she responded by saying, “God would be well pleased if on Christ-
mas each church would have a Christmas tree on which shall be hung offerings, great and small, for these houses of worship. Letters of inquiry have come to us asking, Shall we have a Christmas tree? Will it not be like the world? We answer, You can make it like the world if you have a disposition to do so, or you can make it as unlike the world as possible. There is no particular sin in selecting a fragrant evergreen and placing it in our churches, but the sin lies in the motive which prompts to action and the use which is made of the gifts placed upon the tree.”

The inspired counsel can be sum-
marized as follows: Christmas can be observed to serve a good purpose; minds can be directed heavenward to Christ’s sacrifice for sinful hu-
manity; and offerings should be
given to the Lord’s work. In other words, Christmas can be made a blessing for Seventh-day Adventist families and churches.

In a Review and Herald editorial, Kenneth H. Wood made two practical suggestions as to how Seventh-day Adventists can celebrate Christmas Christian-style: First, he suggested giving priority to others over self. Visit the old and the lonely. Invite someone who cannot repay you your hospitality for a meal, or take a Christmas basket to someone in need. Second, he suggested selecting a proj-
ect in the church such as Investment, Adventist World Radio, Voice of Prophecy, It Is Written, ADRA, evan-
gelism, etc. Then cut back on some-
ing this season (fewer cards, fewer gifts, no tree, etc.) and contribute that amount to the selected project.

This is in harmony with Ellen White’s counsel when she says, “Let there be recorded in the heavenly books such a Christmas as has never yet been seen because of the dona-
tions which shall be given for the sustaining of the work of God and the upbuilding of His kingdom.”

Christmas should be celebrated in harmonic with Christian principles. In providing for the poor and lonely, and by giving gifts to God’s work at Christmas, we honor Christ. Above all we should take care not to lose sight of the fact that Christmas calls attention to Christ’s first advent. A daily study of His life and work here on Earth during the Christmas season would be particularly appropriate. Children can be taught that, although the date of Christ’s birth is unknown, we can celebrate the event intelligent-
ly and in proper taste.

REFERENCES

1 The Adventist Home, pp. 477, 478.
2 Ibid., p. 482.
3 November 18, 1971.
4 The Adventist Home, p. 483.
Mary His mother, ‘Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed’” (vss. 29-35, NKJV).

The Christ-child would be a sign to be disputed. Spoken against. Someone argued over. People would take different sides. This child would elicit opposing responses.

Here’s a child who would bring out the best or the worst in people. This would be true not only for Christ’s own immediate family, but also for the human family as a whole. Jesus would be the great moral and spiritual divider. A point of spiritual moral convergence and pressure. It is never comfortable to face the real implications of Christ.

We witness this divergence in the contrast between the shepherds and the priests, the wise men and Herod. We see it in Christ’s ministry and among His disciples. Some loved Him with a passion. Others hated Him with a passion. There’s no difference today. Jesus still brings the best or the worst out of people.

Simeon informed us all that God’s purpose in sending Jesus is to test our thoughts and purposes. So “that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” he says (Luke 2:35, NKJV). The realm of thoughts includes our values, our attitudes, our motives, our outlook—what we really want and are deep down inside. This includes our thoughts about God. Our thoughts about our need of salvation, how it works, whether we need it, want it. Our thoughts about everyday things like money, power, sex, relationships, marriage, the authority of God’s Word—every sphere and aspect of life.

Jesus comes to us, not with a child’s appeal, but with the everlasting man’s authority: to force us to difficult decisions, to compel us to review and reshape the values of our living, to renounce pride or greed or lust of power, and to accept instead the imperatives of both His character and law of service.

We are compelled to take a stand. We cannot meet Jesus and ever be the same again—either way, for good or for bad.

We glimpse what Simeon had in mind in John’s record of a particularly low and pivotal point in Christ’s preaching ministry: “Many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’ When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, ‘Does this offend you?’” (John 6:60, 61, NKJV).

A lot of people, offended, turned their backs on Jesus that day. The Greek word for “hard saying” does not mean hard to understand. It means hard to tolerate. Hard to accept. Hard to stomach. Hard sayings of doctrine, of moral values, of lifestyle matters. Hard sayings about interpersonal relationships, about ethics, about authority, about one’s need of salvation and where it is found.

From that time, many of His disciples walked no more with Him.

As long as Jesus said nice, comfortable things, people hung around. They were quick to leave, though, when what they heard was so radical that they would not accept it.

Brain researchers identify four quadrants of the brain and suggest their implications for choice and change: frontal left, lower left, frontal right, lower right. They believe that most of us are born with an innate biochemical preference for processing information in one or two of these quadrants. But we don’t have to be stuck for life with that preference. We can choose differently if we decide to.

Scripture implies that every one of us has a heart preference that tends us toward important moral and spiritual inclinations, values, choices, being. “This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God” (John 3:19-21, NKJV).

The person and teachings of Jesus uncover our heart preference, which way we’re really leaning, morally, spiritually, with reference to Him. What we’re really like inside. The good news is that we’re never stuck with this if there is need for change. We can choose differently! That is why Jesus was born—to press every one of us on this important level.

Simeon’s words about Christ go beyond the mere revealing of the thoughts of our heart. They imply that Jesus will ultimately bring moral and spiritual decision one way or another. Some to the point of collapse and others to what in the Greek text refers to as “resurrection.”

Elisa brought loving responsibility out of her father Gustavo and hateful dysfunction from her mother Awilda. So with Jesus. Some will come, and some leave. He will bring out the best in some and the worst in others. Jesus will ever press us to choose Him over everything and anything else.

Heaven unearthing peace! Jesus has come to bring peace on Earth—but only after He has upset our equilibrium and pressed us with the reality of Himself and His claims on us through His Word.

REFERENCES

1 Time (December 11, 1995); Newsweek (December 11, 1995).