Not What, but Whom Are We Celebrating

The incarnation of Jesus Christ reinforces in us the reality of our radical depravity – without Christ, we are dead in our transgressions and sins; controlled by the devil; under God's wrath; enslaved to sin. See Eph 2:1-3; Rom 7:18; 6:16, 20, 22, 19. From our basal sin of idolatry flow a wretched stream of ingratitude and manifold expressions of vileness, which we gladly commit and whose commission by others, we energetically approve, Rom 1: 18 –32. The Lord God responds as follows:

God's assessment. "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually " Gen 6:5

God's indictment. ". Both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." ... "There is no fear of God before their eyes."’ Rom 3:9-18, passim.

God's judgment. "The soul who sins shall die .." "[T] he wages of sin is death, .." Eze 18:20; Rom 6:23.

God's commitment. " "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Jn 3:16

In spite of man's violent rebellion against a holy, loving, good and just God, the Lord God sovereignly intervenes in the concrete affairs of history by sending his eternal Son, Jesus Christ, to live for, die and be resurrected for those God had chosen unto himself, in Christ, in eternity past, for his own glory. Christ is God's redemptive nevertheless, God's saving in spite of , the divine interruption of the full course and development of man's sin. By this I mean that in spite of man's sin and although man justly deserves God's eternal condemnation, nevertheless, God, in the fullest demonstration of his love, sends forth his Son to reconcile the fallen world unto himself.

This Jesus Christ was witnessed to in the Old Testament by many signs, symbols and shadows, all of which pointed to his coming. "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." Gal 4:4-5. Therefore, the central issue at Christmas is not what but rather whom we're celebrating. The meaning of Christmas is inextricably located in and derived from the messianic ministry of Jesus Christ. Without such redemptive truths defining our perspective at this time of year, we are left with a festivity that dishonors Christ by disregarding his character and mission. Without such gospel realities dominating and directing our perspective of Christmas, what we are left with is a superficial event that exalts Santa Claus and that commemorates man's ephemeral good-naturedness. Yes, there are giving and sharing, joy and laughter, excitement and merriment, but without Christ, these are all humanly contrived and will soon dissipate with the pressing realities of life that are brought in by the New Year.
Thus, this Christmas, let our celebration be focused on Christ alone. “Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, ..” Ps 115:1. Let him be our central joy and our chief consolation. Let us acknowledge and revere him as the source of our joy that we share with others. Praise him not only for being the reason for the season but above all, for being the goal of all life who is to be received by faith alone for “..so long as we are without Christ and separated from him, nothing which he suffered and did for the salvation of the human race is of the least benefit to us. ” John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, III. i. Let us bear witness to him in word and action even as he, our Great High Priest, bears our names before the Father in heaven, Heb 9:24.

Merry Christmas to you.