

Christmas-Jolly or Melancholy?
(Rev. Dr. John Bartol)

"It is Christmas in the heart that puts Christmas in the air." — W. T. Ellis

Christmas, as everyone knows, is a time to be happy. It is a time for family reunions, gifts, carols, feasting and joyful expressions of best wishes for the coming year. We're all supposed to experience something called the Christmas spirit.

However, a great number of people experience Christmas very differently. For them, the season to be merry is instead a time of disappointment, extravagance and exhaustion. Psychiatrists and counsellors tell us that, in December, their schedules are overloaded with patients trying to cope with depression and painful memories.

There must be some reasons why so many face Christmas with dread rather than joy. Certainly, there is the increased pressure that many people feel. Compulsion to get the shopping done, the cards addressed, the house decorated, the presents wrapped, the parties planned, and the bills paid, along with unrealistic expectations.

For some people, the traditional family reunion, instead of being a joy to look forward to, only increases the pressure because of some old resentments or family rivalry.

Loneliness is another cause for Christmas depression. We should remember students and members of the military who are away from home at Christmas, widows and those who recently lost loved ones, the sick and the elderly, along with those who may feel unloved and rejected because they have no one with whom to share the joys of Christmas.

For me, the No. 1 cause for Christmas depression is because of the way in which Christmas has become so commercialized and secularized. We have drifted away from the real meaning of Christmas and its spiritual foundation so that the entire celebration can be an empty show. Without Christ, there would be no Christmas.

Space limits me to list only a few practical steps to overcome Christmas neurosis so that this beautiful season may be truly meaningful. We can make a deliberate effort to reduce holiday pressures.

We can start our preparations early, set priorities and eliminate what does not really need to be done.

We should show understanding and compassion to those who find December to be a difficult time of the year. This may mean the giving of our finances, time and energy to make others feel wanted and remembered.

Finally, if we find ourselves facing Christmas with anxiety rather than with joy, we may need to renew the spiritual aspect. We need to draw apart from the hustle and bustle of life and be thankful. Through the promises of God's word, we can find resources to make Christmas the season to be jolly rather than melancholy.

“Joy to the world! The Lord is come; let earth receive her King.”