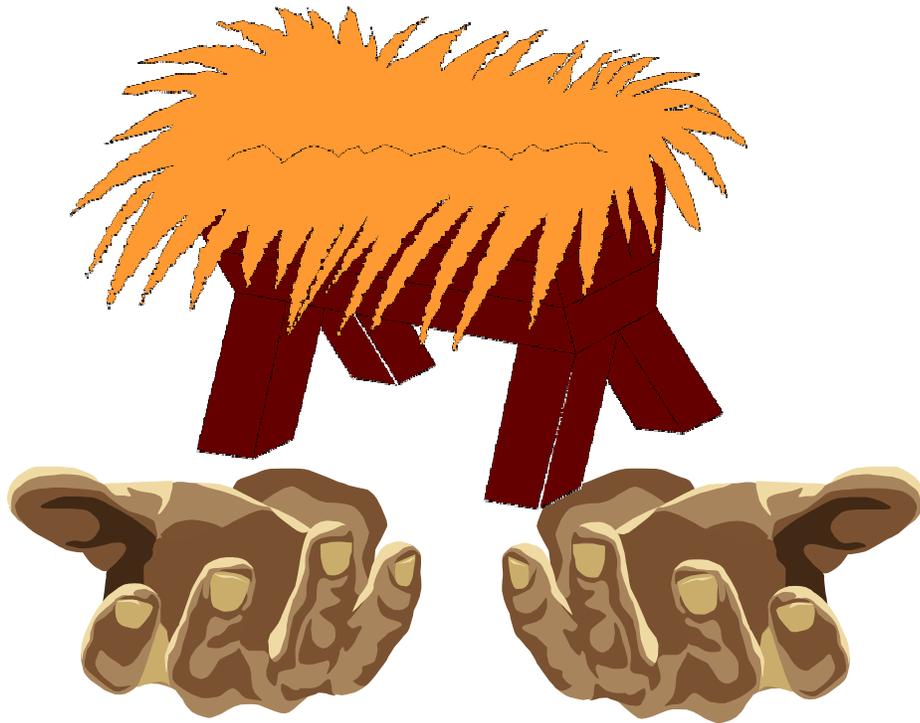


*Simple Living at St. Joseph*

# Christmas Clutter

November 2003



What memories  
do you carry with you?

How will you create new memories this year?

What is truly lasting about the gifts you exchange?

How can you be Emmanuel,  
God-in-the-world?

*Whose Birthday Is It,  
Anyway?*



## Many Americans Believe Christmas Has Lost Its Focus

**Americans say Christmas has become too commercialized, with not enough emphasis on religion**

A Gallup poll conducted Dec. 2-4, 2001, finds the public growing disillusioned with the way Americans celebrate Christmas. Ninety-six percent of Americans celebrate the holiday, but the percentage of those who say they would enjoy it more if people did not exchange gifts is growing. In 1994, 28% said they would enjoy a "gift-less" holiday more, and that percentage has grown to 42% in the current Gallup poll. Nearly six out of 10 Americans (57%) say they do not enjoy Christmas shopping.

The number of Americans who think Christmas is too commercialized also appears to be growing. Eighty-five percent said "yes" to this question in the current poll, compared to 79% when Gallup asked the same question in December 1990.

## Cartoon Wisdom

**How the Grinch Stole Christmas (1966)** Bitter and hateful, the Grinch is irritated at the thought of the nearby village having a happy time celebrating Christmas. So disguised as Santa Claus, he raids the village to steal all the Christmas things. But he learns his lesson eventually, as everyone does—it's not about THINGS. It's about holiday spirit and being together.



### A Charlie Brown Christmas (1965)

When Charlie Brown complains about the overwhelming materialism that he sees amongst everyone during the Christmas season, Lucy suggests that he become director of the school Christmas pageant. He accepts, but it proves to be a frustrating struggle. When an attempt to restore the proper spirit with a forlorn little fir Christmas tree fails, he needs Linus' help to learn what the real meaning of Christmas is.

**The least we can do is  
make his coming not  
more difficult...than the  
earth makes it for spring  
when it wants to come.**

**-Rainer Maria Rilke**

## Slow down ye frantic shoppers

*(sung to the tune of God Rest  
Ye Merry Gentlemen)*

Slow down ye frantic  
shoppers for there's  
something we must say  
If you would spare a  
moment all the stores  
would go away  
Big business has been  
telling us what Christmas  
means today  
Now it's time we decided  
for ourselves, for  
ourselves. Yes it's time we

decided for ourselves.  
To some folks Christmas  
means a time for gathering  
with friends  
And enemies might take it as  
a time to make amends  
But TV says it's time for  
pricey gifts and selfish ends  
Now it's time we decided for  
ourselves, for ourselves. Yes  
it's time we decided for  
ourselves.



Some people feel that  
Christmas is when Jesus  
makes a call  
For others it's a time to stress  
good will and peace to all

But advertisers tell us it means  
Santa's at the mall  
Now it's time we decided for  
ourselves, for ourselves. Yes it's  
time we decided for ourselves.

# What is a Gift?

How does a gift come to us?

In what might it be wrapped -- in the blankets of a tiny baby... in the box carried on a long journey of a seeker... in the artwork of a child... in the creativity of a friend... in the corporate logos that go to all in the company... in the ancient message of the small picture... in the contemporary competition of foils, ribbons, and papers?

Can we see gifts, can we receive gifts, in the unwrapped places of life -- in the barns, where the animals are... with today's travelers... with the clean and with the dirty?

Should we be looking for God's gifts to us in every place, in every experience of life?

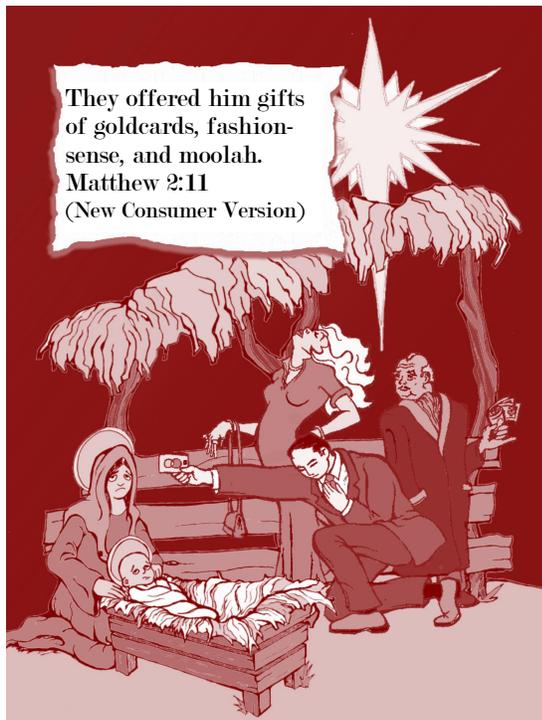
Should our eyes be open to what God is

giving us in our relationships, in the messages shouted across all the media, in the

emotions of guilt, celebration, longing, and love? Should our eyes be open to the vision that is held out before us that keeps us in a slightly uneasy quest for Christmas after Christmas?

A gift is more than an object. A gift is a carrier of meaning, values, esteem, and is a symbol of our faith. So that any gifts we think of giving reflect God's giving, and truly participate in the giving to which God calls us, let us ask ourselves:

- ◆ What meaning can this gift carry?
- ◆ How can this gift reflect my feelings for the receiver?
- ◆ What values can this convey?
- ◆ What can this gift symbolize about my faith?



# Christ Climbed Down

Christ climbed down from His bare Tree this year and ran away to where there were no rootless Christmas trees hung with candycanes and breakable stars

Christ climbed down from His bare Tree this year and ran away to where there were no gilded Christmas trees and no tinsel Christmas trees and no tinfoil Christmas trees and no pink plastic Christmas trees and no gold Christmas trees and no black Christmas trees and no powderblue Christmas trees

hung with electric candles and encircled by tin electric trains and clever cornball relatives ...

Christ climbed down from His bare Tree this year and ran away to where no Bing Crosby carollers groaned of a tight Christmas and where no Radio City angels iceskated wingless thru a winter wonderland into a jinglebell heaven daily at 8:30 with Midnight Mass matinees

Christ climbed down from His bare Tree this year and softly stole away into some anonymous Mary's womb again where in the darkest night of everybody's anonymous soul He awaits again



Buy Nothing Christmas is a national initiative started by Canadian Mennonites who offer a prophetic "no" to the patterns

of overconsumption of middle-class North Americans. They are inviting Christians (and others) all over Canada and the U.S. to join a movement to de-commercialize Christmas and re-design a Christian lifestyle that is richer in meaning, smaller in impact upon the earth, and greater in giving to people less-privileged.

See their website for a study guide, stories, posters, and other resources:

[www.buynothingchristmas.org](http://www.buynothingchristmas.org)

## Alternative gift ideas

- ◆ Give gifts of your time, such as walking the dog; mowing the lawn, grocery shopping for an elderly relative or neighbor, massages, spring cleaning, child-minding for new (or not so new) parents, manicure, etc.
- ◆ Compile a list of memories and arrange them in a creative fashion.
- ◆ Write and illustrate a book for the young people in your life.
- ◆ Give away a valued possession.
- ◆ Wrap gifts in newspaper, maps, scarves or interesting clothing.
- ◆ Collect quotes that make you think of someone.
- ◆ For the elderly people in your life, research newspaper and magazine articles from their youth and present in a creative fashion.
- ◆ Buy a used book and in the inside cover explain why you chose it for that person.

Find more at [www.buynothingchristmas.org](http://www.buynothingchristmas.org) and [www.newdream.org](http://www.newdream.org)

## Nov. 1-2 • What memories do you carry with you?

## What makes these valuable and meaningful?

- Avoid commercialized Christmas hype. Take some quiet time each day for reflection about what you want to celebrate this Christmas.
- Celebrations are ritualized interruptions in daily life that remind us of who we are, where we came from and where we are going. They can be a powerful way to nurture the human spirit. Celebrating the birth of Jesus can mean renewal of home and direction for our lives.

## Nov. 8-9 • How will you create new memories this year?

### What needs to be driven out of Christmas to allow this to happen?

- "Buy Nothing Day" (Friday after Thanksgiving, which is the biggest shopping day of the year). Expand to include the day after Christmas, which is probably the second biggest shopping day of the year.
- Rediscover new "old ways" of giving, in which thoughtfulness and creativity - not money - are the measures of good gifts.
- Restore meaningful gift-giving practices that are personal, thoughtful and considerate of the earth's resources and people. Find ways to give of yourself through what you can make, what you can teach someone to do, and gifts of your time, especially to younger children and older parents.



## Nov. 15-16 • What is truly lasting about the gifts you exchange?

### How do you measure a gift's value?

- Buy me nothing; I'll still love you. Give gifts of your time (see inside).
- Am I comfortable with the gift-giving patterns of my family? Does my spending for Christmas reflect my faith?
- Do I feel pressured by the media, friends, relatives or myself to spend money or do things in ways that do not honor the birth of Christ? Resist the forces of commercialism which tell us that the only way to show love is to buy.
- Ask those with whom you exchange gifts what they need vs. want; put a dollar limit on gift exchanges.



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## Nov. 22-23 • How can you be Emmanuel, God-in-the-world?

### God's gift is to be among us in the world

- Consider what you spent last year. Re-channel a portion of the money you spent last year to the hunger program or other social ministries of the Church as a "birthday gift" for Jesus.
- Include in your Christmas celebrations those who would otherwise be alone.
- As a family, select a cause or organization to support with money you collect. Choose a percentage early in the season, then give that amount every time you spend any money for Christmas...in addition to the amount you normally give away. Decorate a can to hold the money. Put it on display.

Cartoon graphics and other resources provided by Alternatives for Simple Living – *Equipping people of faith to challenge consumerism, live justly and celebrate responsibly* – since 1973. Visit [www.SimpleLiving.org](http://www.SimpleLiving.org)



St. Joseph Community  
Serving Alameda, CA  
and surrounding areas



For more information about simple living at St. Joseph and available resources, see: [www.stewardshipparish.org](http://www.stewardshipparish.org)