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NEWS

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Your Most Memorable Christmas

IS CHRISTMAS A CHRISTIAN HOLIDAY ANYMORE?

Volume Eight • Number Four

My Most Memorable Christmas



Erwin W. Lutzer
Senior Pastor,
The Moody Church

Dear Friend,

Christmas.

I remember as a child shaking the Christmas gifts under the tree trying to imagine what might be inside. And now, as a father and more recently a grandfather, I enjoy watching the children take their turns guessing what is in the packages and then unwrapping their gifts with abandon.

Of course, not everyone shares such happy memories. Sometimes at a Christmas party, I'll ask others to share their most memorable Christmas, whether happy or sad. I've heard delightful stories of unexpected reunions, idyllic settings, and generous gifts. I've also heard stories of deep hurt, poverty, family breakups, and even death. That word *Christmas* just doesn't evoke the same memories for everyone.

I'd like to share what I think might be *my* most memorable Christmas. Back in 1970, my wife and I joined a tour group to visit the Luther sites of the Reformation in East Germany. In those days, that part of the country was firmly in the grip of communism; dogs sniffed our luggage and tour guides dutifully gave glowing reports of life under the Soviet Union. But even so, in the cities we visited, such as Wittenberg and Eisleben, we met people who celebrated Christmas and let us know that the truths of the Reformation had not been snuffed out.

For example, when we arrived at our hotel in Wittenberg, a sparsely-decorated tree was in the lobby. I asked an employee what she knew about Jesus, and she said, "Christus ist in mine hertz" ("Christ is in my heart"). That was my first clue that communism could not stamp out Christianity; the flame could be smothered but not extinguished. Hints of Christmas were everywhere, in the stores, in restaurants, and along the dimly-lit streets. Although there was not much to buy and the people had even less money to buy it with, we felt a oneness with those who remembered our Savior's birth.

When we arrived in Erfurt, where Luther spent his days in a monastery, we were introduced to a Lutheran pastor who not only showed us the premises but pointedly assured us that he preached the Gospel and was not ashamed to follow in Luther's heroic footsteps. Christmas was celebrated here, too.

For New Years we attended a service at the great St. Thomas church in Leibzig, where Bach is buried and where he was minister of music. The message that evening was on the topic of time: for God there is no time as we know it, because He is beyond time and thus we can confidently trust Him for He alone knows the future. Thus, there is hope in the midst of repression, poverty, and unanswered questions.

And that, come to think of it, is the essence of Christmas: the God who is beyond time became one with us so that we might be reconciled to Him and trust Him not just with our future on earth but with eternity that is yet to come.

No matter the country and the conditions, God has His people everywhere, rejoicing that Jesus has come to give us hope in the midst of misery, and confidence in an uncertain future. Despite geographical and cultural differences, Christmas is a shaft of light in a dark and sinful world.

What is your most memorable Christmas?

Pastor Lutzer

Celebrating the Joy

OF CHANGED LIVES

God assures us that nothing, “neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation” can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39, ESV). Whatever our struggles and temptations, He’s ready to hear our repentance and surround us with His love. Thank you for supporting Moody Church Media so we can share this truth with hurting souls everywhere!

Forgiveness and Healing

“Dr. Lutzer,

*I have a confession to make. Actually, two. First, I didn’t like **Running to Win** when I first began listening. Second, your messages speak directly to me.*

*I began listening to **Running to Win** in December when our local Christian radio station began broadcasting Christmas songs 24/7. I clearly recall telling my son that I wasn’t at all sure if I liked your messages. However, I continued to listen.*

Correction, I have three confessions. For you see, I was involved in an extramarital relationship at the time. I was resistant to your messages at first because you were speaking to me when I wasn’t yet ready to hear. I knew the relationship was wrong; I just wasn’t ready to give it up.

*Listening to **Running to Win** made it clear that I have some deep-seated psychological issues that need to be addressed. I’m turning to God and working on forgiving myself, and healing. The relationship is over. With God’s help, there will never be another. I now look forward to hearing your program and make it a habit to listen to the weekly programs again at the end of the week. I’m looking forward to exposing God’s plan in my life.*

Thank you, Dr. Lutzer, for your words and encouragement.”

The Blessed Blend

“Dear friends,

Just a brief note expressing to you our gratefulness for your Moody Church Hour. After being members and serving in a local, active, evangelical church for over 50 years, we have been sorrowfully disappointed in the current direction. In brief, the sermons are weak, music has lost its traditional fervor, and attendance and monies are dwindling. Consequently, after leaving our services, we tune into The Moody Church Hour for our spiritual teaching and worship.

We are at a loss as to where to worship. We recognize that ‘change’ must come, but it seems music has turned the tide of the majority of church ministries. We are grateful that you have a blessed blend. We were reared on hymns of ‘theology,’ as well as our children, but our grandchildren will never know them. We will keep tuning in, and keep your ministry in prayer. We thank our God for Erwin Lutzer.”

—Mr. & Mrs. H.J.

Should we celebrate Christmas at all?

We've all run into the question: should Christians celebrate Christmas, now that it's been overtaken by so many secular overtones and traditions? Pastor Lutzer shares his thoughts with us.



Europe, like America, celebrates Christmas, but do they believe in it?



That is a good question. Christmas is loved in Europe for much the same reason it is loved in America: it is a time of commercialism, a time for family and revelry. Unfortunately, it is reduced to parties and self-indulgence. It is definitely not a time to worship the King born in Bethlehem.

I am reminded of a christening that took place in England. When the ceremony began, the honored baby was nowhere to be seen. He was found smothered under the coats the guests had laid on the bed. Just so, whether in Europe

or America, Jesus—the real Jesus—cannot be found in public celebrations!

Just witness our own controversies regarding the presence of a crèche in a town square!



That said, should we as Christians even participate in our Christmas customs and traditions?

A Almost every year I receive letters and booklets saying that we should not celebrate Christmas because it is rooted in paganism and has become too identified with the spirit and commercialism of the world. And, why should we be sharing gifts among ourselves? Aren't we like the heathen who chop down trees and celebrate? And besides, we don't even know the time of year Jesus was born!

I have no doubt that Jesus is often secondary even in the celebrations of Christian families. I'm reminded of a little boy who prayed, "Forgive us our Christmases, even as we forgive those who Christmas against us!" However, I think that Christmas is recoverable.

For one thing, Christmas should be a time for corporate worship. Personally, the singing of Christmas carols enables me to appreciate Jesus more fully. Second, we need to promise ourselves that we will sacrifice for others at Christmas—purchasing gifts for needy families, including the lonely in our family celebrations, etc. Third, we must include Jesus in all we do. In our family, no gifts are opened until we have read the Christmas story and prayed in gratitude to God. Fourth, we should try to not be extravagant in our gifts but choose those things that are necessary and helpful. Finally, Christmas is our best opportunity to witness to the world. People are more open to the Christmas story during this joyous season.

Your article speaks about your experience in Luther's country. Is he not credited with several Christmas songs and traditions?

A Let me clarify. Luther is not the author of "Away in a Manger" as commonly believed. This carol was put in a Luther book of children's songs, and so it has incorrectly been attributed to him.

But Luther, to my knowledge, is the first person to bring a tree into the house and transform pagan practice by putting candles on the branches to signify that Christ brought light into the world. Luther made much of Christmas and all of the Christian festivals, believing that they were opportune times for teaching and celebration.

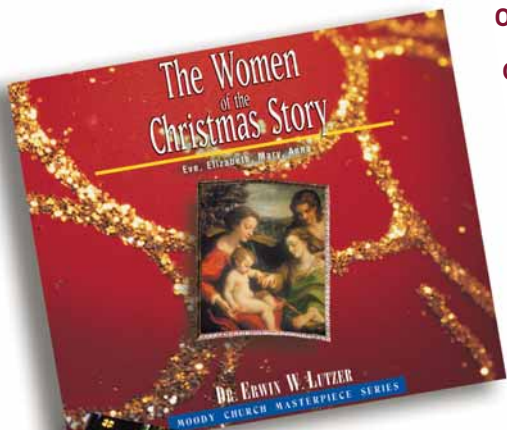
How will you celebrate Christmas this year?

A God willing, we will celebrate it with our three daughters, their husbands, and our six grandchildren. We don't take this for granted because our son-in-law Ben, our "soldier son," was in Afghanistan last year, so he was absent for our celebrations. Previously he was in Iraq. I might add that we are grateful that he is now out of the military.

I pray that we will use Christmas to bless the hearts of others and renew our own worship of Christ. In the past we've had an open house in our condo to invite neighbors and friends for a fun evening with the Gospel being shared.

Keep Christ at the Center of Christmas

The rush and busyness of Christmas will soon be upon us. Moody Church Media offers you the following helpful resources that encourage you to slow down and focus on the meaning of the holiday instead of all its commercial trappings.



The Women of the Christmas Story: Eve, Elizabeth, Mary, Anna

In this series of four messages, Pastor Lutzer takes us through the redemption story of Christmas from the moment God said He would put conflict between the serpent and the woman, to Anna's testimony at Jesus' presentation at the Temple. Deepen your appreciation of Christ's birth through an understanding of God's work over the centuries before it!

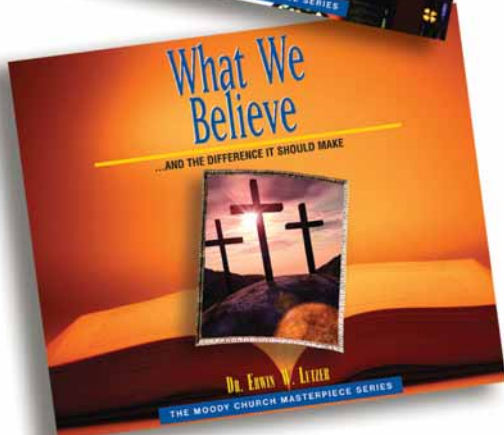
CD or cassette, \$16.95.



Christ Before Bethlehem: What Isaiah Predicted about Jesus Centuries Before His Birth

Of course, we as Christians know that the coming of Jesus was prophesied. But how accurate were the ancient prophets? These four messages, all drawn from the book of Isaiah, will help you understand both the first and second coming of Jesus, as revealed centuries before His birth.

CD or cassette, \$16.95.



What We Believe and the Difference It Should Make

Here is spiritual meat that believers need if they wish to grow! A life without doctrine is a tree without roots, a building without a foundation. The truths in these ten messages are not just intended to be food for the mind, but a primer on how to live in a world that scoffs at the idea of "absolute truth."

CD or cassette, \$34.95.

To order, please call: (800) 215-5001 or include your check with the enclosed newsletter reply slip.

please join
us in *prayer*



*All of us at
Moody Church
Media, and
especially
Pastor Lutzer,
appreciate*

*your prayers on behalf of the
ministry. Your prayers truly lift
us up and help us stay strong.*

Please pray:

For God to give Pastor Lutzer the right words for every situation in his many speaking engagements, for travel safety, and that God will open the hearts of all his listeners.

For a spiritual awakening in Chicago and all across the nation.

That God will use Pastor Lutzer's new book, *Slandering Jesus: Six Lies People Tell About the Man Who Said He Was God*, to expose the errors and lies about Jesus so prevalent in our culture.

That our ministry partners will hear God's call to continue supporting our growing media ministry.

**Moody
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**FOR
YOUR**

*inspiration
AND
encouragement*

Upcoming Series on Moody Church Radio

(Listings are subject to change)

Running to Win

Nov. 1-17	Series: Christians in Conflict
Nov. 20-22	Just One in a Crowd
Nov. 23-Dec. 11	Series: When God Shows Himself
Dec. 12-24	Series: The Flurry of Wings
Dec. 25-26	Lots of Space, but No Room
Dec. 27-31	For Such a Time as This

The Moody Church Hour

Nov. 18	What God Expects of Us
Nov. 25	The Role of the Church in the World
Dec. 2-Dec. 23	Series: Christ, God's Gift to the World
Dec. 30	Praying with Christ One Hour

Songs in the Night

Nov. 18 & 25	Two-part Sermon: We've Been Down this Road Before
Dec. 2-23	Series: Christ, God's Gift at Christmas
Dec. 30	The Torch is Passed

Live Streaming for Moody Church's Sunday morning service begins at 9:50 a.m. at www.moodychurch.org. Just click on the "Live Broadcast" link to join our worship!

**we'd love
to see you
there**

Please pray for Pastor Lutzer in his upcoming speaking engagements. If you are able to attend any of the following events, which are open to the public unless otherwise noted, Pastor Lutzer would enjoy meeting you.

February 5
22nd Pastors' Conference, Jacksonville, FL.
For more information, contact the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville at (888) 827-1825 or visit www.jaxpastorsconference.com.

February 7-9
Founders Week—Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, IL.
For more information, call (312) 329-4407, email conferences@moody.edu, or visit www.moodyconferences.com.

February 17
Outdoor Resort of Palm Springs, Palm Springs, CA.
For more information, call (206) 714-8333.



You Are
in Our
Prayers

Please fill out the enclosed prayer needs slip and let Pastor Lutzer and the staff of Moody Church Media bring your needs before God!

“For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers.” (Romans 1:9, ESV)

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- Erwin W. Lutzer
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In the Footsteps of Luther and the Reformers

German Reformation Tour



June 9-21, 2008

(with a pre-extension to Rome, June 5-10)

Join Pastor and Rebecca Lutzer for an exciting, spiritually enriching journey through the reformation areas of Germany and Switzerland. Pastor Lutzer will also provide important insights into Nazi Germany and sites related to Hitler's life. For more information, use the enclosed response form to request a brochure or call (888) 771-8717 today!

Date (2008)	Location
June 5 (Pre-extension)	Fly to Rome
June 6	Catacombs & the Appian Way
June 7	Christian Rome Sites
June 8	Rome's Early Church Sites
June 9	Sistine Chapel & the Pantheon
June 10	Fly to Berlin
June 9-10 (Main tour)	2 Nights in Berlin
June 11	Berlin Sightseeing
June 12	Potsdam & Whittenberg
June 13	Whittenberg
June 14	Eisleben & Erfurt
June 15	Eisenach to Munich
June 16	Munich
June 17	Munich
June 18	Geneva driving all day through the Alps
June 19	Geneva
June 20	Zurich
June 21	Fly Home

This schedule is subject to change according to circumstances.