

COMMENTARY

Where's The Birthday Boy?

By Philip S. Chua, M.D.*

When Marilyn Monroe, in her sexy tight-fitting gown, in May of 1962, sang "Happy Birthday, Mr. President," the attention of the world was momentarily on her, but John F. Kennedy, 45, on whose honor the party was being given, was still center stage, the man of the hour, where the spotlight was redirected. After all, he was the honoree.

Jolly Santa Claus, with his famous white moustache, beard, and long curly hair, red baggy outfit and winter black boots, is a most popular figure at Christmas. Every year, he gets the honor, and men, women, young and old, and children of all ages, have accepted him as a symbol of Christmas itself --- holiday cheers, gifts, food, and merriment.

It almost seems that without Santa Claus, there would not be any reindeer, no sleigh, no stockings, no gifts, and no Christmas. Ask any child, and that will invariably be the answer you get. Santa Claus is very important during this holiday. Without him there won't be any Christmas. There won't be any gifts. He is, after all, the bearer of gifts from the North Pole. That's what the children are led to believe, unintentionally I am sure, but nonetheless that's the subliminal vibe they get from us adults as they grow up.

Everything during the Christmas season, including our conversation and greetings, is about Santa, about parties and gifts, and about all the material things we can buy in this highly commercialized world of today. Many of us hardly talk to our children and amongst ourselves about the Birthday Boy, the celebrant Himself. About His wonders, about His greatness, about His ultimate sacrifice.

Are we focusing too much on the material and earthly things and too little on the sacredness of Christmas?

Yes, I think we are, and, sadly, almost inappropriately. We seem to have lost our focus, and Jesus, the celebrant, is often relegated to the background, even forgotten during His own birthday party. Shopping, food and merriment preoccupy and overwhelm everybody's mind during this holiday. The honoree, the Main Event, the very reason why we are celebrating in the first place, is no longer on center stage. Sometimes, I feel that we have even neglected to invite Him to His own party. In many cases, He is no where to be found, because He may not be a conscious priority on our mind on this busy and festive occasion. The sheer joy of the celebration and the loud Ho! Ho! Ho! seem to have drowned Him out. We seem to be missing the significance and the holiness of it all.

Isn't it time to put the birthday Boy back on center stage, where He belongs, and to honor Him in the right spirit? After all, this is His party. And we are only His guests.

To one and all, a Very Merry CHRISTmas, and to the Child in the manger: Happy Birthday, and thanks for coming.

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