

Voices: What it means to keep Christ in Christmas

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In *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, the titular character famously laments the true meaning of Christmas has been lost in a sea of commercialization, materialism and cynicism.

Just when he's about to lose all hope, Linus steps in to remind him what Christmas is all about by reciting Luke 2:8-14, the story of angels announcing the birth of the Christ child to a group of shepherds. "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown," Linus says.

Every year, a horde of modern-day Linuses take it upon themselves to make sure none of us forget that message. With billboards and yard signs, T-shirts and bumper stickers, radio hits and TV appearances, a cottage industry has formed around the simple message of "keeping Christ in Christmas."

A conscientious objector

For years, I've received this message with a skepticism rooted in my Baptist heritage. Because I believe in religious freedom, I'm not offended when someone tells me, "Happy holidays" at the grocery store instead of, "Merry Christmas." Because I believe in the separation of church and state, I've refused to throw a fit when some city hall in Delaware decides not to put up its nativity scene. I have been a conscientious objector to the so-called war on Christmas.

Having second thoughts

But this year, I admit I'm having second thoughts. As I look at a world starved for hope, peace, joy and love, I wonder if we don't need more Linuses out there prompting us to keep Christ in Christmas.

My only caveat: In the spirit of James 1:22, which calls us to be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves," and James 1:27, which teaches that true religion is "to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world," I would like to expand what keeping Christ in Christmas means.

What keeps Christ in Christmas

Beyond the songs we sing, the decorations we put up and the greetings we exchange, our actions can keep the holiday holy.

In a season of materialism and overindulgence, we keep Christ in Christmas by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and welcoming the stranger.

In a season of partisan rancor, we keep Christ in Christmas by loving our enemies.

In a season when family life is glorified nearly to the point of idolatry, we keep Christ in Christmas by ministering to the homebound, the hospitalized, those in nursing homes and the children bouncing from foster home to foster home.

With a nod to Linus, we keep Christ in Christmas by reading about a child born in Bethlehem so many years ago and believing with all our hearts he is the Savior, Christ the Lord.

And with humble, childlike faith—not aggression or hostility, slickness or sensationalism—we proclaim that blessed truth in word and deed to the world Jesus came to save. After all, Linus was right: That’s what Christmas is all about.

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