

One reason it's hard to celebrate Christmas is the challenge to focus on its meaning. When I drive to my office at the Chancery every morning, I pass by two statues standing side-by-side at 39th and Gillham. One is of Santa Claus, the other is of George Washington. Santa is bright red, standing 30 feet tall; George is bronze, lifesize, astride his horse. They're not really on display, they're just kept in storage there. At this time of the year Santa moves around the corner into full view as part of Santa's Wonderland in Gillham Park. There he is joined by toy soldiers and live animals, part of a manger scene. Toy soldiers with toy guns guard the spot where the Prince of Peace will be born.

We used to go to the park every year when I was a kid and I still enjoy passing by there. Now because there are both sacred and secular symbols there, it has become a sign for me of the challenge to focus on the meaning of Christmas.

John the Baptist says to prepare a way for the coming of Christ. Clear a straight path. Fill in the valleys, lower the mountains. What in your life obstructs the way for the coming of Christ? What draws your focus away from the meaning of Christmas? For some, commercialism burdens them. They know they're supposed to buy gifts but they sometimes can't afford or the gifts seem all too trite. Others have family problems. They know that families are supposed to be happy this time of year and there's no hope that theirs will be. Still others have lost people they love, and they grieve at the idea of facing the holidays without them.

John the Baptist says to prepare a way for the coming of Christ. Clear a straight path. There are obstacles on the road to Christmas. We've got control over some of them, and no control over others. If it's within your power to clear a straight path for Christmas, do it. Let this be the Christmas you talk to a forgotten friend; let this be the Christmas you forgive. If it's not within your power to clear a path, don't despair. If a family member died this year, you're going to feel sad this Christmas. If you want to avoid commercialism, you'll have to lock your door and shut off the lights. But those obstacles may be illusions. You may find Christ not at the end of the path, but in the very obstacle that falls in your way. Keep your focus on the meaning of Christmas, then watch for the coming of Christ. If Christ can be found in a manger, he can surely be found even in Raytown, even at Bannister Mall, even in the sorrows of our heart.