Living Word
Lutheran Church
LCMS

Don't you think it's horrible that "Happy Holidays" has replaced "Merry Christmas"?

Short Answer: Yes and no.
(How's that for diplomacy - or just being wishy-washy?)

Longer, detailed answer:

First off, I greatly appreciate you being concerned that Christ is being taken out of our Christmas celebrations. He *is* the reason that we have hope during the darkest time of the year (and the rest of the year too). Christ is the reason for our December 25 celebration. Thank you for wanting to keep it that way! Now, on to the "yes and no" part of the answer.

As a *Christian citizen of a country that has a largely Christian heritage*, the answer is "Yes" It kind of ticks me off that a relatively few people are trying to erase all evidence of our Christian heritage. Taking "God" out of the Pledge of Allegiance or the Ten Commandments out of the courts or manger scenes off Post Office lawns just because a few people claim to be offended seems to me to be "just silly" (at best). From the sounds of it, many, many more people are offended by the removal of these Christian heritage reminders than are offended by our continuing use of them.

As U.S. citizens we also need to remember Jesus' words, "*Give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's.*" In other words, give your government what you owe your government. In a democracy, one of the things we owe our government is our voice. For a democracy to succeed the people need to voice their thoughts and concerns. We have a responsibility to voice our concerns about the removal of our heritage. (But.... it seems to be media and business - not the government - that are doing away with "Merry Christmas," so you have a right to let them know you prefer Merry Christmas, because it is our heritage.)

On the other hand, from the perspective of a Christian who is a citizen of God's eternal kingdom and who believes that people need to trust in Jesus in order to live forever in that kingdom... the answer is "No." It really doesn't matter to me what kind of greeting other people use during December. This may seem kind of strange, but think about it: Is anyone going to put their faith in Jesus as a result of hearing "Merry Christmas" instead of "Happy Holidays"? Not very likely. In fact, if everyone says "Merry Christmas" no one gives the greeting a second thought. But if most folks are saying "Happy Holidays" and you respond with something different (like "Merry Christmas") that may actually cause someone to stop and think about the words you just spoke. (And maybe ask "why?" which would give you a chance to point them to Jesus). Remember, God can always take things we see as "bad" and turn them into a "good" opportunity to be a witness for Christ.

With that in mind, as Christians who want other people to know Christ, we must always be aware of that our actions are a witness about Christ to the people who don't really know Him. We should be thinking about the impression our actions give to those who don't know Jesus. For example, what impression of Christ do "whiny" Christians give? Not a good one. And, I would guess, that non-Christians see us as just a bunch of whiners when all they hear this time of year is how we are miffed at not hearing "Merry Christmas." Chances are our complaining isn't leaving them with a positive image of Christ.

So, what do you do? Go ahead and wish people a Merry Christmas. In a world of "Happy Holidays" it may make them stop and remember what the holiday is really about. But don't get overly bent out of shape when they wish you a Happy Holiday in return. Whining isn't the best witness to the Christ whose birth you are celebrating. (Maybe it will help to also know that "holiday" is simply short for "holy day" - a day set apart for the Lord. And isn't that really what Christmas is?)

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to mailto:pastor@livingwordlutheran.net