

Can Christmas Lead You To Christ?Transcription

Well, it's that season of the year and this morning I like you to turn in your bibles to three different places.Â Get ready for the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 2.Â Turn there, that's where we'll begin, Matthew 2.Â Then put a marker in the Old Testament, prophet Jeremiah Chapter 10.Â So Matthew 2, Jeremiah Chapter 10 and then the Gospel of John.Â We're familiar with that book, Chapter 10, Matthew 2, Jeremiah 10 and John Chapter 10.

Let's pray.Â Our Father we have entered into a month that we have come to celebrate.Â So many of us Lord looks forward to the Christmas season, the songs that sung.Â The memories that it brings but some of us have painful memories of past Christmases.Â We pray that You would heal those.Â We Pray Father that as a body, we would understand who we are in Christ, but the freedom that we have and the responsibility that we have to make Christ known even among legends and myths.Â We pray Lord that You would help us to be creatively using the gifts, the talents that we have individually, to do that.Â Give us ears to hear what Your spirit might want to say to us on this day in Jesus' name, amen.

And today's study is going to be a little bit different.Â If you don't mind I'm going to wax a little historical, not hysterical, historical on you and then give you a little bit of background of some things that you seen that you know about but you may not know where they came from and what is our response to them.Â I've had you open with the Gospel of Matthew, that's where we're going to begin.Â But the title of this message is "Can Christmas lead you to Christ?"Â Which might sound like a dumb question to ask because we're thinking, "Wait a minute, Skip, His name is in the word."Â Of course it can, Chris, Christ, mas.Â It's sort of like asking, "Does Lincoln's birthday have anything at all to do with Abraham Lincoln?"

However, let me ask it in another way.Â Can this lead you to Christ?Â What about this wrapping paper, could that lead a person to Christ?Â I know we have big trees on the stage.Â There's a little one for a prop Christmas tree.Â Do you think that could do it?Â Will that lead a person to Christ?Â What about the stuff we put on the Christmas tree like the lights that are here?Â Do you think that could lead a person to Christ?Â Now, most people started saying, "No, no, no and then fewer and fewer and fewer." and perhaps that's because you're thinking about it a little bit differently because I submit to you that perhaps, even these things can be used to draw a person's attention to Jesus Christ.

Now, the first thing we have to do is get rid of a lot of the fiction that comes with this time of the year and you know there is a lot that is surrounding the Christmas story and Christmas story have been added to an embellish over the year.Â So I want to begin by reading to you something that someone passed along to me, some facts about Santa Claus.Â Number one, no known species of reindeer can fly, you knew that.Â But there are 300,000 species of living organisms yet to be classified and while most of them are insects and germs, that doesn't completely rule out flying reindeer.

Fact number two, there are two billion children in the world.Â Those persons who are under 18 years of age, but since Santa doesn't appear to handle Muslim, Hindu, Jewish or Buddhist children, that reduces the work load by 85%, leaving 378 million according to the Population Reference Bureau.Â At an average census rate, that's 91.8 million homes.Â One presumes that there's at least one good child per house.Â Number three, Santa has 31 hours of Christmas to work with.

Thanks to the different time zones and the rotation of the earth, assuming that he travels from east to west which seems logical.Â This works out to 822.6 visits per second.Â That's to say that for each Christmas household with good children, Santa has one thousandth of second to park, hop out of the slay, jump down the chimney, fill the stockings, distribute the remaining presents under the tree, eat whatever snacks have been left, get back up the chimney, get back onto the slay and move to the next house.Â Assuming that each one of this 91.8 million stops are evenly distributed around the earth which of course we know to be false but for purposes of our calculations, we will accept.

We are not talking about 0.78 miles per household.Â A total trip of 75.5 million miles, not counting stops to do what most of us do at least once every 31 hours, plus eating et cetera.Â That means that Santa's slay is moving at 650 miles per second, 3,000 times the speed of sound.Â Now, for purposes of comparison, the fastest man-made vehicle on earth the Ulysses space probe moves at a pokey 27.4 miles per second.Â A

conventional reindeer can run at tops between 25 and 30 miles per hour.

Number four, the payload on the sleigh adds another interesting element. Assuming that each child gets nothing more than a medium size Lego set which is two pounds, the sleigh is now carrying 321,300 tons. Not counting Santa who is invariably described as overweight. On land, conventional reindeer can pull no more than 300 pounds, even granting that flying reindeer could pull 10 times the normal amount. We can't do the job with eight or even nine. We now need 214,200 reindeer. This increases the payload, not even counting the weight of the sleigh to 353,430 tons. Again, for comparison that is four times the weight of the HMS Queen Elizabeth.

Number five, 353,000 tons travelling at 650 miles per second creates enormous air resistance. This will heat up the reindeer in the same fashion as spacecrafts reentering the earth's atmosphere. The lead pair of reindeer will then absorb 14.3 quintillion joules of energy per second each. In short, they will burst into flames almost instantaneously exposing the reindeer behind them and creating a deafening sonic boom in their wake. The entire reindeer team will be vaporized within 4.26 thousandths of a second.

Santa meanwhile will be subject to centrifugal forces of 17,500.06 times greater than gravity, which means that 250 pounds Santa will be pinned to the back of the sleigh by a 400,315,015 pound force. In conclusion, if Santa ever did deliver presents on Christmas Eve, he's now dead, lots of fiction at Christmas so much so that a person might make this leap all of that is fiction. How do we know then that that baby in the manger isn't also fiction?

There's been a campaign in the last few years by the American Atheistic Association of small but growing and very vocal group of people that are trying to relegate everything in Christmas to a myth. Get this, here's an ad that was put up in Ohio recently and you'll notice on the sign there's a picture of Neptune and Jesus and Santa Claus and Satan. And the sign reads "1.6 million Ohioans know myths when they see them. What do you see?"

One of the reasons in an article that I read that the American atheist feel the need to bring this stuff up every Christmas. According to the article is Christmas is a time when atheists feel lonely. They feel like everybody's celebrating something but not us. So they're feeling a little isolated. Now, I have the solution for them, probably one that they don't want to hear. That's another sermon.

But it brings up this point. This is what we want to deal with. Christmas has become so commercialized over the past 100 or 200 so years. Is it even okay for Christians to engage in it at any point, in any regard? Should we have anything at all to do with Christmas? I'll bring that up because every year we get letters or e-mails or phone calls or pastoral staff deals with this, this time of the year, every year. Why do you guys have a tree in the foyer? How come you're celebrating a pagan holiday? Now, that was bad enough. Look at our platform, we got like -- well this is our effort to make Albuquerque green. We'll just have trees up on the platform.

Now, if we look back in our history we understand that this issue we're dealing with has been a long standing issue. The puritans for example in early American history did not celebrate Christmas. They thought it was so filled with paganism. It was to be shunned. That was a worldly holiday. They never celebrated Christmas. First of all because the word "Christmas, Christ-mas" has mas in it and because they felt that the mas undermines the finished work of Christ on the cross with the need to have it done all the time, it shouldn't be celebrated.

Number two because it distracted Christians from keeping the Lord's Day, the first day of the week. That's what people should be keeping, they didn't celebrate it. Did you know that because of the puritans, Christmas was actually outlawed for a period of time in the east coast? For 22 years, it was illegal in Boston, Massachusetts to commemorate Christmas. If you're a business owner and you had a store, you're forbidden by law to close your store on Christmas and go home and celebrate it with your family. If you defy that and you went home, you could be prosecuted by law. That was repealed in 1681 incidentally, but it was even illegal to bake plum pudding on Christmas and the puritans instead of saying, "Happy Yuletide!" which was a common greeting. They mock people and said, "Happy Fooltide!" Because they have said it was so foolish.

Now, Puritanism inculcated the culture in the east to the extent that it wasn't until 1847 that colleges and universities back east even allowed the student body or the teachers to have Christmas day off. And it wasn't until 1855 that Federal workers in America had Christmas off. So that culture has persisted. Now, let's look in a different direction. The Jehovah Witnesses is a group that will say, "You shouldn't celebrate Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving or birthdays, they're forbidden." And if you were a Jehovah Witnesses, you would be forbidden to celebrate them and some of you know that because you have relatives who are into that.

Now, the reason that Jehovah Witnesses will say that will say that is, first of all because we don't know when Jesus was born and the bible never celebrates the birth of Christ. It only commemorates the death of Christ. And so, since the bible never celebrates the birth of Christ, neither should you. Of course, I think they would have a hard time convincing the angels outside of Bethlehem in Luke Chapter 2 about that. Can you imagine the angels saying, "We're so happy Jesus is born"? But you should never do this.

More disturbing is an article in the Watchtower magazine put up by the Jehovah Witnesses that says, "Celebrating Christmas can cause you to lose your good standing before God." In other words, you could lose your salvation keeping Christmas because they say it encourages idolatry. They define idolatry as the worship of Jesus Christ as God. U.S.A today even had an article a few years back that said, "There's still a significant amount of people in the English speaking world that regard Christmas as pagan blasphemy." So, what are we to do? Are we to just make our mantra bah, humbug or should we take a different act?

Now, this morning I'd like to do a few things with you. I would like you to look back with me, look in the past. We're going to look back at some traditions that have come our way. Number two, we want to look to the present how to answer those aged, old traditions. What do we do now? What is the solution? How do we address them?

And then third, we want to look to the future and I want to challenge you to come up with your own innovations. What and how could you make this time of the year something that speaks of Christ for His glory? We turn to Matthew Chapter 2. This is actually taking place after the birth of Jesus Christ. It's the story of the wise man. Now, I've had you turn here because talk about a story that is fraught with tradition and this is it.

Okay, without the biblical record how many wise man are there, quick? You said three and then say there are three. We say there are three because a song written in 1857 called "We Three Kings of Orient Are" has been sung a long time and since then people have been making Christmas cards and how many wise man did they put on there? Three and they're all riding what? Camels.

Probably really what it was, it was a whole entourage of men riding Arabian steeds because they make a big splash in Jerusalem, Herod the king gets really upset that they're there. I don't think he'd get upset of three guys on camel show up, but it upsets all of Jerusalem. Well, let's look at the story.

Now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king behold wise men from the east came to Jerusalem. Wise man is the Greek word Magos, we get the term Magi. This was probably a priestly cast of Mede. They were from Medo-Persia, a 500 mile journey following an astronomical wonder saying, "Where is He who has been born King the Jews? For we have seen a star in the East and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled. Better word, agitated, worked up and all Jerusalem with him. When he gathered all the chief priests and the scribes and the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet; 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler who will worship my people Israel.'" So this is a story of the wise men who came after the birth of Jesus to celebrate and to bring gifts. One person that I have it here suggested it would be considerably different if they were wise women instead of wise men and this person says -- first of all, they would have asked directions. They would have arrived on time. They would have helped deliver the baby. They would

have cleaned the stable, made a casserole and brought practical gifts from Babies "R" Us like diapers, wipes, bibs and formula.

Okay, whatever.Â This is the story.Â And they came after Jesus was born and they came to Bethlehem after He had already been born.Â When did they come after He was born? When was He born?Â Silence, it's because nobody knows when Jesus was born and you gave the right answer.Â There is no answer.Â When was Jesus born?Â Nobody knows.Â Most people believe He wasn't born December 25th simply because shepherds according to most sources don't keep their flocks at night in Judea after the fall of the year.Â Mid October to early November, that's when they stop and they bring all the flocks inside.

So we don't know when Jesus was born.Â You can say December 25th, nobody knows.Â The earliest date we have in history.Â The very earliest guess as to when Jesus was born was from the late 2nd century AD by Clement of Alexandria who affixed the birth date of Christ as May the 20th.Â And that sort of ruins it for you, right?Â You don't think about putting up a tree and giving gifts May 20th.Â Other early dates besides May 20th, April 18th, April 19th and another one March the 28th.Â All those are the earliest dates we have on record as people guessing the birth of Christ.

We don't get December 25th in history until about the 3rd century AD when a man named Hippolytus of Rome said, "Jesus was born on December 25th."Â Now get this, he said He was born December 25th because he said he knew the exact day when Mary was conceived in her womb by the Holy Spirit.Â When Jesus was conceived in the womb by the Holy Spirit and he said that was March the 25th.Â So he counted exactly nine months later from March 25th and came up to December 25th.Â As if babies are like exactly nine months, but that's another story.

So Jesus, it was sad.Â His birth was to be celebrated December 25th.Â Now, there was a convenient pagan holiday going on in Rome at that time.Â That has a very interesting background that I want to tell you about.Â I told you I was going to get a little historical with you.

The Babylonians years before the Romans, but it got passed down culturally to the Romans, the Babylonian culture began with the guy named Nimrod.Â Now you know his name.Â He's from Genesis Chapter 10.Â Raise your hand if you know who Nimrod or if you've ever heard the name.Â Okay.Â The rest of you need to read your bibles.Â Nimrod was the guy who founded the town of Babel which became Babylon.Â Nimrod it says was a mighty hunter in the earth.Â Nimrod according to Babylonian legend marries a woman named Semiramis whom they called the queen of heaven.Â Nimrod marries the queen of heaven, Semiramis.Â Nimrod dies according to the legend and over time Semiramis turns up pregnant quite a bit after the time of her husband's death.

She says she got pregnant by a miraculous flash of light that came from heaven, a lightning bolt.Â The son that was born, she named Tammuz.Â Tammuz was born December 25th, after the winter solstice.Â Semiramis' story is that Tammuz is the reincarnation of her husband Nimrod.Â He is the sun god and ziggurats were built around Babylon, these inspiring huge places of worship for the sun god.

Two festivals that celebrated this whole event, two festivals in Babylon, one was in the spring and one was in the winter.Â The one in the spring was called Ishtar and Ishtar celebrated Semiramis getting pregnant with that bolt of lightning.Â The way it was celebrated was by giving little bunnies to one another which symbolizes fertility and little eggs called Ishtar eggs.Â You can see the connection, right?

Tammuz was celebrated December 25th after the winter solstice.Â The days are getting longer.Â He is the reincarnated sun god and incidentally, his birth was celebrated by taking a log called Yule log.Â That's a Babylonian term for the infant log.Â The log symbolized the dead stock of Nimrod.Â It was placed in the fire.Â It was consumed and the next day that was consumed on mother night, December 24 and in its place the next day was this beautiful tree which symbolizes the reincarnation of the sun god in the person of Tammuz.

Now, turn back to the Old Testament, Jeremiah Chapter 10.Â Some of you know where I'm going with this and are you familiar with this text?Â Jeremiah 10, Jeremiah is denouncing the pagans around Israel including the Babylonians.Â "Hear the word which the Lord speaks to you, O house of Israel. Â Thus says

the Lord: "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed of the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them for the customs of the people are futile; one cuts a tree from the forest; The work of the hands of the workman with an axe cuts a tree from the forest." They decorate it with silver and gold; They fasten it with nails and hammer so that it will not topple."

Now, some of you right now are going, "Uh-oh" and you're looking up at this platform that all the trees are going, "Uh-oh." Now, some people see this as the origin of the Christmas tree. Actually, it could be tied into that Babylonian festival but the tree was then cut down and crafted into an image and they put gold and silver chains. It was a little idol that they would carry around and the rest of the context makes that clear.

Okay, this festival of the sun worshipped from Babylon gets passed down from culture to culture to culture. So remember I said that in Rome, there were a couple of festivals and Hippolytus said, "December 25th, Jesus was born. Let's celebrate his birthday." But there was a convenient pagan festival going on.

Let me tell you about the pagan festival in Rome. During this season of the year, two festivals in ancient Rome were celebrated. One called Brumalia, one called Saturnalia. Saturnalia was first, it was December 17th through December 24th. It was the festival of the unconquered sun and on December 25th was Brumalia, the festival of the invincible sun because now the days are getting longer and the solstice has passed and they're celebrating that whole coming of light and the worship of the sun.

So these two festivals coincided with the celebration by Hippolytus of Christmas. Then there's Santa Claus, he comes up every time this year. A big fat man in a red suit who lives at the North Pole and travels at the speed of -- well, almost the speed of light.

It's so much more than speed of sound. He can do this thing miraculously and there's enough historical ammunition to make any of us as Christians say, "Well then bah, humbug." But again, I caution you, don't get so part in the term Santa Claustrophobic over this. Hold on just a little bit longer. We can be reactive or we can be redemptive. Okay, we've looked at the past. I want to move this into the present now. Let's look at the present. Let's ask ourselves, "What are the solutions to some of these past traditions?"

Because--this is an important question, if you're the kind of a person and I would even salute you and applaud you for the heart that you have behind this. It says, "Oh, I'm not going to have anything at all to do it, any even pagan inclination or pagan naming at all." That's cool, but you're going to have a problem because if you say, "I worship on Sundays." Somebody could say, "Well, Sunday is the day the sun god was worshipped." You can't say that term anymore. Well then, I'll worship Saturday but Saturday was Saturn's day. You certainly are not going to worship on a day when Saturn was worshipped and you can't worship Monday. That's the day of the moon, moon day was worshipped. Tuesday, Tyr the north god for Mars, the god of war was worshipped. You get my point.

You can't use January anymore because that's the Roman god Janus. You can't use March, that's Mars. You can't say June because that's Juno, the wife of Jupiter. July was the month when the commemoration of the deification of Julius Caesar. I could go on and on and on. So what do you do, what do you do? You have not only days and months. You have all of these traditions. I suggest to you that we do what the little bracelet that some Christians wear says we do, WWJD "What would Jesus do?" We do what Jesus would do.

Now I have you turn to John Chapter 10. I want you to see what Jesus did with a popular holiday, not biblical holiday but a popular holiday that was going on at the time He was around, John 10:22. Notice how the Verse begins. "Now, it was the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem: and it was winter." It was like around this time of the year. "And Jesus walked in the temple in solemn, in Solomon's porch and the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, How long do you keep us in doubt? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do on my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and

they will never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand.Â My Father, who has given to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand.Â I and my Father are one."

Okay, what feast was it?Â It was the Feast of Dedication.Â Feast of Dedication is known as Hanukkah or the Festival of Lights.Â Now, the Feast of Dedication is not a biblical feast.Â Hanukkah is not a biblical feast.Â It's not like Passover.Â It's not like Pentecost.Â It's not like the three mandatory feasts.Â The Old Testament made every Jew to celebrate in Jerusalem.Â But there was a celebration in Jerusalem and Jesus was at it, it was Hanukkah.

Let me give you a quick little background of Hanukkah.Â This feast happened between the Old and the New Testament.Â That's when it started.Â There was a group up north of Syrians and there was a Syrian oppressor named Antiochus Epiphanes who hated the Jews went in, destroyed their temple in part by sacrificing a pig on the altars of the unclean Jews' gut all over the temple.Â Forbid the worship of Yahweh.Â Stop circumcision.Â Stop all the Jewish festivals and commanded the people to worship Zeus on that temple.Â That oppression continued until a group of priest called Hasmonean priest, one in particular Judas Maccabeus overturned the Syrians and rededicated the temple to the worship of God.Â That's where the Feast of Dedication comes from, when they did that dedication of the temple, according to -- listen carefully, legend.

There was only one slug of oil.Â One crucible oil that could be put into the Menorah, the seven-branched candlestick in the holy place, an oil enough for one day only, but according to legend miraculously it lasted for eight days.

So, today if you see in Jewish homes during this time of the year.Â A candlestick, it has nine branches on it called Hanukkah that symbolizes the eight days plus one candle is the lead candle to light all the rest.Â It's celebrating the Feast of Dedication.Â Here's a question.Â Did that really happen? Did the lengthening of the oil really happen?Â We don't know.Â It's a legend.Â It's a good story, but it was a tradition that was passed down.Â It may have happened.Â It may not have happened.

A lot of people just think it was a tradition and never really happened.Â It's not a biblical feast and yet, Jesus didn't stay away from Jerusalem.Â It's winter time, it's Hanukkah.Â He's in Jerusalem and He's using this time of the year the Festival of Lights to point to himself as the light of the world.Â It's very significant and important.Â I suggest you and I do what Jesus would do with the holiday that is similar in sorts.

Think of it this way, people right now in shopping centers and malls are singing the same songs you just sang moments ago in worship.Â It's the only time of the year they do that.Â They're humming, Hark the Herald Angel sing, Joy to the World.Â It's a really cool opportunity for you to bump up.Â Next time you go, "Hey, that's a great song."Â Let me tell you about the words.Â It could be used as a tool.Â So we do what Jesus did or what about the Christmas tree where did that come from?Â And why is it in church?Â That's a question I get.Â Why would you do that?Â Let me tell you why.Â The Christmas tree's origin that is far as we can tell comes from Latvia and in Germany.Â In the middle ages, the Latvians and the Germans will take a tree and they called it -- not a Christmas tree but a paradise tree.Â The only decorations that were on it were apples because it was the festival of Adam and Eve they were celebrating and the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, they would take from it and they would eat it to commemorate that.

But also on the tree were little wafers of communion that symbolized the redemption of Christ to end the curse that Adam brought on the earth, that's the paradise tree.Â It's pretty cool huh?Â You know where they first put them up?Â Churches, the redemption that finished work of Christ taking away the curse of Adam eventually, they started being brought inside of a home.Â Okay, in ancient Latvian and German homes besides the paradise tree were little triangular wooden configurations with shelves on them and it was ornaments.Â They would take and decorate it with evergreen.Â They would put little figurines of the Christmas story like an activity set and a star on top.

It is believed that Martin Luther was the guy who said, "Let's just combine them.Â Let's celebrate Christ with this tree."Â We are already doing it in the paradise tree and it is thought that Martin Luther was the first one to put candles on the tree, the light.Â Put candles on the tree bring children around it and say,

"Just as these candles eradicate the darkness in this room."Â So Jesus Christ came to take away the darkness in our lives.Â He used it to preach the Gospel.Â I think it's a really great idea.

Now, understand something.Â Go back to Hippolytus in Rome, 3rd century when he said, "We're going to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ as December 25th."Â Okay, you can stop there and get all hang up ago, but we don't know when he was born.Â I have a deep theological response.Â Who cares?Â I mean, don't you want to celebrate that He came to the earth to pay for our sins?Â And this is good of a time as any, I mean it's already happening.Â Why not take part in it and use it for the right way?Â Give me an example.

Every year we celebrate the birthday of Lincoln.Â Did you know historically, we don't exactly know when Abraham Lincoln was born?Â So do we stop doing it?Â I don't think so.Â Here's a better example.Â Let's say you go overseas and adopt a child from a poor country and they don't have good birth records in a lot of those countries.Â So they're going to say, "Mister and Missis so and so, we're glad you adopted this child.Â They're going to take him home to America but you have to know.Â We don't exactly when this baby was born.Â So or forever, you're going to take this child home.Â We'll never celebrate your birthday."Â No, you're going to take a date and celebrate the birth of that child.

Now, I had you turned only three portions of scripture.Â I'm going to read you a fourth portion.

You don't have to turn there.Â If you want to mark this down, you can.Â This is Romans Chapter 14.Â Here is Paul slamming down an argument about days of worship and commemoration.Â This is Romans 14:4, "Who are to judge another man's servant?Â To his own master he stands or falls.Â Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.Â One person's esteems one day above another, another esteems everyday alike."Â Here it is, "Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.Â He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it."

So, I simply encourage all of us to do what Jesus did with a popular non biblical holiday and capitalize on it.Â Also, I would say do what Santa did.Â I'm glad I got a couple of your attentions like, "Wait a minute where does that fit in?"Â We may do what Santa did.Â There is no Santa Claus skip.Â Okay, there's no fat man in a red suit who lives at the North Pole and hangs out with little guys wearing tights with pointed ears, that I grant you.

However, though there may not be this kind of Santa Claus, there was a guy in the 4th century and this guy comes from that guy.Â His name was Nicholas, Saint Nick.Â Nicholas, Nicholas in the 4th century AD in the town of Myra.Â He was a clergy man.Â The bishop of Myra in the province of Lycia in the country of Anatolia, that's modern day Turkey.Â And Nicholas by the way was at the Counsel of Nicaea in 325 AD.Â He's one of the good guys who stood up for the doctrine of the Trinity against all the heretics.

Nicholas had intention for compassion and every year he would load up his wagon and put toys in it, put fuel in it for the poor, put food on it for the poor and distribute it.Â When he died, people were so impressed with his example that on the Feast of Saint Nicholas they said, "Let's give gifts to one another."Â That's where it came from.

Okay, so the red and the white hat.Â It is believed that the bishop's miter, headdress and cape which were red and white in ancient days.Â That's where it came from and it was added by artists later on.Â And also later on, it was added.Â Saint Nicholas in Dutchman and German, Saint Nicholas and the contraction to sinter Claus comes from Saint Nicholas, sinter Claus, hence the anglicized Santa Claus.Â There was actually a man named Santa Claus.

So, can these things lead you to Christ?Â Probably in and out of themselves but boy you could sure tell a kid about Nicholas who gave gifts to the poor and loved people on the name of Christ and a tree with lights that Martin Luther once said, "Points to Jesus as the Light of the World."Â And the wrapping paper, you can talk about the simple wrapping of God in a human form given as a gift to this world.Â What a wonderful set of opportunities we have.

So now I end with the third.Â We've looked to the past, the present real briefly.Â As we look the future, let me challenge you to be innovative.Â Come up with some ideas to bring Christ into your home and into

the community at this season.Â Let me throw out a few ideas.Â Number one, you could put ornament on your tree that marks spiritual milestones.Â Some of you have told me recently after an altrical.Â "My nephew went forward today or my father went forward or my daughter went forward."Â Why don't you make an ornament that has his or her picture with the date they were saved, commemorate that.Â Put that on your tree or a baby dedication or some spiritual milestone.

Here's a second thing you could do and some of you are already doing it, adopt a needy person.Â Nicholas did.Â You do that with OCC, Operation Christmas Child.Â Some of you do with Caring Tree, visiting the detention centers.Â A third thing you could do, this is a tradition from my family now.Â It was my wife's idea.Â I cannot take part for any of this.Â On Christmas Eve, we usually want to teach Nathan how Jesus changes us and we took a little brown paper bag.Â The narrower the bag, the better because it represents the old year, the old life and you write on the outside of the bag something you want God to change in your life.Â Some sin you're confessing.Â You write that on the bag and you put it out.

The next morning my wife had three bags, new one set out in place of the old brown ones with goodies inside and sweets inside to show that God changes us and it's so sweet when he does.Â And the first thing they did Christmas morning was not go to the tree but find the bag.

Fourth thing you could do.Â You could find a neighborhood and drive through it slowly praying for each house on that block, maybe your neighborhood, maybe a poor neighborhood, maybe a richer neighborhood.Â I just warn you, when you go through neighborhoods really slow be careful.Â Keep going because it looks like you're casing a joint, right?Â Drive by praying, a pray for the houses in the neighborhood.

I want to show you what one group did in Enid Oklahoma to take what goes on during this time of the year in the form of Christmas trees and use it to share the Gospels.Â It's very creative and innovative.Â I draw your attention to this screen.

(Video Playing 00:41:01 - 00:41:57)

Male: Today, you guys have took that step out of the queue and you guys are out now and this is a chance for you guys to really go out and show these people the love of Christ.Â That's why we're out here, the tree is the way to get us in into the houses but the real thing that they need to see is the thing that's living inside of you and that's what they really need.Â You're going to see a lot of brokenness.Â You're going to see a lot of houses that are really shattered, a lot of clutter.Â It's going to be hard to probably even get in some houses, but the people are really excited to meet you.Â They were just blown away knowing that someone was going to come out give them a Christmas tree for Christmas.Â And all these people that you're going to, they will not have a tree this Christmas if it wasn't for you all.

Pastor Skip Heitzig:Â Â Let's all stand.Â Here is the bottom line.Â Do you want to be known for what you are against or do you want to be known for what you are for?Â There's a lot of people who are known for what they're, "I'm against that.Â I'm against that."Â Nobody wants to hang-out with anybody like that.Â When you're known for what you are for, I'm for Jesus and I want to make Jesus known to you and tell you the rest of the story.Â It could be a very compelling thing.

So that's our challenge this month.Â To see what ways the Lord would inspire us to reach out in His name, with His love for His glory.