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CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

PRINCE OF PEACE

A perfect world is
coming

WHY CHRISTMAS?

Maybe it was the only
way

A DIFFERENT CHRISTMAS EVE

The best Christmases are
spent for others



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personally speaking



Christmas has a way of bringing out the best in people. It's one time of the year when we look upward in search of peace and hope, inward for the resources to love and give freely, and outward in reconciliation. At Christmastime, most of the world shares a brief but blessed moment of peace.

But what about this year? With numerous armed conflicts around the world, peace agreements being broken almost before they are brokered, and the growing specter of international terrorism, is there any reason to believe that peace will ever come?

When we look at the world situation, there's very little reason to hope. But when we look to the Prince of Peace, Jesus, there's every reason to hope—and every reason to pass that hope on to others.

What can you do to help bring peace on earth? You're just one person, after all, and have very little influence—or do you? You may not command an army or sit at the negotiating table where peace treaties and disarmament plans are forged, but you can change situations through your prayers and you can influence everyone you come in contact with through your attitude and actions. A song that was popular some years ago put it like this: "If everyone lit just one little candle, what a bright world this would be!" You may not be a light to the whole world, but you can light your part of the world. We all can.

From all of us at Activated, may God bless you and yours with His perfect peace, and may He make you a blessing to others this Christmas season and always.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Phillips". The script is fluid and cursive.

Keith Phillips
For the Activated Family

It was past 10:00 P.M. on Christmas Eve, and holiday lights brightened the roads of Bangkok.

My son Joey and I had just collected three large bags of bread and pastries from the bakery of a five-star hotel that often donates their leftovers to our family of Christian volunteers. Apparently the hotel bakery had overestimated its Christmas business, because this was considerably more than they usually had for us.

As we walked the last few blocks home, I prayed out loud, "Lord, what are we going to do with all this bread? It's way too much for our family of four!"

It didn't take the almighty God a lifetime to answer. An instant later, it was right in front of us. Sitting on the side of the road was a young beggar in a shabby dress. Next to her, a young child lay on a dirty but neatly spread blanket.

Joey reached into one of the bags, and the smell of freshly baked bread poured out. He handed her a large loaf, and she bowed deeply in the beautiful Thai tradition. When

she lifted her face, she was smiling through tears.

Another loaf, an inner voice whispered. *Give her another loaf!*

The second loaf was met with a smile even more radiant than the first. By now, joy had erased every trace of despair. The young woman looked truly beautiful, despite her rags.

With warm Christmas and New Year greetings, Joey and I said goodbye and set off in search of more lonely and destitute folks to share our bread with. As in almost any major city, there are always plenty of poor people on the streets of Bangkok, even at that time of the night. For the next hour or so, offering Christmas greetings and bread in exchange for smiles became a happy little ritual.

With our bags almost empty but our hearts overflowing, we headed home. It had been a different sort of Christmas Eve for us, with a little more meaning than we had expected. Giving even in this small way had helped us remember what Christmas is all about—a gift from our heavenly Father's heart to ours, Jesus. •

Josef Gebhard is a full-time volunteer with The Family.



By Josef Gebhard

a different Christmas Eve





Light looked down and beheld Darkness.
"Thither will I go," said Light.
Peace looked down and beheld War.
"Thither will I go," said Peace.
Love looked down and beheld Hatred.
"Thither will I go," said Love.
So came Light and shone.
So came Peace and gave rest.
So came Love and brought Life.

Laurence Housman

the prince of peace

Event after event has left the world questioning, "Why all the pain and strife? Why the slaughter of the innocents? Why troubles and sorrows?" It is getting darker and colder all the time. The sun is setting, the darkness is falling, and the world is looking for some ray of hope.

That hope is here.

Two thousand years ago, over the town of Bethlehem, a new star shone and an angel of God pro-

claimed to a group of shepherds, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10–11).

On that special night, God gave us the greatest gift anyone could give—His Son, Jesus. Though Jesus came into the world as a tiny baby, He brought with Him all of God's wonderful gifts. As He grew older, He unwrapped these gifts for us, one

by one, as He taught us how to love God and each other. Then, when Jesus died for us, He gave us the greatest gift of all—the promise of eternal life in Heaven when our time on Earth is done.

Jesus wants to bring His peace to the hearts of all men everywhere. He sees the misery and grief and pain of the heavy-hearted. He sees the weak and the weary. He sees those who struggle with fear—fear of the past, and fear of the future. He sees the persecuted and war-torn, those who have been robbed of hope and a chance to live in peace.

He hears our cries and reaches out to us in love. He offers us a way out, an escape route from our inner conflicts, fears, and sense of hopelessness.

“Let not your heart be troubled,” He tells us. “You believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1). “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you” (John 14:27). “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

If you will reach out your hand to Him now, He will lead you through the darkness and into the light. Jesus came into this world to offer you life and love and peace that know no boundaries. These gifts are not limited by race or religious background or color or creed. They are for now and forever.

He wants to be with you always, through every disappointment and every hardship. He wants to protect you from harm. He wants to be a light when darkness surrounds you. No matter how dismal the conditions, He will always be there to pull you through.

He will always be by your side,

always ready to answer your questions, always ready to guide and instruct, always ready to comfort and encourage.

Even when there is trouble on every side, you won't need to worry or fear. If you have His love in your heart, no matter what happens, He will take care of you. No matter how dark the night, His light will shine for you.

Jesus will be your closest and dearest friend. You will be able to talk to Him anywhere, anytime, and He will answer. He will speak to your heart and guide you through the storms of life.

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, will not only give you peace in your heart here and now, but when this life is over, He will bring you to His haven of rest. In His heavenly Kingdom there will be no more oppression or war or poverty or pain or sickness or suffering or sorrow or death, but only peace and plenty for all. There evil and darkness dare not go!

Jesus is reaching out to you now. Won't you take His love?

::

If you have not yet personally received Jesus' gift of eternal love and life, you can do so now by praying the following prayer:

Dear Jesus, I want to receive Your gift of love—love to relieve my inner longings, and love to brighten the lives of others and help them find true happiness. Please forgive me for my sins, Jesus, and come into my heart as my Lord and Savior. Please fill me with Your Holy Spirit and help me to be a living example of Your love to others, so they, too, will want to open their hearts to You and receive Your love. Amen. •

You will be
able to
talk to Him
anywhere,
anytime, and
He will answer.

ONE SPECIAL GIFT!

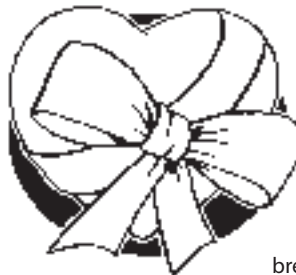
All this hoopla is about Me—after all, it is My birthday—yet I seldom see the stores carrying gifts suitable for Me.



Well, that's because I don't care for new gadgets, toys, clothing, or anything else money can buy. The gift that I love to receive the most is the same gift that is so priceless to your family and friends—your love and friendship.

Yes, I'd like a place in your heart. I mean that! I want to move into your heart and never leave you. The very best present you can give Me is an invitation to do just that. I'm strong enough, but I never beat down any doors. I always wait for an invitation. I just knock, and hope you'll hear that knock and open the door of your heart.

You don't have to put presents under the tree for Me. You can do that for your loved ones.—I like to see people happy! But what I want most from you, and from your whole family for that matter, is to be invited in to live with you.



Will you do that for Me on My birthday?

You would make the day unforgettable for Me if you did! Your heart is a priceless gift. It's beautiful, and I cherish it. Other gifts grow old and break or wear out with time, but I promise that if you give Me the gift of your heart, I'll fill it with My warmth and love so that it stays young forever. Thank you for thinking about it. All I need to hear is a yes, and I'll be standing on your doorstep with the biggest smile you ever saw. Just say the word, and I'll never let you down.

I'm yours always,

Jesus

Mind if I walk with you as you rush to the next store?

How's the gift shopping going?

You look a little tired.

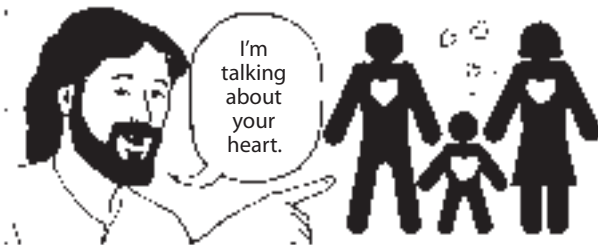


Are those long lines and Christmas sales getting to you?



I want to let you in on a secret. The very best Christmas present you could give your loved ones can't be found in those shops you're planning to check out. You won't find it in any exclusive boutique either.

It's a precious treasure, safely encased in ... you!



I'm talking about your heart.

Everybody knows that money can't buy happiness, yet people are all too eager to overlook that fact during holidays. It's so easy to get caught up in the frenzied rush to buy the latest gadgets and toys for your loved ones, all the while crowding out those precious moments you could spend with your family and friends, sharing with them the greatest gift in the world, the love in your heart.



Where are mom and dad?
Out shopping



Shall I let you in on another secret?

Welcome!

What's in your bags?

Gifts for you! ... And more to come.



IN A CLASS BY HIMSELF!

Jesus Christ has done more to change history, the course of civilization, and the condition of man than any other leader, group, government, or empire before Him or since! He has given the love of God to billions and made the way for as many as will believe in Him to receive eternal life!

Jesus Christ is not merely a philosopher or teacher or rabbi or guru or prophet, though He has been called all these things. He is the Son of God! God the Father is a Spirit and is all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere, and in everything. He is so far beyond our limited human comprehension that He had to send His Son, Jesus, in the form of a man, to show us what He Himself is like and to bring us to Himself.

And although many great teachers have spoken about love and God, Jesus *is* love and He *is* God. Jesus is the only One who died for the sins of the world and rose from the dead. He's in a class all by Himself because He's the only Savior. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). •



feeding reading

WHY GOD SENT JESUS INTO THE WORLD

To show us what God is like:

2 Corinthians 4:4
Colossians 1:13,15
Hebrews 1:3

So we can know and understand God:

John 8:19
John 12:45
John 14:7-9

To make a way for us to be forgiven for our sins, be reconciled to God, and have eternal life:

John 3:16
John 1:29
John 10:10
Romans 5:8
Ephesians 2:4-7
1 John 4:8-10

A PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS MORNING

By Henry Van Dyke¹

The day of joy returns, Father in Heaven, and crowns another year with peace and good will.

Help us rightly to remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wise men.

Close the doors of hate and open the doors of love all over the world.

Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting.

Deliver us from evil, by the blessing that Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clean hearts.

May the Christmas morning make us happy to be Thy children, and the Christmas evening bring us to our bed with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. Amen. •

¹From *A Treasury of Christmas Stories*



WHY CHRISTMAS?

Retold by Keith Phillips

There was once a man who didn't believe in God, and he didn't hesitate to let others know how he felt about religion and religious holidays, like Christmas. His wife, however, did believe, and she raised their children to also have faith in God and Jesus, despite his disparaging comments.

One snowy Christmas Eve, his wife was taking their children to a Christmas Eve church service in the farm community in which they lived. She asked him to come, but he refused.

"That story is nonsense!" he said. "Why would God lower Himself to come to Earth as a man? That's ridiculous!"

So his wife and children left, and he stayed home.

A while later, the winds grew stronger and the snow turned into a blizzard. As the man looked out the window, all he saw was a blinding snowstorm. He sat down to relax in front of the blaze in the fireplace.

A short while later, he heard a loud thump. Something had hit the window. Then another thump. He looked out, but couldn't see more than a few feet. When the storm let up a little, he ventured outside to see what could have been beating on his window. In the field near his house he saw a flock of wild geese. Apparently they had been flying south for the winter when they got caught in the snowstorm and couldn't go on. They were lost and stranded on his farm, with no food or shelter. They just flapped their wings and flew around the field in low circles, blindly and aimlessly. A couple of them had flown into his window, it seemed.

The man felt sorry for the geese and wanted to help them. *The barn would be a great place for them to stay*, he thought. *It's warm and safe. They could spend the night there, and wait out the storm.* So he walked over to the barn and opened the doors wide, then watched and

Why would
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Himself to
come to Earth
as a man?

waited, hoping they would notice the open barn and go inside. But the geese just fluttered around aimlessly and didn't seem to notice the barn or realize what it could mean for them. The man tried to get their attention, but that just scared them further away.

He went into the house and came out with some bread, broke it up, and made a breadcrumb trail leading to the barn. They still didn't catch on.

Now he was getting frustrated. He got behind them and tried to shoo them toward the barn, but they only got more scared and scattered in every direction except toward the barn. Nothing he did could get them to go into the barn where they would be warm and safe.

"Why don't they follow me?!" he exclaimed. "Can't they see this is the only place where they can survive the storm?"

He thought for a moment and realized that they just wouldn't follow a human. "If only I were a goose, then I could save them," he said out loud.

Then he had an idea. He went into the barn, got one of his own geese, and carried it in his arms as he circled around behind the flock of wild geese. When he released it, his goose flew through the flock and straight into the barn. One by one, the wild geese followed it to safety.

The man stood still and silent as the words he had spoken a few minutes earlier replayed in his mind: "If only I were a goose, then I could save them!" Then he thought about what he had said to his wife earlier. "Why would God want to be like

us? That's ridiculous!" Suddenly it all made sense. That is what God had done. We were like the wild geese—blind, lost, confused, dying. So God had His Son become like us, so He could show us the way and save us. *That* was the meaning of Christmas, he realized.

As the winds and blinding snow died down, his soul became quiet and pondered this wonderful thought. Suddenly he understood what Christmas was all about, why Christ had come. Years of doubt and disbelief vanished like the passing storm. He fell to his knees in the snow and prayed his first prayer: "Thank You, God, for coming in human form to get me out of the storm!" •

We were
like the wild
geese—blind,
lost, confused,
dying.

WHAT GOD DID

Can you remember a time when you were a child and you wanted something so badly that it seemed that special something would never come?—And then when it finally did come, it wasn't what you had expected at all, but something far better? That's what our heavenly Father did with Christmas.

Since the beginning of time, people had longed for a special something to make their lives truly happy and complete. Who would have ever thought that all of that would come in the form of a tiny baby born in a barn in some faraway land? But that's exactly what happened.

God looked at every human heart He had created and every heart to come, and He knew just what they needed. So He took a part of His own heart and fashioned the perfect answer. Then He sent the answer into the world. And He called the answer Jesus.

—Keith Phillips

gifts of love

A successful young attorney said, "The greatest gift I ever received was a gift I got one Christmas when my dad gave me a small box. Inside was a note saying, 'Son, this year I will give you 365 hours—an hour every day after dinner. It's yours. We'll talk about what you want to talk about, we'll go where you want to go, play what you want to play. It will be your hour!'"

"My dad not only kept his promise," the attorney went on, "but every year he renewed it. That was the greatest gift I ever received. I am the result of his time."

::

Before Christmas, a Christian teaching in Africa had told his students how Christians, as an expression of their happiness and thanks for all Jesus has given them, give each other presents on His birthday.

On Christmas morning one of the natives brought the teacher a beautiful, lustrous seashell. When the teacher asked the boy where he had discovered such an extraordinary shell, the boy said he had walked many miles to a certain bay, the only spot where such shells could be found.

"I think it was wonderful of you to travel so far to get this lovely gift for me," the teacher said.

The boy's eyes brightened. "Long walk part of gift."

::

It's not what we give, but what we share, for the gift without the giver is bare! •



CHRISTMAS KISSES

Some time ago, a friend of mine scolded his three-year-old daughter for wasting a roll of gold wrapping paper.

He became exasperated when the child tried to decorate a box to put under the tree. Money was tight, and the gold wrapping paper was expensive. Nevertheless, on Christmas morning the little girl brought the gift to her father and said, "This is for you, Daddy."

He was embarrassed by his earlier overreaction, but his aggravation flared again when he found that the box was empty. "Don't you know that when you give someone a present, there's supposed to be something inside of it?" he lectured her.

The little girl looked up at him with tears in her eyes and said, "Oh, Daddy, it's not empty. I blew kisses into the box. All for you, Daddy."

The father was crushed. He put his arms around his little girl, and he begged her forgiveness. My friend told me that he kept that gold box by his bed for years. Whenever he was discouraged, he would take out an imaginary kiss and remember the love of the child who had put it there. •

THE GIFT OF LIFE



By Michael Palace

Every year, shortly before Christmas, I go to the same office to take care of some personal paperwork. My visit there is usually made easy by the help of Judy, one of the office staff. I always considered Judy a godsend.

Last year, after several minutes of introductory chat, Judy burst into tears. Her husband's cancer had returned—he had already had one tumor removed from his liver—and the doctors said he didn't have long to live. "Thomas is only 42," said a tearful Judy, "and our two sons are so young!" Judy was beside herself with concern for Thomas and worry over their future.

I prayed with her for her own peace of mind and for God to heal Thomas, if it was God's will.

Judy smiled and thanked me for having taken the time to talk and pray with her.

When I phoned Judy the next day, she told me Thomas was scheduled for a thorough checkup a few weeks later, at which time they would have a better idea how much longer he had to live. We arranged to talk some more when I returned to her office to finish my paperwork before the New Year.

Several weeks later, Christmas had come and gone but strains of "O Come All Ye Faithful" were still running through my mind as I got together some things for Judy and Thomas to read—some leaflets and a booklet of comforting thoughts and promises for the dying and bereaved, *Glimpses of Heaven*. They were going to need lots of encouragement and strength from God's Word, I figured.

When I arrived at the office, Judy was not at her desk. I supposed she was with her husband. Surely she was more needed at his side than in the office

at this time.

Then suddenly Judy entered the room, and when she saw me, she lit up like a light bulb! She explained that at Thomas's last checkup, the same doctors who had shown him a clear image of the cancerous tumor on the ultrasound screen before we prayed for his healing couldn't find any trace of it now. It had completely disappeared, and the doctors were baffled.

Judy and Thomas were ecstatic. They had wanted to phone me to share the wonderful news, but hadn't been able to find my number. Judy and I rejoiced together, right there in the office.

As I looked down at the *Glimpses of Heaven* booklet still in my hand, I realized how little faith I had had that God would answer our prayers. I felt a little embarrassed about that, but very happy that God had given both Judy and Thomas a most wonderful Christmas gift—the gift of life.

Thomas imports baked goods and had given his wife a bag of biscuits (cookies) especially for me, as a little thank-you gift for praying for him. Then it was my turn to cry. •

Michael Palace is a volunteer with The Family in Taiwan.



Nyx
Martinez
is a
volunteer
with The
Family in
Southeast
Asia.



By Nyx Martinez

santa said it

I never liked Santa Claus. My parents had taught me from childhood that Christmas was for Christ, and I held that belief firmly. While other children spent their Decembers writing “Dear Santa” letters and clamoring for “Kodak moment” pictures beside the man in red at the mall, I wanted nothing to do with the overweight, white-bearded impostor who seemed to be taking baby Jesus’ place of honor.

But two Christmases ago, a talent company had signed me to host a show that would feature dancers, acrobats, opera singers, cartoon character mascots, and of course, their special Yuletide guest—Santa Claus.

And so, ironically, there I was on stage, microphone in hand, belting out the counterfeit’s song: “He’s makin’ a list, and checkin’ it twice, he’s gonna find out who’s naughty or nice...”

I wish there was a way to help the children think about Jesus in the middle of all this, I thought as jolly Saint Nick came bounding in.

He was carrying a big red sack of goodies, and that gave me an idea. *Perhaps we could offer a special prize to whoever could answer the question: Whose birthday are we celebrating on Christmas?*

As Santa pranced around the fancily lit stage and then stepped down to greet the children, I waited for an opportunity. But I never got the chance. The stage director signaled for me to hurry the program along and pass the mike to Santa so he could give a special message.

I imagined that he would captivate the children with tales of the North Pole and flying reindeer, but instead, this Santa Claus hushed the children and, with a friendly smile, said, “I want to tell you kids something, so you will all have to be quiet and listen.”

He sat down on the stage and the children crowded around him, each anxious to be the first to receive a gift from the glittering red bag.

“We must never forget why we celebrate Christmas,” Santa continued. “We must never forget the real reason. It’s not just about parties with yummy food and presents, you know! And...”—he paused and beamed an even bigger smile—“I will give a special prize to whoever can answer this question: Whose birthday are we celebrating on Christmas?”

All the children tried to outdo each other as they yelled, “Jesus! It’s Jesus’ birthday!”

“Yes,” answered Santa Claus, “and you must always remember to pray and thank Jesus for everything!” He turned to me. “Isn’t that right?”

I smiled and nodded.

The program was perfect. The real guest of honor was remembered after all! Santa said it! •

By Roumiana

Panajot was one of the most promising young artists in Bulgaria. Then he was accused and convicted of killing his best friend—a charge he strongly denied—and sentenced to 26 years in prison. He became depressed and belligerent with the prison guards, who then refused to let him have his canvases and paints. Some time later, a fellow inmate gave him a piece of Family literature, and Panajot began corresponding with us.

When we moved to Bulgaria last year, we felt Jesus wanted us to visit Panajot in prison. This presented quite a challenge, since he is in a high-security prison where visits are restricted, especially visits by anyone other than members of the prisoners' families. We finally managed to meet with Panajot for 15 minutes in a visiting room, where we were separated by wire mesh. He was so thankful that we had come, as he almost never gets visits. He thanked us profusely for all the reading material we had sent him, especially the *Activated* magazine.

Last Christmas he painted a Christmas card for us with this message (translated from Bulgarian):

Dear Family,

I want you to know that your ministry of reaching the lost, your beautiful music tapes, and the literature you send me are helping to heal my soul. The process of getting over my anguish and despair is slow, but what you have already done for me has been a great help. Until you came along, no one had been able to so much as scratch the

Christmas card
painted by
Panajot



when I was
in prison, you
visited me

surface. Bars and prison walls bind me, but through your literature I am free in spirit. “If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

Thank you for all you have done for me. I see my family in all of you, and I am happy to have such loving and caring brothers and sisters. I cry as I write this, but these are tears of joy and thankfulness to have found people who care enough for me to write and visit.

—Panajot

Roumiana is a volunteer
with The Family in Bulgaria.



By Scott McGregor

SINGING IN THE TRAIN

Jack sat in the cold train carriage and pulled his hat down over his ears. He and his fellow passengers had been stranded there for several hours already. The steam locomotive and the lead carriage of the overnight express train had jumped the tracks halfway between Hell and nowhere. Now all they could do was wait until help arrived. It was 1959, the middle of winter, and the dead of night. No power, no heat, and no light except for a few flashlights that the conductor

and some passengers had.

Jack knew it was going to take awhile before somewhere up the line someone realized that the express was not on schedule and raised the alarm. Search parties would have to be mobilized and sent out with some caution. A train could be sent up the single spur line in the other direction, but that would have to be done with great caution as they could find themselves traveling head-on into the delayed express travel-

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were there.

ing from the other direction. The signal system on this part of the track was antiquated, as Jack, a train aficionado, knew. The real search, he concluded, would not begin until dawn.

He and the other passengers had scrambled off the train once it had come to its jerking halt. The steam locomotive and the lead carriage were off the track and had plowed into a thick gravel embankment, but both were upright. Miraculously no one was killed, although the engineer and fireman had sustained nasty head injuries.

They had been carried back to one of the carriages to endure the freezing night with their passengers, several of whom had also been hurt. It was frustrating and scary to know that they were out there with little chance of rescue till daylight.

Then from somewhere in Jack's carriage someone started singing. It was the old World War II Vera Lynn song, "The White Cliffs of Dover." Soon everyone in the carriage joined in. When that one was over, someone started another.

"We sang all night," recalled Jack some years later. "We didn't care what the song was. We sang popular songs, old music hall numbers, hymns, even Christmas carols. As long as we kept singing, it kept our spirits up. People from other carriages came up and we all, as much as we could, crowded in together to keep warm. Most of us were strangers to each other but we all became comrades in disaster, lifting each other's spirits.

"They were a mixed bunch, from young army recruits returning to camp from leave, young families, a few old-timers, even some guys I wouldn't normally want to be around on a dark night. But somehow the social barriers all came down. I heard one enormous fellow, Clifford I learned his name was, let off such a

stream of cursing when the accident first occurred that it probably equaled all the other swearing and blasphemy that I had heard in my life. But he was the fellow that scooped up the engineer in his arms, carried him back to the carriage, and hovered over him like a cross between an angel and a nurse for the rest of the night. If I've met anyone in my life that was a rough diamond it was him.

"I had been used to judging books by their covers, but I have to admit that in this fellow's case I was wrong and probably have been many other times. There's nothing like the worst of happenings to bring out the best in people.

"It was the most incredible night of my life in many ways, and I made fast friends with many that were there. I was almost sorry when the rescue teams located us early the next morning."

On that miserable night, stranded in the middle of nowhere, Jack and his fellow passengers forged lifelong friendships. They decided to have a reunion every year on the date of the accident. Jack went to their weddings and some of their funerals. Clifford became an orderly at a hospital and then joined the Saint John Ambulance Brigade. Seems he had only been out of jail a few weeks before the wreck and was traveling that night to settle a few scores with some erstwhile friends. "That wreck stopped me from making a wreck out of my life," he told Jack at one of their reunions several years later.

Jack got on with his life—being my dad amongst other things. It wasn't the most outstanding of lives, some might say, but he gained an outstanding lesson that night that never left him and one he was fond of telling me. Our darkest experiences can sometimes turn out to be some of our best, and can forge the greatest friendships. •



The Christmas tree

By Amanda White

A Christmas tree! What a beautiful sight! But what does it mean to me? I wondered as I gazed at the Yuletide display before me.

The evergreen tree—it symbolizes Jesus, who lives in my heart for good. He never dies away in the winter of my difficulties, but is always with me.

The star on the tiptop of the tree is like that unforgettable star that lit the way to the first humble home of my Savior two thousand years ago. It also reminds me to always look up, that there's always a shining star of hope, even in my darkest nights.

The baubles and pretty decorations are the good, happy things that fill my life with spice and delight. I don't take time as often as I should to thank God for all my blessings, or even for the sad things and the hard times that have made me the person that I am today. Life wouldn't be life without both joy and sadness, the good and the bad.

The colorful string of lights reminds me of the things God does to light my way through life. "His Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). I never need feel alone.

And last but not least, the presents under the Christmas tree symbolize my gifts to Jesus. It is His birthday, after all. The most meaningful gifts are gifts of love—time, friendship, company, giving, forgiveness, and understanding. I give Him gifts each time I give from my heart to others.

The heart of Christmas is not in the presents we give, but the love that we share. This is what makes Christmas.