

R. Albert Mohler Jr.

RECAPTURING

the

GLO^{RY}

of

CHRISTMAS

A 25-Day Advent Devotional

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To my wonderful Mary,
with whom I have shared more than
forty sweet Christmases, and our son Christopher,
and to our daughter, Katie, now with her husband Riley
and
their precious children Benjamin, Henry, and Mary
Margaret,
with whom every celebration of the birth of Christ
is so joyous and wonderful.
Thank you for making every day of my life so sweet.

And to Ann Mohler, my sweet Aunt Ann, the last of
that great generation in my family who surrounded
me with love and remains so incredibly
encouraging and faithful.

From the depth of my heart
Merry Christmas



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Recapturing the Glory of Christmas

Christmas comes year after year. Even in our secularized, post-Christian culture, our society cannot escape Christmas. This season only exists because God in Christ came into the world to save sinners. Yet believers and nonbelievers alike celebrate it every year, spending enormous amounts of time, money, and energy on one day in the month of December. If you drive down your neighborhood street on a December night, you will likely find numerous homes decorated with lights and sparkling trees displayed in front of windows. But how many of your neighbors understand what they celebrate? We are told “Merry Christmas” as we bustle about from store to store, but does the barista or checkout clerk grasp the meaning of the word *Christmas* and why we should be merry about it? Even more perplexing is this: How many *Christians* comprehend the incalculable glory of this season?

Our secularized society can subtly coax Christians away from biblical fidelity on any number of issues. Indeed,

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the apostle Paul's command and warning in Romans 12:2 shows how easily surrounding customs—even pagan ones—could derail Christian commitment to God: “Do not be conformed to this age,” he wrote, “but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.” Christians, in other words, will conform their hearts and minds toward either godliness or ungodliness, and this includes a danger that we let the Christmas season pass us by without seeing and savoring the truths God has revealed to us.

The modern age is seductive, and even Christians are tempted to miss the imperishable glory of Christmas as we celebrate the birth of our own Savior. In short, our culture has scandalized Christmas. Materialism has replaced the Messiah, and Santa has eclipsed the Savior. Perfectly wrapped presents placed under evergreens rob the affections of men and women, young and old, from something far more spectacular and joyful. We have commercialized Christmas, and Christians can, lamentably, capitulate to the downward spiral of confusion that distorts the Christmas message.

The Bible, however, leaves no room for confusion. God's infallible, inerrant Word will not allow us to trade the glory of the incomparable God for the glory of created things. Indeed, regarding Christmas, the Scriptures summon the world to come and behold a wonderous, glorious

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display of God's immeasurable love for the world. God revealed in his Word the Advent of his beloved Son—the incarnation of God in Christ who had come to dwell among us. This Immanuel, “God with us” (Matt. 1:23 *esv*), broke into a sinful world—lost in dark depravity—that he might cast the saving light of redemption. This is the glory of Christmas.

The prophet Isaiah wrote, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness” (Isa. 9:2). Christmas reminds us that light has come and the darkness has been overcome. Those words from Isaiah declare the coming Prince of Peace and the light and life he would bring. Indeed, the Savior has come. Christmas marks the Advent of God's only Son, who would come to dispel the darkness, put death to death, and secure everlasting life for the people of God. Christmas, then, marks not only the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy but the dawn of a new age. Christmas is far more than a season of sleigh bells and smiling children. It is the crux of all history. It is the inbreaking of the light into darkness. It is the birth of the Lord and Savior of the world. History is cut in two, and sinners are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

Light has always been central to the Christmas season. Families string lights around trees, and fathers bravely ascend ladders to string lights around the perimeter of

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the house, illuminating their homes with displays of brilliance and color. The warm glow of lighted candles dispels the darkness. Christmas bears a sense of radiance as a season of light. While the lights of the modern Christmas season might serve as mere decoration, the prophet Isaiah understood light as a mark of divine revelation. The light of Christmas represents God's glorious revelation, when a young woman named Mary gave birth to the Light of the world.

Indeed, in John's Gospel, the apostle spoke of Jesus Christ as the true light from God which would enlighten every man. John declared, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:4-5). The birth of Jesus Christ brought the unconquerable light of divine majesty. When the eternal Son of God humbled himself by taking the form of a servant, he came with a salvific light that lifted the veil of the kingdom of darkness.

The need of this Light points to the harrowing reality of the darkness. All humanity lives under the black shadow of sin and shame. The darkness which blanketed the world inhibited everyone from seeing and knowing God. Darkness befell the creation all the way back in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve, through a display of high treason, disobeyed God and subsequently plunged the creation and the cosmos under the shadow of sin. God, however, promised

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a day of redemption. Indeed, in Genesis 3, God cursed the serpent, pronouncing, “I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen. 3:15). From that day forward, God continually spoke of a day when the curse would be reversed, when the light would break through the darkness, when redemption would rescue people from their sin.

That is what happened at Jesus’s birth. The birth of Christ marked the culmination of all God’s promises. God incarnate had come as “the true light that gives light to everyone” (John 1:9). *This* marks the glory of Christmas.

Our culture has surrendered the everlasting Light and incarnation for a Christmas season emptied of the radiance of the glory of God; and if we are not careful, Christians can forget Paul’s instructions and let ourselves be conformed to this world. It is incumbent on God’s people to hasten toward repentance, to recapture the splendor of this season, and to reinvigorate our affections with the glorious truths of Advent. The refrain of that Christian hymn, “O Come Let Us Adore Him,” should serve as the anthem for all believers in this season. God, by his grace, has cast his glorious light and saved his people from the darkness of their sin. The veil is lifted; the darkness has receded because the Light has come.

Recapturing the Glory of Christmas

Christmas means worship and adoration, and I intend this Advent devotional as a call to worship and praise. Each day will mine the depths of the Bible and its teachings about Advent and Christmas. We will dwell on all the theological riches God has gifted to his people through Christmas. Indeed, Christmas beckons the world to come and adore the Savior King: the King exulted by the angels; the King who took on flesh; the King who deserves *all* glory, *all* honor, and *all* praise.

O come let us adore him, Christ, the Lord.

Christmas should spark worship and adoration,

and R. Albert Mohler Jr. offers a devotional that mines the theological riches God has gifted to His people. *Recapturing the Glory of Christmas* is a call to worship and praise, from the reality of a babe born in Bethlehem to the awe of the Creator of the universe. Indeed, Christmas beckons the world to come and adore the Savior King!

DR. R. ALBERT MOHLER JR. serves as president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is married to Mary, and they have two children and three grandchildren.

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