

Synthetic Christmas Gives Wrong Idea

MERRY Synthetic Christmas! So much of our Christmas celebration has become artificial that it is easy to get an ersatz idea of the reason for this great religious holiday and send insincere greetings.

Our factory-made Christmas trees are decorated with imitation snow, counterfeit candles and plastic icicles. False-bearded Santa Claus characters listen to credulous youngsters recite lists of desired gifts about which the Santas can do nothing.

Children watching television may become uncertain about whose birthday anniversary is being celebrated — the Christ Child, Frosty the Snowman or some character from an animated cartoon.

Adults might be little better off, with musical programs presenting a strange mixture of spiritual and non-religious songs interspersed with indecorous advertising appealing to baser natures.

A whiskey ad is headed "Here's to those who've taught us the true spirit of Christmas." It portrays Charles Dickens' "Christmas Carol" in this

light, expressing the "hope that you, too, will raise a glass to everyone who's shown you what Christmas is all about."

That might be about all some people understand about Christmas as they motor tipsily from party to party, filled with "spirits." More clearly than in "Christmas Carol" Dickens wrote the purpose of Christmas in "The Life of Our Lord," penned in 1849 for his small children. It begins:

"My dear children, I am very anxious that you should know something about the history of Jesus Christ. For everybody ought to know about Him. No one ever lived who was so good, so kind, so gentle and so sorry for all people who did wrong, or were in any way ill or miserable, as He was.

"And as He is now in Heaven, where we hope to go, and all to meet each other after we are dead and there be happy always together, you never can think what a good place Heaven is, without knowing who He was and what He did."

Not infrequently Christmas leg-

ends and customs may be emphasized more than the true significance of the event. Churches may celebrate the birth of the infant in ways that submerge the divine purpose of Christ's advent. People may make charitable gifts simply to try to make up for yearlong indifference to others.

"The meaning of Christmas is that God has come in Christ His Son to redeem each one of us who will believe in Him," says Billy Graham, perhaps today's most influential preacher of the Gospel. "He came to live among us — to take our humanity and to understand our needs, to set for us an example of love and obedience."

Our customs for celebrating Christmas may not be inappropriate if observed in this light. Religious worship services, family gatherings, feasts, exchanges of gifts and other activities may be used to recognize Christ as God's gift to mankind.

When this is done, then the occasion may become a real Christmas event; not just a synthetic, mercenary affair.