



Merry Christmas!

Long before there was any question about the political correctness of wishing others a “Merry Christmas,” the pastor of the parish of my youth took the occasion every year of telling us why he preferred to wish everyone a “*Happy* Christmas.” He’d point out that we never wish anyone a “Merry Easter” and would question whether this adjective for Christmas, dating back to the 17th century, was the best one for us to use today. The first printed Christmas card (1843) wished recipients a “Merry Christmas” but in 1823, at the end of *A Visit from St. Nicholas* (“Twas the night before...), Clement Moore's Santa wished all a “Happy Christmas... e’re he drove out of sight.”

The history, then, is mixed. Both “merry” and “happy” seem too light and fail to bear the weight of this day's substance. So what kind of Christmas *do* we hope and pray our family and friends will have?

My prayer is that you'll have a ***Joyful Christmas***: a Christmas rooted in the serenity that deep faith provides, strong enough to survive the disappointments and sorrows life delivers to our doorstep and exuberant enough to celebrate life's happiest times. May the birthday of Christ fill you with deep joy...

And I pray that you'll have a ***Peaceful Christmas***: the peace the world is so clearly unable to give itself; the peace that broken hearts long for; the peace that's ours to share with one another in forgiveness, kindness and charity; the peace that might end wars and bind nations together. May the birthday of Christ sow seeds of peace in your heart...

Finally, I pray that you have a ***Hopeful Christmas***. So much in the world around us encroaches on our capacity to hope: a spirit abroad that seems intent on draining the beauty and poetry from our lives while our ever burgeoning knowledge robs us of awe and reverence before the mystery of life, of love and of God. May the birthday of Christ renew and refresh hope in your heart...

So, I wish you a ***Joyful, Peaceful, Hopeful Christmas!*** And should your Christmas be merry and happy, too – all the better!

Please pray the same for me.

In the peace of Christ,

Fr. Fleming