
Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!!

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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Merry Christmas AND Happy New Year! Do they belong together? Yes, I believe they do; it is good and right that Christmas occurs just as we also observe the counting of a new year.

Christmas celebrates a new Light coming into the world, just when the days are shortest and our nights are longest. When the natural world sees the smallest amount of light, we celebrate that divine spark of new life in the baby Jesus which will grow into maturity. A new life, and a new year, are both beginning.

Our Christmas gifts, too, are meant to play a part in this growth. When we give to others, we are planting the seeds of love and relationship. A gift to someone, however small, and however simple, yet represents a physical bond between giver and receiver.

We are meant to give during the Christmas season, because that action turns us outward, back into the world, in the same way that God turns attention toward the world. God gives the world his own Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, as a sign of love and commitment. God turns attention not inward, toward himself, but outward towards us.

When the days are shortest, when the light around us looks dim and doubtful, God acts. God loves us most when our darkness is greatest. A Christmas gift is our way, however humble, of imitating God. Relationships need nurturing when nights are long and dreadful. Relationships need gifts to hold them together like two lovers in the cold.

What if our New Year Resolution was to keep Christmas throughout the year? "I resolve that I will not lose the gift of giving." On Christmas, God gave me the gift of his son, the gift of love. On Christmas, I gave something of myself to those whom I love. I resolve to continue that giving through this new year.

Indeed, the new year will need some giving. For ours is a culture who needs to acquire. We have a disease, which some might diagnose as an addiction. We are addicted to acquisition. We need more, goes the mantra. Even when all is pleasant at our house, some catalog arrives in the mail, some notice of a sale, seductively suggesting that we need still more.

Some of us do not feel alive unless we are shopping, unless we are buying, unless we are acquiring. Our very economy is built upon consumption. Our country does not fare well unless we categorize ourselves as "consumers" and we consume. Yes, that is the name we call ourselves in economic reports, and even in national data reports. We are reduced to "consumers."

God calls us not be "consumers," but "givers." Indeed, God calls us to be Christians in an age of acquisition.

Oh, you might say, but we need to buy something in order to give. We must naturally act as a consumer when we purchase something to give to another. Yes, of course that is true. The point is not to avoid the natural exchange of property and services which we call commerce. The point is to break the bonds of addiction and consumption which oppress that natural commerce.

The Christian Church is meant to represent freedom from those bonds of consumption. We are meant to be teachers of giving, following the example of God's gift of his son.

Hey, just as I write of these matters, our stewardship director delivers a note: "If you're looking for a topic for your newsletter article," she says, "you might mention our financial gifts status, our stewardship campaign." So I will! Our stewardship status needs you. The Cathedral needs you to join the givers. In fact, it's not just the Cathedral. It's the world that needs you to give. Hey, it's not even just the world. It's you! In order to grow, in order to be healthy, it's you; you yourself need to give.

Merry Christmas AND Happy New Year! Celebrate the gift of God's son by becoming a giver yourself, by giving throughout this new year.

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The Very Rev. Sam Candler

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