



Why We Stop for Christmas

BY JOHN HORVAT II

It is Christmas time, and the world stops for a brief moment. It does not stop long because there are too many important things to be done to waste on festive and unproductive folly. It can only be a short pause on Christmas Day before the world must almost immediately return to the frenetic intemperance of the daily hustle and bustle. But this quick respite is enough to give a most necessary and calm reprieve of sanity, peace, and order to our burdened souls.

Of course, the world does not stop willingly. It even tries to secure some advantage from this unnecessary break by making frantic attempts to commercialize and secularize the feast. Despite it all, the peace of Christmas somehow prevails.



Stopping for Christmas challenges the modern world. To those enmeshed in our secular society, the birth of the Christ Child interrupts their lives with moral considerations that they would prefer not to consider. To practical atheists, Christmas is a curiosity that provokes painful memories of innocence long lost. Shallow Christians find the feast to be a sentimental time for

some vague joy that they prefer not to make more profound. All these are somehow threatened by the date; yet all are forced, willing and unwilling, to stop to observe it.

However, faithful Christians everywhere are not threatened but strengthened by Christmas. We stop because Christmas reminds us that we are called



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to live in the presence of an Almighty God of infinite grandeur and majesty. This fact provokes in us a sense of wonder at the immense gulf between the Creator and His creatures.

Seeing our wonder and our desire to understand Him, God manifested Himself to us in a marvelous manner. He incites in us great aspirations or dreams for a better world to come. He bridged the gulf by presenting to us that which Catholic thinker Prof. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira called the “most striking, indisputable, and audacious dream imaginable.”

That dream was the fact that the Word was made Flesh and dwelt amongst us. On Christmas night, we hear the antiphon that proclaims this daring reality: *Puer natus est nobis, Et filius datus est nobis*, “For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us.”(Is. 9:6)

On that ineffable night when our Saviour was born to Mary Ever Virgin, an immense impossibility became possible: the God-Man was born and revealed Himself to us. On that holy and silent night, one can sense the sweetness and perfection that emanated from the Divine Infant in the manger in Bethlehem. He who seemed so inaccessible suddenly became accessible to all, kings and shepherds. He who appears so weak became powerful enough to stop the whole world for centuries to come.

To honour the grandeur of that sublime moment, we must stop not just once but every year to marvel at this fact that only increases our wonder at this good God that gave to us His only Begotten Son.

However, there is yet a greater reason for us to stop and marvel. The Birth of Christ also signaled the coming of a Redeemer who, for love of us, would reestablish the link broken by our first parents. In that marvellous and joyful Birth, we find foreshadowed the sorrows of His Passion. We stop and adore Him who was born so that we might be redeemed, saved, and united with Him for all eternity.

Finally, we stop because Christmas means much more than just our personal salvation. Christ made possible a civilization we call Christian. From the poverty of the manger in Bethlehem, an immensely rich channel of grace was opened for us. From Heaven descended torrents of blessings, which paved the way for the most audacious dreams and the immense possibilities of a world centered on the sublime principles, virtues, and teachings of the Gospel. In Christendom, it became possible to practice the Commandments and evangelical counsels, inside an order that the pagan world then judged (and today’s neo-pagan nightmare still judges) impossible.

That is why everyone stops

for Christmas. The powerful image of the Christ Child still has the capacity of capturing the modern imagination if only for a brief moment, amidst a world of sin and distractions. During the blessed season, the grace of God still reaches out and draws all men of good will toward Him despite so much rejection.

Others stop for the wrong reasons. Sadly, some atheists or rationalists stop merely to smirk at such considerations. They do not realize that, by limiting themselves to their sterile musings, they embrace the narrow vision of a soulless and pragmatic world, bereft of wonder.

But for those of us who celebrate a Merry Christmas (and not unhappy holidays), we stop at this time every year to recreate a marvellous wonder world visibly expressed by decorated trees, Nativity scenes, and joyous caroling that reflect this joyful reality of Christ’s coming. More importantly, we gather inside our souls the peace of the Christ Child that calls us to return to order by realigning ourselves to live in function of a world created by God, turned toward God, and where God shows Himself actively intervening out of love for us.

The Christmas Rose

The Christmas rose blooms at Christmastime. Really! The flower pushes up out of the snow. The blooms last for weeks and the plant lasts for years.

It is said that it bloomed outside the stable at Bethlehem, although the plant is not a native of the Holy Land. The rose reminds us of the stable in the snow, the hovering angels, the kneeling donkey and the Magi. The story of the Christmas Rose reminds us of another story the Little Drummer Boy.

A little country girl who on visiting the Stable and wept because she had nothing to give the Christ



Helleborus niger, aka Christmas Rose

Child. Her tears fell in the snow and a hovering angel landed and showed her the Christmas rose poking through the snow to use as her gift.

Even though the plant is very poisonous, the Christmas Rose is truly a wonderful plant. For one thing, its seeds are spread by, of all things, snails. They eat the oil covering the seed and carry the rest away. It's certainly no normal plant. The flowers are literally frozen solid and yet, when the ice falls away, the petals are soft and fresh as spring blossoms.

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Variety and Unity in Christmas Carols

Through Their Christmas Carols, Each People Glorify the Child Jesus in Their Own Way

BY PLINIO CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA

Christmas carols vary according to the national character, but all share the same notes appropriate to that Holy Night. The carols may be American, Brazilian, Italian, German, French, or Spanish. The music may vary greatly, but each manages to manifest the same sentiments aroused by the Child Jesus, Our Lady, Saint Joseph, and the Nativity scene. What are these sentiments?

The first one is innocence. We note that the various peoples were able to compose genuine hymns of enthusiasm for the innocence of the Child Jesus. This enthusiasm echoes the innocence of each people expressed while glorifying Him.

When we sing these carols, it reflects our innocence. Indeed, if we have no innocence, we would not be interested in Him. We would join those who have no interest in Him or appear to be interested out of habit or formality. When we have innocence, we are interested, and sing of His innocence.

Another sentiment is that of tenderness that elicits compassion because the Child Jesus is so fragile and



small yet He is also the Man-God—so great yet contained in that Little Child. Hence comes the desire to protect the Child Jesus against any aggression. Thus, some Christmas songs suggest a note of defending the Divine Infant.

We might compare the different national Christmas carols with the sun. Its light is the same color. However, when passing through a stained-glass window, its rays take on different but harmonious colours. The sunlight then projects itself like precious stones.

Likewise, the Infant Jesus is only one being, but we notice a certain beauty when the English soul sings of Him; another beauty when the German soul sings, and still other beauties emerge with Latin, Brazilian, Hispanic-American souls. I have also heard very beautiful Slavic and Russian carols, which display different qualities. All these songs form, as it were, a stained-glass window for the Child Jesus.

This article is taken from an informal lecture Professor Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira gave on December 30, 1988. It has been translated and adapted for publication without his revision. —Ed.

Canada Needs Our Lady is a special campaign of the Canadian Society for the Defence of Christian Civilization to win the hearts and minds of Canadians for Mary.

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