

Monthly Update

December 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As has become our tradition, in the December Update we declare a moratorium on the news of all that is happening (some of it unsettling) – and information about Christmas. This season should be a time of peace and remembering one of the truly important things in life – Jesus.

A change in this year’s December Update is that we composed it so that if you wish to copy it and hand it out to others – or insert it in Christmas cards for family and friends – you may do so. It might be that you could use it to brighten up someone else’s life with the Christmas insights that are included. Another thing you will notice is that some of the material is the same; we included it because we wanted to make it rich with meaning for those who may be feeling lonely, depressed, or feeling that this year seems to be “stale” and boring.

Something that I have done for the past several years is to spend Christmas with family in South Georgia; I plan it so that I will be driving down there or returning home on Christmas Day. Along the way, I hand out Christmas cards that include stories and information such as is contained in this Update, an evangelistic tract, and some other token to cheer people up. As I travel, I pull into gas stations or highway rest stops, go up to each car or person there, and ask, “Would you like to have a Christmas Card?” Only twice in all the years I have done it have people refused. Since they are traveling on Christmas Day, many are despondent or depressed. Often their countenance brightens as they take it. This past year, I had stopped at a Waffle House to get supper and, since I had given out the last of the “stuffed” Christmas Cards to the patrons who were there, I was eating my own meal and putting more inserts into the envelopes when one of the guys I had given a card to stopped by my booth and said, “Thank you for the Christmas Card; I really enjoyed it. By the way, don’t bother to look for your check – I took care of it.” It was my turn to thank him. Then a few days after the holidays were over, I received a letter from one lady; she was Hindu, but expressed how much she liked getting the Christmas card and insert – and how it had cheered her up. So, please try to use this for others.

This past year has been productive for our ministry. In addition to the conferences we had attended from Washington, DC to Overland Park, Kansas we have sent informative mailings to members of the Commission on A Way Forward (plus the bishops and other leaders) who have been charged with formulating how we as a denomination will move into the future. We are cautiously optimistic about what will come out of General Conference 2019 in St. Louis.

Each December, we make our annual request for help. We ask that you seek the Lord’s will as to how you might partner with Concerned Methodists. We make the most efficient use possible of the money you entrust to our work. Since we have no paid employees and economize our expenses, we are able to translate the maximum amount of your donations into our ministry of informing people about what is happening within our United Methodist Church.

Let us continue to pray for our Church, our country, and a hazardous world.

From all of us here, we wish you the very best during this Christmas season and throughout the coming year. We thank God for His goodness – and for you!

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

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Christmas Update

People were coming over and I was frantically trying to get the house ready for Christmas. I was also driving my family crazy, barking out orders to pick up, help set the table and not to mess up the living room. While I was cleaning the kitchen, I realized I'd pushed them too far. "Mary," I snapped at my 12-year-old daughter, "where's the broom?"

"I don't know, Mom," she fired back. "Where'd you put it when you landed?"*[Note: You have to love that kid. AOM]

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Christmas Traditions

I recently read of a custom in times past called "burning of the greens" done on Twelfth Night or Epiphany, which celebrated the coming of the Wise Men to the stable to pay homage to the Christ Child. Evidently, celebration of Epiphany dates back to the third or fourth century A.D. Ms. Lillian Elders of St. Louis, Missouri wrote of an old family custom of burning the Christmas tree in a celebratory way. This included inviting people to:

1. Take pen and paper, find a peaceful place to sit and meditate. Let your mind go back over the past year, but don't dwell on disappointments; rather, write down the five most pleasant memories of the year.
2. Then, write down your plans and goals for the new year.
3. Finally, consider the burning of the tree itself. If you can burn your tree without violating fire ordinances, do so. Otherwise, burn some branches of it in your fireplace or other safe place. As they burn, think of it as burning away the unwanted "residue" of unpleasant memories from the past year. Remember the fragrant smell that is left. Let that be the memory you keep.

Christmas carols. The birthplace of the true Christmas carol was Italy. In the 13th Century, Saint Francis of Assisi was the first to introduce the joyous carol spirit, which soon spread all over Europe. Saint Francis wrote a beautiful Christmas Hymn in Latin, Psalmus in Nativitate, but there is no evidence that he composed carols in Italian. From Italy the carol quickly spread to Spain, France and Germany, where many carols were written under the inspiration of the 14th Century Dominican mystics: John Eckhardt, John Taler and Blessed Henry Suso.

The singing of Hymns and Carols can be a way for families and neighbors to reflect on the wonder and joy of Advent and Christmas. Good King Wenceslas and Twelve Days of Christmas are examples of carols for Christmas that are not sung in Church services but carry strong Christmas messages and have interesting historic origins.

Good King Wenceslas tells the story of the king who ruled Bohemia in the 10th Century. While it does not address the story of the Nativity, it is a hymn about Christian charity and his extraordinary efforts to give food to poor families.

The Twelve Days of Christmas originated as a Hebrew hymn which began: "In those twelve days". In the Middle Ages the song was rewritten in Latin with Christian images, and by 1645 an English version of the hymn had appeared. By the 18th Century, that had, in turn, become the Christmas carol we know today. One author describes this traditional English carol as "a catechetical mnemonic device that Catholics used to teach their children the truths of the faith during the years that the Catholic faith was suppressed in England" and goes like this:

Partridge	The One True God
Two Turtle Doves	Old and New Testaments
Three French Hens	Three persons of the Trinity (or the Three Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)
Four Colley Birds	("colley" means black) The four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

Five Gold Rings	The first five books of the Bible, believed to be written by Moses, called the Pentateuch
Six Geese	Six jars of water turned to wine by Jesus at the wedding at Cana.
Seven Swans	Seven Sacraments
Eight maids a milking	Eight Beatitudes
Nine Ladies dancing	Nine Choirs (or ranks) of Angels
Ten Lords a leaping	Ten Commandments
Eleven Pipers	Eleven faithful disciples (not including Judas) or the eleven stars seen in the Old Testament account of Joseph's dream
Twelve drummers	Twelve Apostles or the twelve tribes of Israel.
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Preparing for a large Christmas Eve family gathering, I had been giving out orders like a drill sergeant: "Pick up your things! Don't get your clothes dirty! Put away those toys!" My four-year-old daughter had been underfoot, so I sent her to the next room to play with our wooden Nativity set. As I scurried around setting the table, I overheard her make-believe conversation in an all-too-familiar tone of voice: "I don't care who you are, get those camels out of my living room!"
*— By Catherine Halverson as appearing in Reader's Digest *Mary Gzik; from Reader's Digest.*

Wildlife Advisory – Reindeer Alert!

According to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game at North Pole, Alaska – while both male and female reindeer grow antlers in the summer each year, male reindeer drop their antlers at the beginning of winter, usually from late November to mid-December. Female reindeer retain their antlers until after they give birth in the spring. Therefore, according to every historical rendition depicting Santa's reindeer, every single one of them, from Rudolph to Blitzen had to be a girl.

We should have known. Only women, while pregnant, would be able to drag a fat old man in a red velvet suit all around the world in one night and not get lost.

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Recipe for a Happy New Year

Take twelve whole months, clean them thoroughly of all bitterness, hate, and jealousy.

Make them just as fresh and clean as possible.

Now cut each month into twenty-eight, thirty, or thirty-one different parts, but don't make up the whole batch at once.

Prepare it one day at a time out of these ingredients.

Mix well into each day one part of faith, one part of patience, one part of courage, and one part of work.

Add to each day one part of hope, faithfulness, generosity, and kindness.

Blend with one part prayer, one part meditation, and one good deed.

Season the whole with a dash of good spirits, a sprinkle of fun, a pinch of play, and a cupful of good humor.

Pour all of this into a vessel of love.

Cook thoroughly over radiant joy, garnish with a smile, and serve with quietness, unselfishness, and cheerfulness.

– Received from Weeks Parker, Fayetteville, NC.

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Things to do at Christmas:

+ Spend time with the people that you love. Read Luke, Chapter 2 in your Bible – aloud and as a family. Build a fire in your fireplace; roast marshmallows in it. Help put the lights on the house. Go sledding, ice skating or snow skiing with your younger relatives. Spend time just talking with an older relative or daughter, son, brother, sister, granddaughter, grandson. Just gaze at the Christmas tree lit up in the dark. Spending quality time with your friends and family helps to make the Christmas season special, and you can make memories that you'll cherish for the rest of your life. & "Chill out."

- + Watch Christmas movies with your family such as *A Christmas Carol* (the old one with Alastair Sim), *The Life of Jesus*, Frank Capra's *It's a wonderful Life* (James Stewart and Donna Reed), *The Santa Claus*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, etc.
- + Wear a "Merry Christmas" button to remind folks the reason for the season. Say "Merry Christmas" to people – often.
- + When you shop, go to those stores who are not afraid to say "Merry Christmas" back to you. If some of the retail chains are so "politically correct" that they refuse to acknowledge Christmas, I am so devoted to my Savior that I will not shop there. After all, if they don't know the priceless gift of Jesus Christ to the world and why we celebrate Christmas, I am not sure I would trust the "quality" of whatever they sell or their services.
- + Learn about a holiday different from Christmas, especially the Jewish Hanukkah, since the Israelites are our spiritual ancestors. After all, if it had not been for the Jews, where would we Christians be? Spend time with a friend of a different faith and see how they celebrate the holidays. Who knows, you might even want to include some parts of their celebration into your own traditions. But be careful to not let any secular ideas compromise your own Christian beliefs.
- + Go to the theatre for a seasonal play. Whether at a well-known place downtown or at your school's auditorium, there are lots of holiday productions at this time of year. A senior at the University of Michigan wrote, "Every year, I check out a local theater's rendition of *A Christmas Carol*. I really get a kick out of it, and it feels good to support local productions." I usually like to see a performance of "The Nutcracker Suite" – although some people might not like ballet.
- + Go shopping – and make it a challenge to spend no more than \$10, \$15, or \$25 for each gift (or to buy the materials so that you can make a gift for someone else) – and then give the rest of your Christmas gift money to help a needy family, Operation Blessing, or Salvation Army during this season.
- + Decorate your apartment or house; make the place where you live a little more festive.
- + Send out Christmas cards – with a tract, poem, or pocket calendar with a spiritual message inside.
- + Collect different colored leaves and place them around your home to add a more festive air to your surroundings.
- + Make paper snowflakes and decorate your house with them (all you need is white printer paper and scissors, it really isn't difficult – and it's fun if you have people help you).
- + Make a gingerbread house. Take time to sample some of the ingredients as you build it.
- + Buy a present for yourself – some little thing you have always wanted – as a holiday treat.
- + Wrap presents with artistic ribbons or in unique ways – after you have tucked a little note inside.
- + Decorate your Christmas tree in an unusual way. Show imagination.
- + Make your own ornaments.
- + Make hot chocolate (find a recipe, make your own, and put the ingredients into mugs to use as gifts). Stock up on Swiss Miss, find festive mugs and add mini-marshmallows or candy canes. Give them as "thinking-of-you" gifts.
- + For teenagers, use your Christmas time at home to get more comfortable in the kitchen and learn new recipes; talk with your mom or grandmother about how it "used to be." Make traditional Christmas dinners, especially if you are a kid; you will want to know how to make your favorite dishes when you're on your own. Pay close attention to cultural cuisine, like University of Michigan sophomore Kylie Kagen, "My dad is Jewish, so to keep part of his cultural background alive during Christmas time, we have a big Jewish meal on Christmas Eve. I always look forward to cooking that traditional Jewish food with my family." Check out recipes from *AllRecipes*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, or your own cook books. Having come from Texas, it is a custom among some of the Hispanic people to make the traditional tamales wrapped in corn husks and to serve stuffed jalapeno peppers (with cream cheese inside) – along with the other Mexican Food.
- + Spend an afternoon baking cookies, trying out new recipes in addition to family favorites. Make cookies and decorate them in bright, sparkling colors. Have your friends and family help you (or vice versa). Save some to

- eat later, but definitely give cookies as gifts to your neighbors – and especially to those who are “less fortunate” than you are.
- + Drive around and look at Christmas lights. Enjoy how beautiful your neighborhood looks all lit up at night, and decide whether white lights or colored bulbs are prettier. Take “underprivileged” kids with you.
 - + Visit Santa at the mall. With all of the parents and kids waiting in line, you yourself will get to feel like a kid again.
 - + Fix up Christmas cards with a spiritual message, tract, or poem inside and then go to the truck stops around your town. Take along some of the cookies you made. Do this on Christmas Day. There are always truckers on the road, and I have found that they seem especially grateful for the little bit of cheer your card and verbal “Merry Christmas” bring.
 - + Curl up in a blanket and read a good book – just for fun.
 - + Enjoy a low-key dinner party with your friends; make it a potluck meal, use that family recipe, and swap Christmas memories – and recipes – with two (or twenty) of your friends.
 - + Have a game night with friends and family. Play “charades” or board games such as Scattergories, etc.
 - + Go Christmas caroling. I used to take my youth group from Camp Ground United Methodist Church; we would fix up baskets with fruit, include a picture Christmas card of our kids, and give it at each place that we serenaded at the Senior Center on Rosehill Road here in town. Or rather than caroling, just get together with friends and sing your hearts out.
 - + Cover someone’s holiday shift at your job. Working during the holidays can be depressing and it keeps people from spending quality time with their families. Reach out to a lonely Single or “Senior” during these holidays.
 - + Relive the good memories of past Christmases; keep a “memory book” of Christmases.
 - + One family in Michigan used to do something called “Tacky Christmas.” They would dress up as Christmas characters and drive or walk to houses with gifts they had made.
 - + Attend or throw a Charles Dickens Christmas party. Dress in old-fashioned clothes and do what the people did in colonial times. Have an apple-bobbing contest. Learn some of the old customs and do the traditional dances such as the “Virginia Reel,” Square Dance, etc.
 - + Attend or throw an ugly sweater party. The bright green sweater Rudolph’s face on it that “Aunt Dorothy” gave you three years ago? It’ll fit right in at an ugly sweater party. If you don’t have any ugly sweaters, go to a local consignment shop to find one. Or think up a different theme and have a get-together. Be original. Be sure to take lots of pictures.
 - + Give back to the community. Volunteer during the Christmas Season, serve food to the homeless at a local soup kitchen
 (but here in Fayetteville, North Carolina, if you want to do this at the Salvation Army, call them well before Christmas
 because they have more volunteers than they can use at this time of the year).
 - + If you live close to a military installation, go to the USO or chaplains’ office and ask for a soldier (sailor or airman) to host for Christmas. Offer to pick them up, feed them a good meal, make them feel at home, and drive them back to the post. If room in your home permits invite two or three servicemen. Then keep in touch for the rest of their tour at the post.
 - + Give a donation to those Salvation Army bell-ringers (or volunteer to be a bell-ringer for a specified amount of time). For local volunteer opportunities, check out websites such as Volunteer Match; ask at one of the charity places such as the Salvation Army or Operation Blessing; or ask the pastor of your church how you might help.
 - + Help a neighbor put up Christmas lights, especially for someone disabled, a “Senior” or a single mother.
 - + Buy groceries and gifts for a needy family that can’t afford a Christmas, drive to their house, ring the doorbell, and then hide so that they won’t know who left them.

++ I knew of a ten-year-old boy who wanted to play Santa. His forty-year-old aunt indulged him. As they made the rounds, talking to the residents at the senior center, “Santa” was quick on the comeback to some of the pointed questions:

Resident 1, “You’re pretty small for a Santa Claus. Somehow, I thought you would be bigger.”

Santa, “You probably remember seeing me when you were a little boy yourself, and I looked bigger to you then.”

Resident 2, “Your elf looks pretty big. Are you sure that’s an elf?”

Santa, “Yes, we feed them pretty well at the North Pole. So they grow large.”

The residents thoroughly enjoyed the visit from the diminutive “Santa” and relived the memories for years to come.

++ I read of a guy who used to love playing Santa Claus. He would find out about needy families to include the ages and sexes of the kids. He would then get a gift that was appropriate to each kid, put them in a bag, and then with his “elf” go “Ho, Ho, Ho-ing” to the house. At one home, he heard the family speaking in Polish (the parents were immigrants from that country); he added his own “Christmasy” talk – in Polish – to the utter amazement of the home’s inhabitants. As it happened, “Santa’s” parents were from Poland. When the people expressed surprise, he responded in Polish, “Of course, Santa can speak all of the languages.” When he visited another house filled with kids (to include one girl who was in foster care), the kids all responded enthusiastically – except this same girl who was withdrawn and morose. Finally, Santa called the little girl over, had her sit in his lap, and then offered her a beautiful doll asking, “Do you want this doll?”

The girl responded petulantly, “No.”

Santa asked, “Why not?”

She leaned over and whispered in his ear, “Because I’m Jewish.”

Santa in turn leaned over and whispered in her ear, “I’m Jewish too. Now do you want this doll?”

She smiled, happily nodded “yes” – and took it.

The guy who played Santa started doing it in his early twenties because he loved the light, laughter, beauty and joy of the Christmas season and wanted to take part in the holiday festivities – even though he was Jewish. Seeing nothing wrong with it, he took to his role with enthusiasm and it grew into what was for him a cherished avocation.

And there is nothing wrong with that. Christmas is for everybody – just as Jesus Christ is for everybody.

Oh, and during the Christmas holidays – remember to read your Bible, pray, and go to church.

....And after the Christmas holidays, don’t be afraid to - - - - - catch up on your sleep!

But through it all – and above all – remember the Reason for the Season is Jesus Christ!

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The Christmas Gifts

It was Christmas Eve 1892. I was fifteen years old and feeling like the world had caved in on me because there just hadn’t been enough money to buy me the rifle that I’d wanted for Christmas. We did the chores early that night for some reason. I just figured Daddy wanted a little extra time so we could read in the Bible. After supper was over I took my boots off and stretched out in front of the fireplace and waited for Daddy to get down the old Bible. I was still feeling sorry for myself and, to be honest, I wasn’t in much of a mood to read Scriptures. But Daddy didn’t get the Bible instead he bundled up again and went outside. I couldn’t figure it out because we had already done all the chores. I didn’t worry about it long though I was too busy wallowing in self-pity.

Soon he came back in. It was a cold clear night out and there was ice in his beard. “Come on, Matt,” he said. “Bundle up good, it’s cold out tonight.” I was really upset then. Not only wasn’t I getting the rifle for Christmas, now he was dragging me out in the cold, and for no earthly reason that I could see. We’d already done all the chores, and I couldn’t think of anything else that needed doing, especially not on a night like this. But I knew he was not very patient at one dragging one’s feet when he’d told them to do something, so I got up

and put my boots back on and got my coat. Momma gave me a mysterious smile as I opened the door to leave the house. Something was up, but I didn't know what.

Outside, I became even more dismayed. There in front of the house was the work team, already hitched to the big sled. Whatever it was we were going to do wasn't going to be a short, quick, little job. I could tell. We never hitched up this sled unless we were going to haul a big load. Daddy was already up on the seat, reins in hand. I reluctantly climbed up beside him. The cold was already biting at me. I wasn't happy. When I was on, Daddy pulled the sled around the house and stopped in front of the woodshed. He got off and I followed. "I think we'll put on the high sideboards," he said. "Here, help me." The high sideboards! It had been a bigger job than I wanted to do with just the low sideboards on, but whatever it was we were going to do would be a lot bigger with the high sideboards on.

Then Daddy went into the woodshed and came out with an armload of wood – the wood I'd spent all summer hauling down from the mountain, and then all Fall sawing into blocks and splitting. What was he doing? Finally I said something. I asked, "What are you doing?"

"You been by the Widow Jensen's lately?" he asked. Mrs. Jensen lived about two miles down the road. Her husband had died a year or so before and left her with three children, the oldest being eight. Sure, I'd been by, but so what?

"Yeah," I said, "Why?"

"I rode by just today," he said. "Little Jakey was out digging around in the woodpile trying to find a few chips. They're out of wood, Matt." That was all he said and then he turned and went back into the woodshed for another armload of wood. I followed him. We loaded the sled so high that I began to wonder if the horses would be able to pull it. Finally, he called a halt to our loading then we went to the smoke house and he took down a big ham and a side of bacon. He handed them to me and told me to put them in the sled and wait. When he returned he was carrying a sack of flour over his right shoulder and a smaller sack of something in his left hand.

"What's in the little sack?" I asked.

"Shoes, they're out of shoes. Little Jakey just had gunny sacks wrapped around his feet when he was out in the woodpile this morning. I got the children a little candy too. It just wouldn't be Christmas without a little candy."

We rode the two miles to Mrs. Jensen's pretty much in silence. I tried to think through what Daddy was doing. We didn't have much by worldly standards. Of course, we did have a big woodpile, though most of what was left now was still in the form of logs that I would have to saw into blocks and split before we could use it. We also had meat and flour, so we could spare that, but I knew we didn't have any money, so why was he buying them shoes and candy? Really, why was he doing any of this? Widow Jensen had closer neighbors than us; it shouldn't have been our concern.

We came in from the blind side of the Jensen house and unloaded the wood as quietly as possible; then we took the meat and flour and shoes to the door. We knocked. The door opened a crack and a timid voice said, "Who is it?"

"Lucas Miles, Ma'am, and my son, Matt, could we come in for a bit?" Mrs. Jensen opened the door and let us in. She had a blanket wrapped around her shoulders. The children were wrapped in another and were sitting in front of the fireplace by a small fire that hardly gave off any heat at all. Mrs. Jensen fumbled with a match and finally lit the lamp.

"We brought you a few things, Ma'am," Daddy said and set down the sack of flour. I put the meat on the table. Then he handed her the sack that had the shoes in it. She opened it hesitantly and took the shoes out one pair at a time. There was a pair for her and one for each of the children – sturdy shoes, the best, shoes that would last. I watched her carefully. She bit her lower lip to keep it from trembling and then tears filled her eyes and started running down her cheeks. She looked up at my Daddy like she wanted to say something, but it wouldn't come out.

"We brought a load of wood too, Ma'am," he said. Then turned to me and said, "Matt, go bring in enough to last awhile. Let's get that fire up to size and heat this place up." I wasn't the same person when I went back

out to bring in the wood. I had a big lump in my throat and as much as I hate to admit it, there were tears in my eyes too. In my mind I kept seeing those three kids huddled around the fireplace and their mother standing there with tears running down her cheeks with so much gratitude in her heart that she couldn't speak.

My heart swelled within me and a joy that I'd never known before filled my soul. I had given at Christmas many times before, but never when it had made so much difference. I could see we were literally saving the lives of these people.

I soon had the fire blazing and everyone's spirits soared. The kids started giggling when Daddy handed them each a piece of candy and Mrs. Jensen looked on with a smile that probably hadn't crossed her face for a long time. She finally turned to us. "God bless you," she said. "I know the Lord has sent you. The children and I have been praying that he would send one of his angels to spare us."

In spite of myself, the lump returned to my throat and the tears welled up in my eyes again. I'd never thought of my Daddy in those exact terms before, but after Widow Jensen mentioned it I could see that it was probably true. I was sure that a better man than Daddy had never walked the earth. I started remembering all the times he had gone out of his way for Momma and me, and many others. The list seemed endless as I thought on it.

Daddy insisted that everyone try on the shoes before we left. I was amazed when they all fit and I wondered how he had known what sizes to get. Then I guessed that if he was on an errand for the Lord that the Lord would make sure he got the right sizes.

Tears were running down Widow Jensen's face again when we stood up to leave. My Daddy took each of the kids in his big arms and gave them a hug. They clung to him and didn't want us to go. I could see that they missed their Daddy and I was glad that I still had mine.

At the door he turned to Widow Jensen and said, "The Mrs. wanted me to invite you and the children over for Christmas dinner tomorrow. The turkey will be more than the three of us can eat, and a man can get cantankerous if he has to eat turkey for too many meals. We'll be by to get you about eleven. It'll be nice to have some little ones around again. Matt, here, hasn't been little for quite a spell." I was the youngest. My two brothers and two sisters had all married and had moved away.

Mrs. Jensen nodded and said, "Thank you, Brother Miles. I don't have to say, 'May the Lord bless you'; I know for certain that He will."

Out on the sled I felt a warmth that came from deep within and I didn't even notice the cold. When we had gone a ways, Daddy turned to me and said, "Matt, I want you to know something. Your Mother and me have been tucking a little money away here and there all year so we could buy that rifle for you, but we didn't have quite enough.

Then yesterday a man who owed me a little money from years back came by to make things square. Your Mom and me were real excited, thinking that now we could get you that rifle, and I started into town this morning to do just that, but on the way I saw little Jakey out scratching in the woodpile with his feet wrapped in those gunny sacks and I knew what I had to do. Son, I spent the money for shoes and a little candy for those children. I hope you understand."

I understood, and my eyes became wet with tears again. I understood very well, and I was so glad Daddy had done it. Now the rifle seemed very low on my list of priorities. He had given me a lot more. He had given me the look on Mrs. Jensen's face and the radiant smiles of her three children. For the rest of my life, Whenever I saw any of the Jensens, or split a block of wood, I remembered, and remembering brought back that same joy I felt riding home beside of my Daddy that night. He had given me much more than a rifle that night, he had given me the best Christmas of my life....

– Matt Miles.

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Beginning with Alabama in 1836, what would be all 50 States came to recognize Christmas Day as a legal holiday.

In 1856, President Franklin Pierce put up the first Christmas Tree in the White House.

On Christmas Day, 1868, President Andrew Johnson proclaimed full pardon and amnesty for all who had participated in secession, without reserve or exception.

In 1870, President Ulysses S. Grant signed a Bill making Christmas Day a Federal Holiday.

In 1893, Christmas Day was recognized as an official holiday in the U.S. States and Territories.

On Christmas Eve, December 24, 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had told the American people: "It is not easy to say 'Merry Christmas' to you, my fellow Americans, in this time of destructive war...We will celebrate this Christmas Day in our traditional American way...because the teachings of Christ are fundamental in our lives...the story of the coming of the immortal Prince of Peace." – William J. Federer. Published courtesy of Mr. Federer; permission granted.

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The Birth of Jesus. In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.....

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was with him.

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With all good wishes to you for this coming year,

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