

## REFLECTIONS ON THE SACRED MYSTERY/SECULAR MIRACLE OF CHRISTMAS

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No sooner does the winter solstice arrive and revive the vanishing sun in the northern skies, when Christmas bursts onto the scene. With its brilliant juxtaposition of lore and history, tradition and novelty, ritual and frivolity, Christmas dazzles the senses, restores wonder, and redeems hope.

The central theological mystery celebrated during “Christ’s Mass” is the birth of the Christ child to a virgin named Mary one starlit night in the little town of Bethlehem of Judea. Some 2,000 years after the historical birth of Jesus is believed to have taken place, many are discouraged by the secular banality obtruding upon this centrally important Christian feast. However justified, attempts to “put Christ back into Christmas” are often as short-lived and superficial as have been attempts to diminish or erase the religious significance of Christmas and other early winter holidays.



The “war over Christmas” makes good fodder for pundits around the holidays, but the sparring parties generally miss what is most mysterious and miraculous about this holiday. As Philip Knopper points out in his beautifully illuminated book, *A Christmas Testament*, “almost everyone in Europe and the Americas celebrates Christmas...from devout to barely nominal Christians...to agnostics and avowed atheists who participate in the ritual of gift giving.” To this we would add people from an array of faiths around the world who today take part in some aspect of the Christmas celebration.

And what are they all celebrating? Strict doctrinaires would again point to the birth of Christ, an event of such magnitude that having transformed our culture in so many ways, can indeed be called a miracle and a mystery. But Knopper also suggests we not overlook a more temporal miracle of Christmas: that a brief tale, recounted in only two out of the four canonical gospels, and somewhat differently in both, has become an epic story around which the most phenomenal spectrum of traditions has evolved.

Wherever Christmas has traveled, it has adopted the beliefs and traditions of the people it encountered, intricately interlacing sacred and secular threads into the same majestic tapestry. At Metanexus, we celebrate the rich tapestry of the world’s religious traditions, and affirm their place in a global dialogue aimed at restoring wholeness to our communities, our universities, and our lives. Metanexus promotes this dialogue through rigorous transdisciplinary research and a global network of some 300 projects in 43 countries.

From the entire team at Metanexus, we wish you and yours a very Merry Christmas.