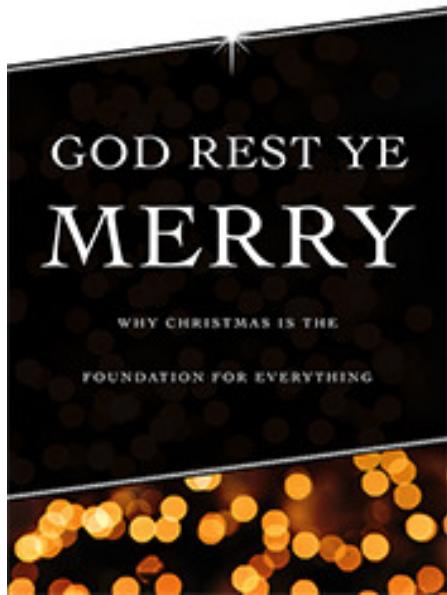


DOUGLAS WILSON



God Rest Ye Merry: Why Christmas Is the Foundation for Everything

Douglas Wilson

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God Rest Ye Merry: Why Christmas Is the Foundation for Everything Douglas Wilson

The repetition of Christmas traditions can appear to dull the powerful nature of the holiday. *God Rest Ye Merry* is meant to rekindle the Christian's understanding of Advent on every front, from politics to shopping to uproarious celebration.

Pastor Douglas Wilson critiques false reasons for the season (and false objections to it), teaches the importance of Israel in Christmastime history, explains why nativity sets should have Herod's soldiers (and how Santa Claus once punched a man in the face at a church council), offers the Enlightenment Assumptions Detector test as a guide to understanding Christmas symbolism, and much more. The last section contains a read-aloud meditation and prayer for each day of Advent, making *God Rest Ye Merry* an excellent tool for cultivating a deep family love of Christmas.

God Rest Ye Merry: Why Christmas Is the Foundation for Everything Details

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Peter B. says

Doug Wilson does a good job giving some robustness to Christmas. Not sentimental or pietistic, but delighting in the victorious coming of King Jesus to earth to humble Herod and Caesar, confound the philosophers, defeat the powers of darkness, and save His people from endless woe. Oh, and "you do not prepare for a real celebration of the Incarnation through thirty days of Advent Gnosticism."

Clint says

Very good. Read this every year starting on the first Sunday of Advent and leading up to Christmas. This will help you truly prepare you for the season, and keep you firmly impressed by the power of the Incarnation. Also, during that time, read the daily devotionals in the back of the book with your family. This a great way for any and all Christians to focus on Christ during the rush of our consumer version of the holiday.

Kyle Grindberg says

So good

Miles Smith says

Maybe not as viscerally engaging as Wilson's other works, but I found myself refocusing on the Incarnation as a reality through the observance of Advent. Worthwhile to read devotionally perhaps more than as a primer for what Christmas is. For those unaware of Wilson's shared predilections with Tom (NT) Wright concerning the inherently political meanings of Advent, the book may seem a bit strange. But such strangeness is necessary to rectify the near gnostic indifference of most Evangelicals towards what Christ coming kingdom actually portends for the future.

Jeremy says

Kara and I started reading the Advent meditations on Nov. 25, 2015. I finished reading the book on Christmas Day, 2015.

Kirk Cameron talks with Wilson about this book [here](#).

Lesson One: To Gain His Everlasting Hall

11: "If the history of the world is a story, then theology is a type of literary criticism."

15: Paul (2 Cor. 2:6-11) isn't talking about our eternal state

15-17: Wilson weaves hopeful lyrics from Christmas carols into his prose

17: Tyndale: "low bottom of the heart" [Prologue to Romans]

17: Anthony Esolen's *Ironies of Faith* (see pp. 18-20 for the ironies of time, power, and love)

17: "We love what words can do because we love what the Word has done."

18: Tolkien and eucatastrophe

18: "as the story unfolds, there will be more and more [believers]"

19: Luther and "left-handed power"

20: connection between loving and giving

21: creeds are inescapable; godliness is not just pietism—it's the assent to doctrinal truths

22: the foundation of our faith is the Incarnation

24-25: don't let Catholic idolatry keep us from remembering Mary's importance

26: childbirth as conquering

26-27: Satan tempts us to be "spiritual," but earthiness can be very Christian

27-31: Simeon's blessing (with grief mixed in)

29: reference to Herbert's poetry

29-30: Mary knew the end of the story, but the pain was still real (see here)

30: deep comedy includes tragic elements

32-33: false solutions to supposed Christmas problems (sentimentalism, moralism, spiritualism)

34: an (angelic) army brought a message of peace

35-37: the gospel of God's grace is for the whole world

40: failure of the modernist imagination and the miracle of the star

42: getting details right regarding the wise men; five reasons that the wise men were probably part of the aristocracy

42-44: the wise men part shows us that Christ is king; the gospel is for kings too; "nursing fathers" (Is. 49:23); gift theory (authority and submission); Jesus (and His church) receives gifts from those who acknowledge Him as king

45: people dismiss God in arrogant ways (modernism: God must prove His existence to me) and in false-humility ways (postmodernism: who are we to claim that we downstream folks can understand the source?)

46: the Word doesn't smudge things—He articulates them

49: distinguish without separating (passive and active obedience of Christ)

50: Irenaeus's "recapitulation," Wright's "reconstitution," and Reformed Theology's "active obedience"

Lesson Two: The Politics of Christmas

53: worldview is political; to be apolitical is to abandon the world

56-58: the coming of Christ was the beginning of the sunrise; we do not make the sun rise—we pull back the curtains

59: C.E. and B.C.E. are anti-Christian, because secularists know the importance of marking our days

60: Dennis the Insignificant (c. A.D. 500) put Christ's birth at year 1 (Annunciation on March 25); Pope Gregory XIII moved New Year's Day to Jan. 1; Diocletian (emperor), Simeon Bar-Kochba (Jewish false Messiah), and French Revolutionists (1792) also tried to mess with the calendar

61: ACLU = Anti-Christian Liberties Union; God doesn't need us, but He's pleased to use instruments

61: the commercialism/generosity antithesis is a false one, ultimately; the real antithesis is between Christ and sin

65: we bear false witness when we claim that Christ's kingdom is ethereal, insubstantial; Jesus came to save us from, among other things, our political sins too

65-66: Jesus' life was bookended by negative attention from political rulers

66: Jesus shows us how to be more human, and not just a private human, but a public and political one too

66-67: the Christmas celebrations of godly Christians should make carnal kings worry

67: the human race was entirely lost (not entirely forsaken), including its economics, politics, art, culture, philosophy, etc.

68: Christmas holidays are answers to various philosophers; the Incarnation really messes with Greek philosophy

70: 1 John 1:4—Jesus came to give us full joy

71-73: Hitchens wanted Christmas celebrations (which he knew were religious) to be relegated to the private sphere, arguing that the Constitution mandated the separation of church and state (it doesn't, regardless of Jefferson's letter to some Baptists); "When the constitution was ratified, nine of the thirteen colonies established state churches at the state level."; Christmas belongs wherever the curse is found, including the public sphere

Lesson Three: Celebrating Christmas like a Puritan

77-78: Puritans opposed ecclesiastical corruption; sometimes opposing corruption makes you look like you're opposing the good parts too (make sure that you're *not* opposing the good stuff)

78: the weaker brother does not observe Christmas

79: sometimes Christians adopt pagan practices, but sometimes they transform them (Boniface and Luther—Christmas trees and lights); even the WCF folks allowed for special days of thanksgiving (justification was Purim)

80: fight the secularization of time

81: in the OT, only one day was penitential

83: three arguments against extended seasons of penance

84: our descendants can tell a lot about us based on our liturgical practices

84-86: two kinds of waiting and two kinds of sorrow (parallel: one kind dissipates strength, and the other kind gathers it)

86: Tyndale and Luther on *metanoeiete*

87: "the unexamined holiday is not worth celebrating" (HT: Socrates)

89: C.S. Lewis on the Puritans—they were more Chestertonian than their Catholic adversaries

90: "Sin is not resident in the stuff"—stuff is like a blackboard where you might register an error, but we can register piety on stuff too; God went *overboard*

91-93 (not sure how this section fits in this chapter): brief history of Christmas; Jesus is Lord and His government increases; Easter was celebrated immediately; Sol Invictus and Saturnalia aren't the sources of our Christmas celebrations; it's likely that the pagans were copying the Christians; St. Nicholas probably punched Arius at the Council of Nicea; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and "Christmas"; *-mass* shouldn't concern any Protestants, because it wasn't until the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) that the Catholic Mass was codified; much of our Christmas celebrations are Victorian; look at the growth of Christ's kingdom over stretches of 500 years—it's obviously growing

Lesson Four: How Shall We Then Shop?

97: "Joy is deep satisfaction in the will of God"

97-98: 1 Peter is written to suffering believers, and they are told to be joyful; we tend to act as if sentimentality (happy Christmas thoughts) will make our problems (due to sin) disappear

98-99: pain makes this world real, but we can look *along* pain to see its refining purpose

99-100: only the joy of suffering Christian realists has a peace that passes understanding

101-02: giving and receiving gifts can be emotionally exhausting—that is why we must get dressed (in particular virtues [see Col. 3:12-17]) *before* the day arrives

104: significance of the wise men's gifts

104-06: we give gifts to God by giving gifts "down" or "across" (to our neighbors)

107: family gatherings show us that God is keeping His covenant promise to Abraham

Lesson Five: Daily Meditations for Advent

112: saints' days and ecclesiastical clutter (constant pounding, as opposed to rhythm)

112: true stories (aka legends, lies, myths, fairy stories)

114: Christian understanding of time

115: calendars always tell stories (fiscal, academic, civil), marking the beginning of the year somehow; Christians should neither forget how our year is marked (in November with Advent) nor let other stories crowd out *the* story

116-17: Christmas is not just sentimental and nostalgic; Jesus came to bring a sword, although He is also the Prince of Peace

118-19: history is wedding prep, and the Incarnation was the invitation

119-20: the origin of Santa Claus (decking Arius at Nicea); don't let that story supplant the true story

121: Christmas is not a sanitization of a pagan celebration; Dickens's feel-good "A Christmas Carol"

122-23: N.T. Wright on worldview (narrative, symbol, practice); in our Christmas celebrations, we express our worldview to the world—that the world will one day be as full as the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea

123-24: dating of Jesus' birth

124-25: the thickness of the material world (very similar to Wilson's praise of Hopkins in his book *Writers to Read*, pp. 119-20)

125-26: sentimentalism is dangerous; sin is a part of Christmas; tyranny is dead

127-28: biblical antithesis, Caesar Augustus, Virgil, blasphemy, clash of kings, Luke's ironic juxtaposition (Caesar basically fulfilled prophecy by *asking* Jesus' parents to come to Bethlehem and deliver a rival emperor)

128-29: biblical narrative doesn't mention a stable; Justin Martyr mentions a cave

130: don't be more penitential than the Old Testament saints

131: N.T. Wright on how Ratzinger and Rahner have walked back the doctrine of Purgatory

132: Christians longing for more liturgy should do so both joyfully and warily, remembering the abuses that stemmed from the doctrines of Purgatory and Penance; Jesus' work on the cross does not need supplementation

134-35: Isaiah's prophecy about a virgin conceiving came true in his own day as a sign to King Ahaz; it's possible that in fulfillment of the typology that Herod died before Jesus was weaned

136: distinguishing vs. separating

137: angels in hyperdrive

138: magistrates should "acknowledge that Christ rules over [them]"; three options in response to the antithesis (affirm, blur/deny, misplace)

139: Caesar pulled the lever to end his own rule

141: the Son of God is also an "Everlasting Father" (Isaiah)

142: the kingdom of God continually increases

144: words for *virgin*

146: it's likely that the wise men read Balaam's prophecy (Numbers 24), recorded outside Hebrew Scripture

146-48: modernist cosmology resists thinking about the star in certain ways

148: kingdom after kingdom fell, and then Caesar made that decree...

149: Jesus conquers by dying, not by killing; He also taxes differently than Caesar

150: we have secret sympathies with Martha; the two sisters (works and grace) need to be made into one woman

Joshua says

Good basic thinking on the theology and practice around Christmas. I wouldn't stop here, but it's a great place to start.

Lea Lea says

Another great one from Douglas Wilson.

He argues FOR the giving of gifts and extravagance, and teaches us just how joyful Christmas really is!

Peter N. says

The best part of the book is the joy that comes through. Too many of us do not approach this holiday with joy we should. There is always an earthiness to Pastor Wilson's writing. It comes through in this book. He deals with concrete realities and uses good illustrations to help us find the gladness that Christ and the Christmas season is supposed to give us.

Jerry says

Really wish there were six stars. The bulk of this book consists of four essays working through the typical Christmas texts (in atypical and delightful ways), the political ramifications of Christmas (add Herod's soldiers to your manger scene), how to celebrate like a Puritan which is the opposite of what you think, and why the shopping baby shouldn't be chucked with the consumerism bathwater. The other and final part includes thirty brief Advent meditations. Christmas is wonderful and most of us can really use a book like this.

Ryan Watkins says

Wilson makes a lot of good observations and his witty writing is a joy to read. I found chapter three "Celebrating Christmas Like A Puritan" helpful in understanding the development of the church calendar and the continental reformed view on the matter. Since embracing confessional reformed theology my view of the Lord's Day and Christmas have had an inverse correlation. I'm personally under the conviction that Christians should have a much higher view of Sunday than Christmas but still think Christians have the liberty to celebrate the incarnation on December 25th if they do so choose.

Katherine says

Family action item: increase our joyful(!) celebration of Easter in some tangible ways.

Steve Hemmeke says

Christmas is over for most. Here's a post mortem.

Christmas goes beyond sentiment. Jesus entered a real world of sheep manure in a cave. He humbled himself to exalt men. Tinsel and the bells and cards are all fine and dandy as long as we remember and root them in the joy that flows from Christ's humiliation for us.

Christmas is political. A king came to us whom we must accept or reject. Herod rejected Him. So do many earthly kings today and they will regret it one day. The public square is involved in Christmas. Herod and all Jerusalem had reason to be troubled as long as they grasped power for themselves. But rulers and wisemen who bow to Him and give instead of take are joyful and blessed.

Christmas is about stuff. God the Son became a physical creature to redeem the physical world. He is on a salvage operation to restore His kingdom. If you have to have your stuff then it has to go (a la Rich young ruler). Otherwise Christ means for you to have it, enjoy it and use it to serve others. Stuff and buying stuff is not the enemy. Idolizing it is. But we need stuff (a physical world) to express love.

These are the main themes and they are right on target. The writing and flow seem uneven throughout the book as I suspect this is a patchwork of blog posts past.

Jake McAtee says

Proofed the audio of this for a release in the next week at Canon. Still great.

1st review: My favorite Christmas Read. Christmas is v Post-Millennial.

Michael Cunningham says

I love celebrating Christmas. I also love reading Doug Wilson. So I quite enjoyed this book! It is a great encouragement to celebrate Christmas for God's glory.

Becky Pliego says

I just finished reading the first "four lessons" in the book, and now we are enjoying reading the Daily Meditations for Advent around the family table every night. And even though we still have a few weeks of Advent devotions to read, I can already recommend this book to you.

This book is like no other. Really, where else have you read about the "Theology of Christmas Gifts"?

Go grab a copy soon! This is the season to be Merry!

Read again in 2014 and 2015.
