

Christmas in the Family

Christmas is a magical time. Regardless of age it transports us back to our childhood. Some of my fondest childhood memories are from the Christmas season: family gatherings; the smell of a newly-cut Christmas tree; special goodies; decorations; colorful gifts that needed shaking—some even with my own name; nervous excitement practicing for the Sunday school program, and all that comes with it. Finally, Christmas morning was full of anticipation wondering what additional gifts Santa had left behind. It was painful waiting for the last one to wake up because all of the family needed to be awake before opening gifts. Such wonderful memories I have!

Family Traditions

As a father I hoped that my children would have the same kinds of memories. After my wife and I were married, unique family traditions were molded into one. They became “our” traditions. The family grew as additional blessings came year after year, and as the family grew so did the excitement, and number of gifts under the tree. The busyness of Christmas at times was exhausting. And, then it happened, shortly before Christmas in 1985, death touched our family, an event that forever changed our lives.

That Christmas remains a blur. Surely there was more sadness than joy. I felt bad that our children were affected because of our loss. Yet, I trusted that God knows all and we were comforted knowing that one of the heavenly angels was now our small daughter. God’s plan is perfect, and this experience, too, has been a blessing for our family. It has drawn us closer. It has also had a lasting effect on our Christmas traditions.

Sometime after her death, and as the family continued to grow, the chaos of the holidays returned. Late one Christmas Eve after the wrapping of presents was complete, I stood looking at a tree almost unrecognizable because of the number of presents. This isn’t Christmas, I thought. In the world around us the celebration of Christmas was becoming more and more commercialized. Was this also happening to me and my family? I wanted our children to understand a deeper meaning of Christmas. Jesus was born as God’s greatest gift for each of us. I hoped that this gift would be understood to be the most important of all.

Meaning of Christmas

The next morning children awakened with excitement, eager to open gifts. Some that they had shaken, or others that Santa had left. Wait, I thought, we should pause and reflect on the true meaning of Christmas. But what would the children think if I mumbled something about the most precious gift? I was worried that I would be misunderstood if I spoke what was in my heart about the real meaning of Christmas.

But I spoke. I wanted to reflect on the God-given gifts of the previous year; another child being born to the family; God's protection from the world; God blessing us with provisions of daily bread; believing friends; and good health. We remembered aunts, uncles, and cousins that remain dear to this day, and, of course, how could we forget the blessings of believing grandmas and grandpas. We also remembered those who had tired on the journey and given away the treasure of living faith. We remembered our heavenly angel, our daughter who had gone before and waits for each of us. Yet, most of all, the little Star of Christmas was part of our home. By grace, He had found a manger in our hearts. In the end, it was the most peaceful feeling when the gospel was preached and sins were forgiven for weak and tired travelers. There we experienced the greatest gift and peace of Christmas.

Now as time has gone the little ones have grown to adults, with little blessings of their own. In their families, traditions are melding together, but the message of Christmas remains. A message that warms the heart of the weak traveler. One day eternal Christmas peace will begin and never end.

*The angels once sang of the triumph
of heaven on Christmas night.
They sowed into mother earth's sorrow
a radiant star-filled night.*

*That glorious hymn is resounding
from each generation on.
It causes the heart-frost to crumble,
my forefather's as my own.*

*You hear it, O children, each Christmas,
how one day our way doth lead
from trials to Christmas eternal
and heavenly Christmas peace (SHZ 28).*

Eric Jurmu

Things to Visit About:

1. During the Christmas season, what traditions have become dear to you and your family? Why?
2. As you've grown older, has the meaning of Christmas changed for you? In what ways?
3. Have you thought of ways that you and your family can pause to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas?

4. Have you ever had other than close family share in your Christmas celebration? What do you think it meant for them? What did it mean to you?

5. What Christmas memories would you want your children to be left with?