

# BEVERAGES AND BIBLES

**“Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before! What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas...perhaps...means a little bit more!”**

**— Dr. Seuss**

**Introduction Question - What's the most memorable gift you've ever received?**

**Question: What's your favorite Christmas Song? How does that song influence or shape your faith?**

- "My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple: loving others. Come to think of it, why do we have to wait for Christmas to do that?" - Bob Hope
- "I truly believe that if we keep telling the Christmas story, singing the Christmas songs, and living the Christmas spirit, we can bring joy and happiness and peace to this world." –Norman Vincent Peale
- "Yet as I read the birth stories about Jesus I cannot help but conclude that though the world may be tilted toward the rich and powerful, God is tilted toward the underdog." — Philip Yancey
- "My brothers and sisters, true love is a reflection of the Savior's love. In December of each year we call it the Christmas spirit. You can hear it. You can see it. You can feel it." - Thomas S. Monson
- "God is here. This truth should fill our lives, and every Christmas should be for us a new and special meeting with God, when we allow his light and grace to enter deep into our soul." — Josemaría Escrivá
- "The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear." – Will Ferrell, Elf

**Question: Some fear that we've lost our focus on the spiritual side of Christmas - the birth of Jesus - with the modern secularization of the holiday. Does that resonate with you? How do you balance the fun of holiday parties and gift-giving with our joy in the Incarnation and the meaning of gathering in worship?**

- "How many observe Christ's birthday! How few, His precepts!" - Benjamin Franklin
- "I wrapped my Christmas presents early this year, but I used the wrong paper. See, the paper I used said 'Happy Birthday' on it. I didn't want to waste it so I just wrote 'Jesus' on it." - Demetri Martin
- "God never gives someone a gift they are not capable of receiving. If he gives us the gift of Christmas, it is because we all have the ability to understand and receive it." - Pope Francis
- "Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox; that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home." — G.K. Chesterton

**Question: When does the Christmas season begin for you? Stores seem to get ready in early November, and Christmas signs, symbols and carols truly fill the air around Thanksgiving Day. Some of us embrace this joyous celebration and leap right in. Others prefer to mark Advent first, a time of preparing for Christ's coming, waiting until Christmas Eve to begin the excited whirl of the Twelve Days of Christmas on Christmas Day and carry it on until the Three Kings arrive on Epiphany, January 6. When does your tree go up? How long does your Christmas season last?**

- "What kind of Christmas present would Jesus ask Santa for?" — Salman Rushdie
- "He who has not Christmas in his heart will never find it under a tree." - Roy L. Smith
- "Christmas is a baby shower that went totally overboard." – Andy Borowitz

**Question: What's more central to the Christian faith: Christmas or Easter?**

- "It's funny how we 'do' Christmas. Christmas is not something that we do, it is something that was done. It celebrates the long awaited arrival of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. We had nothing to do with it, but what we can do is praise God for the coming of the Lord, who washed away the sins of the world by dying on the cross." Monica Johnson
- "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." - Romans 6:5
- "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning. Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light...The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, glory like that of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." - John 1

**Question: Richard Rohr writes, "Humanity has the right to know that it is good to be human, good to live on this earth, good to have a body, because God in Jesus chose and said yes to our humanity. Or as we Franciscans like to say, "Incarnation is already redemption." What is redeemed or renewed at Christmas? Why does it matter that God chose to be human in Christ?**

- "God seeks to influence humanity. This is at the heart of the Christmas story. It is the story of light coming into the darkness, of a Savior to show us the way, of light overcoming the darkness, of God's work to save the world." - Adam Hamilton
- "Into this world, this demented inn, in which there is absolutely no room for him at all, Christ comes uninvited. But because he cannot be at home in it, because he is out of place in it, and yet he must be in it, his place is with those others for whom there is no room. His place is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons,

tortured, exterminated. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in this world. He is mysteriously present in those for whom there seems to be nothing but the world at its worst." - Thomas Merton

- "On Christmas morning, before we could open our Christmas presents, we would go to this stranger's home and bring them presents. I remember helping clean the house up and putting up a tree. My father believed that you have a responsibility to look after everyone else." - George Clooney
- "Peace on earth will come to stay, When we live Christmas every day." - Helen Steiner Rice

**Question: "Christ is still in Christmas, and for one brief season the secular world broadcasts the message of Christ over every radio station and television channel in the land. Never does the church get as much free air time as during the Christmas season." ~R.C. Sproul, who died this past week. Do you agree with Sproul here?**

- "Christmas, my child, is love in action." — Dale Evans Rogers
- "The thing about Christmas is that it almost doesn't matter what mood you're in or what kind of year you've had - it's a fresh start." - Kelly Clarkson
- "Christmas is a bridge. We need bridges as the river of time flows past. Today's Christmas should mean creating happy hours for tomorrow and reliving those of yesterday." — Gladys Taber
- "We got to the moon on Christmas Eve 1968, at the end of a poor year for this country. We had Vietnam. We had civil unrest. We had the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King. But we went around the moon and saw the far side for the first time. A script writer couldn't have done a better job of raising people's hope." - Jim Lovell

### **More Quotes**

- "Instead of being a time of unusual behavior, Christmas is perhaps the only time in the year when people can obey their natural impulses and express their true sentiments without feeling self-conscious and, perhaps,

foolish. Christmas, in short, is about the only chance a man has to be himself." ~ Francis C. Farley

- "Christmas waves a magic wand over this world, and behold, everything is softer and more beautiful." - Norman Vincent Peale
- "I don't think Christmas is necessarily about things. It's about being good to one another, it's about the Christian ethic, it's about kindness." - Carrie Fisher

#### More Questions

- What's the best Christmas gift you've been given?
- How has Christmas changed in your life? Is it the same now as it was when you were a kid?
- What's your favorite Christmas tradition?
- The bible doesn't give a date for Jesus' birth. Would Christmas be the same in July?
- Do you remember what gifts you received last Christmas?

#### **Why Should We Care About Advent? by Rob Bell, originally published in November of 2010 at <https://relevantmagazine.com/god/deeper-walk/features/23640-why-advent>**

Christmas is coming. It may seem like it's way too soon to be talking about trees and lights and presents and eggnog and all that. But Christmas is the culmination of Advent, and Advent is about the church calendar and the church calendar is something we never stop talking about.

So that's what I'm writing on here: Advent. But to talk about Advent, we need to talk about sound, and then time and then Spirit.

First, then, a bit about sound.

If you are quiet enough in your kitchen, you will hear a noise. It is a continuous sound, a long, droning noise with no particular beginning or ending. It has very little, if any, dynamic range. It may go up and down in volume, but those changes are rarely perceptible. It is the same flat noise, and it goes on and on and on, hour after hour, day after day. If it's loud enough, it can grate on the nerves, but otherwise it's simply there.

Making that sound, mostly unnoticed, there in the corner of your kitchen.

It is the buzzing of your refrigerator.

Now for another noise. I'm currently listening to the new Jónsi album (he of Sigur Rós fame), which I've had on repeat for a number of weeks now. From the first bleeps, squawks and chirps of the first song, the album is full of noises. Drums, voices, piano—the noises stop and start, come and go, they're loud and quiet. Some notes sustain for a measure or two, others come and go within the second. The kick drum rumbles, the cymbals clang, the strings flutter. All those sounds work together to make something compelling, inspiring, beautiful, evocative, confrontative, urgent, hopeful, honest or peaceful—something that sounds stunning.

And so it is noise, it is the sound—but it is a particular, intentional arrangement of those noises and sounds that make it what we commonly refer to as music.

Two kinds of noise, two variations on sound—one we call music and the other we call refrigerator buzz.

Next, then, a bit about time, because time is a lot like sound. A song works because the noises and sounds and voices and drums are arranged with a precise awareness of time. Music divides time up into beats, giving time a shape, a flow, a pattern, a rhythm.

We've all experienced the low-grade despair that comes when our days blend into each other—wake up, eat breakfast, brush teeth, go to school or work or the office, change another diaper, do another load of laundry, write a check, fill a tank, cook a meal and then repeat it all over again the next day.

One day looks like the next, everything starts to feel the same, life starts to feel like the existential equivalent of refrigerator buzz.

And that, of course, takes us back to the Exodus. (Didn't see that coming, did you?) The story of those Hebrew slaves being rescued from Pharaoh isn't just a story about the God who rescues people from having to make bricks every day—it's about the God who rescues people from other kinds of slavery as well. Namely, the one involving time.

Life in Egypt was comprised of making bricks for the Pharaoh every day, all day.

Bricks, bricks, bricks, eat, sleep, more bricks, bricks, bricks. Tomorrow will be just like today: bricks, bricks, bricks.

When the Israelites are rescued, however, God gives them commands, one of the most urgent being to take a Sabbath day a week, a day unlike the others. A day without bricks.

Six days you shall work, but on the seventh, don't. Why is this so monumental? God gives them rhythm. But not the rhythm of sound, the rhythm of time. Life before was an interminable succession of sevens. Seven, seven, seven.

But now, their time is broken up, measured, arranged with a beat: six and one, six and one, six and one.

God is the God of the groove.

We need rhythm in our time—it's what makes one moment different from another. It gives shape and color and form to all of life.

The first Christians understood this—that time, like sound, is best when broken up, divided and arranged into patterns and rhythms. And so they created the church calendar. A way to organize the year, a way to bring variance to our days, a way to find a song in the passing of time.

For example, Lent. For the seven weeks leading up to Resurrection Sunday, we practice sober awareness of our frailty, sins and smallness. It starts on Ash Wednesday when those ashes are traced on our foreheads in the shape of the cross, a tactile reminder of our origins in the dust. From there we come, and to there we will go.

You want to really live, the kind of living that drains the marrow from every day? Then start by facing your death, your weakness, your smallness. We spend seven weeks facing our death and despair and doubt, entering into it with the fullness of our being—heart, mind, emotions—we leave nothing behind.

We do this for a number of reasons, chief among them the simple truth that Sunday comes after Friday. Only when you've gotten through, not around "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" are you ready to throw the only kind of Resurrection party worthy of the occasion—that Sunday when we run huffing and puffing from the open tomb, beating our pots and pans in that clanging raucous outburst that begins with those three resounding words: "He is risen."

That day when all the amps are turned up to "11."

But that's not the end—don't let your pastor start a preaching series on tithing or marriage that next week—because Resurrection is just the beginning. On we go to the season of Pentecost—the celebration of the Spirit, the One who moves in mysterious ways. Jesus is not with us in body, He's with us in Spirit. He's risen,

but He's also here, in ways that transcend language, and so reflect on this for a season, tuning your radar to the divine presence in every moment of every day.

And so we're headed somewhere, we're coming from somewhere else, and we're doing it together, as a community of disciples, as a church.

Finally, then, a bit about Spirit. Because Spirit, it turns out, is a lot like sound and time.

The first thing Spirit does in creation is move. That tells us the deepest matters of the Spirit are constantly moving, shifting and morphing. The life of the spirit is a dynamic reality, taking us through a myriad of emotions, experiences and states of being.

Sometimes we're exhausted, other times we're overwhelmed with doubt. Sometimes we're on top of the world and everything is going smoothly, other times we find ourselves standing in the midst of the wreckage, surrounded by smoldering flames, wondering how it all went so wrong.

What the church calendar does is create space for Jesus to meet us in the full range of human experience, for God to speak to us across the spectrum, in the good and the bad, in the joy and in the tears.

This is the crime of only singing happy victory songs in church (we often ask sad people to sing happy songs)—half of the Psalms are laments.

The math should move us on that. The Bible is not a collection of war chants from victors—it's an incredibly varied collection of writings reflecting an intensely diverse amount of postures, moods and perspectives.

A lot like how life is, actually. Sometimes you're furious with God, other times you're madly in love.

The issue then, as it is now, isn't just getting us out of Egypt—it's getting the Egypt out of us.

Rescuing us from sameness, dullness, flatlined routine, reminding us that however we're feeling, whatever we're experiencing, wherever we are in our heart—the Spirit waits to meet us there.

And that takes us to Advent. Advent, then, is a season. Lots of people know about holidays—one day a year set apart. The church calendar is about seasons, whole periods of time we enter into with a specific cry, a particular intention, for a reason.

Advent is about anticipating the birth of Christ. It's about longing, desire, that which is yet to come. That which isn't here yet. And so we wait, expectantly. Together. With an ache. Because all is not right. Something is missing.

Why does Advent mean so much to me?

Because cynicism is the new religion of our world. Whatever it is, this religion teaches that it isn't as good as it seems. It will let you down. It will betray you.

That institution? That church? That politician? That authority figure? They'll all let you down.

Whatever you do, don't get your hopes up. Whatever you think it is, whatever it appears to be, it will burn you, just give it time.

Advent confronts this corrosion of the heart with the insistence that God has not abandoned the world, hope is real and something is coming.

Advent charges into the temple of cynicism with a whip of hope, overturning the tables of despair, driving out the priests of that jaded cult, announcing there's a new day and it's not like the one that came before it.

"The not yet will be worth it," Advent whispers in the dark.

Old man Simeon stands in the temple, holding the Christ child, rejoicing that now he can die because what he'd been waiting for actually arrived.

And so each December (though Advent starts the last Sunday of November this year), we enter into a season of waiting, expecting, longing. Spirit meets us in the ache.

We ask God to enter into the deepest places of cynicism, bitterness and hardness where we have stopped believing that tomorrow can be better than today.

We open up. We soften up. We turn our hearts in the direction of that day. That day when the baby cries His first cry and we, surrounded by shepherds and angels and everybody in between, celebrate that sound in time that brings our Spirits what we've been longing for.