

# Finding Cheer in a COVID Christmas

When the Civil War interrupts the Christmas plans of the March sisters in Louisa May Alcott's novel [\*Little Women\*](#), the four lament their reduced prospects for a happy holiday. "Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents," Jo says.

Many of us likely feel similarly to Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy as we reach the end of a year that has frustrated our normal plans. While it's easy to moan about our miserable Christmas prospects, it's helpful to consider the plight of the March girls and many others like them, for the last 2,000 Christmases have been racked with plenty of earthshaking events throwing wrenches into happy yuletide plans.

Consider, for example, the Christmases during and bookending World War II. Author and editor Whittaker Chambers wrote about that period in a *Time* essay entitled "[CHRISTMAS 1945](#)." It was the first in many years in which Americans did not have to deal with the realities of war, a welcome change with the promise of peace. Yet in spite of these encouraging circumstances, Christmas 1945 was still overshadowed by the war's casualties and the lurking fears of what was to come.

"Beside every U.S. celebrant of Christmas," Chambers wrote, "there watched, like the shepherds, three presences: the war's dead, the wretched and The Bomb."

Our present Christmas contains similar parallels.

## The War's Dead

The dead of 1945 were not just soldiers who died on the battlefield, but those who perished through famine, flight, or fear.

Today's "war dead" are easily recognizable as the nearly 275,000 Americans whose [deaths are attributed to COVID-19](#). But this number overlooks what we might call secondary COVID deaths—those who died not from the fallout of war, but from the indirect consequences of the virus. Increased suicide rates are likely to be one of these. While it's still too early to tell if there has been an increased rate of suicides this year, a survey report from the Centers for Disease Control found in June that people's reported [thoughts of suicide](#) doubled in 2020 compared with 2018.

## The Wretched

The anxious and displaced of World War II sat with "beseeching eyes" asking "What will you do?," Chambers wrote.

Today, businesses are closed, schools are slow to reopen, and fear and unrest triggered by the virus is everywhere. COVID has no small share of its anxious, displaced, and "wretched" citizens. Sadly, they have learned that the question "What will you do?" often brings only more misery, as government leaders try to give them a little safety in return for the relinquishment of their liberties.

## The Bomb

The newly created atomic bomb was unsettling to the people of 1945. It "seemed to transfer responsibility for his fate from God to man," Chambers wrote.

Our response to the virus is a transfer of responsibility as well. We have frantically attempted to completely stop the spread of this virus. The reality is that, despite what prudent measures we may take to stop the virus's spread, much of the outcome is beyond our control. Chambers wrote of the attempts of experts to control the uncontrollable:

The practical aspects of these questions would be settled in time, in the world's way, by able men, purposeful men, shrewd men, perhaps ruthless men, and always confused men. There would be Babels of planning and organization, pyramids of policy. But these would come to no more than all those that had gone before unless, as on this day of Nativity, 1945, man felt within himself a rebirth of what some have called 'the Inner Light,' others 'the Christ within.' They would fail like all the rest unless man achieved the ultimate humility and the power implied in one of the Bible's most peremptory commandments: *Be still, and know that I am God.*

We can plan and plot and prod others to wear masks or stay locked down, but in the end these "Babels of planning" and "pyramids of policy" will come to naught.

Instead of fretting ourselves into such a state of worry, this year is our chance to be still and consider the wonder of Christmas. Not Santa, or gifts, or even carols or family gatherings. Instead it is time to return to what Christmas is all about. The babe in the manger who came to redeem humanity from its sorry, sinful state.

In the absence of our normal plans and parties, let's take this opportunity and season of quietness to "adore him, Christ the Lord."

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