

# “CHRISTmas Card Theology”

Isaiah 9:2-7 <sup>1</sup>

Well, we’re nearly there. About sixty hours to go! And, despite all the flurry and hurry, these last days of Advent tend to awaken feelings of awe and wonder, warmth and joy, within us.

These are days in which we emphasize family relationships and other special friendships, and one of the ways in which we celebrate those special relationships is through the sending of Christmas cards. Sometimes we send a once-a-year update letter to friends far and near, friends of the past and of the present with whom we hope to continue to share love into the future.

I am somewhat a student of Christmas cards. I pay attention to what they say and what they don’t say, to observe what they affirm and encourage, and on what basis. For example, Christmas cards frequently contain printed messages such as this “baker’s dozen”:

A joyous Christmas and a New Year full of Happiness!

Best Wishes and Warmest Thoughts!

Happy Holidays! May this be the start of a bright and wonderful New Year!

May the Joy and Peace of Christmas be with you today and always!

May the Miracle and Magic of Christmas fill your Heart with Joy!

May you be blessed with Peace and Joy in this Season blessed with Hope!

Merry & Bright: let the Light of the Christmas Season Shine in your Heart.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Merry Christmas! Wishing you a Bright and Beautiful Holiday

Peace to you this Christmas and always.

To wish you all the Joys of Christmas!

Wishing you all the Special Joys of this Christmas Season

Wishing you Peace and Joy this Season and all through the New Year.

I expect that you’ve received bunches of cards similar to these, but you may not have received one like this next one. Pastor Fleming Rutledge commented that “Despite the terror and suffering all around us, we demand soft-focused peace-and-joy images for our Christmas cards.

“The most unforgettable Christmas card my husband and I ever received was designed by the Catholic Interracial Council of the Twin Cities in the late 1960s. On the front was a verse from the *Benedictus* on a red background: “*The day shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death*” (Luke 1:78-79).

“On the inside was a black-and-white photograph of a small, ragged boy sitting forlornly in the bleak, littered courtyard of a slum dwelling. The Interracial Council continued to produce cards in this vein for a year or two more, and then gave into consumer realities, offering cards with smiling black-and-white children holding hands in a circle.”<sup>2</sup>

That’s pretty heavy, but it is also closer to the real meaning of Jesus’ arrival among us, is it not? Here’s one that gets closer to the real Good News:

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on December 22, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), pp. 387-388.

'Twas the night before Christmas when all through the earth,  
 no crowds were expecting that one humble birth  
 could set into motion a marvelous plan:  
 our Savior, God with us, the true hope of man.  
 Celebrating Jesus, the miracle gift of Christmas.  
 “I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly”  
 (John 10:10).

Here are a few more:

Joy to the world!  
 Rejoice in the Miracle of Christmas and take comfort in His Peace and Grace.  
 Wishing you a blessed Christmas and a New Year full of Promise!

May the Good News of Great Joy fill your Heart and Home  
 with Peace, Hope, and the Love of Christ this season and in the year ahead.

Celebrating the glorious birth of Jesus and wishing you a Christmas  
 filled with His Goodness.

Wishing you all the Christmas Blessings Christ was born to bring.

Well, that's all pretty nice. Such thoughts leave a warm fuzzy feeling with us. And, while warm fuzzies are pleasant, I find myself wondering if there is any real basis for these warm feelings. Are our Christmas cards merely examples of magical thinking? Are they a modern-day version of the old *Candyman* song?<sup>3</sup>

“Who can take tomorrow, dip it in a dream, separate the sorrow and collect up all the cream? The Candyman! The Candyman makes everything he bakes, satisfying and delicious! Talk about your childhood wishes – you can even eat the dishes!”

The song is nice, but life isn't really like that, and in the long run, reality continues to be a far more rewarding place to live than fantasy. So, when I read Christmas cards, I continue to wonder:

Why *should* the holidays be happy?

What *are* the joys of Christmas?

What is there about Christmas that is *peaceful*?

Is there really a *miracle* at Christmas or of Christmas?

Is there really any reason to hope for a *wonderful* New Year?

All these questions have positive answers. I know that and you know that. The Reason for the Season is not to be found in Madison Avenue advertising spin or in Hallmark niceties. The Reason for the Season is Jesus! Jesus was and is God's unimaginable Gift sent down from heaven for me – for you!

The birth we celebrate at CHRISTmas is God's unspeakable Gift, a Gift planned from eternity: “*But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son born of a woman . . . and he was given the name, Jesus—the Lord is salvation—because he would save his people from their sins*” (Galatians 4:4; Matthew 1:21).

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Candy\\_Man](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Candy_Man)

Our problem during CHRISTmas—and at every other time—is that many of our friends and neighbors don't know this Good News in any real way! And we, as followers of Jesus, God's children, as people who once walked in darkness . . . we are able to share a just a bit of this Good News with the persons in the circles of our lives by means of the cards we send to commemorate Jesus' birth. For some, the card they receive from you or from me at CHRISTmas may be one of the only notes they receive all year that can give them real reason to Hope, to discover Joy, to experience Peace.

And so, though the days are growing short, I encourage you to send more than warm, fuzzy cards that feel good for a moment and then are gone. Send real Hope, real Joy, real Power, real Peace – send them *Jesus*.

Jesus is Hope – because every one of God's promises is fulfilled in Him.

Jesus is Love – because He gave Himself for us without reservation.

Jesus is Joy – because in Him is found abundant Life.

Jesus is Peace – because all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him!

May I share with you some suggestions for your own ministry of card sending? Sending CHRISTmas cards doesn't have to be merely an expensive ritual.<sup>4</sup> Sending CHRISTmas cards can become a joyful, caring giving of yourself and sharing Jesus' love. Here are some card texts that head in that direction:

Christmas is Jesus. Jesus is Love. He came to pay a debt He didn't owe, because we owed a debt we couldn't pay. May this season be a special reminder of how much you are loved!

Christmas means we never have to wonder how much God loves us! *"This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him!"* (1 John 4:9).

He became what we are so we could become what He is! *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God!"* (1 Corinthians 5:21).

The light that shattered the darkness has put together the broken pieces of our hearts. *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid"* (John 14:27).

The wonder of Christmas is that the God who dwelt among us, can now live within us! *"They will call him Immanuel, which means, God with us!"* (Matthew 1:23).

Christmas is a time when I see just how much God loves me. But Christmas shows me much more, too, for I also see God's love for you! Isn't it wonderful to know we're loved!?

Oh, how He loves you! Oh, how He loves me! Oh, how He loves you and me! May Christmas bring you Time to remember God's Gifts; Joy in knowing God's Son; and Life Abundant in God's Love!

Those are all good, especially when accompanied by a personal word of encouragement; but I think my favorite CHRISTmas card of all time was one that picked up the theme of our text concerning the names of Jesus (Isaiah 9:6) and took the reader on a journey through the entire Bible. The card was really an imitation of "Aaron Jeoffrey's" song, "HE IS." Come with me on that Journey for a couple of minutes:

In Genesis, He's the Breath of Life,  
In Exodus, the Passover Lamb.

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<sup>4</sup> And of course, the very best cards of all are cards that we have made ourselves.

In Leviticus, He's our High Priest,  
 In Numbers, the Fire by Night.  
 In Deuteronomy, He's Moses' Voice,

In Joshua, He's Salvation's Choice.  
 In Judges, He's Law-Giver,  
 In Ruth, Kinsman-Redeemer.  
 In Samuel, Our Trusted Prophet,  
 In Kings and Chronicles, Our Sovereign.

In Ezra, True and Faithful Scribe,  
 In Nehemiah, Rebuilder of Broken Walls and Lives.  
 In Esther, He's Mordecai's Courage.  
 In Job, He's Timeless Redeemer.

In Psalms, He's Our Morning Song.  
 In Proverbs, He's Wisdom's Cry,  
 In Ecclesiastes, Our Time and Season;  
 In the Song of Songs, He's the Lover's Dream.

He is [in the Past], He Is [in the Present], HE IS [Our Risen Lord & Coming King]!

In Isaiah, He's Prince of Peace,  
 In Jeremiah, The Weeping Prophet.  
 In Lamentations, The Cry for Israel,  
 In Ezekiel, He's the Call from Sin;

In Daniel, He's the Stranger in the Fire.  
 In Hosea, He's Forever Faithful,  
 In Joel, He's the Spirit's Power.  
 In Amos, He's the Arms That Carry Us,  
 In Obadiah, He's the Lord our Savior.

In Jonah, He's The Great Missionary,  
 In Micah, The Promise of Our Peace.  
 In Nahum, He's Our Strength and Shield,  
 In Habakkuk and Zephaniah, He's A Call to Revival.

In Haggai, He Restores a Lost Heritage;  
 In Zechariah, He's Our Fountain.  
 In Malachi, He's the Son of Righteousness with Healing in His Wings.

### **He is, He Is, HE IS!**

In Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, He's God and Man, Messiah.  
 In Acts, He's Fire from Heaven.  
 In Romans, He's the Grace of God,  
 In Corinthians, He's the Power of Love.

In Galatians, He's Freedom from the Curse of Sin.  
 In Ephesians, He's Our Glorious Treasure,  
 In Philippians, The Servant's Heart.  
 In Colossians, He's the Glorious Trinity,  
 In Thessalonians, Our Coming King!

In Timothy, Titus, and Philemon He's Our Faithful Pastor,  
 In Hebrews, The Everlasting Covenant.  
 In James, He's The One Who Heals the Sick.  
 In Peter, He's Our Shepherd;  
 In John and Jude, He's the Lover Coming for His Bride.  
 In Revelation, He's King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

**He is, He Is, HE IS!**

The Prince of Peace,  
 The Son of Man,  
 The Lamb of God,  
 The great I AM!

He's the Alpha and Omega,  
 Our God and our Savior,  
 He is Jesus Christ the Lord.  
 And when time is no more,

**He is, He Is, HE IS!** <sup>5</sup>

“Jesus. The mere mention of His name can calm the storm, heal the broken, raise the dead. At the name of Jesus, I've seen sin hardened men melted, derelicts transformed, the light of hope put back into the eyes of a hopeless child . . . .

“At the name of Jesus, hatred and bitterness turn to love and forgiveness, arguments cease.

“I've heard a mother softly breathe His name at the bedside of a child delirious from fever, and I watched that little body grow quiet and the fevered brow grow cool.

“I've sat beside a dying saint, her body racked with pain, who in those final fleeting seconds summoned her last ounce of ebbing strength to whisper Earth's sweetest name – Jesus, Jesus, *Jesus*. . . .

“Emperors have tried to destroy it; philosophies have tried to stamp it out. Tyrants have tried to wash it from the face of the earth with the very blood of those who claimed it. Yet still it stands.

“And there shall be that Final Day when every voice that has ever uttered a sound – every voice of Adam's race shall rise in one great mighty chorus to proclaim the name of Jesus – for in that day *every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!*”

“It was not mere chance that caused the angel one night long ago to say to a virgin maiden, ‘his name shall be called Jesus.’ Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. You know, there is *something about that Name* . . . .<sup>6</sup>

Oh, my friends, His name is Wonderful. His name is True. And all that He is, He is for you! And you don't have to wait until CHRISTmas to know Him. You don't have to wait until CHRISTmas to receive this Gift. You don't have to wait even one more moment!

If you are tired of the load of your sin, let Jesus come into your heart.

<sup>5</sup> Lyrics by Jeffrey Benward and Jeff Silvey, © Star Song, 1994. <http://www.cmo.com/cmo/cmo/starsong/aj/aj.htm>; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aaron\\_Jeffrey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aaron_Jeffrey)

<sup>6</sup> Bill and Gloria Gaither, “There's Something About that Name” (1970).

If you desire a new life to begin, let Jesus come into your heart.

If there's a tempest your voice cannot still,

If there's a void that this world cannot fill, let Jesus come into your heart.

If 'tis for purity now that you sigh, fountains for cleansing are flowing nearby:

Let Jesus come into your heart!

Just now, your doubting's give o'er. Just now, reject Him no more.

Just now, throw open the door, let Jesus come into your heart.