

Frederick William Dame

THE MOST MAGNIFICENT GIFT



For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

- St. Luke 2:11

Children always ask their parents questions about Christmas. They revolve around the following subject matter and are posed in query form similar to the following:

Is it Christmas...

if all around the lights are lit and blinking?

if grandfather is secretly hobbying in his workshop?

if people form crowds at Christmas markets?

if the pantry and the fridge are full of food and goodies to eat?

if the smell of nuts, baked Christmas goods, and wine punch are in the air?

if you are thinking about what presents you can give?

if the family decides to visit the grandparents over the holidays?

If children asleep waiting for Santa Claus to come down the chimney?

if everyone helps decorate the Christmas tree?

if the children play in the new-fallen snow?

if children see a reindeer with a red nose?

if the family watches Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* on television?

if the children write a letter to Santa Claus?

if a little girl plays the role of Maria in the local church Christmas play and her brother is also in the play and forgets his lines?

if the church choir sings Christmas carols outside your house?

if you learn a poem to recite on Christmas Eve while the family is gathered in front of the Christmas tree?

if peaceful and tolerant Muslims say they are insulted when churches, businesses, and towns display manger scenes?

if churches, businesses, and towns don't display manger scenes because they don't want peaceful and tolerant Muslims to be insulted?

Yes, it is Christmas. But Christmas is also ...

when we rally around the cry: MAKE CHRISTMAS GREAT AGAIN!

when you get homesick even when you are at home.

when you see Baby Jesus in the manger.

when you see His being in every aspect of Nature.

when Jesus Christ lights up your world to overcome the darkness that threatens you.

when the Light of the World remains with you until Christmas next year.

when you understand that only Jesus Christ is the way to God the Father in heavenly paradise.

when you assist others in experiencing the Joy that is Christ.

when you give thanks for His love and mercy.

when you realize Jesus Christ is a glorious reality.

when you pay witness to His presence and make music to honor Him.

when you understand God's magnificent gift.

Then it is Christmas!

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, ... And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found *him*, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

- St. Matthew 2:1,8

Have you ever asked yourself why people read St. Luke, Chapter 2 and consider the rendition we know as the Gospel of Luke as the official Christmas story and prefer it instead of the report of Christ's birth in the first two chapters of St. Matthew? One answer could be the consideration that the description in St. Matthew does not fit into our conception of Christmas. In St. Matthew, the evil King, Herod the Great (74/73 BC-4BC, reigned as Roman client King of Judea from 37-4 BC) appears immediately with the ruse that he wants to worship Jesus. Yet, we all know that he was responsible for the edict *Massacre of the Innocents* at the time of Christ's birth to avoid the loss of his kingship because he feared the arrival of a new-born king of the Jews.

The manger scene is not present in the Gospel according to St. Matthew. There is no choir of angels in St. Matthew either. An angel appears to convince Joseph not to renounce the marriage contract with Maria. In place of the shepherds there are astronomers coming from the Orient.

There is no idyllic report in St. Matthew. On the contrary, St. Matthew describes the murder of children in Bethlehem. Yet, together, St. Luke and St. Matthew present a reliable description of the magnificent Christmas gift. In romanticized paintings, we receive the impression that the atmosphere of Christ's birth is pastoral. St. Matthew shows us that Christ's birth is more than this. Christmas is Jesus Christ being born into this world. Whereas St. Luke presents us with the bucolic atmosphere of a stable, animals, a singing choir, and shepherds, St. Matthew describes the magnificent gift in the framework of social problems, murder, and injustice. Such an atmosphere was the hard reality of life in the days of King Herod and it is still the hard reality of life in today's world. Accepting Jesus Christ as the savior means that He is ever present in our lives. In this sense, every day is Christmas. This is the core meaning of Christmas that comes to us with the most magnificent gift: Christ's birth.



Adoration of the Shepherds (c. 1650) by Bartolome Esteban Murillo (1617-1682).

Source: <http://www.catholichousehold.com/birth-of-jesus-in-art-20-paintings-of-the-nativity/> and [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Adoraci%C3%B3n_de_los_pastores_\(Murillo\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Adoraci%C3%B3n_de_los_pastores_(Murillo).jpg) The work is in the public domain.



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