

Where To Begin

Let's begin with Christmas. At least that is familiar. We have all been through it at many different stages of our lives. We remember Christmas as a child, as a teenager and perhaps as an adult. It has become an integral part of our lives and is a part of our culture including our religious culture.

However, that which we may be missing in all of this is that Christmas comes to us time and time again as a spiritual opportunity. Unfortunately, that dimension of Christmas often passes us by. Of course, we are probably quite religious about celebrating Christmas, but have we picked up on the clue that it is a tremendous spiritual opportunity?



Christmas is a spiritual opportunity simply because it celebrates God's coming to us in a different way and through a new and unfamiliar medium—the Divine taking up residency in human flesh. This incarnation of God's becoming human was what we call today in our world of technology—a true breakthrough. It was not the first time God ever approached the human, created in the image of the Holy One, but it was the first time for God to show up on the scene as one of us. That was new and different. Therein lies our spiritual opportunity.

By doing it the way it was done it revolutionized God's way of relating to us. It turned upside down the religious traditions, which had evolved over the ages. Religion and religious practice had become ways of remembering or celebrating the experience that people had had with God over the centuries. Religious tradition was an effort to preserve these phenomenal experiences with God and codify them into a fixed form in order to pass them down to the next generation.

Religious tradition became a treasury of such experiences. The effort to reenact them through traditional celebrations was always done with the hope that the fire of the original experience would be rekindled by the celebration. Unfortunately, seldom did it work that way because each generation needs its own experience with God, as does each person. Second hand experiences do not contain the same essence and life as the initial experience. We must each have a first-hand experience with God if the power of God's Holy Spirit is to work within us. That is what a spiritual journey is—a first-hand experience with God.

Spirituality is not about God; it is learning to live in intimacy with God. It is strictly relational in nature. While the profound yearning for God is universal, the experience of intimacy with God is personal and communal.

That is why Christmas is a likely place to begin our exploration of Spirituality because it celebrates God's crashing through all of the encrusted, burdensome and lifeless religious expressions and traditions that had developed and accumulated up until that time. Jesus' appearance on the scene presented an entirely new dimension to the human encounter with God. It was made clear that the relationship was therefore to be personal, communal, first hand and new.

The spiritual journey we embark upon will likely take us in a new direction from our present and former religious awareness and experience. As we pursue this journey we will find that some changes will begin occurring within us. Some of these changes will be perceptual, some will be emotional and some will be behavioral. They will all be important changes. Often you will recognize them only in retrospect.

Guaranteed, however, is that you will like the new you, and you will begin to feel more comfortable inside yourself? More importantly, you will feel much more comfortable with God. That is not only the goal of the spiritual journey, but also the major purpose of life in the first place. That brings up an underlying principle, fundamental to all of life.

