

Christmas 2023 and New Year 2024

December 15, 2023

Christmas and Love



December 2023. Most people are now preparing for a beautiful Christmas. The tree is put up and decorated with glittering baubles, lights, garlands and maybe some chocolate wreaths.

And in the gleaming children's eyes, the magic of Christmas is reflected.

In the Netherlands, we used to celebrate Sinterklaas and then Christmas. They were two completely different celebrations. Sinterklaas should not be confused with Father Christmas, even though both give presents. Sinterklaas was always a children's celebration. The anticipation was already wonderful. From the moment Sinterklaas "came into the country", children were allowed to place their shoe, with a carrot for the horse. If you looked in your shoe in the morning, chances were good that there was something inside. It was usually a little something. It could be a tangerine, or some walnuts, or a chocolate mouse.

Presents at St Nicholas were often useful or practical gifts. It could be a new nightshirt or pyjamas, or a pair of socks or warm gloves. There were usually one or two presents that children requested and there was always a plate of goodies for each child such as a chocolate letter, mandarins, nuts, chocolate cigarettes, some typical Sinterklaas sweets, pepernoten (I have no translation 😊), etc. We were always elated with joy and gratitude.

This was followed a few weeks later by Christmas, a Christian Feast. It was all about Jesus' birth. Whether everything went exactly as it did back then, well, that remains to be seen. I may not be that Catholic any more, but I always like to go back to the story of the cold, no place in the inn, a baby in a manger, a donkey and an ox to give the baby some warmth, the Three Kings, the shepherds and the angels. A little wistful, a little homesick, a longing for maybe some simplicity and some magic. But Christmas has degenerated into a very commercial event.

Do we even remember what Christmas actually stood for?

When I look outside - especially in December - I see the major roads chock-full of cars from early till late. Where are they going? People are all very busy, they have a lot of stress and when I ask what for?

Then it's about the fact that they still have to buy the presents. They are no longer small gifts. They are big and sometimes very expensive gifts, even if they are meant for still very young children.

Parents and family and friends apparently think the best way to show your love is with these big expensive gifts for under the Christmas tree. Children's rooms are usually packed with expensive toys anyway.

Children have so many toys that they no longer know what to play with, not to mention the many digital gifts that keep children glued to a screen all day.

A 3-year-old getting gifts that cost a fortune? A child could spend a whole day playing with laundry pins or napkins, but no.

*It always has to be bigger and more expensive and especially more than what others buy for their children. An unprecedented rivalry.
These days, if I ask a child what Christmas is or what it is for, they look at you like you are crazy. Christmas is for presents, right? What else?*

A few years ago, there was a pandemic, Corona. Back then, there were also lockdowns and nobody could just go anywhere anymore. At Christmas, we could no longer just be together. There were a lot of super-strict rules, aimed at preventing Corona from spreading further.

During that time, a lot of families found out that

- there is more than eating out twice a week*
- there is more than going on holiday three times a year*
- there is more than "me, me, me"*
- there is more than work alone*
- there is more than expensive gifts*

Back then, people wanted nothing more than to spend Easter, Christmas, birthdays, etc. together with their loved ones, with children, grandchildren, family and friends. But they couldn't, they weren't allowed to. As a result, people were particularly frustrated, sad and lonely.

Many learned something from that period, learned to set very different priorities. But the majority fell back into an old pattern afterwards.

What is Christmas about? Ah, of course you get to be with others and eat and drink well and enjoy everything. Everyone is welcome to that.

But Shanoré, our spiritual guide, 43 years ago said, that every day should be like Christmas, meaning that we show our love and compassion not only at Christmas, but every day, in the PRESENT.

Because the NOW is all we have. Yesterday is gone and what comes tomorrow, we don't know, but NOW, NOW is everything.

Once we arrive at the final station, at the stop where we have to get off, let's make sure that in our suitcase there is no unnecessary ballast such as guilt, regret, anger, opportunities that were not taken advantage of.

Make sure that then you can look back on a fulfilled life, that you carry with you only a big heart, forgiving, grateful, a heart full of love.

In the end, LOVE is all that matters, always and everywhere.

I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Blessed, Healthy and above all Loving New Year.

Tonny

