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Others, At Christmas -- And Always

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It was the day before Christmas and, to everyone's delight and glad surprise at the Tinker's house, it had snowed heavily during the night. The world looked transformed, dressed in its pure-white bridal gown and shimmering with the radiance and beauty of a bride. Even now, the frosty air was full of lazily turning, feathery flakes and John Tinker, dressed in his very heaviest and warmest clothes, stood for a long while beneath a giant maple tree and reveled in the wonder and the beauty of it all.



Walking briskly, he soon stepped into the fragrant stillness of the pine grove, his favorite retreat for aloneness and stillness. A shaft of silver sunlight pierced the heavy snow-laden clouds and at the same instant a flash of scarlet winged past him, ultimately calling a loud, happy "Cheer, cheer, cheer" from a lofty pine. With the appearing of the sunlight's shaft, instantly every branch and feathery twig was aglitter with a million lights. The world was sparkling.

John stood in rapt wonder and silence, feeling the quietly-wonderful presence of God. It was as if He, too, loved the serenity and the beauty of His own creation, the young man thought, stepping deeper into the heavily-wooded, pine grove.

He walked until he was far removed from the world outside him; then he found his favorite place of waiting on God and dropped to his knees in prayer. There was so much that he needed to tell the Lord, so many blessings for which to thank and praise Him and so many heartaches and sorrows to talk over with Him."

He sighed in spirit. Amid all the beauty, the delicious bustle and thrilling excitement of Christmas, there were so many hearts that were sorrowful. The lovely Christmas carols, the wonder and light in little children's eyes, and the glory and beauty of the wonderful story of the Christ of Christmas had little if any meaning to many. It was as if Christ had never been born, as if He had never come to be man's Saviour, the young man thought, feeling heavy-hearted and sad over the deplorable living habits of the masses who seemed to want no part of Christ and His proffered love which was ever reaching out and searching after the lost.

Tears stung John's deeply-set, dark eyes and cascaded unceremoniously down his cheeks, forming almost-instant shining crystals on his face that sparkled with the same glittering radiance as the trees and the bushes. In a little while, he was in a deep agony of spirit and his intercessory praying ascended far above and beyond the beautiful grove of evergreen trees to the throne of God. His prayer list of better than thirty names was called imploringly to God, each name a special and significant burden and concern.

He remained for a long while in the woods and when he got to his feet with the assurance that he had made contact with heaven and that his incense of prayer was a "sweet savour unto God," he started leisurely back toward the farm.

Snow crunched beneath his feet and at one place where he stopped to enjoy the beauty of his surroundings, two does ambled nonchalantly and indifferently close by the path which he would soon be taking. Farther along the trail, he saw a beautifully-marked raccoon waddling over the snow, and from overhead came the twitter and chatter of countless birds. Accompanying the twitter and chatter was the call of a crow and the clarion "cheer, cheer, cheer" of the cardinal.

John was loathe to leave it all, but with much yet to be done, he ambled slowly homeward, thinking of the Moores and their sad predicament. Loneliness seemed to camp on their doorstep. In all the great city, with its hustle and bustle and activity, none came to see them or call them friend. They never received any exciting invitations to dinner and no gifts either. Their children had virtually forgotten and abandoned them. Oh, it was a heartless thing for the son and daughter to have done! John thought, feeling tears start in his eyes. He was glad he had asked his parents to invite them to share Christmas with the family on the farm. Roscoe Moore was as excited as a child with a favorite gift toy and Mamie Moore couldn't restrain herself from weeping.

John smiled, thinking of the gifts, beautifully wrapped and placed among the Tinkers' gifts but marked, To Roscoe and Mamie. What a surprise of love for the elderly Moores!

He was thankful he had obeyed the voice of the Spirit that day in the city when he came from his office to stop by the apartment complex and give out tracts. It was his first encounter with the aged couple, but not his last; he had gone weekly to see them

and pray with them, many times leaving small expressions and tokens of his love behind. His visits, they told him frequently, were the one bright spot in their otherwise dreary and lonely life. And now, they were both Christians.

Then there was Mrs. Healey. Surrounded by loving friends and half a dozen children, each one outdoing the other in an effort to help her forget the sorrow that stalled her every waking moment, still she remained in a sort of haze. Only a year ago, the one she loved was part of all the Christmas plans. This year, she was alone, and all the glitter and shimmer and breathless plans were a bitterness and a mockery to her spirit. Had his visits to her home and his many prayers with her availed anything? he wondered as he walked, his burdened heart reaching out to her in prayer. What about the gift-wrapped Bible he had given her before leaving for his parents' home on the farm; had she read it at all?

There were so very many sad homes in the world, he reasoned, deep in silent thought and meditation. But whatever the sadness, Christmas, if one let it, could make even the darkest clouds to sparkle with light. For one of the lovely things about Christmas was that its greatest warmth and light and beauty came to one not in being done to, but in doing . . . in making others happy, at Christmas and all year long.

Wasn't this the real meaning of Christmas . . . this giving! This was the one and only purpose of the Saviour's coming, John soliloquized. He came that man might find healing in God's great love, given by Jesus Christ the only-begotten, beloved Son of God. This love, revealed to man by the Child of the manger, was the very essence of giving.

Thinking back to the birth of Jesus as given in the account of the Gospels, John suddenly realized how vital a part dreams played in the narrative. Joseph's dilemma, when he learned of Mary's condition, was solved by a dream. The angel appeared and told him, "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."

Then the wise men were warned by God in a dream not to go back to see Herod but to return another way (Matthew 2:12). And Joseph, a second time, was warned by an angel who appeared to him in a dream and told him to take Mary and Jesus and go into Egypt and remain there until further instructed by God (Matt. 2:13). And in the very same chapter, he was again given explicit instructions by an angel of the Lord in a dream that he was to return to the land of Israel.

It was all so very wonderful, the young man thought, deep in meditation.

Before he was aware of it almost, he found himself in front of the big, well-kept and neat farmhouse. Smoke curled lazily skyward from the fireplace chimney and the Christmas wreaths, hanging from every window, added to the tranquil spectrum of the scene. Oh, it was good to be home again. He looked forward to each week end spent

with those he loved so dearly. If it were possible to have found employment elsewhere, he'd certainly not have gone to the city to set up his business.

A car stood in the driveway and John recognized it as Amy's. A thrill of joy and excitement raced through him. Amy was a young woman whom his parents had helped and befriended in her girlhood years. Orphaned when she was ten and shifted about from one foster home to another, they learned of her sad plight through their pastor and took her to care for at fifteen. Of a shy and timid nature, she remained strangely aloof and much to herself until the genuineness and sincerity of his parents' love finally penetrated her fearful heart. Like a lovely flower unfolding its satin-smooth petals, Amy turned her heart and life over completely to the Lord. From then on, and since her soon-after sanctification, she became a shining light for God's cause. Now home from Bible School, John could scarcely wait to see the lovely Amy, his bride-to-be.

He hurried inside and was met by a flurry of happy voices, Amy's among them.

"I thought you weren't coming until tomorrow morning early," John teased, repeating what he had heard one of his sister's say.

"Things changed at my part-time job and they let me off earlier than they said they would. So I did the natural thing and headed this direction," the lovely young woman replied.

John beamed down upon her. "I'm glad you're here," he said, "because now you can go with me into the city to get the Moores. They're to spend these few delightful days with our happy family. Besides, I have a few last minute Christmas deliveries to make and you're the perfect helper."

Amy laughed softly. "Oh, John, I might have known there'd be no rest for the weary," she said, winking at John's two teenage sisters. "But I'm sure I'll be delighted with your company, you big, kind, generous-hearted man. You always think of others, don't you, John?"

Smiling broadly, he replied, "Well, that's what Christmas is all about, isn't it? Others, I mean. Christ made Himself of no reputation because of His concern for others . . . others like you and me."

With happy tears shimmering in her eyes, Amy said brokenly, "Yes, John; oh, yes. Always, it must be . . . and it shall be . . . Christ, then others. Not only for Christmas but all year long."

Beaming proudly upon her, John said a hearty, "Amen, Amy."

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