

Bridging the Gap Christmas Card

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A Christmas Note from Pastor What do we find in Bethlehem?

How easy it is for us to be drawn into a celebration of Christmas that has little to do with the event we celebrate. At Bethlehem we hear and see the good news that transforms life for all of us forever. The good news is that God has entered into your life and mine through his coming! It would never have been enough simply to enter life as a baby and let it stand there. Some people treat Jesus only as the baby in the manger. They don't let him grow up for them and become their savior. It makes no difference who was there at Bethlehem if we are not there. It makes no difference who hears the angel's song if we do not hear God's proclamation of good news. No one can come near Bethlehem without the response of faith to God's gift of life and love.

In our theme this year the question is asked from Jesus "Who do you say that I am?" My prayer for you and your family is that you take time to really celebrate and know Jesus for who he really is in your life. So from our house to yours, Darla and I want to wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. God has blessed us as a church with a good year, and it time to celebrate the best gift of all, God's son: Jesus Christ!

Enjoy the Journey,
Pastor Clayton

"I heard the bells on Christmas Day. Their old familiar carols play. And wild and sweet the words repeat. Of peace on earth goodwill to men"

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Christmas Memories....

by Ruth Pope

As Christmas approaches, I'm reminded of childhood memories of going to my Grandma and Grandpa Ziegler's home. I was raised in a pastor's home so since my early childhood, we lived a distance from Dixon, MO which is where my grandparents lived on a farm about 7 miles out of town. Excitement would build as we turned off the blacktop road onto a gravel road to travel the 7 miles and almost too much excitement to contain as we drove down the lane to the two story farm house lined with huge cedar trees. Mom's famous

last words as we drove down the lane to her four children were "Kids, don't tell Grandma and Grandpa everything you know."

Grandma had prepared for days for our visit and the most wonderful smells came from that country kitchen. A hard walnut candy was a (German) tradition. On winter nights Grandpa had picked out the walnuts setting by the wood stove. Grandma made this candy for years - I still miss it. The farm house had one bedroom downstairs and two upstairs. When it was bed time, Grandma and Grandpa would take us 4 children upstairs to sleep with them (in feather beds - piled high with home made quilts). Mom & Dad were given the bedroom downstairs. Stockings were hung from the end of the iron bed frames, and we knew Santa or Grandma would fill them with things we were not given at home - jewelry and fingernail polish! Of course, there was candy and fruit too. We had plenty of time to talk before we went to sleep, and it was in those times that we did indeed tell Grandma and Grandpa "everything we knew!"

The Christmas tree in the living room was always a cedar tree that had been chopped down off the farm by Grandpa - the smell of it was like none other. I can still remember the ornaments that had been handed down or hand made. Christmas day usually brought my aunt, uncle and cousins in to share in the festivities.

On Christmas Day afternoon, we would visit my Grandma West and Aunt Annabelle - my Dad's mom and sister who lived together. We could look forward to a pair of mittens knitted by Grandma from yarn she had spun from sheep wool. She also lived on a farm in a two story house. She had carpeted bedrooms! The carpet was made from rugs woven by her or my aunt on a loom and sewn together. She also had made blankets from wool she had spun. Molasses cookies

were a tradition at her house made from molasses that had been made in the fall on the farm. I know I'm dating myself, but for some reason, I wanted to share these childhood memories.

We love our two children and their spouses and five grandchildren so much and hope that we have made some memories in our home over the years that will be a part of their memories.

Enjoy making Christmas memories!

Ruth Pope

"It is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas when its might Founder was a child Himself."
Charles Dickens.

Paul Harvey says:

I don't believe in Santa Claus, but I'm not going to sue somebody for singing a Ho-Ho-Ho song in December. I don't agree with Darwin, but I didn't go out and hire a lawyer when my high school teacher taught his Theory of Evolution.

Life, liberty or your pursuit of happiness will not be endangered because someone says a 30-second prayer before a football game.

So what's the big deal? It's not like somebody is up there reading the entire book of Acts. They're just talking to a God they believe in and asking Him to grant safety to the players on the field and the fans going home from the game.

But it's a Christian prayer, some will argue. Yes, and this is the United States of America, a country founded on Christian principles. According to our very own phone book, Christian churches outnumber all others

better than 200-to-1. So what would you expect -- somebody chanting Hare Krishna?

If I went to a football game in Jerusalem, I would expect to hear a Jewish prayer.

If I went to a soccer game in Baghdad, I would expect to hear a Muslim prayer.

If I went to a ping pong match in China, I would expect to hear someone pray to Buddha.

And I wouldn't be offended.

It wouldn't bother me one bit. When in Rome...

But what about the atheists? This is another argument. What about them?

Nobody is asking them to be baptized. We're not going to pass the collection plate. Just humor us for 30 seconds. If that's asking too much, bring a Walkman or a pair of ear plugs. Go to the bathroom. Visit the concession stand. Call your lawyer!

Unfortunately, one or two will make that call. One or two will tell thousands what they can and cannot do. I don't think a short prayer at a football game is going to shake the world's foundations.

Christians are just sick and tired of turning the other cheek while our courts strip us of all our rights. Our parents and grandparents taught us to pray before eating; to pray before we go to sleep.

Our Bible tells us to pray without ceasing. Now a handful of people and their lawyers are telling us to cease praying. God, help us. And if that last sentence offends you, well ... just sue me.

The silent majority has been silent too long. It's time we let that one or two who scream loud enough to be heard know that the vast majority doesn't care what they want. It is time the majority rules! It's time we tell them, you don't have to pray; you don't have to say the Pledge of Allegiance; you don't have to believe in God or attend services that honor Him. That is your right, and we will honor your right. But by golly, you are no longer

going to take our rights away. We are fighting back and we WILL WIN!

God bless us one and all; especially those who denounce Him;

God bless America, despite all her faults. She is still the greatest nation of all.

God bless our service men and women who are fighting to protect our right to pray and worship God.

2008 will be the year the silent majority is heard and we put God back as the foundation of our families and institutions ... and our Military come home from all the wars.

Keep looking up!

“AND THAT'S THE REST OF THE STORY”

Paul Harvey

He came to pay a debt he didn't owe because we owed a debt we couldn't pay.

Christmas Magic

by Tammy Weakley

The nighttime is a magic time
Throughout most of the year,
But this night of nights is more magic
Cause Santa Claus is near.
The full moon shines on the blanket of snow
That warms the earth beneath,
The snowman stands straight and tall;
Around his neck, a wreath,
Inside the house the children sleep.
A peaceful smile on their faces.
Mom and Dad are stuffing stockings;
The presents are all in their places.
The twinkling lights cast shadows on the ceiling
Making crazy patterns with colored lights.
Milk and cookies left out for Santa
On this magical night of nights,
The children awake to the jingle of bells.
Santa had been there, of that they were sure.
Nearly all believe that Christmas is magical,
But the children believe in so much more.

What Kids say about Angels

I only know the names of two angels. Hark and Harold.

Gregory, age 5

I hear angels all the time in my dreams. And I'm sticking with that no matter how many people tell me I'm crazy.

Molly, age 8

It's not easy to become an angel! First, you die. Then you go to Heaven then there's still the flight training to go through. And then you got to agree to wear those angel clothes.

Matthew, age 9

Angels work for God and watch over kids when God has to go do something else.

Mitchell, age 7

Angels talk all the way while they're flying you up to heaven. The basic message is where you went wrong before you got dead.

Daniel, age 9

My guardian angel helps me with math, but he's not much good for science.

Henry, age 8

Angels live in cloud houses made by God and his son, who's a very good carpenter.

Jared, age 9

All angels are girls because they gotta wear dresses and boys didn't go for it.

Antonia, age 9

My angel is my grandma who died last year. She got a big head start on helping me while she was still down here on earth.

Katelyn, age 9

Some of the angels are in charge of helping heal sick animals and pets. And if they don't make the animals get better, they help the kid get over it.

Vicki, age 8

What I don't get about angels is why, when someone is in love, they shoot arrows at them.

Sarah, age 7

"Christmas waves a magic wand over this world, and behold, everything is softer and more beautiful."

Norman Vincent Peale

What if the Three Wise Men had been Three Wise Women?

The women would have stopped for directions, not been late, taken a casserole, delivered the baby, cleaned the stable and given practical gifts.

But the wise men said: if it had been Three Wise women they would have said:

"Did you see the sandals Mary was wearing with that dress?"

"That donkey sure didn't smell good!"

"Have you heard Joseph isn't even working?"

"That baby really didn't look a lot like Joseph."

"That stable sure was a mess!"

"How long do you think it will be before we get our casserole dish back?"

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My Christmas Prayer

by Rosalyn Hart Finch

Dearest God, Please never let me
Crowd my life full to the brim.
So like the keeper of Bethlehem's inn.
I find I have no room for Him.

Instead, let my heart's door be ever open,
Ready to welcome the newborn King.
Let me offer the best I have,
To Him who gives me everything.

What goes "Ho, Ho, Swoosh, Ho, Ho,
Swoosh, Ho, Ho, Swoosh?
Santa Claus caught in a revolving door!

What happens when Santa's cat eats a ball
of yarn?
They have mittens!

Mom, can I have a dog for Christmas?
No! You can have turkey like everyone else.

The Blessing of the Crèche

By Sue Monk Kidd

One Christmas I traveled to Bethlehem. There is a little shop there that sits on a winding road, not far from the nativity cave. As I stepped inside, a dark eyed man with a wide white smile appeared at my elbow. "May I help you, Madam?" he said with a nicely polished Hebrew accent.

"I'm looking for a crèche," I replied. "A nativity set."

His eyes gleamed like two black pearls. He made a little bow to the rear of the store. I followed him along an aisle until suddenly he stepped aside, sweeping out his arm, and there in the middle of a table set a crèche. A crèche so splendid it seemed to glow with the ancient holiness that inspired it. It had been carved from the olive trees that dotted the Judean hills like green umbrellas. The rich wood shone warm and golden in the dim light of the little shop. I touched each piece with reverence. Only moments before I had stood in the heart of the holy cave where Jesus was born and my heart was still full.

The salesman stood nearby like a bird on a perch, his shoulders curved forward, his eyes darting, "You like, Madam?" he asked, as my fingers touched the tiny tips of the star carved atop the stable. He stepped closer, "It is the finest wood. And the workmanship is unmatched." I nodded.

I walked around the table, trying to make up my mind. "I'm not sure, I said.

"Ah, but Madam, you must have it!" he said. "A Bethlehem crèche has secret blessings!"

In the end I purchased the crèche, not for its alleged "sacred blessings" but because of its irresistible beauty, and because I was in Bethlehem and the long ago miracle still lived in the air.

I stored it in a cardboard box in the attic. The next Christmas, I wanted to make the crèche's first appearance beneath our tree special. I thought and wondered, How could it touch my family with the Bethlehem miracle? I found myself remembering the

words of the salesman, "A Bethlehem crèche has secret blessings." Perhaps he was right. Perhaps God *could* bless and inspire our lives through its presence, if only we let Him. And not just with a Bethlehem crèche...but *any* crèche, even the tiny one my daughter had made from popsicle sticks one Christmas past.

So I sat down and wrote a prayer. Then, filled with anticipation, I climbed to the attic and brought down the cardboard box. That night, with the tree lights shining in the darkness and dancing on the windows, my family gathered around the tree. An almost reverent silence settled about us as softly as a whisper in church. My husband opened the lid. The children took turns standing each item of the crèche beneath the tree as I read my poem aloud:

It is time, Lord. Time to take the holy drama from this cardboard box and set it beneath the tree. As I blow away the dust, may this little crèche come to life on our home and bestow its secret blessing.

Bless this wooden stable, Lord. This lowly abode of cows and donkeys. May it keep me humble this Christmas.

Bless this tiny star beaming at the top. May it light my eyes with the wonder of your caring.

Bless the little angel. May her song flow through our house and fill it with smiles.

Bless the caring shepherd and the small lamb cradled in his arms. May it whisper of Your caring embrace on my life.

Bless the wise men bearing splendid gifts. May they inspire me to lay down my shining best at Your feet.

Bless this earthly father in his simple robe. May he remind me of all You have entrusted to my care.

Bless this Virgin Mother. May she teach me patience as I tend to my own little ones.

And bless this Baby nestled in the hay. May the love He brought to earth that Bethlehem night so fill my heart with compassion and warmth that it becomes a Christmas gift to those around me.

Now the crèche is here, Lord...and we are holy participants in Your miracle night. May Your secret blessings come to us as a spark from Your glory... a candle that never goes out. Amen.

I can't tell you *exactly* what happened to us that night, but I don't know that I experienced a special holiness and a reverence for our family that stayed with me all through the Christmas season. That was my "secret blessing," and perhaps each of us shared the same "secret." For this little ritual has become the single most important Christmas preparation for our family.

Story from The Guideposts Family Christmas Book

"A good conscience is a continual Christmas."
Benjamin Franklin.

In another Guidepost Christmas book Darla loaned me I found this page paper clipped so I bet Darla or Pastor has shared it with us at some time. But I believe it is so simple and special that it deserves repeating.

A Christmas Reminder

By Ruth A Ritchie

This Year

-Mend a quarrel
-Seek out a forgotten friend
-Dismiss suspicion and replace it with trust
-Write a love letter
-Share some treasure
-Give a soft answer
-Encourage youth
-Manifest your loyalty in word and deed
-Keep a promise
-Find the time
-Forgive an enemy

-Listen
-Apologize if you are wrong
-Try to understand
-Flout envy
-Examine your demands on others
-Think first of someone else
-Appreciate
-Be kind, be gentle
-Laugh a little
-Laugh a little more
-Deserve confidence
-Take up arms against malice
-Decry complacency
-Express your gratitude
-Welcome a stranger
-Gladden the heart of a child
-Take pleasure in the beauty of the earth
-Speak your love
-Speak it again
-Speak it still again

Editor's Note

When I asked about a Christmas newsletter, I thought it would be fun to do. But God had more than that in mind for me today.

It has been fun, but as I've sat at my computer most of the day with religious Christmas music playing, drinking hot chocolate, reading and typing your memories and poems as well as those from various books, I've realized more. In this busy season I've spent the day focused on Jesus' birth, God's love for us, and the wonderful, warm memories this celebration creates. Next week I'll jump into hurried Christmas preparations again, but I've spent today focusing on messages of Christmas – both serious and humorous. I am blessed!

As Tiny Tim said, "God Bless You One and All."

Debbie

P.S. Thanks to Belinda Floyd who proofread this newsletter.