

Christmas Season

The Christmas season is upon us in our country. The commercial aspect stresses buying things for gifts. Stores rely on such spending, getting most of their annual profit from such year-end sales. Some houses are decorated with lights, making them more beautiful in the winter evenings. Many charitable organizations request and expect extra donations during December, again making a difference between financial loss or gain for the year. I tend to minimize participation in these things.

For decorations we continue to use a Christmas tree (now artificial, made in China) decorated with white lights and white decorations with gold and silver accents. The symbols are standard Christian designs that have been around for up to two thousand years.

Our church has an annual Christmas musical of professional quality, using talent mostly from within our congregation. This year the theme was “I’ll Be Home For Christmas”. The setting was late 1941 between Thanksgiving and Christmas. That included the time of the attack at Hawaii that brought our country into the war. The style had parts simulating radio broadcasts and other parts a home and family setting. Music included styles of that period as well as the more modern songs looking back to those times. Costumes and props



were also styled for seventy years ago. I took 90 photos of representative parts of the production for sharing with the performers. A professional video recording was made of the musical, to be available on a DVD. About a quarter of the audience was in our building for their first time. A free dessert of pies and cakes and candy was available after each of the three performances last weekend.

The meanings of words associated with the season might be interesting. “Christmas” has two parts. The “mas” comes from “Mass”, referring to the religious worship service. It comes from the Latin “missa”, meaning to dismiss. The word in Latin was used at the end, letting the people know that they could go home. The “Christ” refers to the person Jesus whose birth is celebrated. It comes from the Greek “christos”, meaning one who is anointed with oil in a special ceremony to be a priest (religious leader) or king. It also refers to the special person who would fulfill the predictions made over the previous many centuries.

The name 耶穌 Jesus is a Latin version related to the Hebrew Joshua, meaning “savior”. An angel specified that name “because he will save his people from their sins”. When he was an adult, a leader named John identified Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” His perfect life, covering me gives me righteousness in God’s eyes. That concept is predicted in the ancient Chinese oracle bone character, continued in the traditional character, 義 but now lost in the simplified version.

Jesus is also given the title “Immanuel” meaning “God is with us”. The understanding is that Jesus is God in human form. That ties in well with the Chinese name for Christmas: sheng dan, both fourth tone. The two characters mean holy birth. I think that is a much better word for Christmas, preserving what was happening then.

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圣诞

I have more than a month break from my university teaching. That gives me some time to make a few minor improvements in my course materials and to try a new format for “online” teaching. I also need to select a new textbook for the Spring quarter and thereafter. The book that I presently use is now out of print and not available from the publisher. The book that I am considering is written by Dr. Qihao Weng, who now teaches in America.

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13 December 2012