

Mission

The Twelve Days of Christmas

Recently, *Evangelical Times* interviewed Roger Ellsworth and Jim Holmes about a new project they are working on: the publication, promotion and distribution of a small-format, 112-page book, *The Twelve Days of Christmas: morning and evening thoughts on Immanuel — God with us*. The book is by Roger Ellsworth (details from <http://twelvedaysofchristmas.net>).

ET: Jim, tell our readers how the *Twelve Days* idea came about.



Jim Holmes: Several years ago, Evangelical Press published Roger Ellsworth's book *The 31 Days of Christmas*. I loved the title and the

idea — short devotional readings that could be consumed by ordinary people in one month — but it went out of print. To cut a long story short, Roger and I have been able to rework some of the original content and make it available once again.

ET: Roger, you have evidently preached a lot about Christmas over the years. Are people receptive to the gospel message at this time of the year?



Roger Ellsworth: Yes, people do seem to be more receptive to the gospel during the Christmas season. There is such a sustained emphasis on showing kindness and goodwill to our fellow citizens, that even those who are opposed to Christianity are apt to be a bit more patient with Christians in general, and especially with those in their own family and among their colleagues.

It is also the one time of the year that some unbelievers are willing to attend a church service, perhaps to honour a family tradition or please a family member. Individual Christians should seize opportunities to invite unbelievers to attend services at Christmas, and pastors should be prepared to clearly and winsomely proclaim the gospel.

ET: Jim, tell us why you chose the title *The Twelve Days*?

Jim: There is something really catchy in the idea of 'twelve'. And as everyone knows the song, it seemed such a good idea to pack some good, Bible-based content in bite-sized chapters into a book with this title.

By the way, we express the mission of the book thus: 'It is

intended to help the hearts and minds of believers to focus on the wonder of the incarnation, as well as to encourage unbelievers to come in repentance and faith to Christ'. The meditations are easy to read and include bulleted points for practical application.

ET: Roger, in a nutshell, how do you define Christmas?

Roger: Christmas is the celebration of the Son of God coming to this earth in our humanity. The angel who appeared to the shepherds outside Bethlehem put it this way: 'For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord' (Luke 2:11).

ET: What do you think many people greatly misunderstand about Christmas?

Roger: While most still understand that Christmas is the celebration of the birth of the Lord Jesus, very few know why it was necessary for him to come. Many seem to think that Jesus only came among us to be an example to us. They do not connect the manger of Bethlehem with the cross of Calvary. They do not understand that Jesus came in our humanity for the express purpose of dying on the cross. And they certainly do not understand why it was necessary for him to die on the cross.

People do not realize the reality and enormity of their sins. They do not realize that our sins deserve the wrath of God and that Jesus went to the cross to receive that wrath, so that all who put their trust in him will not have to endure that wrath.

We must never think of Jesus' death on the cross in terms of just another man dying a physical death. Jesus' death was much more than that. It was a special death, in which he received the full measure of the judgment that our sins deserve.

When we view Christmas through the lens of the cross — assuming we truly understand the cross — Christmas will become exceedingly precious to us.

ET: Roger, over the years, *ET* readers have seen how your writing strongly directs them to apply what they read, in personal, practical ways, to their lives. How challenging is it to write like this?

Roger: As far as I am concerned, the Christian author faces the most challenging of all tasks, namely, to put the glorious truths of Christianity into clear and understandable language without losing the glory of those truths.

ET: This is a devotional book, and yet it calls people not only to worship the one true, living God, but first to come to him in repentance and faith. How do you expect ordinary readers who may not yet be believers to respond to this emphasis in your writing?

Roger: Repentance from sin and faith in Christ have never been popular topics. No mere man can produce repentance and faith in himself, let alone in anyone else. This always has been and will be the work of the Holy Spirit.

As I preach and write, I pray that the Spirit of God will use my feeble efforts to powerfully convince sinners of their sins and draw them to Christ.

We must never think of Jesus' death on the cross in terms of just another man dying a physical death.

ET: Jim, we understand that there are aspects of Roger's book that can be personalised for the specific use by a certain church. Please explain how this works.

Jim: Yes, this is customisation: personalising a high quality book so that it is identifiable with a church or ministry. Poorly produced

material used in the name of advancing the gospel can be a turn-off to unbelievers, but it is possible to print nice literature affordably and with its own unique look and feel.

Our method is simple: people may select the cover they prefer, and Bible text using the version they most like (AV, NKJV or ESV), and then place their

order. If they wish to add their church's name and contact information on the cover and inside page (to describe or promote their ministry or use the book as a giveaway), we offer this option too. What a great way to help churches connect meaningfully with their communities!

ET: Isn't this quite an expensive kind of project to undertake?

Jim: No, it's actually a fairly low cost, high value project, and it is a very well produced product. The book's suggested retail price is £4.99. But, by producing it in a pre-publication model that has low overheads, collects payment before printing and arranges for the printers to send the books directly to the user, we are able to give generous discounts. It is very affordable.

ET: So it's really just one book (with the option of Bible texts quoted from three different versions) and with the choice of three different covers?

Jim: Yes. The content is exactly the same in all three editions of the book — other than that Bible texts are quoted from a different version in each one. The covers reflect different tastes, ranging from modern to traditional designs. We're really happy to accommodate people's wishes.

If there is an *ET* reader who has a new and different idea to share, we'd love to explore this (visit the site <http://twelvedaysofchristmas.net> for contact details)

ET: Roger, as we close this interview, in one sentence what is your prayer for people who will read this book?

Roger: I pray that unbelievers will come to faith in the Lord Jesus and that believers will have a greater sense of awe and wonder regarding the Lord Jesus.

