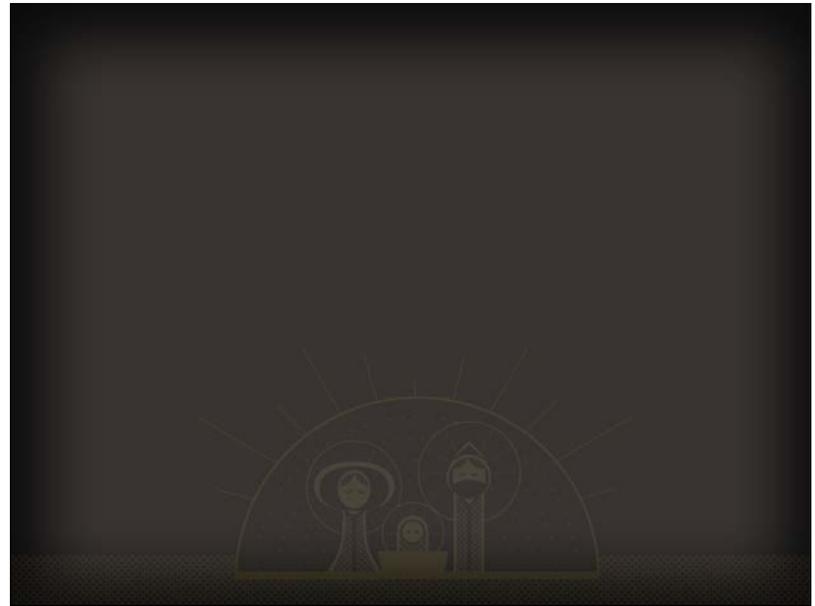
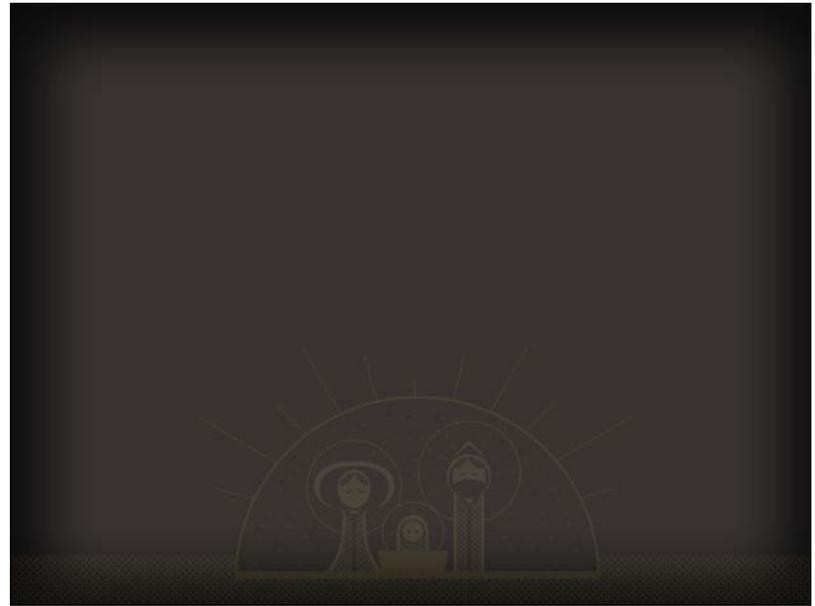




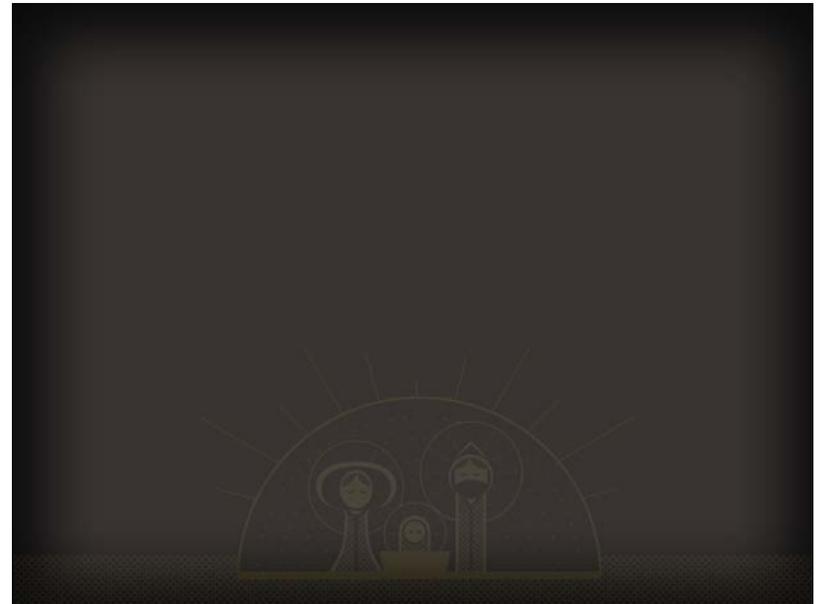
Why I Don't Do Christmas



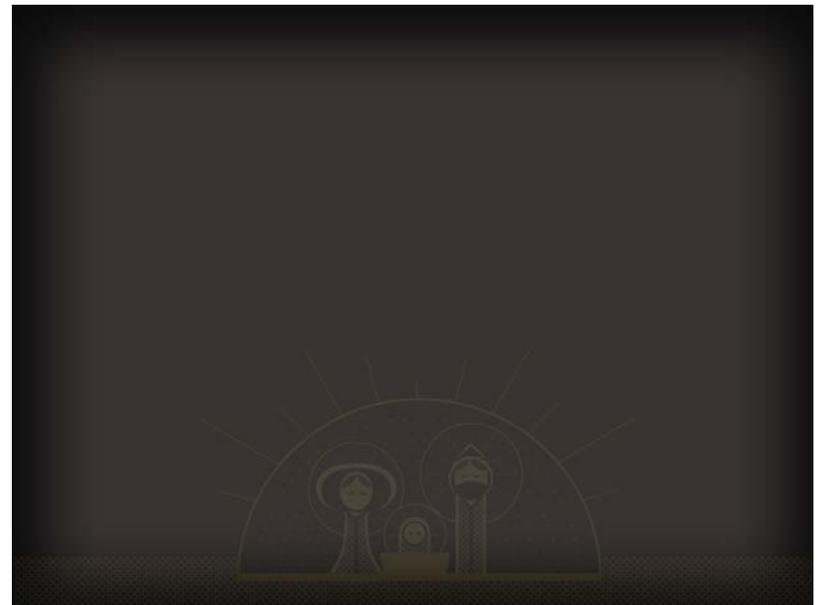
I played the Christmas game when my children were little. I was not reckless with the sense of wonder that collects around Santa Claus and the Baby Jesus and, alas, morphs the two together. I bought presents. Some years I even decorated a tree.



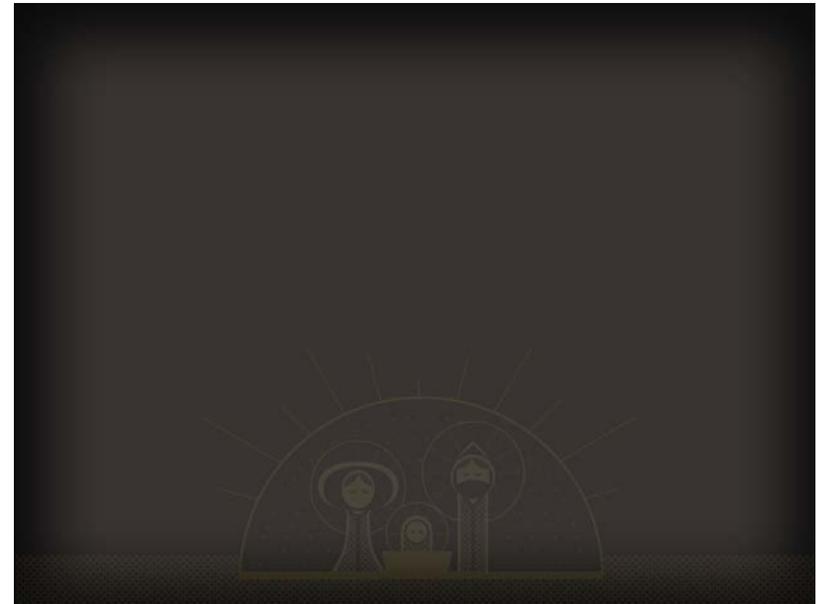
Don't get me wrong. I enjoy giving gifts. I think ritual is essential to human flourishing and to family life, and we need more of it. I have a deep reverence for the incarnational heart of Christianity. I even still recognize faint glimmers of these impulses in the trappings of 21st-century Christmas.



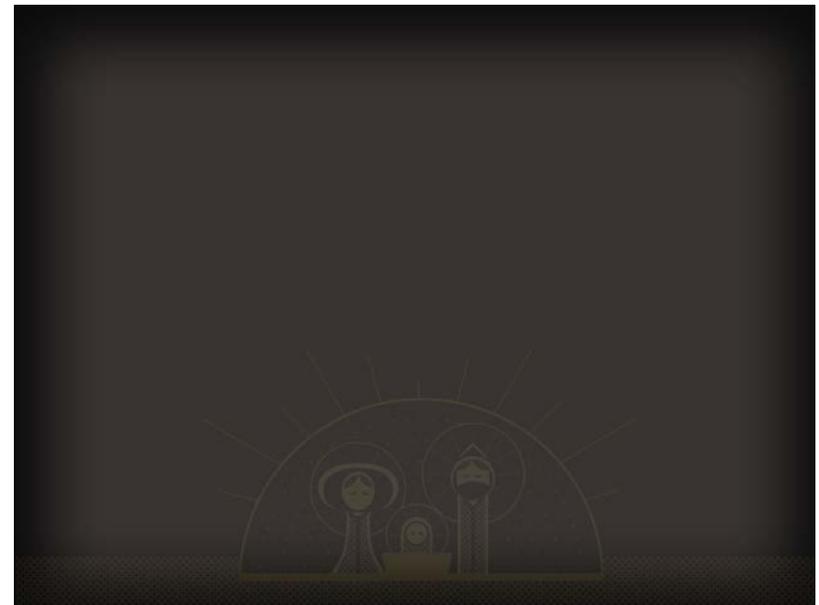
But I think this season has become a distortion of them — a distortion of us as a culture, as humans, as families. And I for one am done.



I don't like obligatory gift-giving. And this has become linked to a commercial orgy that has now even co-opted the ritual angle. We have Good Friday and Maundy Thursday for Easter. Now we have Black Friday and Cyber Monday for Christmas.



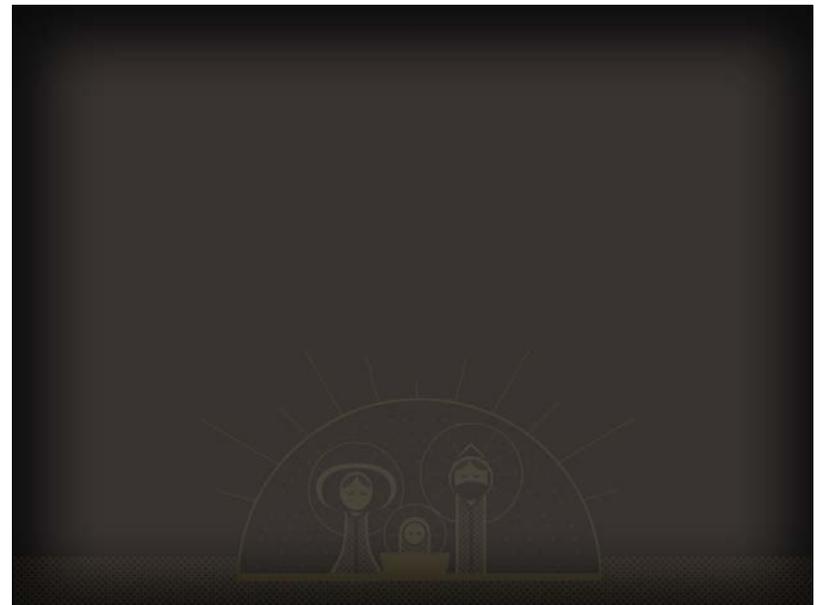
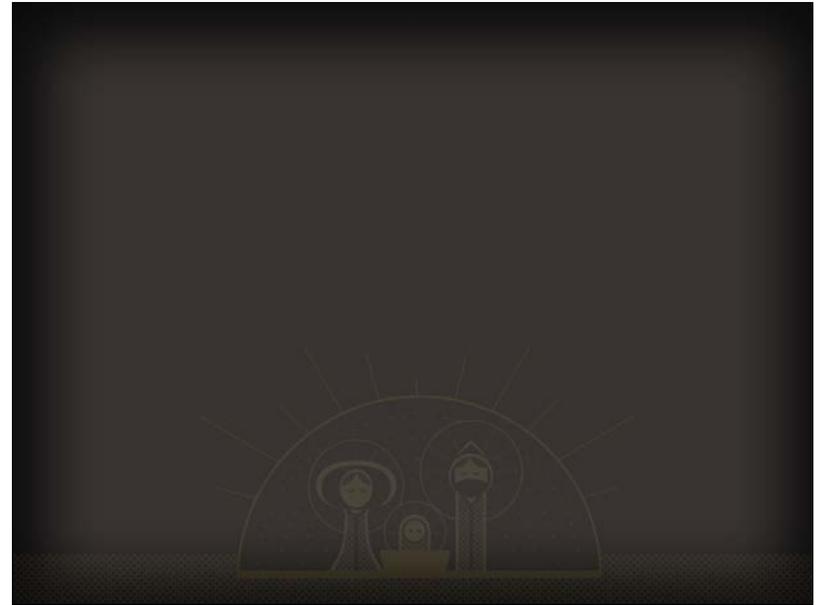
Like all mantras of ritual, they work on us from the inside. They are an economic event by which we measure a certain kind of cultural health. But this is not health at all.



When I was growing up, even in a financially comfortable family, we waited all year for the new bicycle, the new Barbie. Christmas was a reward for a kind of patience. It was even supposed to be a reward for goodness.



We who are fortunate to have money to spend on Christmas presents now inhabit a world where the new bicycle or the new video game are purchased on demand throughout the year.



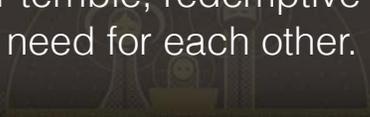
Then there is the religious distortion of Christmas. In so many of the churches I've attended as an adult, Christmas is dressed up as a children's holiday. A play. Not really for grown ups, not really about us.



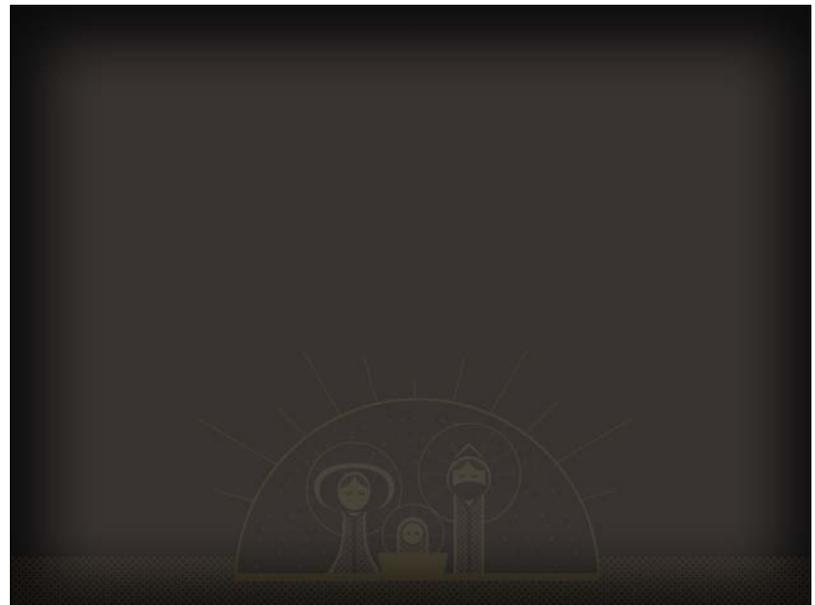
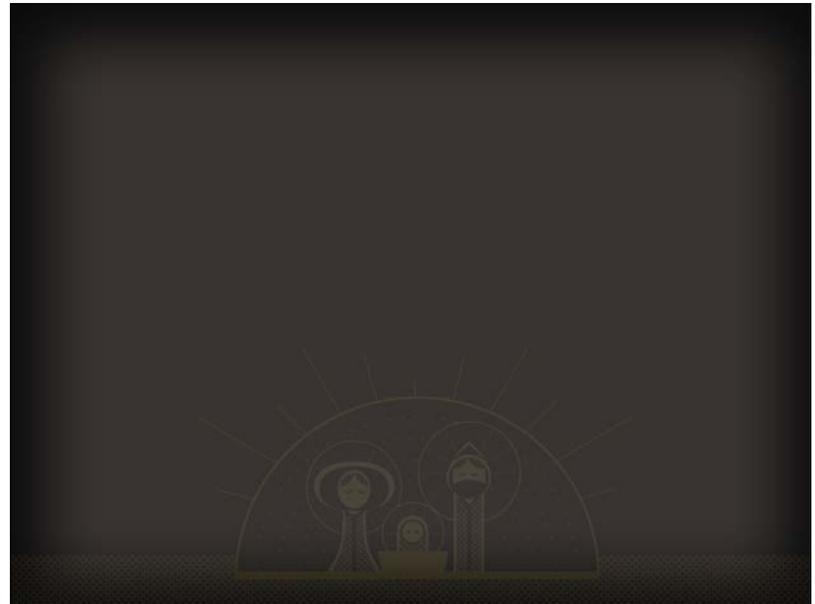
Make no mistake, I've teared up at that re-enactment of the manger scene many times myself, especially when my own children had adorable roles. But it does not begin to do justice to the message of God become human.



Here's what I do take seriously.
There is something audacious and mysterious and reality-affirming in the assertion that's stayed alive for two thousand years that God took on eyes and ears and hands and feet, hunger and tears and laughter and the flu, joy and pain and gratitude and our terrible, redemptive human need for each other.



It's not provable, but it's profoundly humanizing and concretely and spiritually exacting. And it's no less rational — no more crazy — than economic, political, and media myths to which we daily deliver over our fates.



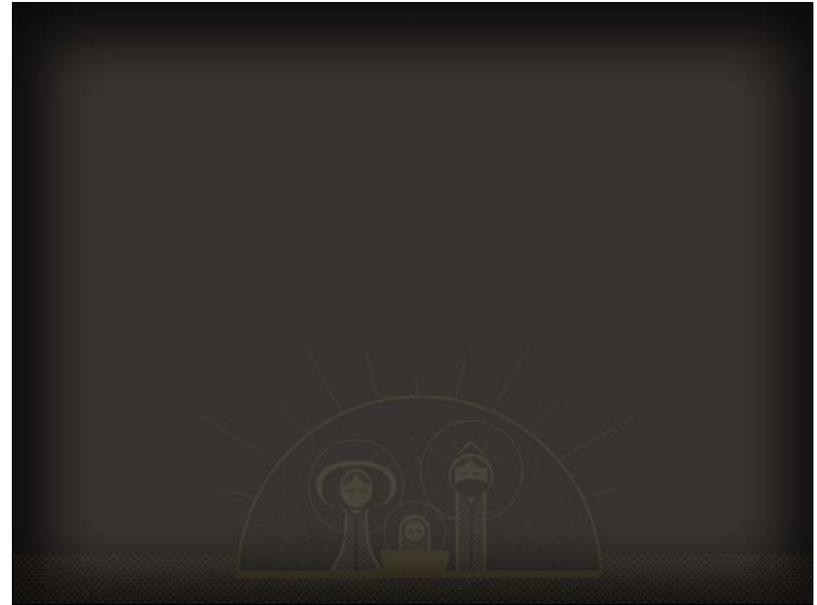
So here's what I'm thinking about this Christmas. I'm not going to buy any presents for my family this year. Instead, we will go shopping as a family for these homeless teenagers, and I will try to be honest about the equivalent I would spend on my own children on the commercial holy days if I believed in them.



I report this in some hope of feeding a little rebellion I sense many of us are quietly tending. But I also make it public to be sure I follow through.



As I said, we need each other. And that impulse, surely, is deep in the original heart even of the most secular things like Santa Claus and surrounding your home with lights: examining what we are to each other and experiencing that, sometimes when we do this, something transcendent happens.



hopes & fears
are met in thee tonight







In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:1-5



Responsive Prayer

○ God, you caused the holy night of Christ's birth to shine with the illumination of the true Light.

C: Grant us, we ask of You, that as we have known the mystery of that Light upon earth, so may we also perfectly enjoy Him in heaven where with you and the Holy Spirit he lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

Responsive Prayer

○ Light that shines in our darkness: come
and free us from our sin.

**C: O Word, now wrapped in human skin:
speak peace on earth through your
children.**



Responsive Prayer

○ Light that shines in our darkness: come
and free us from our sin.

**C: O Word, now wrapped in human skin:
speak peace on earth through your
children.**



Responsive Prayer

Almighty God, who has poured upon us
the new light of Your incarnate Word:

**C: Grant that the same Light, enkindled
in our hearts, may shine forth in our
lives; through the same Jesus Christ our
Lord, who lives and reigns with You, in
the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God,
now and for ever.
Amen.**

