

3 of the top 16 disasters since 1000 AD came in December:

- 2004 Dec 26, The world's most powerful earthquake in 40 years triggered massive tidal waves that across southern and southeast Asia. The initial estimated death toll of 9,000 soon rose to some **230,000 people** in 14 countries.
- 1920 Dec 16, In China an 8.6 earthquake in the northwestern provinces of Gansu and Shanxi caused massive landslides and the deaths of **100,000-200,000 people**.
- 1908 Dec 28, Some **70,000-100,000 people** died in the Messina earthquake in Sicily.

Other Disasters in December, which we might remember:

- **2014 Dec 28**, Indonesia AirAsia Flight QZ8501, an Airbus 320-200 with 162 people on board, went missing during a flight from Surabaya city to Singapore.
- **2012 Dec 14**, Adam Lanza (20) killed 27 people, 18 of them small children, in a shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. He killed his mother at home before the rampage at the school.
- **1984 Dec 3**, More than 4,000 people died and 200,000 were injured after a gas escaped from a pesticide plant operated by a Union Carbide subsidiary in Bhopal, India. 40 tons of vaporous chemicals were released after an explosion. Over the years, according to the Indian government, some 15,000 people died from effects of the gas.
- **1967 December 15**, the Silver Bridge collapsed while it was full of rush-hour traffic, resulting in the deaths of 46 people. Two of the victims were never found.
- **1907 Dec 6**, Worst mining disaster in American history took place in Monongah, Marion County West Virginia, killing 361 coal miners.

But, you see, [the number of persons involved in the disaster tends to not be as important to our memory as the personal connection that we had to the event](#).

Only 46 people were killed on the Silver Bridge in December 1967, but my father

was just a few cars back from getting on the bridge that night. THAT makes a difference.

To a boy from Marion County, whose Church started the nationwide day of remembrance in June following that worst American mine disaster in Monongah, in December 1907 – a remembrance we now call “Father’s Day” – that makes a difference.

Robert F. Kennedy put it pretty succinctly: ***A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic.***<sup>1</sup>

A ***[Feeling] Blue Christmas*** does not come about because of some international, nor national, nor state tragedy. A ***[Feeling] Blue Christmas*** comes about because of the personal touching of a tragedy, that robs us of the capacity (even, if only temporarily) of the ability to share in feelings of joy, hope, peace, and sometimes even the ability to give and receive love.

And the tragedy need not have occurred in December. Actually, my research of disasters and tragedies over the past 100+ years reveals that December does not actually have any more its share of tragedy than any other month. It’s just that it ***feels*** that way more during this season when everyone else seems to be wearing a happy face that just does not fit – even as a mask attempted to be worn as a cover up. ***More people want to come to the worship tonight than do, because they don’t know how to lower the mask, for even a little bit.***

Indeed, the stereotypical sanitized Christmas Card notion of this holy season so inadequately fails to capture the real pain that was present with the original Christmas – disinfected of the pain of the holy family pressed up against a sanctimonious religious culture, pressed up against the angst of paranoid politicians who fed off the adrenaline of fear.

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<sup>1</sup> Attributed to Robert F. Kennedy on a quote stone at Kennedy Federal Prison in Morgantown, WV (early 1970’s) also attributed to Herodotus and Joseph Stalin, amongst others.

So, here's the point:

- The reason for the pain is irrelevant to its reality.
- The lack of control over the drain of it upon our nobler desires is not sinful
- The natural and real and healthy response to pain is not to put on a phony mask of pretend
- The God of Joseph and of Mary, and of their families, and of the families of all the babies killed by Herod's troops because of Jesus' birth, does not wave a magic wand and make it all clean, freshly changed stable straw.

The God of Christmas became human to experience our pain with us, even the pain of having His own child wrongfully executed.

God knows our pain. *And God desires us to neither cover it up in this moment, nor to wallow in it forever.*

God wants to hold us close and know the tender strong touch of an embrace of love, that is silent and is holy. This is perhaps the real meaning of "silent night, holy night." Quiet. Still. Loving.

And real ... even when we are not able to feel it now, but to perhaps remember when we could ... and to know that today's feelings are not permanent. God loves us too much for that. Even if you can't believe that tonight, perhaps your memories of God's love can allow you to just **let it be** tonight, **without making it a life sentence**. Just to experience tonight for what it is. And to leave it in God's hands. **AMEN.**