

Ransom Notes

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South Side Christian Church
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Naughty or Nice?

Turkey legs, mashed potatoes, and pumpkin pie have vanished. Mounds of wrinkled tissue paper, bruised bows, and empty boxes line the curb, awaiting the garbage guys. Hugs, smiles, chatter, and verbal memory adventures generally create a pleasant slot in our brain. The visiting family has stuffed the final gifts into the trunk, scurried to the Interstate, and home to their own little beds.

The Holidays are History for 2024

But are they really over? Have we forgotten the real meaning for our days of family gatherings, gift giving, and going across the country to visit and rejoice? December 25th is really the beginning, not the conclusion, of a time of celebration. Although we do not know the exact date of His birth, the Christ Child's birth is recognized by many on the 25th. That being said, as I type away, Jesus is three days old, or maybe we should say He is about 2,024 years and three days old. But then, if we remember that He is God's Son, He is *infinitely* old. We would need to find a million bakers willing to join hands and mixing machines to create a cake sufficiently large for the candles needed to light and blow out.

At times I wonder if we have unconsciously drifted away from the initial reason for the season. Have gifts and gigantic feasts become our object rather than a time of thanks and celebration for the birth of the ultimate sacrifice for our sins?

Recently I picked up an interesting piece of 'fake' money. The smiling, whiskered face drew my eyes toward the rest of the pretend piece of cash. Could you believe it? The numerals **\$1,000,000** just popped out. In fact, I momentarily contemplated grabbing several bills. My head leaped into high gear as I thought about the many churches, charities, and Christian workers who would quickly dash into expansion and/or debt-reduction mode upon receiving one or two of these bills. The smiling Santa just had one requirement to receive his gift. The recipient needed to have been *nice for 365 days*. A quick review of my behavior seemed to contain relatively few horrible moments of naughty actions. Well, some of my thoughts probably were unkind, but hopefully Santa can't read minds.

Flipping the bill over, four words came into focus, "IN GOD WE TRUST." Hmm! Well, maybe the creator of this bill had a second idea in mind. Maybe Santa wasn't the real focus? Perhaps the real purpose was to suggest recipients remember the Christ Child, the everlasting gift, given us by the Father above. Money is wonderful and useful for everyone, but perhaps not our long-term need or goal. The words *naughty or nice*, however, are essential when we contemplate our relationship with Christ. In fact, Matthew 5:48 shares an incredible statement by the Lord as He discusses our treatment toward our enemies. God loves all, even His enemies. What does He tell us to do? *"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* Guess I'd better take a quick inventory of people who might irritate or upset me, making certain I continue to love all, in spite of a disagreement or frustration. That's a tough charge, but necessary as I aim to be perfect.

James 3:13 suggests wise persons will demonstrate true wisdom in an interesting way. *"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom."* Guess God has heard about the 'naughty or nice' behavior plan. Ugh! Unfortunately, God CAN read my mind. Humility sometimes is difficult to maintain. According to Proverbs 16:18, *"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."*

Matthew 19:21 even talks about our gift-giving actions. The Rich Man left after his conversation with the Master and hearing these words. *"Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me.'"*

As I conclude my New Year thoughts, I encourage each reader to do a quick inventory of his or her thoughts and actions toward others. Set as a resolution to model God's desire for each of us to love others, to be kind, and be thoughtful.

Nice Is Far Better Than Being Naughty — Both Santa and God Agree On That Principle.