

Making the Most of Christmas

Dear friends,

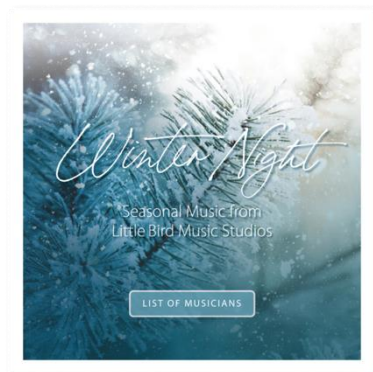
Merry Christmas! As I fondly remember Andy Williams crooning when I was a kid, “It’s the most wonderful time of the year.” I believed it then and I believe it even more passionately now. Christmastime is a season of different colors, scents, tastes, music, decorations, even fashions. More important still, it is a season that calls back profound memories from holidays gone by (even when bittersweet) and which reminds the whole world of the most joyful, liberating miracles the world will ever know. And that’s still not all for the Yuletide presents Christians with unique opportunities to enlighten and enliven those who do not yet know the peace of Christ’s forgiveness.

Claire and I both love Christmas – for what it has meant to us in the past, for what delights and challenges it brings now, and for what it represents regarding our future in God’s forever Kingdom. It is therefore a special delight for us to once again offer a few Christmas treats with you. As you turn the pages of this packet, you’ll find some of our favorite poems, a few inspirational readings, and several ideas of how to “make the most of Christmas” this year with your friends and family. So have fun; have faith; and have a very blessed Christmas!

Denny & Claire Hartford
December 2022

P.S. Here’s an added bonus -- free downloads of Patrick Osborne’s beautiful, challenging, inspiring Christmas music. That’s right; all of the tracks on the Winter Night CD are available for free download at Little Bird Music Studios. They are a wonderful addition to your Christmas festivities.

<https://www.littlebirdmusicstudios.com/downloadlinks>



Denny & Claire's Christmas Quiz --- Number One

- 1) Which Latin singer had a big Christmas hit in the 1960's with "Felize Navidad"?
A) Ricky Martin B) Julio Iglesias C) Desi Arnaz
D) Jose Feliciano E) Carlos Santana F) Edward Schwartz
- 2) In what year were poinsettias first sold in Philadelphia as Christmas decorations?
A) 1833 B) 1910 C) 1927 D) 1945
- 3) In which of these Christmas movies did Bing Crosby star? A) *The Bishop's Wife*
B) *Rudolph's Ride to Glory* C) *It's a Wonderful Life* D) *Going My Way*
- 4) The music for what Christmas carol was written in 1818 by an Austrian priest to be played on a guitar? A) "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" B) "Adeste Fidelis"
C) "Oh Holy Night" D) "Silent Night"
- 5) What Christmas work was originally written for the entertainment of the author's own family and was not published for 26 years after its writing? A) "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens B) "A Visit to St. Nicholas" ("Twas the Night Before Christmas) by Clement Moore C) "The Grinch Who Stole Christmas" by Dr. Seuss D) "White Christmas" by Irving Berlin
- 6) The first one of these was made in 1844 and they began to be sold commercially in 1860. Now, over 2 and 1/2 billion are used every Christmas season. What are they?
A) Christmas trees B) Outdoor lights C) Candy canes D) Christmas cards
- 7) Who announced to Mary that she had been chosen to be the virgin mother of Jesus?
A) The angel Gabriel B) Elizabeth C) She learned it in a dream. D) John the Baptist
- 8) What is the popular Christmas custom that is attributed to Martin Luther?
A) Yule log B) Hanging stockings C) Attending church D) Christmas tree lights
- 9) In the story and film, *A Miracle on 34th Street*, who is put on trial?
A) Santa Claus B) The mayor of New York City
C) A guardian angel named Clarence D) An elf named Hardrock
- 10) Good King Wenceslas hailed from what country?
A) Syria B) England C) Bohemia D) Alsatia
- 11) The name of Scrooge's deceased business partner in Dickens' classic story, "A Christmas Carol," was:
A) Bob Cratchit B) Jacob Marley C) Mr. McPosey D) Martin Chuzzlewit
- 12) What familiar Christmas object comes from a word meaning "to shine"?
(Hints: there were seven of them in the Old Testament tabernacle and it is an important part of the Advent wreath.)
A) Candle B) Yule log C) Crown D) Holly wreath

- 13) In Tchaikovsky's beautiful ballet, *The Nutcracker*, the main enemy of the handsome hero is:
A) Drosselmeyer the magician B) The King of the Mice
C) The puppet maker D) The Blue Dragon
- 14) Long before Scrooge or the Grinch, there was a real villain who could rightfully be called "The Man Who Tried to Kill Christmas." Who was he? A) Genghis Khan B) Caesar Augustus
C) Ivan the Terrible D) Herod the Great
- 15) When did "Good King Wenceslaus" look out? A) Christmas morning
B) Epiphany C) Feast of Stephen D) Candlemas eve

Answers: 1) D 2)A 3) D Bing also starred in other Christmas movies including *Bells of St. Mary's*, *Holiday Inn*, and *White Christmas*. 4) D – "Silent Night" was written hastily for a Christmas Eve service after the priest discovered the organ was broken and that the service would have had to go without music. 5) B 6) D 7) A 8) D 9) A 10) C -- Wenceslas was actually only a 10th Century Duke of Bohemia, not an actual king. 11) B 12) A 13) B -- The King of the Mice, usually represented with seven heads, leads his troops against the nutcracker's toy soldiers, but loses the battle when Clara, the heroine, stuns him with a hurled shoe. 14) D -- Herod was Rome's "puppet ruler" over Israel at the time Jesus was born. Paranoid, vicious, and an insanely jealous tyrant, Herod murdered hundreds of people to secure his throne. It was he who ordered the murder of the infant boys of Bethlehem in an effort to end the life of Jesus, Who had come to save mankind (even Herod himself) from the curse of sin. 15) C

In the Bleak Midwinter (Christina Rossetti)

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him, nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away when He comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, whom cherubim, worship night and day,
Breastful of milk, and a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him, whom angels fall before,
The ox and ass and camel which adore.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;
But His mother only, in her maiden bliss,
Worshipped the beloved with a kiss.

What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.



The Real Emmanuel Event

Emmanuel.

God with us.

This is the amazing miracle on which the entire Christmas season is established.

But just when did this “Emmanuel event” actually happen? For instance, did the Messiah’s advent into that Bethlehem stable occur on the 25th of December or on some other day of the year? Well, my friends, whichever date you end up with as the birthday of Jesus, you must understand that the most important issue is what happened *about 9 months before!*

That’s right; it is the *conception* of Jesus that is the true Emmanuel event, the moment when God was first with us in the incarnation of Jesus.

The Bethlehem Christmas was only the revelation; the unwrapping, as it were, of that magnificent Christmas present.

We celebrate Jesus’ birthday and glorify God for the astounding grace and power involved in the virgin birth. That is certainly appropriate and good to do. But our celebration should include a joyous appreciation of the “virgin conception,” as it was *actually that moment* when Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit and the Incarnation truly began. That awesome miracle is the turning point in history that not only presents compelling evidence of the love and power of our overcoming God, but a severe warning to a culture that so callously undermines the lives of children in the womb.

So, in the festive celebrations of this Christmas season, let’s also take care to treasure the Emmanuel event that *preceded* the Bethlehem scene.

Christmas Conversation Starters

Having a party and you want to get folks in the Christmas mood? Maybe you need something to help you engage co-workers in a profitable discussion about the season? Or you might just want something to assist you in your own reflections on this holy, happy season. Well, whatever your purpose, here's a few Christmas conversation starters that might do the trick.

- 1) What would be the perfect Christmas setting for you?
A snow-covered inn in Vermont? A "silent night" overlooking Bethlehem?
A bustling New York street in the 1940's? You name it!
- 2) Are there any ethnic or ancestral holiday traditions you keep? Are there traditions you have invented or adapted for your own family?
- 3) You are the director of the ultimate Christmas television special.
Who are your musical guests (living or late)?
- 4) What is your favorite Christmas scent?
- 5) Do you prefer blinking or non-blinking lights?
- 6) What is your favorite Christmas film?
- 7) Describe a special ornament that hangs on your tree.
- 8) Did you ever peek to discover your Christmas presents?
- 9) What is your favorite Christmas song?
- 10) Did you ever participate in a Christmas pageant?
Give a quick review of how it went.
- 11) What is one of ways you first realize Christmas is coming?
- 12) What do you believe is the most delicious fruit in a fruitcake?
- 13) Describe the Christmas eves of your childhood.
How are they different today?
- 14) What is the most memorable Christmas gift you ever gave?
- 15) Describe your worst Christmas travel experience.
- 16) What is your favorite Christmas beverage?
- 17) Tell something about the Christmas trees you remember from your childhood.

- 18) Do you send out Christmas cards? Explain why or why not.
- 19) Where do you place your nativity set?
- 20) Christmas dinner at your house. Describe it.
- 21) Do you have any special service projects lined up for Christmastime?
- 22) What's the newest Christmas music you have in the house?
- 23) Clothes for Christmas gifts. Where do you weigh in on this controversy?
- 24) What do you make (or have you made) with your own hands at Christmas?
- 25) What is your favorite Christmas literature?
- 26) What did you do as a child when Christmas vacation came around?
- 27) What's a good way to deal with the post-holiday blues?
- 28) Describe the Christmas mornings of your childhood.
How are they different today?
- 29) Of all the figures around the nativity scene, who do you most identify with?
- 30) What do you think is an appropriate gift to give Jesus on His birthday?
- 31) Just when is the moment that the Christmas season starts for you?
- 32) Do you have a favorite Christmas vacation? Perhaps a particularly distinctive one?

Let Every Day Be Christmas (Norman Wesley Brooks)

Christmas is forever, not for just one day,
for loving, sharing, giving, are not to put away
like bells and lights and tinsel, in some box upon a shelf.
The good you do for others is good you do yourself.
Peace on Earth, good will to men,
kind thoughts and words of cheer,
are things we should use often
and not just once a year.
Remember too the Christ-child, grew up to be a man;
to hide him in a cradle, is not our dear Lord's plan.
So keep the Christmas spirit, share it with others far and near,
from week to week and month to month, throughout the entire year!

Once in David's Royal City (Cecil Frances Alexander)

- 1) Once in royal David's city
stood a lowly cattle shed,
where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for His bed.
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ, her little Child.
- 2) He came down to earth from heaven
Who is God and Lord of all,
and His shelter was a stable,
and His cradle was a stall.
With the poor and mean and lowly,
lived on earth our Savior holy.
- 3) And our eyes at last shall see Him,
through His own redeeming love,
for that Child, so dear and gentle,
is our Lord in heaven above.
And He leads his children on
to the place where he is gone.
- 4) Not in that poor, lowly stable
with the oxen standing by,
we shall see Him, but in heaven,
set at God's right hand on high.
Then like stars His children crowned,
all in white, His praise will sound.



Christmas Candle (Eva K. Logue)

“A Christmas candle is a lovely thing;
It makes no noise at all,
But softly gives itself away;
While quite unselfish, it grows small.”

A Few Christmas Thoughts

“Christmas is a season not only of rejoicing but of reflection.” (Winston Churchill)

“Christmas! ‘Tis the season for kindling the fire of hospitality in the hall,
the genial flame of charity in the heart.” (Washington Irving)

“When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.’ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:15-16)

“Christmas Eve was a night of song that wrapped itself about you like a shawl.
But it warmed more than your body. It warmed your heart...filled it, too,
with a melody that would last forever.” (Bess Streeter Aldrich)

“He who has not Christmas in his heart will never find it under a tree.”
(Roy L. Smith)

“I am not alone at all, I thought. I was never alone at all. And that, of course,
is the message of Christmas. We are never alone. Not when the night is darkest,
the wind coldest, the world seemingly most indifferent. For this is still the time God chooses.”
(Taylor Caldwell)

“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.’”
(Luke 2:10-15)

“Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days; that can recall to the old man the pleasures of his youth; that can transport the sailor and the traveler, thousands of miles away, back to his own fireside and his quiet home!” (Charles Dickens)

“Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox; that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home.” (G.K. Chesterton)

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son,
that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

On Going Home for Christmas (Edgar Guest)

He little knew the sorrow that was in his vacant chair;
He never guessed they'd miss him, or he'd surely have been there;
He couldn't see his mother or the lump that filled her throat,
Or the tears that started falling as she read his hasty note;
And he couldn't see his father, sitting sorrowful and dumb,
Or he never would have written that he thought he couldn't come.

He little knew the gladness that his presence would have made,
And the joy it would have given, or he never would have stayed.
He didn't know how hungry had the little mother grown
Once again to see her baby and to claim him for her own.
He didn't guess the meaning of his visit Christmas Day
Or he never would have written that he couldn't get away.
He couldn't see the fading of the cheeks that once were pink,
And the silver in the tresses; and he didn't stop to think

How the years are passing swiftly, and next Christmas it might be
There would be no home to visit and no mother dear to see.
He didn't think about it -- I'll not say he didn't care.
He was heedless and forgetful or he'd surely have been there.

Are you going home for Christmas? Have you written you'll be there?
Going home to kiss the mother and to show her that you care?
Going home to greet the father in a way to make him glad?
If you're not I hope there'll never come a time you'll wish you had.
Just sit down and write a letter -- it will make their heart strings hum
With a tune of perfect gladness...if you'll tell them that you'll come.

Will Yours Be a Car Wash Christmas?

While leaving Blair the other night after a speaking engagement, I drove by a car wash that had this posted on a big sign, "Need a Christmas gift idea? Give free tokens!" I smiled at what I figured was a quirky kind of joke. But, after a few minutes, I thought again. Maybe it wasn't a joke at all. With the modern Yuletide so awash in remarkably garish, gratuitous, and expensive gifts, maybe these guys have gone in a completely different direction -- opting instead for something as mundane and impersonal as car wash tokens. Is this what Christmas has come to?

In the "happy golden days of yore" (the line comes from Martin and Blane's "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas"), giving presents required some personal investment. Dad made you a little wagon; Momma knitted you a scarf; Grandma baked you a pie. Even after Christmas began to be commercialized, shopping for family and friends was a time-consuming activity -- not because there was so much to buy, but because you were searching for just the right gift, something you knew the recipient needed or wanted.

That kind of Christmas shopping is almost nonexistent nowadays. It no longer involves thinking carefully about what to buy. And making something by hand? Good grief -- forget about it. We've lost the time. We've lost the talents. We've even lost the desire itself to expend our own efforts in the creation of a Christmas present. No, just give 'em a gift card to a department store or to an online company. Or give 'em car wash tokens.

One of the causes for this condition is that the commercialization of Christmas I mentioned earlier just got further and further out of hand. One Christmas gift wasn't enough for little Timmy. He now had to get 2 presents, then 4 presents, then 11 presents. And the Christmas lists expanded too. No longer were parents expected to give presents to just their kids (and maybe a little tip for the milkman and the paperboy) but to practically everybody they knew.

So no longer *could* the gifts be very personal. Dad can only whittle so many flutes and Mamma only sew so many dresses. Furthermore, you were coerced by advertisers, storekeepers, peer pressure, and a distorted doctrine of what true affection required (one's worth was measured in quantity of dollars spent) into a whole new system of celebrating Christmas. The modern holiday no longer emphasized reveling with friends and family -- and sharing gifts with those closest to you something reflective of your personal devotion to them. It emphasized instead the mania of Black Friday, excessive spending, debt, stress, and resentment. The giving of gifts became one of the banes of Christmas rather than one of its blessings.

Can we go back? Can we recover some of those warmer, truer, healthier Christmas customs? Of course. But it's going to take some courage. And it might take some explanations. And it might take some sacrifice. After all, baking cookies takes longer than buying an iTunes gift card. But if we want our lives (and those of our family members and friends) to find in Christmas some genuine affection, spiritual meaning, and moral stimulation, we need to concentrate again on quality, not quantity.

Our country can't afford to keep Christmas according to Madison Avenue. The consuming spirit of consumerism (pun intended) has ruined our economy and spoiled our culture. And though it has left in its wake a false sense of entitlement, irresponsible expectations, and a secularized and commercialized Christmas ethic, we *can* start rebuilding. Recall for a moment the intense warmth and hope you feel when watching "It's A Wonderful Life," "White Christmas," or "Miracle on 34th Street." Those feelings have nothing to do with Christmas presents but rather with the invaluable treasures represented by romance, family, redemption, community, and festivity.

With love, reason, and inventive effort, we can indeed recapture some of that warmth and bring it into real life. Perhaps, like me, you're unable to whittle or knit. Fine. But can you bake a pie? Decorate cookies? Throw a party? Sing a song? Tell a story? Write a personal Christmas card? Or, at the very least, spend some time trying to select a personal gift for your loved one rather than take the prosaic path of the gift card or the car wash tokens? Let's give it a try!

Denny & Claire's Christmas Quiz --- Number Two

- 1) Electric Christmas tree lights were first used in:
A) 1776 B) 1895 C) 1914 D) 1933

- 2) The boar's head was a favorite dish in the traditional English Christmas feast. According to legend, the choice of this dish dates back to the Middle Ages when a particularly rowdy boar was killed by: A) St. Nicholas B) St. George
C) King Wenceslas D) Choking to death on a book of Greek philosophy

- 3) Santa Claus, Kris Kringle, and Father Christmas are all names referring to what genuine Christian hero? A) Alexander the Great B) Saint Nicholas
C) Joseph of Arimathea D) Old King Cole

- 4) What plant is called the Flower of the Holy Night in Mexico?
A) Winter's Rose B) Navidad de Valencia C) Poinsettia D) Piccolino

- 5) Most countries commemorate the visit of the Magi on what day?
A) December 8 B) December 14 C) December 25 D) January 6

- 6) What traditional Christmas dish has a name that means "to swell or raise"?
A) Egg nog B) Plum pudding C) Divinity D) Marzipan

- 7) On Christmas Eve in 1944, a terrible tragedy occurred but accurate news of the event was unavailable for a long time afterwards. What was it?
A) The sinking of the S.S. Leopoldville B) The assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria
C) The Boxer Rebellion in China D) Amelia Earhart's airplane crashed in the South Pacific

- 8) The famous defense of Santa Claus' existence written by the New York Sun in 1897 was written in response to a letter written by a little girl named:
A) Belinda B) Mary C) Brooke D) Virginia

- 9) The first film version of *Babes in Toyland* starred what comedy team?
A) Marx Brothers B) Laurel and Hardy C) Bob & Ray
D) Martin & Lewis E) Lucy & Desi

- 10) When Santa is in Finland, he chooses a different form of transportation than the sleigh he uses in the USA. What is it? A) A magic carpet B) A horse C) A goat named Ukko
D) A white elk named Grizel

- 11) The details we have about the Advent of Jesus come from what New Testament books?
A) All four gospels B) Matthew & Luke C) The gospel of John D) The epistles of Peter

- 12) In both Idaho and Indiana there is a town named:
A) Christmas City B) Yuletide C) Tiny Tim D) Santa Claus

- 13) The day after Christmas (December 26) is known as Boxing Day in England and elsewhere. It is also the holy day associated with what saint?
A) St. Stephen B) St. Nicholas C) St. Boniface D) St. Jerome
- 14) This traditional Christmas item was popularized by St. Francis of Assisi in 13th Century Italy. A) Crèche (nativity scene) B) Advent calendar
C) Mistletoe D) Holly wreathes E) Lighted Christmas trees
- 15) In Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," which spirit leads Ebenezer Scrooge to a cemetery? A) Christmas Past B) Christmas Present C) Christmas Future D) None of the spirits took Scrooge to a cemetery. It was Tiny Tim.

Answers: 1) B -- American inventor, Ralph E. Morris is credited with the first use of electric Christmas lights. His purpose was to find something safer than candles which started more house fires than one could count. 2) D -- Yes, the story suggests a student saved himself from a charging boar by throwing a book of Aristotle's writings at it. The boar greedily gulped down the book, choked itself, and thus became a meal for the student and his colleagues.
3) B 4) C -- The Poinsettia is named after an American ambassador to Mexico who "discovered" the pretty flower in the 1820's. 5) D (January 6 is Epiphany)
6) B – There are no plums in traditional plum pudding! 7) A 8) D 9) B
10) C – Ukko is supposedly made of straw. 11) B 12) D 13) A 14) A 15) C

Little, Insignificant Bethlehem

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah; from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.”

This is how the prophet Micah revealed the humble birthplace of the Messiah centuries before the Christmas event. It was the single reference in the entire Old Testament as to where the Messiah would first appear and yet it was clear and unmistakable. And for the scholars of Israel, for instance, those who were consulted by King Herod, it was an established assumption that the Messiah would be born in the small town of Bethlehem, the city where David was born and bred.

Bethlehem (which means “house of bread”) was situated about 6 miles south of Jerusalem (two hours walking distance) and though it had a distinguished history as the birthplace of David and the burial site of Rachel, Bethlehem remained seemingly insignificant, even to the point of being excluded from the list of towns and cities that appears in the Hebrew text of Joshua and even the long list given in the eleventh chapter of Nehemiah.

But the Lord God delights in irony, in turning our expectations upside down to emphasize that His ways are not our ways. Thus He chose little, insignificant Bethlehem to first yield the mighty King David and then, Jesus Christ, the far mightier King of all Kings!

A Big Band Yuletide Quiz

(Answers below)

- 1) What famous Christmas song was introduced by Bob Hope and Marilyn Maxwell in the 1951 film *The Lemon Drop Kid*?
- 2) Noel Regney and his wife Gloria Shayne wrote “Do You Hear What I Hear” in reaction to what early 1960s event?
- 3) “March of the Toys” from the operetta *Babes in Toyland* was a surprising hit in 1939 for which band?
- 4) Who sang “Christmas in Killarney” when it first became a hit record in 1950?
- 5) “Mistletoe and Holly” was the theme song for the *Christmas Seals* in 1960. It was co-written by what singing star?
- 6) In 1950, Gene Autry recorded what million-selling Christmas song for kids?
- 7) The classic 1941 recording of “Winter Weather” featured what vocalists singing with the Benny Goodman band?
- 8) Whose recording of “Silent Night” has sold the most copies?



- 1) “Silver Bells”
- 2) The Cuban missile crisis
- 3) The Tommy Dorsey Orchestra
- 4) Dennis Day
- 5) Frank Sinatra
- 6) “Frosty the Snowman”
- 7) Peggy Lee & Art Lund
- 8) Bing Crosby (1935)

God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen (Anonymous)

1) God rest you merry, gentlemen,
let nothing you dismay;
remember Christ, our Savior
was born on Christmas Day
to save us all from Satan's power
when we were gone astray.

(Refrain) O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy;
O tidings of comfort and joy.

2) From God our heavenly Father
a blessed angel came
and unto certain shepherds
brought tidings of the same,
how that in Bethlehem was born
the son of God by name. (Refrain)

3) "Fear not," then said the angel,
"let nothing you affright;
this day is born a Savior,
the true and radiant light,
to free all those who trust in him
from Satan's power and might." (Refrain)

4) Now to the Lord sing praises,
all you within this place,
and in true love and fellowship
each other now embrace;
this holy tide of Christmas
is filled with heavenly grace. (Refrain)

The Man Who Tried to Kill Christmas

Certainly the coldest, cruelest personage in the Christmas story is Herod, the vicious tyrant whose political ambitions, fear, and hatred of righteousness resulted in the slaughter of Bethlehem's infants. But how much do you really know about Herod?

Before the near-insanity of his last years on the throne, Herod had been a rising star in the Roman world. Nearly four decades before Jesus was born, Herod had been given the vaunted title, "King of the Jews" by the co-rulers of Rome, Octavian and Antony. But the title was an optimistic one, because Palestine at the time was still under the control of the Parthians.

Herod was sent to re-conquer the area and after many tough years, he did so.

He was then given the throne (always under Rome's ultimate rule, of course) and he proved himself as clever and capable a politician as he was a warrior.

Herod was a visionary, building the port city of Caesarea and the fortress of Masada. But Herod was also a pragmatist. He built theaters and racetracks to please the populace; he melted down palace gold to feed people when a severe famine hit; and he married into the Hasmonean house, the ancient ruling family of the Jews.

But it was Herod's ruthlessness that was key to his nature. To maintain a firm grip on his throne (and to seek to satisfy his intense paranoias), Herod had his mother-in-law murdered, then his wife, then hundreds of court officials and attendants; even 3 of his own sons! In fact, knowing that no one would mourn his death, he insured there would be mourning in Jerusalem by ordering several leading citizens to be executed on the day he died!

However, even Herod's pernicious power could not thwart the plan of God, for it was from the clutches of this vicious killer that the Holy Family was protected by the flight to Egypt.

Oh yes, the Christmas story is one of deliverance...in more ways than one.



The Adoration of the Wise Men (Cecil Frances Alexander)

Saw you never in the twilight,
When the sun had left the skies,
Up in heaven the clear stars shining,
Through the gloom like silver eyes?
So of old the wise men watching,
Saw a little stranger star,
And they knew the King was given,
And they followed it from far.

Heard you never of the story,
How they crossed the desert wild,
Journeyed on by plain and mountain,
Till they found the Holy Child?
How they opened all their treasure,
Kneeling to that Infant King,
Gave the gold and fragrant incense,
Gave the myrrh in offering?

Know ye not that lowly Baby
Was the bright and morning star,
He who came to light the Gentiles,
And the darkened isles afar?
And we too may seek His cradle,
There our heart's best treasures bring,
Love, and Faith, and true devotion,
For our Saviour, God, and King.

Music Trivia for the Christmas Season

Originally written to honor America's military serving far from home, the beautiful song "I'll Be Home for Christmas" has become a favorite for many generations now. However, the song's final phrase ("if only in my dreams") was considered too sad and no one in the business wanted to record it. But when songwriter Kim Gannon sang the song for Bing Crosby (while they were playing golf), Bing loved it and promised to make it a hit. And, of course, he did.

Most of us remember "Blue Christmas" from the Elvis Presley version made in 1957. I mean, we hear it everywhere we go in December. But it was originally recorded in 1948 by a country/western singer named Doye O'Dell. But it had to wait to become #1 on the Country chart when recorded the following year by none other than...Ernest Tubb!

Meredith Wilson is best remembered for his hit musical *The Music Man*. But he wrote other stuff too, including "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas," one of the most famous Christmas songs of all time. In 1963, the song was incorporated into his musical, *Here's Love* which was a grand failure. But the song, already very popular from recordings by Bing Crosby, Perry Como, and many others is still going strong to this day.

On December 15, 1944 Army Air Corps Major Glenn Miller climbed aboard a single engine UC-64A Norseman in Bedfordshire, England. He was hitching a ride to Paris where he was to make arrangements for a gala Christmas broadcast with his band. But the plane never reached France and Glenn Miller and the crew would be forever MIA. Miller's band courageously performed the scheduled Christmas concert under the direction of Jerry Gray and they continued to perform for the rest of the war playing their last concert on November 13, 1945 for President Harry Truman in Washington, D.C.

Bing Crosby's sublime recording of "White Christmas" (1942) is the best-selling single of all time, with well over 100 million copies sold worldwide. Composed by one of America's greatest songwriters, Irving Berlin, he knew right away he had something special with "White Christmas." After staying up all night working on it, he told his secretary on her arrival, "Grab your pen and take down this song. I just wrote the best song I've ever written. Heck, I just wrote the best song that anybody's ever written!" Well, the world agreed, especially when sung by Bing Crosby. For though he recorded it in just 18 minutes, it was almost a perfect production. It was #1 for 11 weeks and sold even faster after Bing sang it in the film *Holiday Inn*. Indeed, besides a few of the ancient carols, "White Christmas" remains to this very day the most beloved of Christmas songs.

A Few Christmas Thoughts (Part 2)

“I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year.”
(The converted Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol”)

“The rooms were very still while the pages were softly turned and the winter sunshine crept in to touch the bright heads and serious faces with a Christmas greeting.” (Louisa May Alcott)

“She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus,
for He will save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)

“Never worry about the size of your Christmas tree.
In the eyes of children, they are all 30 feet tall.” (Larry Wilde)

“Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn’t before!
What if Christmas, he thought, doesn’t come from a store.
What if Christmas...perhaps...means a little bit more!” (Dr. Seuss)

“Christmas, my child, is love in action. Every time we love,
every time we give, it’s Christmas.” (Dale Evans Rogers)

“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a Baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!’” (Luke 2:8-14)

“Unless we make Christmas an occasion to share our blessings,
all the snow in Alaska won’t make it ‘white’.” (Bing Crosby)

“Nothing ever seems too bad, too hard, or too sad
when you’ve got a Christmas tree in the living room.” (Nora Roberts)

“It is Christmas in the heart that puts Christmas in the air.” (W.T. Ellis)

“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.
We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son,
Who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

Journey of the Magi (T.S. Eliot)

“A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:

The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.”
And the camels galled, sore-footed,
refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor
and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack
of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns
unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high
prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate
valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of
vegetation,
With a running stream and a water-mill
beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky.
And an old white horse galloped away in the
meadow.

Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves
over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces
of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we
continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too
soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say)
satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death. There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen
birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this
Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our
death.

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old
dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

Good King Wenceslas

(Rev. John Neale, the great medieval scholar and translator of many buried treasures, wrote this wonderful carol. It reminds us that true worship of Jesus Christ requires sacrificial, humble service to those in need.)



1) Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the feast of Stephen,
And the snow lay round about,
Deep and crisp and even.
Brightly shone the moon that night,
Though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight,
Gathering winter fuel.

2) “Hither, page, come, stand by me,
If thou know’st it telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?”
“Sire, he lives a good league hence,
Down beneath the mountain;
Close against the forest fence
By St. Agnes’ fountain.”

3) “Then bring me flesh, and bring me wine,
Bring me pine logs hither.
Thou and I will see him dine
When we bear them thither.”
Page and monarch, forth they went;
Forth they went together,
Through the rude wind’s wild lament,
Through the bitter weather.

4) “Sire, the night is darker now,
And the storm grows stronger.
Fails my heart, I know not how,
I can go no longer.”
“Mark my steps, be brave, my page’
Tread thou in them boldly.
Then thou’lt find the winter’s rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly.”

5) So in his master’s steps he trod,
Where the snow lay dinted.
Heat was in the very sod
Which his foot had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure,
Wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now do bless the poor,
Shall yourselves find blessing.

Christmas Reading Suggestions

Reading aloud the Christmas accounts in Matthew and Luke should be an indispensable part of any family (or individual) Christmas celebration. But Papa should also instruct his children from his study of these texts and others relevant to the Advent of Jesus.

For instance, the mystery of the magi, the significance of the shepherds, the theological “nuggets” contained in the genealogies, the miracle of the virgin conception, and many other of the profound details of the first Christmas should be fully explored. Christmas literature can be tremendously inspiring and fun, but the emphasis should always be put on the historical, supernatural truths of the Savior’s Advent.

With all this understood, then, and based on Claire’s and my long years of delight with Christmas-themed literature, here are a few suggestions to expand your own Yuletide reading.

5 Star Christmas Reading Recommendations

* Christmas poetry. Consider our favorites:
G.K. Chesterton, Alfred Lord Tennyson,
Dylan Thomas, Leslie Norris, Edgar Guest,
T.S. Eliot, Christina Rossetti, Henry
Wadsworth Longfellow, and Eugene Fields.

* The Christmas books and stories of
Charles Dickens: *A Christmas Carol*,
Cricket on the Hearth, *The Chimes*, *The
Battle of Life*, *The Ghost’s Bargain*, *The
Haunted Man*, etc.

* *Shepherds Abiding* (Jan Karon)

* *A Christmas Longing*
(Joni Eareckson-Tada)

* *Spirit of Christmas: Stories, Poems,
Essays* (G. K. Chesterton)

* *The Christmas Room* (Denny Hartford)
Also, Denny’s short stories, “The Freedom
Train Christmas,” “The Winter in the
Woods,” and “Christmas of the Talking
Animals.”

* *Joy Born at Bethlehem: 19 Christmas
Sermons* (Charles Spurgeon)

* *Snow* (Calvin Miller)

* *From Babylon to Bethlehem, The Original
Christmas Carol*, and *The Chronicles of
Christmas* (Rev. Stephen Davey)

* *A Treasury of Christmas Stories*
(including “The Other Wise Man”)
(Henry Van Dyke)

* “The Gift of the Magi” (O. Henry)

* “Beasley’s Christmas Party” (Booth
Tarkington)

* The Christmas stories of Louis May
Alcott, Lucy Maud Montgomery, Hans
Christian Andersen, Grace S. Richmond,
Edward Everett Hale, L. Frank Baum, etc.

* *Old Christmas* (Washington Irving)

* “Christmas At Sea” and “Markheim”
(Robert Louis Stevenson)

* *Christmas at Thompson Hall* (Anthony
Trollope)

* *Christmas Every Day* (William Dean
Howells)

* *Letters from Father Christmas* (J. R. R. Tolkien)

* “Hercule Poirot’s Christmas” (Agatha Christie)

* *O Little Town* (Don Reid)

* “The Drum Goes Dead” (Bess Streeter Aldrich)

* *Nutcracker* (E.T.A. Hoffmann with illustrations by Maurice Sendak)

* *The Bird’s Christmas Carol* (Kate Douglas Wiggin)

* *Dakota Christmas* (Joseph Bottum)

* *Christmas Sermons* (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

* *Good Tidings of Great Joy* (Sarah Palin)

* *Finding Noel* (Richard Paul Evans)

* *The Twenty-four Days Before Christmas* (Madeleine L’Engle)

* *The Golden Ring: A Christmas Story* (John Snyder)

* *The Tailor of Gloucester* (Beatrix Potter)

* *Silent Night: The Story of the World War I Christmas Truce* (Stanley Weintraub)

* *The Christmas Train* (David Baldacci)

* “The Beggar Boy at Christ’s Christmas Tree” (Fyodor Dostoevsky)

* *Miracle on 34th Street* (Valentine Davies)

* “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle” (Arthur Conan Doyle)

* *An English Murder* (Cyril Hare)

* *A Christmas Most Foul: A Collection of Holiday Mysteries* (A variety of mystery’s Golden Age authors)

And finally, two more thoughts relevant to Christmastime reading. 1) There are several books I love in which Christmas plays but a part. Still, because of the tender, memorable scenes of Christmas they depict therein, I’ll mention a few of my favorites: *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame, *Pickwick Papers* by Charles Dickens, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte, *Little Women* by Louis May Alcott, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis, *The Long Winter* by Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery, *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, and *Persuasion* by Jane Austen.

And 2) many of the older poems, stories, and short novels mentioned above have been made available to me through Kindle. For cost-conscious readers and for those who love older literature that is almost unavailable through regular channels nowadays, Kindle is a treasure.



A Big Band Yuletide Quiz (Number 2)

(Answers below)

- 1) Gene Autry recorded 3 of the most popular children's Christmas songs of all time:
"Here Comes Santa Claus," "Frosty the Snowman," and, of course,
"Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer."
But which of these songs was his own composition?
- 2) Which carol's second verse begins with "Christ by highest heaven adored"?
- 3) "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" was introduced in a Hollywood movie that really doesn't have much to do with Christmas. What was that film?
- 4) In 1946, the Andrews Sisters joined Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians in a song that asked if listeners wanted to spend the holiday "away across the sea."
What was the name of that special place?
- 5) Heaven's blessings are foreshadowed in this line from one of the old Christmas carols,
"No more will sin and sorrow grow, nor thorns infest the ground."
Which carol?
- 6) "The Christmas Song" was a hit for the Nat King Cole Trio in 1946.
Who wrote it?
- 7) In what Hollywood movie was the song "White Christmas" introduced?

- 1) "Here Comes Santa Claus"
- 2) "Hark The Herald Angels Sing"
- 3) Meet Me in St. Louis
- 4) "Christmas Island"
- 5) "Joy to the World" (Isaac Watts)
- 6) Bob Wells and Mel Tormé
- 7) Holiday Inn

Christmas Carols in Bureaucratic Gobbledygook

The following titles were “improvements” from government clerks.

Can you guess the original titles?

1) Move Hither The Entire Assembly Of Those Who Are Loyal In Their Belief

2) Embellish Interior Passageways

3) Vertically Challenged Adolescent Percussionist

4) First Person Singular Experiencing A Hallucinatory Phenomenon Of A Natal Celebration Devoid Of Color

5) Soundless Nocturnal Period

6) Majestic Triplet Referred To In The First Person Plural

7) The Yuletide Occurrence Preceding All Others

8) Precious Metal Musical Devices

9) Omnipotent Supreme Being Elicit Respite To Ecstatic Distinguished Males

10) Caribou With Vermilion Olfactory Appendage

11) Allow Crystalline Formations To Descend

12) Jovial Yuletide Desires Expressed By The First Person Plural

13) Commence Auditory Reception The Announcing Cherubs Vocalize

14) Kris Kringle Will Be Arriving In The City In The Not Too Distant Future

15) Bipedal Traveling Through An Amazing Acreage During The Period Between December 21st And March 21st In The Northern Hemisphere

16) It's Arrival Occurred At Twelve O'clock During A Clement Nocturnal Period

17) Exclamatory Remark Concerning A Diminutive Municipality In Judea Southwest Of Jerusalem

Answers:

1) *O Come All Ye Faithful,*

2) *Deck The Halls,*

3) *The Little Drummer Boy,*

4) *I'm Dreaming Of A White Christmas,*

5) *Silent Night,*

6) *We Three Kings,*

7) *The First Noel,*

8) *Silver Bells,*

9) *God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen,*

10) *Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer,*

11) *Let It Snow,*

12) *We Wish You A Merry Christmas,*

13) *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,*

14) *Santa Claus Is Coming To Town,*

15) *Walking In A Winter Wonderland,*

16) *It Came Upon A Midnight Clear,*

17) *O Little Town Of Bethlehem*

The Oxen (Thomas Hardy)

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
“Now they are all on their knees,”
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
“Come; see the oxen kneel,

In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,”
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so’.

Music on Christmas Morning (Anne Bronte)

Music I love -- but never strain
Could kindle raptures so divine,
So grief assuage, so conquer pain,
And rouse this pensive heart of mine—
As that we hear on Christmas morn,
Upon the wintry breezes borne.

Though Darkness still her empire keep,
And hours must pass, ere morning break;
From troubled dreams, or slumbers deep,
That music kindly bids us wake:
It calls us, with an angel's voice,
To wake, and worship, and rejoice;

To greet with joy the glorious morn,
Which angels welcomed long ago,
When our redeeming Lord was born,
To bring the light of Heaven below;
The Powers of Darkness to dispel,
And rescue Earth from Death and Hell.

While listening to that sacred strain,
My raptured spirit soars on high;
I seem to hear those songs again

Resounding through the open sky,
That kindled such divine delight,
In those who watched their flocks by night.

With them, I celebrate His birth—
Glory to God, in highest Heaven,
Good-will to men, and peace on Earth,
To us a Saviour-king is given;
Our God is come to claim His own,
And Satan's power is overthrown!
A sinless God, for sinful men,
Descends to suffer and to bleed;
Hell must renounce its empire then;
The price is paid, the world is freed,
And Satan's self must now confess,
That Christ has earned a Right to bless:

Now holy Peace may smile from heaven,
And heavenly Truth from earth shall spring:
The captive's galling bonds are riven,
For our Redeemer is our king;
And He that gave his blood for men
Will lead us home to God again.

A Whole Season Full of Christmas! (Or “Why 12 Days of Christmas are Better Than One”)

Contrary to popular belief, the season of Christmas is not the period from Thanksgiving through December 25th. That idea comes more from modern advertisers and merchandise salesman – the “only so many shopping days ‘til Christmas” folks. No, the true season of Christmas is not the period *leading up to the holiday* but rather the one *leading from it!* The Twelve Days of Christmas is more than the title of a rather redundant song; it suggests the way the Advent of our Lord can be more fully rightly celebrated.

Claire and I believe that Christmas is just too big and beautiful to be contained in one day. We love December and its various anticipations of Christmas, but our real celebration starts rather than ends on December 25th. While so many are weighed down by the post-holiday blues, we're just getting underway! Interested in stretching your Christmas out to its fullest? Here are a few suggestions.

1) The enjoyment of Christmas movies, reading, music, and parties go on apace for Claire and me even after the 25th. This is an extremely helpful example for all those people who complain about how fast Christmas comes and goes. Take it easy. When you utilize the whole season (December and especially the 12 Days of Christmas proper), you'll see you'll have time for Christmas priorities as well as for its pleasant diversions. Many who adopt this approach find that as they de-emphasize the one-day celebration (with its hectic stress on big dollar presents and big dinner preparations), they are much more able to enjoy family, contemplation, and the other more spiritual elements of Christmas.

2) The nobility of celebrating the entire season of Christmas is that it emphasizes “extending,” over spending. Our gift-giving goes a long way beyond Christmas Morning because we open presents each of the Twelve Days. Imagine how much fun that is! However, the costs of our recent Christmases have gone down, not up. Why? Well, even though we are giving each other more gifts than ever before, we have become much more creative and personal in our selection. We might still buy each other a couple of “pricey” gifts, but with a whole 12 Days in which to cover, we were forced to come up with other ideas. And those other ideas have proven to be delightful ways of coming together in the spirit of Christmas.

For example, now our Christmas gifts often involve performance and personal time. For instance, Claire opens an envelope on the Seventh Day of Christmas which contains a recipe with a note declaring I'm fixing that dish for supper tonight. Or it might be a day off from housework, the addresses of three newly discovered websites I know she'll enjoy checking out, or just a promise of a leisurely car ride out in the country. As for my pleasure in such inexpensive gifts, it runs more to used books, used records, and...let's see; did I mention used books and records already? (I'm pretty easy to shop for!) Anyhow, the point is that whether you use twelve days or one day to celebrate Christmas, the gifts that matter most are ones that underscore things like time, creativity, and personal attention more than mere stuff. For us, the extended approach was very helpful in pursuing the better things.

3) Even within the Twelve Days of Christmas, Claire and I have a few special observances, especially St. Stephen's Day (December 26th) and the Feast of the Holy Innocents (December 28th). Activities for observing the former should certainly include reading the Acts passages relating to Stephen's selection as deacon, his sermon before the Council, and his martyrdom. It could also involve writing letters to missionaries, witnessing to your Faith, or visiting a widow or someone else in need of encouragement. And Holy Innocents Day, of course, has an obvious significance for pro-life activists like us. It is an excellent time for spiritual exercises and public actions that promote the sanctity of life.

4) Another important element of our Christmas season is taking time to consider, pray about, and discuss our New Year's resolutions. Now, I know it's common for certain Christians to be critical of those who make New Year's resolutions. That's unfortunate. I assume it's because these critics believe that making resolutions suggests a dependence upon one's own strength rather than God's grace. How wrong an idea, because making resolutions is quite clearly a biblical practice. Think for a moment about the Scripture's use of exhortational verbs like reckon, count, establish, consider, dedicate, consecrate, remember, put aside, invest, stand, fight, resist, urge, and so many, many more. All refer to the prayerful making (and keeping) of resolutions to live godly. A thorough evaluation of one's entire life is always in order as is a careful plan of action to be more effective as a "doer of the Word." After all, this is a key purpose of the Sabbath rest God instituted. So, why not use the Twelve Days to go deeper-than-usual in one's spiritual analysis in order to better serve the Savior in the year to come?

5) And finally, all things must come to their completion and the "official" Christmas season is over for us when Twelfth Night comes around. However, there's one more very important Christmas event for Claire and me...and for a few of our friends too. That is our celebration of Epiphany on January 6th. Epiphany is the holiday when the manifestation of Jesus is celebrated in much of the world, the day when we remember the visit of the magi as well as the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. It is also the gift-giving Christmas for much of the Eastern Church.

Claire and I use Epiphany as a way to close our Christmas season and we do so with a final Christmas party. We have a meal together, listen to Dylan Thomas reciting his classic "A Child's Christmas in Wales," and sometimes we take time with our friends to wrap up our main nativity set together, each person sharing a testimony or a prayer relating to each nativity figure. It is always a very moving time of fellowship.

So, there you go – a few ideas from our house to yours about how Christmas can be extended in time ---- and elevated in spirit.

Denny & Claire's Christmas Quiz --- Number Three

- 1) In what year did Charles Dickens write "A Christmas Carol"?
A) 1790. B) 1843 C) 1890 D) 1933
- 2) Which popular Christmas song was actually written for Thanksgiving?
A) "Frosty the Snowman" B) "Winter Wonderland" C) "Jingle Bells"
D) "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year" E) "Deck the Halls"
- 3) In *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Linus reads about the real reason for the season from what book?
A) The New Testament gospel of Luke B) Hans Christian Andersen's "The Fir Tree"
C) The song, "Go Tell It On the Mountain" D) Charles Dickens "A Christmas Carol"
- 4) After worshipping the baby Jesus, the magi from the east were warned by God in a dream not to return to:
A) Egypt B) Parthia C) Jerusalem D) Bethlehem
- 5) "Adeste Fideles" is more commonly known as:
A) "Oh, Come All Ye Faithful"
B) "Frosty the Snowman" C) "The Christmas Song" D) "Silver Bells"
- 6) Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus the Savior literally means:
A) Salvation B) House of bread C) Without a home D) Anointed home
- 7) Who wrote the short story, "The Gift of the Magi"?
A) Charles Dickens. B) Lewis Carroll C) O. Henry D) Clement Moore E) Mark Twain
- 8) The Messiah, George Frederick Handel's beloved Christmas oratorio, was first performed in 1742. In what city was it performed?
A) London, England B) Jerusalem in what was then known as Palestine C) Dublin, Ireland. D) Berlin, Germany
- 9) One of the marvelous adventures of the great detective, Sherlock Holmes, is set in the Christmas season. The story involves:
A) The murder of a man disguised as Father Christmas
B) A valuable gem discovered in a dead goose C) A secret message hidden in a child's doll
D) A bomb in a Yule log designed to assassinate the King of England.
- 10) The first people to receive a "formal announcement" of Jesus' birth were common laborers who were looked down upon as social inferiors. Who were they?
A) Shepherds B) Tax collectors C) Reporters D) Actors
- 11) How many wise men visited the stable on the night Jesus was born?
A) 3 B) 7 C) 12 D) None
- 12) In the poem, "'Twas the Night Before Christmas," what headgear was worn by the Momma?
A) Nightcap B) Red towel C) Christmas stocking D) Kerchief

- 13) In Victorian times, Londoners would have been familiar with a “goose club.” What was that?
 A) Holly boughs wrapped up and set on the fire
 B) A three-stringed musical instrument C) A method of saving to buy a goose for Christmas
 D) A group of Christmas merry-makers, usually involved in mischief
- 14) For what singing cowboy was “Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer” a tremendous hit?
 A) Gene Autry B) Tex Ritter C) Hank Williams. D) Roy Rogers E) Rex Allen
- 15) The flight into Egypt was: A) Saint Nicholas' escaping from the Turks
 B) The magi fleeing from Herod C) The nation of Israel being delivered from Pharaoh
 D) The Holy Family traveling to safety after a message from God

Answers: 1) B 2) C -- James Pierpont composed the song in 1857. It's original title? “One Horse Open Sleigh (or Shay)” 3) A 4) C – King Herod (in Jerusalem) had told the magi to return to him and give a report on Jesus' whereabouts. However, he wanted not to worship Jesus (as he had lied), but rather to murder him. 5) A 6) B 7) C 8) C -- Handel wrote the work to aid charities in Ireland. 9) B -- In “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle,” Holmes recovers a gorgeous diamond and, in the charitable spirit of the Christmas season, allows the repentant thief to escape imprisonment if he promises to leave England forever. 10) A 11) D – The Bible does not say how many magi there were who came to visit and worship Jesus. Most Bible scholars believe it was probably several. However, the visit of the magi almost certainly did not occur on Christmas night but many months after Jesus' birth. 12) D 13) C – “Goose clubs” were popular with the working-class of London, who paid a small amount every week towards the purchase of a goose or turkey to eat for Christmas dinner. 14) A 15) D

A Christmas Carol (G.K. Chesterton)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's lap,
 His hair was like a light.
 (O weary, weary were the world,
 But here is all aright.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's breast,
 His hair was like a star.
 (O stern and cunning are the kings,
 But here the true hearts are.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's heart,
 His hair was like a fire.
 (O weary, weary is the world,
 But here the world's desire.)

The Christ-child stood at Mary's knee,
 His hair was like a crown.
 And all the flowers looked up at Him,
 And all the stars looked down.

Two Poems by Leslie Norris

1) The Shepherd's Dog



Out on the windy hill
Under that sudden star
A blaze of radiant light
Frightened my master.

He got up, left our sheep,
Tramped over the moor.
And I, following,
Came to this open door,

Sidled in, settled down,
Head on my paws,
Glad to be here, away
From the wind's sharpness.

Such warmth is in this shed,
Such comfort from this Child,
That I forget my hard life,
Ignore the harsh world,

And see on my master's face
The same joy I possess,
The knowledge of peace,
True happiness.

2) *Camels of the Kings*

“The Camels, the Kings’ Camels, Haie-aie!
Saddles of polished leather, stained red and purple,
Pommels inlaid with ivory and beaten gold,
Bridles of silk embroidery, worked with flowers.
The Camels, the Kings’ Camels!”
We are groomed with silver combs,
We are washed with perfumes.
The grain of richest Africa is fed to us,
Our dishes are silver.
Like cloth-of-gold glisten our sleek pelts.



Of all camels, we alone carry the Kings!
Do you wonder that we are proud?
That our hooded eyes are contemptuous?

As we sail past the tented villages
They beat their copper gongs after us.
“The windswift, the desert racers. See them!
Faster than gazelles, faster than hounds,
Haie-aie! The Camels, the Kings’ Camels!”
The sand drifts in puffs behind us,
The glinting quartz, the fine, hard grit.
Do you wonder that we look down our noses?
Do you wonder we flare our superior nostrils?
All night we have run under the moon,
Without effort, breathing lightly,
Smooth as a breeze over the desert floor,
One white star our compass.
We have come to no palace, no place
Of towers and minarets and the calling of servants,
But a poor stable in a poor town.
So why are we bending our crested necks?
Why are our proud heads bowed
And our eyes closed meekly?
Why are we outside this hovel,
Humbly and awkwardly kneeling?
How is it that we know the world is changed?

A Few Christmas Thoughts (Part Three)

“This is Christmas: not the tinsel, not the giving and receiving, not even the carols, but the humble heart that receives anew the wondrous gift, the Christ.” (Frank McKibben)

“Let the children have their night of fun and laughter. Let the gifts of Father Christmas delight their play. Let us grown-ups share to the full in their unstinted pleasures before we turn again to the stern task and the formidable years that lie before us, resolved that, by our sacrifice and daring, these same children shall not be robbed of their inheritance or denied their right to live in a free and decent world.” (Winston Churchill)

“We see Jesus in the manger. We adore Him; we worship Him; we glorify Him. We stand oppressed before such love -- a love stronger than death -- a love so strong that it did die that we might live. We thank Thee for the sweetness of human love, but how could we ever have dared to think that such love was in the heart of God for us! We look on nature and see Thy beauty and Thy majesty, but we are afraid, for we have sinned. And then we learn that Thou has sent Thy Son, to be bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh; and before such inconceivable love we can only worship and adore. We are so weary of our failures and our slow growth toward Thee. Cleanse us deeply from sin, strengthen our moral purposes.” (Maltbie Davenport Babcock)

“Christmas is the day that holds all time together.” (Alexander Smith)

“And when we give each other Christmas gifts in His name, let us remember that He has given us the sun and the moon and the stars, and the earth with its forests and mountains and oceans, and all that lives and move upon them. He has given us all green things and everything that blossoms and bears fruit and all that we quarrel about and all that we have misused -- and to save us from our foolishness, from all our sins,
He came down to earth and gave us Himself.”
(Sigrid Undset)

“I am going to church, Watson. I believe such attendance was a prominent element of the Christmas season before the giving of gifts and the consumption of certain fowl became *de rigueur*?” (Sherlock Holmes)

Looking for a Good Christmas Movie?

Okay, in the interests of full disclosure, I need to tell you that though Claire and I do enjoy the cinematic arts, it is true that we don't consider the last several decades to have produced much in the way of cinematic excellence. So, we stay with the old stuff and that's pretty much what you'll see listed here in our recommendations. But if you're still interested, here you go with a few Christmas films that will not compromise your spiritual sensitivity or sense of quality. Indeed, the following are films that include brilliant writing, skillfully woven plots, heroic characters and wholesomeness, and superb artistic values.

* Where to start? How about the Christmas-themed films of Bing Crosby -- *Holiday Inn*, *Going My Way*, *Bells of Saint Mary's*, and *White Christmas*, The incomparable Bing stars in all of these with great music, of course, being a common element. And besides the music? Romance. Comedy. Pathos. And sheer class!

* Barbara Stanwyck stars in another couple of our favorite Christmas flicks: *Christmas in Connecticut* and *Remember the Night*. The first is especially great for all of you out there who are kinda' fed up with Martha Stewart and the second (which co-stars Fred MacMurray) is a first-rate and morally provocative film also.

* Everyone knows that Jimmy Stewart is the hero of America's most beloved Christmas film, *It's a Wonderful Life*. However, we actually prefer the lovely little *Shop Around the Corner* for Christmas fun and romance.

* Bob Hope as *The Lemon Drop Kid* is a terrific Christmas character as are Robert Mitchum and Janet Leigh in the sentimental New York comedy, *Holiday Affair*. Mitchum is fantastic in this role. Also check out the heartwarming story of *Miracle on 34th Street* – the version that presents Edmund Gwenn, John Payne, Maureen O'Hara, and the cutest little girl of the movies, Natalie Wood.

* Claire and I like almost all versions of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* but our favorite is the one starring Alastair Sim as Scrooge. He's absolutely first rate as a cad AND as the converted fellow "who knows better how to keep Christmas than any man alive!" Other versions we like star Reginald Owen (1938), George C. Scott, and the musical *Scrooge* with Albert Finney.

* Here's a rather macabre Christmas movie but it's one we absolutely adore, *We're No Angels*. It stars Humphrey Bogart, Peter Ustinov, Aldo Ray, Leo G. Carroll and Basil Rathbone. Bogart is at his surprising best in this subtle, deftly written, and impeccably timed comedy.

* Among lesser-known Christmas treats that Claire and I enthusiastically recommend are Fred MacMurray and Frank Sinatra (playing a priest, no less!) in *Miracle of the Bells*; John Wayne in *3 Godfathers*; Loretta Young and Celeste Holm in *Come to the Stable*; *Beyond Christmas* with Harry Carey and Aubrey Smith; and Jimmy Durante in *A Christmas Wish*. There's also *Meet Me in St. Louis* with Judy Garland though only a little part of it is set at Christmas. Still, hearing Judy sing "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" (and the non-Christmas "Trolley Song") is worth watching the rest of the movie.

* Other Yuletide treats? *The Charlie Brown Christmas Specials*, of course. And, if you're fortunate enough to find a copy, *The Best of the Andy Williams Christmas Shows* is a genuine treasure. There's also the animated *Annabelle's Wish* with Randy Travis providing the narration.

And besides these, we've collected quite a few Christmas-themed TV programs from the days of our youth through YouTube.

* And before I sign off, let me admit that there have been some very enjoyable Christmas films made after Hollywood's Golden Age and so we can honestly recommend *Polar Express* (2004) and *The Christmas Child* (2004) starring William Moses and Steven Curtis Chapman.

A bit earlier were *Prancer* (1989), *A Christmas Story* (1983), *Ernest Saves Christmas* (1988) and *The Christmas Box* (1985).

The Holly and The Ivy (Anonymous)

The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood
The holly bears the crown.

Chorus: O the rising of the sun,
And the running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing of the choir.

The holly bears a blossom
As white as lily flower.
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To be our sweet Saviour.

The holly bears a berry
As red as any blood
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To do poor sinners good.

The holly bears a prickle
As sharp as any thorn;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
On Christmas Day in the morn.

The holly bears a bark
As bitter as any gall;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
For to redeem us all.

The holly and the ivy
Now both are full well grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown.

Shepherds' Carol (Norman Nicholson)

Three practical farmers from back of the dale
Under the high sky -
On a Saturday night said "So long" to their sheep
That were bottom of dyke and fast asleep
When the stars came out in the Christmas sky.
They called at the pub for a gill of ale
Under the high sky -
And they found in the stable, stacked with the corn,
The latest arrival, newly-born
When the stars came out in the Christmas sky.
They forgot their drink, they rubbed their eyes
Under the high sky -
They were tough as leather and ripe as a cheese
But they dropped like a ten-year-old down on their knees
When the stars came out in the Christmas sky.

They ran out in the yard to swap their news
Under the high sky -
They pulled off their caps and roused a cheer
To greet a spring lamb before New Year -
When the stars came out in the Christmas sky.

Two Poems by Eleanor Farjeon

1) The Week After

The Week After
Thou that diest, Thou that never diest,
Thy day of birth has come and Highest!
And Earth has sung Peace and Goodwill to men!

And some have feasted, and still more have fasted,
But in the week that now has slipped behind
The movement was a warm one while it lasted,
And the hearts of men were willing to be kind.

Oh, keep that movement warm, not only now
But in the weeks that still beyond us lie!
Oh, keep that movement constant in us, Thou
That ever diest, and wilt never die.

2) Mary's Burden

My Baby, my Burden,
Tomorrow the morn,
I shall go lighter
And you will be born.

I shall go lighter,
But heavier too
For seeing the burden
That falls upon you.

The burden of love,
The burden of pain,
I'll see you bear both
Among men once again.

Tomorrow you'll bear it
Your burden alone,
Tonight you've no burden
That is not my own.

My Baby, my Burden,
Tomorrow the morn
I shall go lighter
And you will be born.

Where the Christmas Action Is

The converted Ebenezer Scrooge was said to be a man who knew how to keep Christmas more than any man alive. And Scrooge's change of heart wasn't only for the season either. Oh, no; the fellow who once dismissed the holiday as a "humbug" became dedicated to keeping the spirit of Christmas every day of the year. That alone is enough to make him one of our favorite heroes in all literature.

Below I list a handful of "things to do" appropriate to the season but as I do, I urge you to remember Scrooge's year round involvement in "the business of mankind." For example, having a few friends over to decorate cookies with a view to then distribute them to folks who do not have the time, energy, or wherewithal to do so is a terrific Christmastime activity. But are not wonderful things like friendship, creativity, and service to others of inestimable value at any time of year? Of course they are, so don't limit your cookie parties (or whatever) to just this time of the year. So, keeping in mind that the activities below are easily adapted for other seasonal expressions, here are just a few suggestions of how to keep that year-round Christmas spirit.

Turn off the TV and get together with family and friends. And when you do, put a little purpose in your Christmas gatherings.

Make "Santa runs" bearing cookies, soup and cornbread, or sausage dressing.

Make your own Christmas cards.

Build a snowman.

Bake cookies and take them to others.

Host a scavenger hunt.

Listen to Dylan Thomas reading "A Child's Christmas in Wales" or turn out the lights and listen to a Christmas-oriented radio program from the 1940's.

Use this volume's "Conversation Starters" and talk about Christmas.

Have a costume party.

Memorize a few of the lesser-known verses of a Christmas carol.

Invite everyone to bring a favorite poem or Scripture passage to read to one another.

Watch *It's a Wonderful Life* and, like our friend Joe Scheidler and his family, give the assembled party a trivia quiz over the movie.

Create a snow shoveling crew for some of the elderly folks in your neighborhood.

Have dinner or travel around town for a "progressive" meal.

Study the Christmas accounts in the Bible.

Shop for inexpensive gifts at a thrift store or used bookseller.

Go Christmas caroling.

Hold a discussion over a book that you have all read in the previous month.

Prepare a meal for someone who could use the help (or just the attention!).

Pray together as a family or as a group of friends.

Christ's Nativity (Henry Vaughan)

Awake, glad heart! get up and sing!
It is the birth-day of thy King.
Awake! awake!
The Sun doth shake
Light from his locks, and all the way
Breathing perfumes, doth spice the day.

Awake, awake! hark how the wood rings;
Winds whisper, and the busy springs
A concert make;
Awake! awake!
Man is their high-priest, and should rise
To offer up the sacrifice.

I would I were some bird, or star,
Fluttering in woods, or lifted far
Above this inn
And road of sin!
Then either star or bird should be
Shining or singing still to thee.

I would I had in my best part
Fit rooms for thee! or that my heart
Were so clean as
Thy manger was!
But I am all filth, and obscene;
Yet, if thou wilt, thou canst make clean.

Sweet Jesu! will then. Let no more
This leper haunt and soil thy door!
Cure him, ease him,
O release him!
And let once more, by mystic birth,
The Lord of life be born in earth.

Cures for the Post-Holiday Blues

'Twas the day after Christmas and all through the house,
 Mom was depressed and Dad felt like a louse.
 The children were listless; they were having no fun.
'Cause Christmas had lacked magic and now it was done.

Sound familiar? If so, then you're facing that common and most perennial of problems: the dreaded "post-holiday blues." But hey; don't panic and don't despair. There are cures available. Number one cure? Some post-holiday sadness is inevitable as in the case where loved ones who returned home for Christmas have now had to fly back to Detroit, or wherever. The tears in your eyes, which arise from looking at your empty dining room, are natural. There's not much for it except to be patient and to be grateful for the time you did have. Indeed, thanksgiving is a key part of this cure. Let the Lord know your appreciation for the blessing that family and friends have been in your life. Enjoy the memories and look forward to God's using you to be a blessing to your loved ones and to others He brings your way. Pray for peace in your soul; find comfort in the Scriptures and in service; and resolve to do what you can now do to keep in frequent contact with those who are now absent from your side.

Cure number two, however, deals more specifically with those who's Christmases weren't all they had hoped for. In these cases, the post-holiday blues comes more from dashed hopes or misplaced affections. This cure centers on a fresh discovery of the full meaning of Christmas itself. Remember your Dickens? Getting on with the "business of mankind" through kindness, loyalty, and hope was the way the converted Ebenezer Scrooge learned to keep Christmas all year long. No post-holiday blues for him. Even better examples are the magi who sought not a season or a specific holiday, but rather a living King.

You and I can overcome the post-holiday blues by engaging in the great quest those wise men did. They recognized that it's not the day; it's the duty that's important -- the duty of correctly, consistently serving Jesus Christ our King and Savior.

The House of Christmas (GK Chesterton)

There fared a mother driven forth
Out of an inn to roam;
In the place where she was homeless
All men are at home.
The crazy stable close at hand,
With shaking timber and shifting sand,
Grew a stronger thing to abide and stand
Than the square stones of Rome.

For men are homesick in their homes,
And strangers under the sun,
And they lay their heads in a foreign land
Whenever the day is done.
Here we have battle and blazing eyes,
And chance and honour and high surprise,
But our homes are under miraculous skies
Where the yule tale was begun.

A Child in a foul stable,
Where the beasts feed and foam;
Only where He was homeless
Are you and I at home;
We have hands that fashion and heads that know,
But our hearts we lost-how long ago!
In a place no chart nor ship can show
Under the sky's dome.

This world is wild as an old wives' tale,
And strange the plain things are,
The earth is enough and the air is enough
For our wonder and our war;
But our rest is as far as the fire-drake swings
And our peace is put in impossible things
Where clashed and thundered unthinkable wings
Round an incredible star.

To an open house in the evening
Home shall men come,
To an older place than Eden
And a taller town than Rome.
To the end of the way of the wandering star,
To the timings that cannot be and that arc,
To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home.