

Churches push Advent Conspiracy to teach real giving

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Sarah
Blakeman
(left) and
sister Elli
Blakeman
are
making
their own
Christmas
gifts by
knitting
scarves.

Their
father,
Clark
Blakeman,
joined the
Advent
Conspiracy
last year
to focus on
relational
gifts and
donating
money to
charity at
Christmas.

Churches push Advent

Conspiracy to teach real giving

By Nancy Haught

Religion News Service

PORTLAND, Ore. (RNS)—The Christmas contradiction gives Pastor Rick McKinley a headache.

Americans will spend about \$475 billion this year on gifts, decorations and parties that many won't even remember next year. They will run themselves ragged—shopping, wrapping and celebrating. And some won't pay off their Christmas debt until March, if they're lucky.



Advent: Red Letter Days

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Christmas brighter for children of military families, thanks to UMHB student project

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Two-year-old Anna Phillips works on painting the interior of a new playhouse built by students at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor.

Christmas brighter for children of military

families, thanks to UMHB student project

By Laura Frase

University of Mary Hardin-Baylor



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BELTON—Globs of blue paint drip from 2-year-old Reagan Clark's tiny hands. But before they form much of a puddle, he offers a high five to the blank canvas of his playhouse. He admires his artwork with pride and repeats his mark several times, then he immediately whirls around with a wide grin and fresh paint on his face, ready to go back for more.

Students built and painted four playhouses for four military families from First Baptist Church in Belton. All of the families have young children whose fathers won't be home for Christmas.

For some, happy holidays means no gifts

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For some, happy holidays means no gifts

By Michele Melendez

Religion News Service

AUSTIN (RNS)—Scrap the gift lists. Trash the wrapping paper. Blow off the mall.

That's the mind-set of Americans who can't stomach exchanging holiday

presents. They aren't grinchs or scrooges. They just reject what they consider the wastefulness and stress of the season.



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International students share Christmas joy

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International students share Christmas joy

By Laura Frase

University of Mary Hardin-Baylor

BELTON—When Operation Christmas Child sought gifts for children in developing countries, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor international students heeded the call. For the last month, UMHB students from across the globe posted fliers, collected items and wrapped presents for children around the world.

Li-te (Anastasia) Li
experiences a
newfound joy in
serving others as
she assembles
boxes of gifts for
Operation
Christmas Child.
Li and her friend
Liu Chen (Linda)
Tang in the
background are
both from
mainland
China. (Photos by
Carol
Woodward/UMHB)

Who were those ‘wise men from the East’ bearing gifts?

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Who were those ‘wise men

from the East' bearing gifts?

By Benedicta Cipolla

Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—They came. They saw. They gifted. That's about all we know of the foreign visitors who traveled to Bethlehem to see the infant Jesus.

The scene ingrained in the public imagination—a stately procession of three kings in turbans, crowns, elaborate capes and fancy slippers, with an entourage of servants and camels trailing behind—isn't from Scripture.

Stefan Kalipha
(Gaspar),
Nadim
Sawalha
(Melchior) and
Eriq Ebouaney
(Balthasar)
portray the
Magi in *The
Nativity Story*,
now out on
DVD. Most of
what's
believed about
the Magi is
drawn from
tradition
rather than the
Bible, experts
agree. (RNS
photo/Jaimie
Trueblood/New
Line Cinema)

What if Christmas had not

come?

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What if Christmas had not come?

By BO Baker

Can you imagine anything more saddening than a Christmas without the Savior? Whether one is a believer or not, we are all involved in the season of Christmas. We purchase gifts to give away. We joy in the sound of music showering down the neighborhood where we live. Expressions of care arriving come so invitingly as we listen to choirs of angels who never seem far away. I'll be honest with you: I like it, all of it. Our cold hearts need the lift that Christmas brings.

Think about it: What if Jesus had not come? What if he had never entered the mind and heart of the Creator-God?

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Suppose the Cross-figure had been little more than a poor grandstander, a radical religionist looking for attention.

Now to be honest, one must add to the story of the birth of a baby from Bethlehem Who introduced him, the touch of miracles that pointed to him, the cross that held him as he gave himself to all mankind, the tomb that lay open because of him, the angels who clung to the battlements of heaven longing to worship the King of Kingdom Come. Yes, all of this, and more. This is the truth that makes Christmas for all of us. Our future hope rests in the fact of the person of Jesus Christ.

Finding the â€œspirit of Christmasâ€œ

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Finding the ‘spirit of Christmas’

By Sam Underwood

I was listening in (OK, go ahead and call it eavesdropping) on a conversation a couple of people were having in a restaurant. In my defense, it was one of those places where the tables are so crowded together, you might as well be sitting at the table with the ones next to you. I had not paid any real attention to them until one of them gave a heavy sigh and said, “I’m having a hard time getting in the Christmas spirit.”