

WHAT CAN I GIVE?

What can I give Mom for Christmas? What can I put under our tree that will please my Dad best?

This is a very important question in the hearts of most children, as they search the stores for these two important gifts at Christmas time.

Being a parent and believing that I know just the gifts that would please them most, I have listed below a few suggestions, I hope you will feel free to use any or all of them, or make others according to your need.

Select a card. If you do not have the money to buy a card, even that isn't too important. A Christmas wish, written on a sheet of school paper will be just fine.

First write them just how you feel. A few words of love and appreciation for the many things they do for you, then select from the suggestions below, just as many promises as you feel you can give.

This will be their most treasured gift, and I promise that it will be one that will last longer than one purchased with gold.

- I promise . . .
1. To do all that I can in taking care of my own daily requirements, such as keeping my room clean, closets and dresser drawers straight and in order, my bed made, my clothes and books picked up.
  2. To share the daily chores required in making and keeping our home (such as helping with the dishes, taking care of a younger brother or sister at times, cutting grass, etc.)
  3. To keep my body and my thoughts clean.
  4. Not to associate with bad company.
  5. To be present at all family gatherings if possible.
  6. I will never knowingly do anything that will bring dishonor to myself, my family, my country or my God.
  7. My best in all things, whether it be school work, or some disliked chore, assigned me, or my life's work.
  8. To let you know in advance if I might be later than usual coming in. To call you, if possible, when delayed.
  9. To tell you when I leave, where I am going and when I expect to return.
  10. To respect and honor my church, my school, and my teachers, for I realize they are trying to help me become the person God expects me to be.
  11. When driving a car, to observe all traffic laws, to watch out for children and pedestrians, and for the car that I am meeting. A drunk could be driving it.
  12. To never take that first social alcoholic drink.
  13. To keep my morals and ideals high.
  14. To write you at least once a week, to let you know I am well and happy, because I know you care (if living away from home).

Many years ago, I was separating quite a few cards and letters which had accumulated through the years. Our daughter Anne was helping me. She was quite surprised when I told her to put the beautiful store-bought cards she had sent me in the trash, and saved the small pile. She said "Why Mama, you're going to burn all the pretty ones!" Perhaps some day, when she has a daughter of her own, she will understand why I treasured those cards and letters that carried a message, other than the one printed . . . why the letters and cards written to a parent that say "I'm doing my best . . . I miss you . . . I love you," are separated from other gifts, remembered and treasured through the years.

Faith of This Season

That God became man at Bethlehem is the miracle of miracles. Yet there were other miracles on that first Christmas Day.

It was a great miracle that the shepherds believed the message of the angels. Sensible persons would have argued "Would God send a heavenly host to tell shepherds such news? We must be imagining these things."

It was a great miracle that Mary believed her baby was to be the Savior. Even a mother should have had difficulty believing that the helpless child in the manger before her was the King of kings and Lord of lords. Did she not have to nurse him, change his clothes, protect him from cold and harm?

It was a great miracle that Joseph believed the messages which came to him through his dreams. Any other man would have been unable to stifle his suspicions, especially when he saw that this child's birth was just like other births and this child a normal one in every way.

Our common sense rebels when we think of the Christmas story from the human point of view. Why would God do such preposterous things? Why would he put his Son in a crib, endangering his life with the countless perils of childhood? Why could he not save the world in some other way?

Couldn't Almighty God have said to the devil, as Moses said to the Pharaoh, "Let my people go," and thus have freed everyone from the bondage of sin? It disturbs us to think of God using such weakness—a baby dependent upon a woman! How can we possibly believe that God works out our salvation in such a way?

Well, how could the shepherds believe? The Holy Spirit, who preached through the angels, caused them to believe. He caused them to act on that belief when they went to the manger. He caused them to become preachers of the good news even while they remained shepherds.

May we allow the Holy Spirit to create such faith within us and produce the fruits of that faith in our lives.

—Muhlenburg Press

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The Miraculous Night

Something had happened, some strange and terrifying thing. Joel did not know just what it was, but he knew that it was something of great importance. His brother Ezra and the other shepherds had left their sheep and rushed from the hillside in the night, leaving him alone to watch the flocks.

"You can't go, lad," Ezra had explained, hurriedly; "it would be too far for your lame foot. We shall follow where the star leads, and find what strange thing has happened."

Joel looked at the star as it blazed in the sky. It seemed very near, almost so near that he might touch it if he climbed to the topmost branch of the great tree underneath which he had been reclining. But he could not climb the tree. His foot was all but useless; had to be dragged along as he walked.

Ezra was the strongest and best shepherd in all the countryside, Joel believed. "The lad will grow strong and well as he watches the sheep," Ezra had told his father; "I will make a good shepherd of him."

Sometimes Joel wondered if he would ever grow strong. It seemed so hopeless, for he had been weak, and his foot had been lame, as long as he could remember. "Have patience, lad," Ezra would say when Joel became discouraged. "As you watch the sheep and learn to love them more, you will grow into a good shepherd."

Joel could not see just how watching and loving sheep could make him strong and well. Perhaps there was some secret about it that Ezra knew. Joel pondered this as he watched the strange star. It made the whole hillside bright, and it pointed to a place that seemed to Joel to be almost in the center of the little town of Bethlehem. If he walked slowly he might be able to follow it; he might reach Bethlehem before morning. Joel drew his cloak over his shoulders and reached for his staff. Then he remembered what Ezra had told him.

"Keep watch over the sheep." And Ezra trusted him, and although his foot hindered him and his arms were weak and thin, he must do his best for Ezra. Joel turned from the star and sat down again under the tree.

How quiet it was there on the hillside, and how beautiful! Joel sang to himself as he watched the sleeping sheep. He chanted all the songs he knew, songs his grandmother had sung to him when he was a small boy and could not run and play like other children. She often told him stories, too, as he sat beside her, stories that Joel remembered now as he lay beneath the star.

Joel thought of the baby Moses cradled in the bulrushes; of Jacob, who wrestled with the angel all night; of Joseph, whose brothers sold him into slavery. Oh, his grandmother knew all the stories of the tribe of Israel and of the great men chosen to do great works.

Some day a King would be born, she had said, the King of the Jews. He would be the greatest leader that had ever lived. He would always know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. He would be worshipped and loved. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which are little to be among the thousand of Judah" — his grandmother had always quoted — "out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."

Bethlehem! The star! Could it be a sign? Suppose it was, and Joel should not be there! He put his head in his arms as he wept. Never had he despaired so, never had he been so bitter about his crippled foot. He had been left behind!

Joel raised his head. A lamb was crying in the distance! Joel sprang up as quickly as he could and started down the slope. The dogs were whining as they ran ahead. It was hard to walk rapidly, and to keep from falling over the little gullies and rough places. The staff Ezra had cut for him helped him as he hurried along. Now several lambs were bleating, and the sheep were stirring all over the hillside.

Could it be a wolf hiding in the bushes? Joel had seen the other shepherds overcome a beast with one blow of their staff, and he had seen Ezra subdue one with his bare hands when he could not reach his staff. But Joel could not even kill a snake with his staff — what could he do if there was a wolf?

There was a slight movement in the bushes ahead. The dogs bristled and growled. All the sheep were milling about. Suddenly Joel saw a dark form, then another, and another. Several pairs of eyes were looking at him. There was not just one wolf, but a whole pack of them!

What could he do now? There was no use trying to fight these beasts — they would kill him!

Then Joel remembered the lambs he cared for so tenderly each day, and how they depended on him. The sheep that had been injured, they trusted him and let him dress their most painful wounds. He could not let the beasts kill his lambs, not even if they killed him!

In a dim way Joel remembered hearing Ezra say something about a good shepherd laying down his life for his sheep. It had always sounded foolish to Joel, but now he knew what Ezra meant.

It flashed through his mind, too, that the chosen of God had been shepherds, even as he. Abram, Jacob, David — why, they, too, had tended their flocks, had protected their sheep from the beasts at night.

Joel straightened his shoulders. He grasped his staff more firmly. His knees trembled, but he crept forward. "Be with me, Oh God, and help me save my sheep!" Joel prayed. One great beast sprang forth. Joel raised his staff. One blow, two blows descended. Somehow, Joel's arms found great strength, for the animal lay low. Another beast rushed at Joel. He heaved a mighty blow, and his staff was broken.

For a moment a great fear came over Joel's heart. His only weapon broken, what could he do now? He must use his bare hands. Forgetting his lame foot and his own safety, he lunged forward. But there were no more beasts. He could see, for it was light as day. Yet Joel knew that the morning had not yet come. He looked about him in wonderment. Then softly to his ears came the sound of music, and the air seemed to be filled with singing. As though from a great distance came the words: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace."

When the sun climbed over the horizon, and Joel awoke from the peaceful sleep, the sheep were quietly grazing on the hillside, and the sky was calm overhead. There was nothing to give reality to the events of the night. Only the staff that lay broken by his side showed that he had not dreamed.

Joel rose and went to care for his lambs. He lifted them gently and carried them to a sheltered place where they might feed upon the tender grass. He marveled at his own strength. Suddenly he saw Ezra and the other shepherds in the distance. He ran to meet them, to tell them of the miracle of the night. They stopped in wonderment before the lad and looked down at his feet. Joel looked, too, in amazement, for his foot was well!

"Joel, the chosen of God," said the men, and they looked at him with eyes filled with admiration, almost with fear. But Ezra, who had carried him upon his own strong shoulders so many times, who had taught him to tend the lambs, put his arm across Joel's shoulder as they walked together. Ezra watched the foot that had been useless, and that was now strong and free, and he brushed a tear from his brown-bearded face.

"You are a good shepherd, lad," he said. And the wonder of the miracle lived with them in their hearts, as did the sight of the wee Babe the shepherds had visited in Bethlehem that night. It was, indeed, a night to remember.

—By Eleanor Cloud

Merry . . . But Dangerous

Twice as many people are killed in auto accidents on Christmas Eve as on Christmas day. The most dangerous hours are 6 p.m. to midnight. These six hours claim an average of 12 deaths an hour compared to an average of less than five deaths an hour during the next 24-hour period.

At Christmas time, about 55 per cent of the fatal accidents involve drinking drivers. Black coffee at the end of a night of indulging doesn't restore one's senses. The best policy to follow this holiday season is "If you drink, don't drive."



Christmas Thoughts

By MYRTLE SMITH Bachelor

The beautiful Advent season is here again when we celebrate our Lord's birthday. We will again hear the beautiful story, a story of a miracle that happened some two-thousand years ago.

It is a story that never grows old as it proclaims "A King is born," who will become the Saviour of the world, a mighty counselor, a Prince of Peace.

It is true that at this time they were looking for a king, surely they were not looking for a baby, especially one born of lowly parents. They were expecting one to arrive dressed in fine purple, a man of high standing, a man made king, not just a tiny baby found in a manger.

I like to ponder over the events of that day, that great day of our Saviour's birth, for many wonderful things happened, in fact our whole world was changed.

I think of Joseph and the anxiety he must have experienced, for he knew how important it was for him and his wife to find a place to stay.

I think of Mary and the many thoughts that came to her at this time, for in her heart she was still confused over the fact that she had been chosen as the mother of the Christ Child. In our day most mothers know where their babies are to be born, and great preparation is made for this important event. But Mary wondered just where her child would be born.

I think of the inn keeper, for surely he was a busy man, especially at this time of the year. I like to think that he would have helped them, but every place was so crowded, due to the great number of people that had come to pay their taxes.

I think with sadness, how Joseph and Mary turned away after being told, "There is no room in the Inn." How depressed they must have been. It was at this point that someone suggested that a stable was available, so with grateful hearts they accepted it. We find that the Christ Child was born in this stable and that his first bed was a manger. Somehow I can see Joseph putting straw in this manger to make it as comfortable as possible; and then tenderly lifting the little boy Jesus and placing Him very gently there.

When we think on these days, our thoughts are directed to the shepherds, as we catch a vision of these men, so faithfully watching their flock. I can see why they were so afraid when the angel of the Lord came upon them. When the glory of the Lord shone so brightly all around them, this was something out of the ordinary, so I feel sure that their fear was understandable.

There are many things we can do to make others happy. We have only to let our minds run in the right direction, and when we do

Paul's vision must have been something like this, even though the circumstances were so different. He too, saw a great light from heaven as he traveled on the Damascus road.

The angel appearing to the shepherds saw they were afraid, so I can imagine it was in a very gentle voice they were told the good tidings of great joy. The angel also explained that the tidings were for all people. I have always had a great joy in my heart knowing that I was included, and for this, I am indeed grateful.

It wasn't easy for the shepherds to understand, and I think at first the news had to be broken gently. I think then, that they realized the significance more than ever, and especially when the angel joined a multitude of the Heavenly Host, praising God:

"This Heavenly choir singing 'Glory to God in the highest' must have been very effective for we know when the angel left they discussed going to Bethlehem. In fact, they made haste, and when they saw with their own eyes what had been revealed to them, they departed to scatter the news abroad.

The wise men came also to visit "Our Little Jesus Boy" and we are told brought rich gifts. One thing should be remembered: before presenting the gifts, they fell down and worshiped the new born king.

This is what He would have us do today. We must put Christ back in Christmas for this is His day. He is being crowded out. Other things are coming first, for our "Christmas Day" is becoming two commercialized.

We enjoy giving. I am sure we all do, but I think much thought should be given to the way we give. Do we give expecting something in return, or do we give ourselves along with our gift, not thinking of receiving one?

The exchanging of gifts is a custom, more or less, but I am sure that we would be happier in our giving if we were to seek out those that are in need, for Christ has said, as much as you have given to the least of these, you have given unto me.

Many changes have been made since the birth of our Bethlehem Babe, but let us remember love means so much in our world. There should be some time out for visiting the sick, the shut-ins, and I think especially, the elderly people. These I feel, are very much neglected. They need us, for they think they are not needed. We must make them feel wanted and loved.

There are many things we can do to make others happy. We have only to let our minds run in the right direction, and when we do

Hosanna!

By GRACE NIELSEN BABBITT Sea Level

All men are wise when they follow the star that Shone over Bethlehem, For it leads them to the Christ Child, who shows the way To His Heavenly realm.

That Precious Babe in a manger born, was sent from Our Father above, To reconcile all to His Holy plan, of kindness and Truth, and pure love.

God's angels proclaimed His Holy birth, and will Ever and ever again, Repeat those glad Hosannas! Peace on earth, Good will toward men."

Season's Greetings

By TUCKER R. LITTLETON Swansboro

Come once again, angelic choirs, And bring the tidings good, Yea, sing of peace on earth; proclaim The age of brotherhood.

Oh, may the echoes of that song Fill all the earth and sky And through the long and future years Its promise never die

Till men on earth are free from sin And free from Satan's rod To show Christ's love to all and sing "All glory unto God!"

Smile a While

When people start out by saying, "Well, as a matter of fact," you can be sure of one thing: what follows is going to be anything but fact.

—Wall Street Journal

this we will find people to help, and be happier in so doing.

So let us in a silent hour commit our Christmas plans, our hopes, our daily work, our families, our gaieties and our griefs to our Heavenly Father, asking His blessing upon every thought and endeavor. In committing our plans we need to ask that the spirit of Christ may be born anew within us, that we may glorify His nativity with a heart of compassion, and when we do this we will bring back to the Christ Child that which is rightfully His.

We will honor Him on His birthday and bring rich gifts to Him as they did at Bethlehem some two thousand years ago.

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Captain Henry

Sou'easter

The first mate and I went to hear the Christmas portion of the Messiah which was sung in Ann Street Methodist Church Monday night. It was very well done. I especially like to attend, and sometimes take part, in programs that use the talents of folks from all corners of the county—and Swansboro, too.

We are so few in number here that, frequently, to make things worthwhile, town and township lines must be erased. It makes me feel good to think of all of us as one big family, not only because the map says so, but because our hearts say so.

I was talking to a harried and hurried mother the other day. She had been out the night before to select the Christmas tree. When it was brought home, nobody had anything good to say about it. Her teen-age son declared the tree was bought too early.

Her teen-age daughter viewed it and pronounced, "It looks funny." Dad observed that it had a crooked trunk. "But," she said, "after 18 Christmases and 18 trees, I've become quite philosophical about the annual ritual of tree-buying. No matter what is brought home, no one is pleased except the poor guy who made the selection, but on Christmas Eve when it is all trimmed and sparkling and shining, everyone will stand back and admiringly say, 'You know—I think that is the prettiest Christmas tree we've ever had.'"

We have a tree this year that's between five and six feet tall. I call it a hemlock—you know, one of those short-necked trees. And do you know how long it took to

grow that thing? I sawed some of the trunk off and counted the rings: 14 years. You can grow a boy that tall in 14 years!

Just think, to get a 6-foot tree in our house 14 years from now, somebody has to plant a little seedling right quick. I'm sure glad somebody's looking out for dumb folks like me who just take Christmas trees for granted.

Well, I do declare! Here I am, talking in and out and round and about Christmas, when it's right here on our doorstep!

Have a merry one . . . you deserve it.

Christmas — Metamorphosis

By GEORGE E. JACKSON Morehead City

It is all so very strange and yet so wonderful that this world of ours, once a year, regardless of situation or circumstance, goes through a miraculous metamorphosis.

Selfishness becomes generosity, greed gives way to charity, indifference changes to tolerance, revenge to forgiveness, mistrust to faith, and wanting to love.

Mingled with this beautiful harmony there lingers a melancholy note, Loneliness. This has no end on earth.

Fulfillment belongs only to those who want it—to those who earn it. We are so fortunate that this Great Day was given to us. I frequently pray that we use it well, and that eventually all our tomorrows shall be blessed with this eternal reward.