



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©  
\* Knights of Malta \*

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## Chancellor's Update

### The State of Christmas in 2010

During the Twentieth Century Christmas was celebrated with exuberance. Everyone understood the religious part of the feast: who, what and why. The culture added to it music, both religious and secular, art, dramas, literature, and the custom of giving gifts in memory of the three wise men, who brought gold, frankincense and myrrh to the Christ Child. Gift giving was done in a personal way by thoughtful selection for the recipient and often personally by making or crafting the gift. Yet, within the nostalgia and joy of the holiday, everyone knew that the religious sentiment was the reason for the holiday.

At some time after the middle of the twentieth century slowly an erosion of the religious aspect began to take place. Where Christmas festivities used to occur from early December until New Year's Day, the season was abruptly shortened to the day after Christmas, which is also recognized as a busy day for returning or exchanging gifts at stores. Culturally a trend in public schools to eliminate Christmas carols in the holiday or winter concert occurred more frequently. Commercialism began to play a bigger role as emphasis was placed on deep discounts and special discount days for buying gifts. The news media highlighted the crowds of people lining up outside stores before daybreak to be the first customers to purchase the bargains. In the past few years the ultimate Christmas gift has become a luxury automobile!

Sadly this erosion of the religious sense of Christmas is reminiscent of the first Christmas as described by Saint John the Apostle in the first chapter of his Gospel. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing that has been made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness grasped it not...It was the true light that enlightens every man who comes into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.* (John 1, 1-5, 9-11)

As disappointing as this sounds, Saint Paul provides a scarier description of today's world as the Christmas season occurs again. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those men who in wickedness hold back the truth of God, seeing that what may be known about God is manifest to them. For God has manifested it to them. For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes are clearly seen – his everlasting power also and divinity - being understood through the things that are made. And so they are without excuse, seeing that, although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give thanks, but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless minds have been darkened. For while professing to be wise, they have become fools, and they have changed the glory of the incorruptible God*

*for an image made like to corruptible man and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things.*

*Therefore God has given them up in the lustful desires of their heart to uncleanness, so that they dishonour their own bodies among themselves - they who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed forever, amen.*

*For this cause God has given them up to shameful lusts; for their women have exchanged the natural use for that which is against nature, and in like manner the men also, having abandoned the natural use of the woman, have burned in their lusts one towards another, men with men doing shameless things and receiving in themselves the fitting recompense of their perversity. And as they have resolved against the possessing the knowledge of God, God has given them up to a reprobate sense, so that they do what is not fitting, being filled with all iniquity, malice, immorality, avarice, wickedness; being full of envy, murder, contention, deceit, malignity; being whisperers, detractors, hateful to God, irreverent, proud, haughty, plotters of evil; disobedient to parents, foolish, dissolute, without affection, without fidelity, without mercy. Although they have known the ordinance of God, they have not understood that those who practice such things are deserving of death. And not only do they do these things, but they applaud others doing them.* (Romans 1,18-32)

How then are we to react to Christmas in view of Saint Paul's almost prophetic vision of today's pagan world? A popular saint, beloved by both Eastern and Western Churches, provides an example for us. Descended from the Canaanites, Christopher, being of strong stature, sought to serve and obey the greatest prince on the earth. Having served several princes, he finally learned of Christ and sought the advice of a hermit as to how to serve Christ. The hermit told him to carry people across a raging river safely to the other side. One night after successfully carrying a child, whose weight became heavier and heavier, the child said to him, "Christopher, thou hast not only borne the whole world upon thee, but thou hast borne Him that created and made the whole world, upon thy shoulders. I am Jesus Christ, the King, whom thou servest in this work. And because thou know what I say to be the truth, set thy staff and tomorrow it will bear flowers and fruit." (Bulter's Lives of the Saints, P.J. Kennedy & Sons, New York, 1963) Seeing the flowers and fruit, Christopher then went to a nearby city where he comforted Christians about to be martyred and converted others to Christ.

When Jesus was questioned by Pilate before His death, He admitted that He was a King and said, *This is why I was born, and why I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth.* (John 18: 37) **To celebrate Christmas in 2010 let us resolve to be like Christopher, a Christ-bearer. Let us bear Christ in our lives, words, and actions and share the truth of Christ with our neighbors.**

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