

Attention!!

Editor's Note: The following story was written by the late AP columnist Hal Boyle in 1961.

What is Christmas?

It is the time when people's hearts ring like bells. And legend says that oxen kneel in their stalls at midnight in memory.

Christmas is the anniversary of one kind of faith and selflessness. It is the natal date of a lonely Jewish carpenter who in 33 short years of breath stamped an undying conscience on this world and promised all men life everlasting through belief.

He died a radical upon a cross for what he taught, bleeding slowly to death from the agony of nail and spear wounds. Few listened to his message in his day. He died a minor gadfly to a Roman world.

One of many martyrs to many faiths, time has raised Jesus Christ to a gigantic stature, so that today more than 600 million people, one-fourth of all mankind, celebrate his memory. More men follow him than any man who ever lived. In the centuries since his birth, he has become the greatest religious figure in history.

What is Christmas?

It is his spirit and his philosophy — that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

Today the celebration of his birth, like his death, is crossed with old pagan ceremonials. But his spirit and his example inflame the day.

Sometimes religious leaders get cross with Santa Claus and say he takes the honors that belong to Jesus. But no

one who has read the life of Christ could ever think of Him as being jealous. Santa is just Him with a beard on.

Perhaps, if Santa Claus pressed his view 365 days a year, as Jesus did, he might, even in these enlightened days, risk a similar persecution.

What is Christmas?

It is the time of letting go of hidebound prejudices and having the courage to be sentimental and good. It is the time when men take down a cold unfeeling star from the sky and make it a warm and stirring beacon on a tree.

Mainly, the grownups say, "Christmas is for the kids." But they themselves enjoy it most, although often they are oddly ashamed to acknowledge it. In December their crust of foolish sophistication — the crust they grow to protect themselves from disappointment — wears thin. They light a silent candle to an old belief, that most men really do wish each other well but don't know quite what to do about it.

What is Christmas? It is a season when they can cast away their mutual doubts and really do something for one another.

The Jews, who regard Jesus as only a prophet, have their own festival this time of year. It is called Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights. It lasts eight days. On each day they light another candle, give another gift.

The other day a Jewish friend of mine, whose children go to a public school and love the festival of Christmas, told



photo by Mark Figart

me the plight of his young daughter.

She came to her father and said:

"Daddy, I was chosen to be an angel in our Christmas play, but do I have the right to play it?"

And her father, knowing her problem, said:

"Honey, be their angel."

I think that is Christmas — and America.

Editor's Note: This Attention! page will be used each week as a forum for you, our readers. We encourage you to submit any original work that would be suitable for publication in At Ease.

Pictures should be black and white shots that are unique either in content, angle or technique. Columns, essays or poems should be no longer than 500 words, and should relate to an unusual experience, a new perspective on a common experience, or just about anything else you want to share with our readers. Please don't send us your gripes, complaints, or sermons on heavy-duty issues — send those to the Battalion's Opinion Page.

Don't forget to put your name and phone number on anything you send us. Then just drop it off at the Battalion, Room 216 of the Reed McDonald Building. Be sure to specify that it is for At Ease.