

The reason for the season?

By [Henry J. Langknecht](#)

December 19, 2011

*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Langknecht's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

Several years ago I received from a parishioner a "Jesus Is the Reason for the Season" cookie tin. Every time I reached for a piece of Doris's divinity, I had to read that cheery-angry motto of Christian moralism.

Combine that irritation with the times that December when I was embroiled in versions of the perennial "church Christmas vs. cultural X-mas" confab, and by the time Christmas Eve rolled around I was lathered into a sermon that began, "Jesus is *NOT* the Reason for the Season." In fact, I ranted, Jesus is horrified that his followers insist that he is. The Son of Man came not to *be* served but to serve. *We* are the reason for the season; Christmas has always been "for us and for our salvation."

I still believe that. But let me dial it back. I love everything about Christmas, everything sacred and everything cultural, commercial and familial. What I don't love is our (that is, the church's) lack of awareness that whether we opt for embracing the culture at Christmas or fighting it, we are still too enthralled by something that distracts us from our mission.

I chose the reading from Titus as the starting point for my [lectionary column in the Century](#) (subscription required). I wanted to think about Christmas through the lens of an unfamiliar prompt. On the one hand, the high moralistic tone of "Jesus is the Reason ..." would be right at home with much of the content in Titus. On the other hand, I felt invited by Titus to think about Christmas as a post-resurrection Christian who wants to hear what the grown-up Jesus has to teach us about incarnation.

When I'm sitting in the pew on December 25, I'll be glad to revel in the glow with lyrics provided by Isaiah and Luke. But I'd like to hear a sermon that imagines what

the crucified one can teach us about being the incarnate body of Christ for the world.