

## **Message, by Andy Pakula**

We are just two days away from the winter solstice, the darkest day of the year. On that day, there will be only 7 hours, 49 minutes, and 50 seconds of daylight. And that's assuming the sky is clear!

At this time of the year, our ancestors sought to bring light into the world. They may have lit their bonfires and lamps to encourage the return of life-sustaining sunshine. Maybe they did it just to ease the sorrow brought about by so much night.

And we do this still. At Hanukkah just past and Diwali not long ago, the symbols and practices are all about light.

And there's another holiday coming in just a few days - as if you could miss it even if you tried. Christmas is everywhere and we may all be more aware of Christmas than we want to be.

This season is a wonderful one for some. It is indifferent for many whose traditions never included a winter holiday.

And it for others, this is a very difficult time of year.

Some have had losses at this time of year and the festivities grate against and deepen the sorrow they feel.

Some remember Christmas of the past and find themselves lonely now. For them, Christmas is a time to get through - to survive - rather than to relish.

But Christmas is special - not just because of lights or trees or shopping or receiving presents or the festive food and drink of the season. Christmas is a time symbolized by the birth of a child. This child was not a king. He was no one special. He was born to poor parents forced by an oppressive regime to travel while the mother was heavily pregnant.

And this lowly birth brought hope of a different kind of future. The baby grew into a man who was a great and inspiring teacher. Jesus taught of love. He taught of justice. He taught of acceptance.