because it was not in fact very far from Christianity.

G.K.'S WEEKLY (1936)¹

Though it might come as a surprise to those of us who celebrate Christmas with gleeful abandon (present company included), many Christians throughout the world, including those from the Quaker and Seventh Day Adventist traditions, choose not to celebrate Christmas at all. Though Chesterton once went so far as to say that “the man who does not keep Christmas is an incomplete human being,”² perhaps we might preserve an ounce of understanding for those who happen to possess a different opinion on the subject. That being said, the objection that Christmas is merely a Christian “spin” on a pagan holiday, that our Christmas traditions are inherited from pagan traditions, that there is nothing inherently Christian about Christmas—is a topic worthy of discussion.

For Chesterton, the fact that Christmas might indeed have borrowed something from the dark ages of paganism was not a cause for concern, in and of itself. In fact, he was unequivocal in his preference for the pagan superstition of the ancient world over the rational skepticism of the modern one. Paganism, for its many faults, could not, after all, be accused (like modernity) of treating the world as a disenchanted place. At the very least, paganism recognized that the world is charged with meaning. It understood “the mystery of trees and waters and the holy flame.” This is what he means when he says that paganism “was not in fact very far from Christianity.” What he is implying, in so many words, is that it might be easier to make a Christian out of an idol-worshipping pagan than a secular humanist: that a Druid, well-versed in human sacrifice, might be closer to grasping the atoning death of Christ than a materialist with no framework for spirituality (then again, God makes even the impossible possible).

When Chesterton makes the claim that “the greatest glory of the Christian tradition is that it has incorporated so many pagan traditions” (a statement sure to throw fuel on the fire for those Christians convinced of the heathen darkness at the root of the holiday), he does not mean that Christmas should be viewed as pagan in spirit,

but rather that it has *reframed* and *redeemed* certain pagan traditions with the light of the gospel. Though historians such as Tom Holland challenge the claim that the winter celebration of Christmas (and specifically the date of December 25) originated in paganism,³ Christmas does share certain undeniable similarities with the aforementioned Winter Feast, not least of which the fact that it is a feast that takes place in winter.

But there is a deeper observation here. What Chesterton is implying is that the pagans had somehow “anticipated the supreme miracle”—a concept echoed in the writings of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien. After all, why should the redeeming work of Christ not extend to human traditions? If land soaked in the blood of heathen sacrifice could be reclaimed by the kingdom of God (as in the time of ancient Israel), why should feasts and festivals not be reclaimed? As Chesterton says, “It is no controversial point against the Christians that they felt they could take up and continue such traditions among the pagans; it only shows that the Christians knew a Christian thing when they saw it.”⁴

As he wrote in an article published in 1901, “When a learned man tells me that on the 25th of December I am really astronomically worshipping the sun, I answer that I am not. I am practising a particular personal religion, the pleasures of which (right or wrong) are not in the least astronomical. If he says that the cult of Christmas and the cult of Apollo are the same, I answer that they are utterly different; and I ought to know, for I have held both of them. I believed in Apollo when I was quite little; and I believe in Christmas now that I am very, very big.”⁵ This season, let us attempt, however imperfectly, to join him—laying aside childish things while retaining the faith of a child. In the kingdom of God, it’s the only way to grow “very, very big.”


 SCRIPTURE READING & REFLECTION

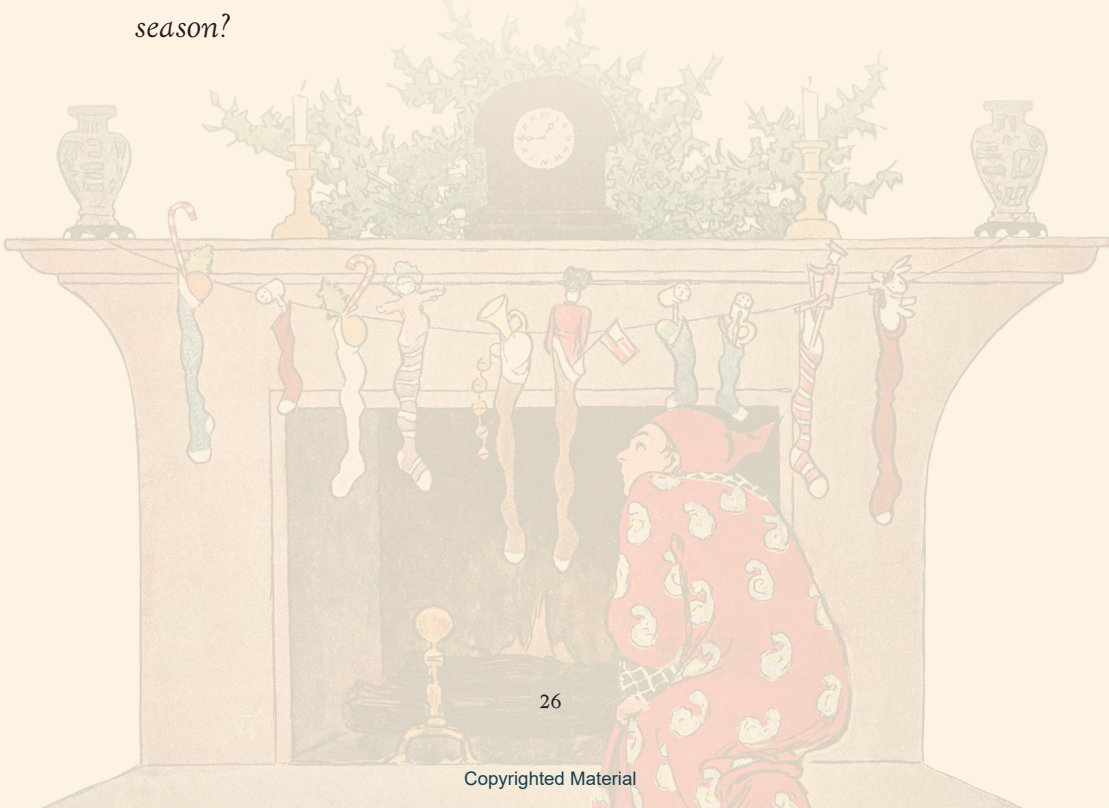
I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

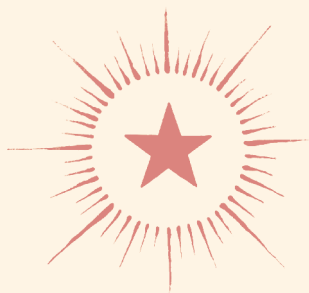
COLOSSIANS 1:25-27

Meditate on Paul's words—that Christ is “the mystery hidden for ages” and “the hope of glory.” How does this connect to the idea of Christmas “redeeming” pagan traditions?

Reflect on your own life and consider some of the ways Christ has redeemed your past.

How might you practice Christ-centered hope during this season?





DAY 4

OF PARADOXES, CELESTIAL LADDERS, AND MOVING WHEELS

The exciting quality of Christmas rests on an ancient and admitted paradox. It rests upon the paradox that the power and center of the whole universe may be found in some seemingly small matter, that the stars in their courses may move like a moving wheel around the neglected outhouse of an inn.

THE DAILY NEWS (1901)¹

G. K. Chesterton was called “the prince of paradox” for good reason. With the skill of a diamond miner, he unearthed paradoxes at every turn. He mused on contradictions, inconsistencies, and incongruities. He reveled at irony, disparity, and absurdity. He spoke of a God “as narrow as the universe.”² Of a cross composed of conflicting angles, opening its “arms to the four winds.”³ Of Christmas resting “on an ancient and admitted paradox”—that the greatest gift the world has ever received arrived in obscurity, in a backwater town

in ancient Palestine, on a night when the streets were filled with drunken laughter and the inns were full, and no one was in the mood for miracles. Only those actively looking for Christ's arrival might find Him, and then only if they squeezed past the crowds, zigzagged through back alleys and out into the cool dark, to a place where cattle noises threatened to muffle the sounds of a baby's cries.

Chesterton wisely recognized the profound irony of the incarnation, marveling that "the power and center of the whole universe may be found in some seemingly small matter"—that God Himself would choose to enter human history in the most anticlimactic fashion imaginable (perhaps God, for all His grandeur, has a sense of humor after all). As Chesterton says elsewhere, "Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox; that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home."⁴

Time and again throughout Scripture, God baffles us, perplexes us, bewilders us. He who inhabits eternity dwells with the humble and contrite of heart (Isa. 57:15). The celestial conductor of wind and earthquake and fire makes His presence known in a gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:12–13). The King of kings arrives not in a castle, but in "the neglected outhouse of an inn." God Himself is a glorious paradox. As Chesterton eloquently articulates in his poem "Gloria in Profundis":

Outrushing the fall of man
Is the height of the fall of God.⁵

There is a concept known in some cultures as an *axis mundi*, defined by *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* as a "line or stem through the earth's center connecting its surface to the underworld and the heavens and around which the universe revolves."⁶ In other words, it is a "thin place"—a place of unusually high spiritual energy, a place where heaven meets earth. Genesis 28 recounts the story of Jacob's dream, in which he saw "a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of

it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!” (Gen. 28:12).

For those with the eyes to see, the cave in that forgotten corner of Bethlehem was (at least for a time) an *axis mundi*, “the stars in their courses” turning “like a moving wheel” around the humble birthplace of Christ, who is Himself the physical embodiment of the intersection of heaven and earth. When Nathanael declared that Jesus was, in fact, the Son of God, Jesus replied, “You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (John 1:51). Jacob’s ladder was a prophetic picture of Christ, “the mediator of a new covenant” (Heb. 9:15). Ephesians 1 tells us that the whole purpose of God’s plan of redemption is to “unite all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth” (v. 10).

As Chesterton says in *The Everlasting Man*,

No other story, no pagan legend or philosophical anecdote or historical event, does in fact affect any of us with that peculiar and even poignant impression produced on us by the word Bethlehem. No other birth of a god or childhood of a sage seems to us to be Christmas or anything like Christmas. It is either too cold or too frivolous, or too formal and classical, or too simple and savage, or too occult and complicated. Not one of us, whatever his opinions, would ever go to such a scene with the sense that he was going home.⁷

There was no room in the inn for Mary and Joseph, when the universe itself could not house the child Mary carried in her womb. For a brief time, the humble cave was the resting place of He who is the eternal resting place of every humble heart. He who was born that night is He through whom all things were born. In the moving conclusion of Chesterton’s poem “The House of Christmas,” he writes:

*To an open house in the evening
 Home shall men come,
 To an older place than Eden
 And a taller town than Rome.
 To the end of the way of the wandering star,
 To the things that cannot be and that are,
 To the place where God was homeless
 And all men are at home.⁸*

Let us join that holy pilgrimage and follow the star to the humble, paradoxical place where hope is born, where heaven and earth meet, where we are eternally at home.



SCRIPTURE READING & REFLECTION

For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,
 who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
 “I dwell in the high and holy place,
 and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,
 to revive the spirit of the lowly,
 and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

ISAIAH 57:15

*Why does God choose to side with the contrite and the lowly?
 How does this connect to Jesus’ pronouncement that the pure
 in heart will “see God” (Matt. 5:8)?*

Consider how this passage in Isaiah anticipates Christ’s coming.

*Consider how you might adopt a posture of humility and
 contriteness during this season.*



DAY 5

**IN CELEBRATION OF
THE UTTER UNSUITABILITY
OF CHRISTMAS
TO THE MODERN WORLD**

Christmas is utterly unsuited to the great future that is now opening before us. Christmas is not founded on the great communal conception which can only find its final expression in Communism. Christmas does not really help the higher and healthier and more vigorous expansion of Capitalism. Christmas cannot be expected to fit in with modern hopes of a great social future. Christmas is a contradiction of modern thought. Christmas is an obstacle to modern progress. Rooted in the past, and even the remote past, it cannot assist a world in which the ignorance of history is the only clear evidence of the knowledge of science. Born among miracles reported from two thousand years ago, it cannot expect to impress that sturdy common sense which can withstand the plainest and most palpable evidence for miracles happening at this moment.

G.K.'S WEEKLY (1933)¹

The future Chesterton speaks of is our present. Our world, in various ways, is the fulfillment of his grim vision: a world unmoored from tradition, set adrift on the ever-changing tide of fad and fashion (he reminds us elsewhere that “fallacies do not cease to be fallacies because they become fashions”²). Modern culture is infatuated with all that is shiny and new and noteworthy. Witness the cult of technology. Behold the ever-expanding elasticity of “expressive individualism.” Watch as the masses pile onto every bandwagon promising truth and justice in the name of progress (marvel not when the wagon goes off a cliff). Puffed up with “chronological snobbery” (to borrow C. S. Lewis’s phrase),³ modernity peers over its shoulder with contempt on the ignorant, unenlightened ages of the past.

Chesterton poses the question: What place does Christmas have in a world such as ours? Blind adherence to science often requires the willful “ignorance of history.” The “great communal conception” of Communism refuses to acknowledge the sacred individuality of human beings made in the image of God. The “healthier and more vigorous expansion of Capitalism” has little to gain from a holiday that values giving over receiving. The “social future” of tomorrow, promising peace and prosperity for all (so long as you ebb and flow with the changing societal tides), might go so far as to mock the humble beginnings of a tradition as selfless and unproductive as Christmas.

Though modern Western culture still carves out time for Christmas, “the holidays” have largely become crass and commercialized—a marriage of unbridled consumerism and vague humanitarianism, rather than a celebration of a Savior who came to save us from ourselves. As Chesterton once observed, “Moving step by step, in the majestic march of Progress, we have first vulgarised Christmas and then denounced it as vulgar. Christmas has become too commercial; so many of these thinkers would destroy the Christmas that has been spoiled, and preserve the commercialism that has spoiled it.”⁴

If this all sounds rather bleak, I suggest that what makes Christmas

“utterly unsuited” to the modern world is what makes it so worthy of recognition. Christmas is gloriously out of step with the times, for it outlasts the times. It champions obscurity over visibility. Humility over hubris. Divine mercy over human effort. Today, let us raise our glasses and our voices and our trees and our stockings in honor of the glorious unsuitability of Christmas. Let us savor the sheer irrationality of it. Shout with joy at the blatant absurdity of it. Like all that is of God, it is a blasphemy to the narcissist. An insult to the hedonist. A farce to the self-reliant and self-consumed. Hallelujah. Pour yourself another glass of sherry. Help yourself to another slice of cake. Praise God that that which was “born among miracles reported from two thousand years ago” still makes miracles in human hearts today (though the voices of this age “can withstand the plainest and most palpable evidence” of such a thing). Christmas is utterly unsuitable to the modern world, which makes it utterly indispensable to the church.



SCRIPTURE READING & REFLECTION

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:20-25

Consider Paul's words about "the foolishness of God being wiser than men" and "the weakness of God being stronger than men." How might this idea affect your observance of Advent and Christmas?

Think of some traditions you might incorporate this season that are "utterly unsuitable" to the modern world.

How might you resist the commercialization of Christmas this year?



DAY 6

ON CHRISTMAS AS A LITMUS TEST FOR SPIRITUAL BUOYANCY

Most sensible people say that adults cannot be expected to appreciate Christmas as much as children appreciate it. But I am not sure that even sensible people are always right; and this has been my principal reason for deciding to be silly—a decision that is now irrevocable. It may be because I am silly, but I rather think that, relatively to the rest of the year, I enjoy Christmas more than I did when I was a child.

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS (1913)¹

Chesterton touches on a great irony at the heart of the gospel. How can one reach maturity while maintaining childlikeness? How can one grow tall in grace while short in cynicism? How can one “put away childish things” and yet retain the faith of a child? As it turns out, Christmas is an excellent litmus test for spiritual buoyancy. Ask yourself: *Do I enjoy Christmas as much or more than I did when I was a child? Has my appreciation of Christmas diminished*

over time or grown exponentially as I have grown older? If not, then you might be one of the sensible people Chesterton is warning us about—those who have no time for fun and games, who believe that silliness is synonymous with youth. What he challenges us to consider is this: Why *shouldn't* we enjoy Christmas *even more* than children? Why shouldn't those with a firmer grasp of grace (if we have not grown too old for such things) not celebrate Christmas with *more joy, more delight, more relish*?

Consider Chesterton himself. Though he possessed one of the most brilliant minds of the twentieth century, he never lost his sense of childlike wonder. For all his brilliance, wit, and wisdom, he maintained a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. A spring in his step. He was unabashedly jolly. He personified mirth—for he saw the same lightness, the same sense of abiding joy, in God Himself. The sad reality is, most of us simply don't have time for the kind of joviality Chesterton embodied. We are too busy with the concerns of daily life to make space for merriment, room for levity. Our souls are too heavy for joy.

In C. S. Lewis's dedication of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* to his goddaughter Lucy, he muses that while she has grown too old for fairy tales, one day she might be old enough to start reading them again.² In Chesterton's poem "The Wise Men," he speaks of learned men who "peer and pore on tortured puzzles" and are well-versed in "labyrinthine lore," and "who know all things but the truth." After encountering the mind-boggling reality of the incarnation, these intellectual giants are reduced to "little children walking through the snow and rain."³

The paradox at the heart of Christlikeness is that the more one learns, the less one knows. The greatest saints are those who are the most childlike, and the most childlike are the most humble.

In an oft-quoted passage from *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton says,

Perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, “Do it again” to the sun; and every evening, “Do it again” to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.⁴

Is it possible that we have matured past the capacity for wonder and surprise? Could it be that we have grown older than our Father? That we have lost our ability to behold, with childlike awe, the greatest fairy tale of all?

This Christmas season, give yourself permission to stop being sensible for a change and start being silly. Take a walk. Take a break. Smile, for heaven’s sake. Find something to laugh about (preferably yourself). Recover the vitality of youth. Practice the “eternal appetite of infancy.” Expand your capacity for wonder. Expand your capacity for pudding. Step outside and look at the stars. Follow one and see where it leads you. Go ice-skating on a frozen lake. Go sledding on a frozen backside. Drink hot chocolate with extra whipped cream and sprinkles. Roast marshmallows over an open fire. Sing a carol with gusto. Tell jokes (even bad ones). Shed some weight. Shed some worry. Get buoyant. After all, how else will you grow young enough to enter the kingdom of heaven? How else will you wholeheartedly embrace the joys of Christmas?



SCRIPTURE READING & REFLECTION

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

MATTHEW 18:1-4

What do the children in your life enjoy about Christmas?

How might you foster a childlike faith in your life?

What are some ways you can wholeheartedly embrace the joys of Christmas this year?



Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

[MOODY PUBLISHERS](#) 

[AMAZON](#) 

[APPLE BOOKS](#) 

[BARNES & NOBLE](#) 

[GOOGLE PLAY](#) 

[CHRISTIANBOOK.COM](#) 

[WALMART](#) 