

# Christmas: a time of celebration and mirth

▶▶▶ Dear Friend

Tucked away in the unlikely book of Nehemiah there is a text which seems to me very appropriate for Christmas. Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Neh 8:10) The last few words are very familiar, but the verse is seldom quoted in full.

The background to all this had been a six-hour marathon reading of the Law from Ezra, which had a powerful effect — everyone started weeping as they realised how far short of God's standards they had fallen. But through Nehemiah, God encouraged his people three times not to grieve and instead told them it was a holy day, a holyday, so it was time to celebrate!

They didn't take long to obey this command — I prefer the Authorised Version here: "All the people went their way to eat and drink and send portions and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that had been spoken to them." (verse 12)

So that was 445 BC, but what has this got for us in 2004?

If all that time ago in Jerusalem, God's people were encouraged to celebrate the revelation of His law, how much more should we celebrate the revelation of Jesus Christ who was the fulfilment of the law! At Christmas time, many have a go at celebrating, but it ends up in self-indulgence and can't mask the reality of broken lives. It would be all too easy to keep our Christmas boxed away into a private family affair, but surely this is a great opportunity to show to this sad world the wonder of Christ-centred celebration. Let's outdo the world in partying this Christmas! Not self-indulgently, but opening our doors and making sure we give something "to those who have nothing prepared."

And who are those who have nothing prepared? To whom could we (or perhaps should we) be opening our doors at this season? The key here for all of us is to be open-minded and open-hearted. Look around you and see the opportunities. Christmas is known as the season of goodwill, so let's spread a little goodwill wherever we are. As we have family gatherings over the Christmas period; as we come together with our church family; as we go about our daily lives — shopping, work, Christmas parties, leisure; as we walk around our

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Highfield Oval, Harpenden,  
Herts, AL5 4BX  
Tel: 01582 463216  
Fax: 01582 463213

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neighbourhoods and are out on the streets where we live; in all these places and situations, let's bring the light of Jesus and the hope of the Christmas message to the people we meet and come across.

I think it's time for a recovery of mirth too! What a great old English word! My dictionary defines it as "merriment or enjoyment, especially when expressed in laughter. [Middle English *mirthe*, Old English *myrgh*]" Notice too the source of the mirth — "they understood the words that had been spoken to them." Again, it's true for us only more so, because we understand that, "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

One of the wonders of the Christmas story is that the glory of the One and Only came down to earth then, and is still available to us today. So let's ask for a fresh revelation of this story in our own lives. May we capture something of the same wonder as the shepherds had; may we have the same desire to seek out the truth as the wise men had; may we see His glory anew this Christmas, and, like the shepherds, may we "spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child" (Luke 2:17)!

We in YWAM England pray that God will bless you this Christmas. May your Christmas be full of great mirth and may the season be one where you know and show His joy to the maximum, strengthening you and preparing you for all that lies ahead in 2005.



David Pott  
Fountain Gate Community  
YWAM England

let's ask for a  
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