

Dear Friends in Christ,

Happy Holidays! That has become a standard December greeting in the United States. We have become a culture so afraid of the name of Christ that we don't dare to use the word "Christmas" publicly. The name of Christ has always made people nervous. People feel free to talk about God because everybody can define God any way they like. But to talk about Christ is to claim that the true God entered human history in the person of his Son. Wishing someone a Merry Christmas does run the risk of offending a few people because you are telling them that you believe the true God is the One who revealed Himself in the person of Jesus.

I think it is a good thing that some atheists and others are recognizing that Christmas is not just a meaningless winter holiday. Christmas is the celebration of God's invasion into our world. I wish all Christians took Christmas as seriously as some atheists do.

A few secularists have declared war on Christmas. We shouldn't be surprised. December 25 was an old pagan holiday before the ancient Church redeemed the day for the celebration of the Mystery of the Incarnation. Now the world wants that old holiday back. Puritans and Pilgrims thought we should give December 25 back to the world. However, most of us Christians don't want to give Christmas back. It is one time of the year when the world looks at Jesus and wonders "what if it is true?"

Some Christians are offended when people wish them "Happy Holidays." They feel like the world is trying to erase Christmas. But someone suggested that when someone wishes you "happy holidays," we should smile and say, "Thank you. And what holiday do you celebrate?" That response invites someone into a spiritual conversation and opens up an opportunity for them to ask you about what holiday you celebrate. You can then tell them about God's gift of love in Jesus. You can't be offending them because they are the one who brought up the holiday (or holy day) in the first place.

Christmas is the celebration of the Incarnation, the Word of God becoming human. I am grateful that it has infiltrated our culture like a secret agent waiting to draw people into the wonder of God's amazing grace. Every year I hope that this Christmas will be the time when people discover the wonderful gift of God in Jesus our Christ.

Our whole purpose as the Church is to share Christ with our neighbors and with the whole world. As we invite folks to worship with us this Christmas, we are sharing the real gift of Christmas with our world. So, I wish you a Merry Christmas. I wish the whole world a Merry Christmas.

Yours in Christ, *Phil Nielsen*