

Christmas should be materialistic

By [Jason Micheli](#)

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Maybe it's because I'm a pastor and my social media is flooded with churchy headlines and hashtags, but I've grown weary of the Christmas tradition of bemoaning the commercialization of the season and criticizing others (usually referring to non-Christians) for being so materialistic about Christmas.

I mean, I've got my own gripes with Black Friday and Xmas music in late September but is there anything more cliché than surveying the wrapping paper debris on the curb and the pine needles on the floor and lamenting that we've missed the meaning of Christmas?

As cliché as such pious hand-wringing is, I'm not so sure it's truly in keeping with the spirit of Christmas.

Since Trinity is its own economy (the Greek New Testament term for *community* or *household*) of constant gift and exchange, then I wonder if perhaps the best way for believers in the Trinity to celebrate Christmas is the old fashioned materialist route of giving actual things to those we love.

Specifically, what I think is problematic about decrying the materialism of Christmas is that it implies there's a deeper spiritual truth to Christmas that we're missing. But Christians don't believe in abstract spiritual truths. We believe in Jesus.

And here's the thing: the incarnation—what we celebrate these 12 days of Christmas—is the most materialistic thing of all.

Christmas is when Christians celebrate that God took human (material) flesh and lived a life just like ours amid all the material stuff of everyday life. He made things (as a carpenter) and presumably gave some of those things to people. He drank wine, ate bread and fish, and partied with sinners.

To say nothing of the magi who brought the baby Jesus their resolutions to lead lives of justice and compassion—sike—they brought him stuff. Expensive stuff too.

The incarnation shows us that God is the most materialistic One of all of us because it's by incarnation that God takes the material stuff of life to get up close and uncomfortably personal to all of us.

Materialism is how God spent the first Christmas so what's wrong with us having passed Christmas the very same way?

Sure enough, at this point, many of the unimaginative and painfully literal among you will point out the gross overabundance with which many of us mark the season and how little that has to do with a Savior born into poverty.

I don't argue with that. I'm only suggesting that the Heifer Project (gifts you'll never see given for people you'll never know) isn't necessarily the only or even the best way to celebrate the incarnation.

If Jesus is Emmanuel—God with us—then giving sincere material gifts of love and friendship that highlight or accentuate our witness, our connection to someone else just might be the most theologically cogent way of marking his birth.

In other words, instead of cows and chickens maybe the most Christian thing to do this Christmas was to give your wife those earrings you know she's wanted for a long, long time but hadn't bought herself or the Playstation your boys have wanted for several years running.

Maybe materialism is exactly what we need to reclaim about our understanding of Christmas.

*Originally posted at [Tamed Cynic](#)*