

THE CHRIST OF CHRISTMAS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. RUSSELL) for 30 minutes.

Mr. RUSSELL. Mr. Speaker, we are told it is the most wonderful time of the year: Christmas. As a Nation, we have celebrated it with family, with breaks from work, and with a bit of pomp in our Nation's Capital. But why? It has not always been the case.

When Americans began to settle in the Colonies, they came with varied religious backgrounds. To the Pilgrims and Puritans, the idea of celebrating a holy day associated with the churches that had persecuted them in Europe was repulsive. But to those high churches long established—such as Anglican, Episcopal, and Catholic—Christmas was observed widespread.

In the fabric of our Nation, the low church settlers dwelt more in New England, where Christmas was not observed, and the high church settlers were more in the South, where it was. Still, it was not until 1837, when Louisiana made Christmas a State holiday, that Christmas was officially recognized.

In time, more States began official recognition. In 1870, Christmas became a national holiday. Its lack of recognition was not for a lack of understanding for the importance of the birth of Christ. Rather, it was out of respect to the various Christian beliefs making up our national fabric.

It was not until 1889 that a Christmas tree adorned the White House, and the first official Christmas tree lighting ceremony did not occur until 1923, under President Calvin Coolidge. The first White House Christmas card did not appear until 1953, under President Dwight Eisenhower.

Still, our Nation and our leaders have always made great effort to express the importance of the birth of Christ. Here is what a few of nearly all of our Presidents have said about the birth of Christ:

Calvin Coolidge: "For many generations, Christmas has been joyously observed . . . because on that day was born one who grew to be the only perfect man and became the Savior of the world. No other influence in human experience has compared with the birth and life of Christ."

Franklin Roosevelt: "Here, at home, we will celebrate this Christmas Day in our traditional American way—because of its deep spiritual meaning to us; because the teachings of Christ are fundamental in our lives; and because we want our youngest generation to grow up knowing the significance of this tradition and the story of the coming of the immortal Prince of Peace and Good Will. But, in perhaps every home in the United States, sad and anxious thoughts will be continually with the millions of our loved ones who are suffering hardships and misery, and who are risking their very lives to preserve

for us and for all mankind the fruits of His teachings and the foundations of civilization itself."

Harry Truman: "In love, which is the very essence of the message of the Prince of Peace, the world would find a solution for all its ills. I do not believe there is one problem in this country or in the world today which could not be settled if approached through the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. . . .

"In the stillness of the eve of the Nativity when the hopes and mankind hang on the peace that was offered to the world 19 centuries ago, it is but natural, while we survey our destiny, that we give thought also to our past to some of the things which have gone into the making of our Nation. . . .

"In this day, whether it be far or near, the kingdoms of this world shall become, indeed, the kingdom of God, and He will reign forever and ever, Lord of Lords and King of Kings. . . .

"Since returning home, I have been reading again in our family Bible some of the passages which foretold this night. . . . We miss the spirit of Christmas if we consider the incarnation as an indistinct and doubtful, far-off event unrelated to our present problems. We miss the purport of Christ's birth if we do not accept it as a living link which joins us together in the spirit as children of the ever-living and true God. In love alone—the love of God and the love of man—will be found the solution of all the ills which afflict the world today."

Lyndon Johnson: "We were taught by Him whose birth we commemorate that after death, there is life. . . . In these last 200 years, we have guided the building of our Nation and our society by those principles and precepts brought to Earth nearly 2,000 years ago on that first Christmas.

"In a few days, we shall all celebrate the birth of His Holiness on Earth. . . . We shall acknowledge the kingdom of a child in a world of men. That child, we should remember, grew into manhood Himself, preached and moved men in many walks of life, and died in agony. But His death, so the Christian faith tells us, was not the end. For Him, and for millions of men and women ever since, it marked a time of triumph, when the spirit of life triumphed over death."

□ 1745

Gerald Ford: "In our 200 years, we Americans have always honored the spiritual testament of 2,000 years ago. We embrace the spirit of the Prince of Peace so that we might find peace in our own hearts and in our own land, and hopefully in the world as well."

Ronald Reagan: "The Nativity story of nearly 20 centuries ago is known by all faiths as a hymn to the brotherhood of man. For Christians, it is the fulfillment of age-old prophecies and the reaffirmation of God's great love for all of us. Through a generous Heavenly Father's gift of His Son, hope and com-

passion entered a world weary with fear and despair and changed it for all time."

Reagan continues. " . . . I have always believed that the message of Jesus is one of hope and joy. I know that there are those who recognize Christmas Day as the birthday of a great and good man, a wise teacher who gave us principles to live by. And then there are others of us who believe that He was the Son of God, that He was Divine. If we live our lives for truth, for love, and for God, we need never be afraid."

George H.W. Bush put it this way: "At Christmas, we, too, rejoice in the mystery of God's love for us—love revealed through the gift of Christ's birth. Born into a family of a young carpenter and his wife, in a stable shared by beasts of the field, our Savior came to live among ordinary men. Yet, in time, the miraculous nature of this simple event became clear. Christ's birth changed the course of history, bringing the light of hope to a world dwelling in the darkness of sin and death.

Today, nearly 2,000 years later, the shining promise of that first Christmas continues to give our lives a sense of peace and purpose. Our words and deeds, when guided by the example of Christ's life, can help others share in the joy of man's Redemption."

Bill Clinton: "The Christmas story is dear and familiar to us all—shepherds and angels, Wise Men and King Herod, Mary and Joseph, and, at the heart of it all, a Child. This Child was born into poverty in a city too crowded to offer Him shelter. He was sent to a region whose people had endured suffering, tyranny, and exile. And yet, this Child brought with Him riches so great that they continue to sustain the human spirit 2,000 years later: the assurance of God's love and presence in our lives and the promise of salvation."

Barack Obama: "More than 2,000 years ago, a child was born to two faithful travelers who could find rest only in a stable, among the cattle and the sheep. But this was not just any child. Christ's birth made the angels rejoice and attracted shepherds and kings from afar. He was a manifestation of God's love for us."

Even with all of their flaws, the political and party tensions, the times of national prosperity and crisis, our Presidents have been consistent in expressing publicly their belief on why Christ's birth matters. Bold Presidential statements: the only perfect man, Savior of the world, immortal Prince of Peace, Lord of Lords who will reign forever, His Holiness, Son of God, the light of Hope, God's love and presence in our lives, a manifestation of God's love for us.

No other human being has ever been accorded such accolade by our Presidents.

Indeed, even in our national Congress, well over 90 percent of elected officials associate themselves with the

Christian faith, and give similar words as to why Christ is important. But even all the words of Presidents and national leaders are not as important as the words of the man himself, whose birth created all the fuss. What did Christ claim about himself? We have bold statements by Jesus. Here are some pretty astounding ones:

John 6:35:

I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger.

John 8:12:

I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.

John 10:9–11:

I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and he will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

John 10:14–17:

I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice and there will be one flock, and one shepherd. Therefore, My Father loves Me because I lay down My life that I may take it again.

John 11:25:

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

John 14:6:

I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except by Me.

John 15:5–13:

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

Ponder this. These are bold claims. The bread of life, the light of the world, the door, the good shepherd, the resurrection, the way, the truth, the life, the vine. Only God could make such claims.

John 3:16 explains it this way:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

As human beings, we understand life because it is real to us. We live. We also understand complexity and order. We arrange our days, our clothes, our

homes, our diet. God has created us with a sense of order.

Created. One only has to look at the complexity of the human eye to see a design. One cannot fathom the circulatory system, and organs, and all the things that make up life and not see the hand of a master designer. One cannot look at the miracle of birth and not see a clear designed creation.

A junkyard full of car parts does not self-produce a new car in any amount of time any more than a jumble of proteins make life by accident.

We have been fearfully and wonderfully made. When one considers all of the world, how it works together, how it is perfectly placed in our solar system, we can see God's hand. With slight deviation of the Earth's axis, we would be dead.

With just a few more miles closer proximity to the Sun, we would be burned to death. With just a few more miles away from the Sun, we would freeze to death. We are not some accident, some purposeless blob of proteins that has no meaning. Nature speaks to God's hand. We see the grandeur of a designer all around us. The giver of life, God himself. But what of His Son, Jesus Christ? The Gospel of John explains:

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 nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it . . . That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

But why? Why did God's Son have to come into the world? When God created man and woman, He created us with choices. He gave simple instruction, but the choice was still Adam's to make. God did not create a robot. He created a human soul. Adam, the first man, chose to disobey God in that simple but uneasy choice. That choice gave us sin, the knowledge of good and evil.

Paul tells us in Romans 5:12 that because of this choice:

Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.

Sin perpetuated from that moment into all mankind. We see it ourselves if we take the time to consider it. We do not have to teach a child how to do wrong. It comes naturally, with the arching of the back, and the shouting of the word "no" as one of those first uttered.

As they mature, we labor to teach them to do what is right, guided by the

conscience that God has placed into us. Why do we feel guilty when we do things wrong? Romans tells us that God wrote that moral law into our hearts, a conscience. We were created with it. We are unique among living creatures in this way. We have a soul. We get a basic sense of God's moral right and wrong, yet, we fail that standard because of our sinful nature.

We fall short. We don't want to, but we do. We want to do what is right, but often, we make a different choice because of our sinful nature. Because of this failing to meet God's standard as He created us, we are unable, by ourselves, to fix it.

□ 1800

For a time, God communicated through His word and His prophets the need to make an atonement for our shortcomings, to cleanse our sins by sacrifices. Christ came to be the final and total sacrifice, erasing the sin in our lives, if we would receive it. Christ's birth was the fix. But how?

God, as the master programmer, if you think in modern vernacular, made us perfect. But we became corrupted with a sin virus that we voluntarily put in, ignoring the warnings. Once a perfect operating system, now we were destined to crash and eventually destroy ourselves. Jesus would become the fix, the patch, the update, to take away the sin virus and to make us whole again before God. But the fix would not be automatic. It has to be installed voluntarily in our hearts.

When Christ came into the world, He did not come by Adam's seed. Christ could not become the fix patched to a sinful, virus-corrupted operating system. Instead, God sent His Son to be born of a virgin—Mary—bypassing Adam's seed and the sinful nature that would come with it. Christ became flesh and dwelt among us. Fully God, yet becoming flesh, acquainted with all our frailties, but not corrupted through Adam's seed. If He could be obedient even unto death, ultimately embodied in a death on the cross, then His sacrifice would be available to all who would receive it as a new operating system for life.

Paul tells us in Romans 5:8 that God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:18 says:

Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act, the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.

That is why Christ came.

Isaiah 9:6:

For unto us a Child is born,

Unto us a Son is given;

And the government will be upon His shoulder,

And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end.

Christ tells us in John 3:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds shall be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.

Christ makes a direct appeal to us when He says: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

We come by making a simple, voluntary confession. Paul tells us in Romans 10:9:

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Harry Truman was correct when he said that in the love of God and the love of man will be found the solution to all the ills that afflict the world today. As much as we may wish to make our Nation strong, it will never happen without observing the truth in Proverbs 14:36:

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

In a world of strife, we could use some peace and encouragement. Christ said:

These things have I spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

In a world of hatred and suffering, we could use some love.

Jesus said: "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

In a world that tells us there is no hope, we can find it in Christ's commitment to us. Romans 5:3 through 6:

Tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint us, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly.

It started 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem.

Luke 2:11: "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."

As I close my service in Congress in what may perhaps be the last time I am privileged to speak in this august Chamber, I am grateful for the privilege to have done so and to the Oklahomans who made that possible. As I bring to a close more than three-and-one-half decades of military and public service to our Nation, I do it with a simple prayer that you may find the true meaning of Christmas: of hope, of salvation, and of celebration.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

IN HONOR OF DR. JAMES BILLINGTON, LIBRARIAN OF CONGRESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUSTOFF of Tennessee). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. FORTENBERRY) for 30 minutes.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Speaker, when I learned of the death of my very close friend, Dr. James Billington, the 13th Librarian of Congress, it hit me pretty hard. That was about 3 weeks ago. Dr. Billington's passion for the institution that he led for 28 years, his scholarly nature, and his gentlemanly demeanor were a tremendous inspiration to me and to so many Members of this body. I so admired him.

First, I want to extend my heartfelt condolences to Marjorie and the entire family. May God grant him peace.

During his 28 years at the Library of Congress, from 1987 to 2015, Dr. James Billington led the institution in a remarkable period of accomplishment. He once referred to the Library of Congress—I like to call it America's Library—as the largest, most wide-ranging collection of world-recorded knowledge ever assembled on our planet. He strove mightily to preserve the Nation's cultural patrimony and open the Library's collections to the American people and to people around the world.

Dr. Billington doubled the size of the Library's holdings to more than 160 million items, including books, manuscripts, newspapers, maps, music and film recordings, and prints and photographs.

Simultaneously, he also created a massive online library, digitizing materials so that the historic and cultural resources of the Library—being historic and cultural resources of the world, I might add—which were once only available to persons visiting the Library now would be instantaneously accessible to anyone anywhere in the world.

Mr. Speaker, Dr. Billington also looked to the future, but he never lost sight of our connectedness and the treasures of the past. During his tenure, he acquired the only copy of the 1507 Waldseemüller world map, which is known as America's birth certificate. He reconstructed Thomas Jefferson's original library for permanent display, and he obtained the papers of hundreds of great Americans ranging from jurist Thurgood Marshall to the songwriter Irving Berlin.

Mr. Speaker, I can't emphasize enough that he was a remarkable man—a Russian scholar with a brilliant mind. He accompanied 10 congressional delegations to Russia and the former Soviet Union. In 1988, he was invited to join President Reagan in traveling to the Soviet Summit in Moscow.

Mr. Speaker, I am a member of the House Appropriations Committee's Legislative Branch Subcommittee, and now I am its chairman. I got to know Dr. Billington from his regular appear-

ances before the Appropriations Committee to talk about the budget.

I often enjoyed the many events he held at the Library, the dialogues, the displays, and the exhibits he organized to engage Members of Congress in their Library.

Dr. Billington went out of his way to accommodate our needs. He once graciously hosted a small British delegation on my behalf that included a member of the royal family and a member of the House of Lords, both with an interest in Charles Carroll, one of the original signers of the Declaration of Independence. Despite the government shutdown at that moment a little while back, which forced us to move the forum into this building, the Capitol, Dr. Billington ensured that the Library's prized displays were in place and were on time, and that he was present to deliver welcoming remarks.

With his retirement, leaving the great institution he served faithfully for nearly three decades, Dr. Billington left an indelible imprint, having created programs and services that continue to benefit Congress and the American public.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, before he retired, in a conversation with his wife, Marjorie—and I knew his retirement was imminent—I told him: Dr. Billington, now it is time to write two books, the book that you want to write that is in your mind, and the book for the rest of us to read to make accessible your life story and your brilliant insights.

Long live his memory.

Again, Mr. Speaker, let me say, may God comfort Dr. Billington's wife, Marjorie, their four children, and their 12 grandchildren in their moment of grief.

I extend to them, as well as the entire Library of Congress community, my heartfelt condolences.

Jim Billington, well done, my friend. Well done, good and faithful public servant.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

ENROLLED BILLS SIGNED

Karen L. Haas, Clerk of the House, reported and found truly enrolled bills of the House of the following titles, which were thereupon signed by the Speaker:

H.R. 3342. An act to impose sanctions with respect to foreign persons that are responsible for using civilians as human shields, and for other purposes.

H.R. 4111. An act to amend the Small Business Investment Act of 1958 to improve the number of small business investment companies in underlicensed States, and for other purposes.

H.R. 4407. An act to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 3s101 Rockwell Street in Warrenville, Illinois, as the "Corporal Jeffrey Allen Williams Post Office Building."