

So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Not the best Christmas Eve passage. This is the night of beauty and peace and joy and love. For us, Christmas is a time of holiness and secular celebration. All the way through Christmas is the expression of life, from the birth of the savior, to the symbol of life and nature expressed in our fragrant evergreen Christmas trees, to the sheer joy on the faces of our children, to the ruddy-faced white bearded Santa Claus in his red-brightened costume of the far north. An apt symbol is Father Christmas for he is like the grandfather of all who are children at heart.

Do you observe it differently now compared to how you observed it when you were a child? How similar or different is Christmas for your children or grand-children? Some Christians observe Christmas as they always have with family traditions, Santa, etc. but with a focus on the Savior’s birth. Some avoid the Santa scene, try not to be wrapped up in materialism (pardon the pun) and focus on Christ. Some have completely given up Christmas because of the materialism and hectic frenzy of getting gifts, entertaining family, and making everyone happy except you.

As a child perhaps you did what everyone else did. Full blown Santa is coming, tinsel-decorated tree, with a big-time focus on presents. You didn’t leave out Jesus but He wasn’t the focus. Perhaps someone would read the Christmas story in front of the nativity scene on Christmas Eve. Or you went to a service just as you are doing tonight. Maybe your parents took you to have a photo taken with Santa. Santa may even come to the church to pass out presents.

For some you made symbols of Christ and placed them or hung them every year as you read Scripture verses about the birth. You sent out “Jesus is the Reason for the Season” Christmas cards. The tree and stockings were still a family tradition but you made sure everyone knew what it was truly about. And as the years passed, the cards became more about Jesus and less about Santa. I have no problem that celebrating Jesus’ birthday wasn’t commanded by God. I want to celebrate the birth of Christ as a miracle of God. *The most wonderful miracle of all!*

Things I like About Christmas:

Focus on Christ. Families getting together (for some, the only time of the year). Church programs. Nativity scenes. Generosity. The music except, Felice Navidad and Have a Holy Jolly Christmas. The lights. Homemade gifts and cards. Goodies (fudge, cookies, pies)

Things I don’t like about Christmas

Lack of focus on Christ. Lonely people feeling lonelier. Christians disagreeing. Greed (coveting) Materialism. Shopping, shopping and more shopping. Debt. Family stress

Everything I have said so far has been about you and me. How you felt. What you are doing. What I like or dislike. And perhaps it is in some way the fulfillment of our passage. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. We let something come to steal and kill and destroy what Christmas is about. And what is it? Christmas isn’t about us. It isn’t about what we do, how we feel, what we like or dislike.

Jesus says, I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. This is what Christmas is about. It is about what God has done. It is about what the Son of God did for us. It is what the living God continues to do for us. This is what Christmas is all about. It is about why Jesus came.

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Abundant life makes life valuable. Realizing that life is short helps us use the little time we have more wisely, and for eternal good. Take time to number your days by asking yourself, What do I want to see happen in my life before I die? What small step could I take toward that purpose today?

Abundant life makes life valuable. Because our days are numbered, we want our work to count, to be effective and productive. We desire to see God's eternal plan revealed now and for our work to reflect his permanence.

Abundant life Saves us From ourselves, from sin, from death.

Abundant life Satisfies us Spiritual hunger and thirst is satisfied.

Abundant life Shares Fellowship with God and others. We learn the importance of relationship, first with God, then with others.

The word "abundantly" means "to the full; extraordinary in amount."

If Christmas is about gifts and Jesus coming, remember this. In James 1:17, God says that He gives every good and perfect gift.

People cannot offer or bring to you the truly good things of life, but God can—and He says that He will if you come to Him and ask for help when you are in "time of need." His answers are satisfying, and His strength is real—life-changing.

Abundant life and Christmas joy can be full, beyond your wildest dreams, if you walk and fellowship with God and Christ as a constant way of life that overarches your every word and deed.

Tonight, let us get in touch with a simple fact. A baby was born to a young girl. The baby was born so you can have real and eternal life, a better life than you ever dreamed of. A life in all its fullness. A rich and satisfying life.

Yes, you can live the rich, radiant, full, happy, joyful, abundant life. This is the gift given to you. Jesus came to hand it to you. Amen.