

A cartoon I saw might explain how a lot of us feel about Christmas. It shows two homes decorated for Christmas. One is covered in lights. There is also a plastic snowman in the yard, a Santa on the roof, and a flashing sign in the yard that says, “Merry X-mas!” It would make the Griswold’s proud. The other home has only a simple nativity scene in the front yard. The couple from the first house looked out their window at the nativity scene in their neighbor’s front yard and said: **“Some people have to put religion into everything!”**

A radio talk show spoofed how some of us have overreacted to Christ being a part of Christmas and not wanting to offend anyone. So, combining the holidays of Ramadan, Hanukkah, Kwanza and Christmas, they wished everyone a happy RamaHanuKwanzMas to the tune of “Have a Holly, Jolly Christmas.” But is it even possible to have a non-offensive Christmas? **The whole point of Christmas is that God came down to get in our faces and stake his claim to the world and more than that his claim upon our lives.**

In a culture that is increasingly secular, there are many people who haven’t got a clue what Christmas is about. A friend of mine gave a Bible to someone going through a difficult time. This person was at a real low point in their life, but in all that time there was never any thought of reaching out to God or trusting their life to God. As my friend gave a Bible to this person, he encouraged him to read it and he suggested that he might start by reading the Christmas story, since it was that time of year. The man looked at him with surprise and replied: **“You mean the Christmas story is in the Bible?”**

For those of us who know the Christmas story very well and have read or heard the Christmas story many times, it seems incredible that someone would not know something that basic. But there is an ignorance of spiritual things in our culture as we attempt to separate our lives from any contact with, or reference to, God. **Apparently, we are supposed to celebrate Christmas, but we are not supposed to remember why.**

And we find that Christ is just as unwelcome in our world today as he was when he was born. People are still offended by him. People still reject him. People still try to forget him and ignore his presence. It's easier to just pretend that he never came and does not exist. Christmas cards are decorated with birds, candles, snow, everything but Christ. Their message carefully avoids any mention of the One whom Christmas is all about.

Maybe as I do, you want to ask the secular world the question: "*What are you so afraid of?*" There doesn't seem to be this kind of reaction to the story and life of any other religious leader in the world, why such hostility toward Jesus?

The answer is because the story is true, and the world has always understood that Christ is dangerous. He is not just a religious leader among many; he is the *One and Only* (as John's Gospel calls him) Son of God. He is unique. He is Emmanuel—God who came to us in human form. And to recognize that means everything must be different. It means that God is in search of me and that I have a responsibility toward him. It means that God has a claim upon my life, and that determines how I am to think and act and live. It means that I can no longer live just for myself. I am obligated to live for God. **It means I have to recognize a higher authority than myself and surrender to that authority. That is what makes the world afraid.** This is why today's Scripture says in verses 10-11, "*He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.*"

1) This means he was Rejected. By themselves these two verses are two of the saddest in all of the Bible. Verse 10 declares that the Creator entered the world he created and yet the world did not recognize him. **The world that he made (v. 3) did not know its Creator.** Notice John's 3-fold use of the word "*world*" in this verse: He was in the world, he made the world, yet the world knew him not, that is, did not even recognize him. "*Knew him not*" carries the meaning that they did not embrace him. They did not know him and love him. Instead, they rejected him with indifference. The world missed its great opportunity. Even sadder is verse 11 where we discover that he came to his

own people and they “*received him not.*” Not only did the anonymous world as a whole reject him, but even the people he knew rejected him. The folks back home rejected him too. He did not come as a stranger or alien. He came to his own. **They should have recognized him, yet they did not receive him.** It is one thing to be rejected by those who do not know you, but it’s something else completely to come to your own people and they too reject you. They turn their backs on you. They do not believe in you. He came to his own, and they “*received him not.*” He was rejected by his own people.

Did your recent Amazon order meet your expectations? Have you heard that question lately? General Electric once ran an ad that raised a different question: “What was Thomas Edison’s biggest blunder?” The ad then reveals that Edison rejected the theory of alternating current developed by Charles Steinmetz. The ad then tells that when Steinmetz was immigrating to this country, he was nearly refused admission at Ellis Island. One of the men most responsible for the electrification of America was nearly turned away before he got started. That would have been a great tragedy indeed, but a spiritually greater tragedy takes place all the time as people turn away Jesus Christ the Light of the world. They reject their own Creator. The true Light was rejected.

2) But then, in verses 12-13 he was Received. By themselves verses 10-11 would look very grim but verses 12-13 inform us that there is a remnant of those who believe. The end of the story is not the tragedy of rejection but the grace of acceptance. While the majority do indeed reject Jesus, there are some that believe. Those who believe are granted the privilege to join the family. They are brought into God’s family through a new birth. **John states in these verses what the new birth is not:**

+Not of blood. That means it’s not by inheritance, not by human ancestry. You cannot get into the family of God by being raised in a Christian family. New birth is not of blood. As one teacher put it, “*God has no grandchildren!*”
 +Not of the will of the flesh. It is not by determining to live as a Christian or live a good life that one becomes a Christian. You cannot make yourself a Christian. It is not by positive thinking or clean living that you become a

Christian. It is not by the will of the flesh, but by the new birth.

+Not of the will of man. It is not the efforts of others that make you a Christian. No pastor, priest, bishop, or pope can make you a Christian. It is not by the will of other people no matter how well meaning they are.

To be born of God, to have a new beginning from God, is the result of God's gift of life made possible to those who receive him. **It does not come as a result of human relationships, achievements, or determinations. It is a gift of grace.** We become a Christian by the will of God. Becoming a Christian is not an external act but an internal embracing of Jesus. When the True Light is received he brings illumination to the darkened soul of sinful humanity.

3) In verses 14-18 we see that he invites us to receive him too. Ron Hutchcraft tells the story of little Harold. Harold wanted to be in the annual Christmas play which was always a big production in his small town, but Harold couldn't always keep up with the other students. The directors of the children's play didn't want to hurt Harold's feelings, but they weren't sure he could handle a part. They finally decided to give him the part of the Inn Keeper. All he had to say was, *"I'm sorry, there's no room in the Inn."* Well, the night of the big play came and the church was packed. At the precise moment Mary and Joseph came and knocked on the Inn door. The whole village of Bethlehem shook as Harold tried to open the cardboard door to the Inn which was stuck. At last, Harold got the door open and the pitiful young couple standing there looked all too real. With a little coaching he blurted out: *"I'm sorry, but we're full and there's no room for you here."* The couple turned sorrowfully away and began to walk off stage when all of a sudden the door of the Inn swung open again, and Harold ran up to the couple and said in a loud voice so that everyone could hear, *"Wait a minute. Come back. You can have my room!"* Not in the script, but it was the perfect addition to the play.

The world **rejected** the Son of God, but some **received** him. Many were not even interested enough to provide room for the Savior, but we don't have to follow that script either. We can give him room—room in our hearts. **Make room today.** Amen.