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**GETTING READY FOR CHRISTMAS**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

Brenda Thornton looked through her sparkling-clean windows to the sprawling English Tudor across the street. The neighborhood she and Joe had moved to years ago had changed almost overnight, it seemed. Everywhere she looked, she saw elegant new houses and perfectly beautiful, well-manicured and managed lawns. Gone were the wide open spaces and the wooded lots which were once so familiar and where, almost every spring

and summer evening, she walked to listen to the sweet song of the birds and watch as they put themselves to bed in the lofty branches of the ancient trees.

She sighed, recalling how each of their children had played in the "forests," as they called the wooded areas in and among the open spaces, whose meadow-like semblances were a kaleidoscope of color from early spring to late summer with wild flowers of every description blooming wildly, rampantly and flamboyantly.

She felt tears sting her eyes as she recalled the singing, nesting birds and the beautiful flowers and peaceful woods where she oft resorted for prayer and quiet meditation. Change was inevitable, she knew; but there were times when she wished it were not so. She guessed her age was "showing," for she had often heard it said that, to the elderly especially, change was not a welcome thing; nor was it a well accepted thing. She "felt" the changes in her neighborhood keenly now.

She saw Trudy Bennelow's face framed inside the windows of the elegant formal living room of the English Tudor. They waved to each other and smiled. Trudy was decorating a perfectly-shaped floor-to-ceiling tree. Brenda felt like she could almost smell the sweet fragrance of the freshly-cut tree.

Her heart ached for the magnificent conifer, whose lofty branches would never again reach heavenward to catch the falling snow or receive the gift of rain upon its "head." Never again would birds rest in its gently-swaying branches nor build their nests there and raise their families, warbling and singing with gladness as they did so. She much preferred seeing the trees in their normal habitat. It was sheer pleasure and delight to walk beneath their lovely green boughs on their densely laid, soft brown carpet and listen to the gentle breezes whisper softly overhead.

Brenda stood for a long while watching the comings and goings of her new neighbors in their beautiful English Tudor and Williamsburg design houses, praying silently for the occupants within the lovely structures. Her heart was burdened for the neighbors. Neither her husband nor she had been able to reach them for Christ. This troubled both Joe and her greatly and deeply. Most said they belonged to a church but that business and busyness had kept them from attending faithfully and consistently.

Seeing the tiny white lights twinkling and glowing on Trudy's tall tree, brought to Brenda's mind her neighbor's answer to the invitation for her and Bill to attend the Christmas cantata with Joe and her in their church.

"Thanks, Brenda," Trudy had replied sweetly. "But I'm much too busy getting ready for Christmas to go to a cantata. I'm sure it will be good."

"It's spiritual and wonderful, Trudy. I heard part of the practice session," Brenda remembered having answered quietly.

"I appreciate the invitation; I really do," Trudy continued. "But I have ever so many things yet to do. You should see the stacks and stacks of presents I must wrap and tag! It's unbelievable. Honestly, Brenda, by the time Christmas is over, I'm worn out. Beat down. I feel like an old woman instead of a mere twenty-eight. I have more cookies to bake and at least twenty pounds more fudge to make. Bill's entire family loves my fudge. Also my butter creams and almond clusters. Not to say anything about Bill himself! That husband of mine goes overboard at Christmas. Eating, I mean, especially. His gastronomic system amazes me. Generally, I'm a sort of 'nibbler.' I prefer to eat lightly; Bill gorges. At Christmas especially. I'll take my 'nibbling' to his gorging. I like my feeling of never being overly full."

Brenda remembered having complimented Trudy for her great willpower regarding overeating. Then she said quickly, "Maybe you and Bill could go with Joe and me to the Sunday morning Christmas service, Lord willing. You'd be getting into one church service this year, if you'll come with us."

Trudy looked shocked as she replied, quickly, "Oh, my, no, Brenda! Bill and I always sleep in on Sunday mornings. And after we've eaten our breakfast we'll be busy putting the finishing touches to the buffet we're having here for some of our friends that evening. There's no way we could go with you and Joe. Thanks for asking us though. I do very little of anything else than work and plan and decorate when I'm getting ready for Christmas."

Brenda felt tears form in her eyes. Her offer to help Trudy with her gift wrapping -- or anything else -- was turned down with a cheerful, "Oh, thanks, Brenda. Thanks much. But I love getting ready for Christmas. Half the fun is

in wrapping presents and making my fudge and butter creams and almond clusters."

Getting ready for Christmas! Brenda felt a stab of pain prick her heart as Trudy's sentence came quickly to mind. How little the world knew of, or cared for and about, the real meaning of Christmas: the true meaning. Like the man at the inn, the average individual had no room for Jesus. Room for fun and pleasure and entertainment and trinkets and such, but no room at all for the Christ. And, like Bethlehem itself which knew not, that starry night, that, cradled in an humble manger-bed in a cave in its hillside lay He who was born King of kings and Lord of lords: He who became the Savior of the world!

Bethlehem was too busy to know or to care. It was too bent upon filling its coffers with the monies of those who had come to be taxed. Money, money. It had blinded the eye from seeing, the ear from hearing and the heart from knowing. Knowing what? That within its gates lay He who was born King of the Jews. "A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of . . . Israel" (Luke 2:32).

The sun was now making a winter-hasty exit. Nighttime was ushered in wearing her deepest sable black, studded by a myriad of glistening, dancing star jewels, and Brenda saw the Christmas lights come on in the houses across the street from Joe's and her house. Thousands of lights, they were, she was sure. They twinkled and sparkled and glistened and glimmered from garland-decorated windows and doorways; from the eaves of roofs; from evergreens on lawns and along driveways; from Christmas trees in great rooms, living rooms and dining rooms; in candle-lighted windows, upstairs and down. Lights, lights, everywhere. It was beautiful. Beautiful! Breathtaking. What a difference the lights made! They pushed back the darkness and brought a brilliance and radiance and life into the entire development.

Light! Suddenly Brenda was weeping. Then she was laughing. "Thank You, kind Father!" she cried joyously. "Oh, thank You!"

His light! That was it, she realized quickly, as wave after wave of holy ecstasy swept over her soul. God had put Joe and her where they were to shine.

"Ye are the light of the world," He had stated clearly and positively in Matthew 5:14. No gimmicks; no fancy speeches; simply, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid." . . .

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (St. Matt. 5:16).

Brenda's heart was full to overflowing. It may take some time before Joe and she saw results with and among their new neighbors, she realized, but results would be forthcoming, she was sure. Joe's loan of a car to the Bremmers when theirs had to be towed to the garage, had made and left a lasting impact for good upon the young Brian Bremmer; not to mention Brian's delicate looking wife Joanne.

Brenda recalled the many loaves of bread she had baked and taken to the new neighbors as they had moved in, one by one. Each loaf was a silent but loving "Welcome to our community" gift, and each snowy-white linen napkin which held the Saran-wrapped, freshly-baked loaf, had an embroidered scripture verse in one corner, put there by her own hands with needle and embroidery floss.

Lights! she thought. Good works! And all so that their Father in heaven may be glorified.

Tears flowed freely as she recalled the many, many hours of labor Joe put in among their new neighbors, helping them with inside and outside finish work to cut back on their cost of construction and labor. All labors of love from Joe, who refused so much as a penny from any of them. Her own many hours and days of baby-sitting and of preparing meals came suddenly to the fore now, as she remembered how she had helped with food and children while the young mothers were getting moved in and settled into their lovely homes.

Lights! Lights! She had never before thought of Joe's and her kindnesses as lights. Now, however, she was blest, as the truth of the Savior's words sank deeply into her soul with their truest and fullest meaning.

It may take time, perhaps years: only God knew how many or how long. Little matter. She was a light. His light. Joe was, too. They were put where they belonged; where God wanted them to be. They were meant to push

back the darkness -- the darkness of sin -- by shining for their Father in heaven. He needed them, Joe and her, to show their neighbors how to get ready, not for Christmas, but to meet the Christ of Christmas.

Brenda hurried away from the window just as Joe turned into their driveway. Putting supper on the table, her happy heart kept reminding her, "Ye are the light of the world. Ye are the light. . . ."