



December 25, 2018

THE REAL MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

Lord, thank you for making a way for us through the gift of Your Son to this fallen world.

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given... (Is 9:6)

One of the most remarkable stories of Christmas comes from one of the darkest moments of modern history. World War I ravaged a continent, leaving destruction and debris in its wake. The human cost, well in the millions, staggers us. But from the midst of this dark conflict comes the story of the Christmas Truce of 1914. The Western Front, only a few months into the war, was a deplorable scene of devastation. Perhaps as if to give the combatants one day to breathe again, a truce was called from Christmas Eve through Christmas Day.

As darkness settled over the front like a blanket, the sound of exploding shells and the rat-tat-tat of gunfire faded. Faint carols, in French or English voices on one side and in German voices on the other, rose to fill the silence of the night.

By morning, soldiers, at first hesitantly, began filing out of the maze of trenches into the dreaded and parched soil of No Man's Land. There was more singing. Gifts of rations and cigarettes were exchanged. Family photos were passed around. Soccer balls appeared. Up and down the Western Front, soldiers, who only hours before had been locked in deathly combat, now faced off in soccer games.

For one brief but entirely remarkable day, there was peace on earth. Some have called the Christmas Truce of 1914 "the Miracle on the Western Front."...

The English brought a soccer ball from the trenches, and pretty soon a lively game ensued. How marvelously wonderful, yet how strange it was. The English officers felt the same way about it. Thus Christmas, the celebration of Love, managed to bring mortal enemies together as friends for a time.

"Friends for a time," "the celebration of love," "peace on earth"—this is the meaning of Christmas. But these celebrations, these truces, don't last. After Christmas Day, the soccer balls and the soldiers went back into the trenches. The Christmas carols subsided and the war carried on. And even though World

War I eventually ended, a few decades later, Europe's countryside and cities became the field of battle once again, as did Africa and the Pacific, during World War II....

We must look to a baby born not with fanfare, pomp, and circumstance, but to poor parents in desperate times. Joseph and Mary, and the Baby Jesus for that matter, were real historical figures. But in a way, Joseph and Mary extend beyond themselves, beyond their particular place and time. They represent all of us. We are all poor and living in desperate times. Some of us are better than others at camouflaging it. Nevertheless, we are all poor and desperate, so we all need the promise bound up in that baby....

The birth of Jesus so many centuries ago might have been a slightly-out-of-the-ordinary birth. Even in ancient times, stalls didn't typically double as birthing rooms and mangers didn't typically double as cribs for new-born babies. And that newborn baby was very much out of the ordinary. Of course, in some respects, He was perfectly ordinary. He was a human being, a baby. He got hungry. He got thirsty. He got tired. When He was born, He was wrapped in swaddling clothes—the ancient equivalent of Pampers. (Excerpts from Stephen Nichols article on [Ligonier Ministries Site](#))

7 TRUE CHRISTMAS MIRACLES THAT WILL RESTORE YOUR HOPE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

These true stories prove that a well-timed letter, a handful of pennies, or a single gust of wind can make an ordinary Christmas a cherished memory.

The mail train's gift: a life-changing Christmas miracle message

My mother told me this story from World War I many years ago. Christmas 1917 was coming, but because her brother Archie Clikeman was missing in action and presumed dead, the family was not going to celebrate.

The townspeople of Parker, South Dakota, always joked that the small-town postmaster read all the postcards whenever the mail train came into town. On that Christmas Eve, he lived up to his reputation.

The family was always grateful that the postmaster, instead of waiting for the rural mail to go out the day after Christmas, called my grandmother and told her that Archie was being held as a prisoner of war. Archie even wrote on the postcard that he was well.

Of course, my mother said, that turned out to be the best Christmas ever. Archie came home after the war and lived to a ripe old age. —Kay Johnson, Parker, South Dakota

Our pennies made all the difference

Many years ago, when I was making 75 cents an hour, my three children asked for bicycles for Christmas, but I couldn't afford them.

So that January, I put three bikes on layaway. I paid all through the year, but a week before Christmas, I still owed \$14.50. The Saturday before Christmas, my son Ricky asked how much I needed. When I told him, he asked if he could pour the pennies out of the penny jug we kept.

I said, “Son, I don’t care, but I know there’s not \$14.50 worth of pennies in there.”

Ricky poured them out, counted them, and said, “Mom, there’s \$15.50 worth of pennies.” Ecstatic, I told him to count out \$1 for gas so I could go get the bikes.

I’ve always thought of this as our little Christmas miracle. It was as blessed a Christmas as anyone could ever have. —Dot Williams, Canton, Georgia. Check out the best Christmas town in every state.

Santa found us on the road

At Christmastime, in 1961, our family was on the way from Seattle to a new assignment on the East Coast, and we checked into a motel in Watertown, South Dakota. It was not the best time to travel with young children, who were concerned about Santa finding us on the road.

We headed into town to find a store, and as our car approached an intersection, there was a Santa right in the crosswalk! He held up his hand for us to stop, and we rolled down our windows.

Santa poked his head through a window and said to our kids, “Oh, there you are! I was wondering where I’d find you tonight.”

Naturally, the kids were thrilled to pieces. They made sure we told Santa which motel we were staying at so he could find them. My wife and I had tucked away gifts for the trip, as we knew we wouldn’t have time to shop along the way.

The cartop carrier and out-of-state license plate might have been a giveaway, but whatever it was, that Santa really made Christmas 1961 a memorable one for our kids. —Dave Grinstead, Bellingham, Washington. Movies are another great way to experience a Christmas miracle. These are the 40 best Christmas movies of all time, ranked.

Fate threw a tree at us

During the hustle and bustle of Christmastime 1958, we told our children, ages 3 and 4, about the beautiful Christmas tree we would have in a few days. On Christmas Eve, at the bakery we had recently purchased, we counted the receipts, cleaned the shop and headed for home with our two sleepy children.

Suddenly, we remembered we had not gotten a tree. We looked for a vendor who might have a tree left, to no avail.

About a mile from home, we stopped for a red light. Suddenly, a gust of wind blew, and something hit the front of our truck. My husband went out to investigate.

The next thing I knew, my husband was throwing a good-sized evergreen into the back of the truck. He went into the mom-and-pop store at the corner where we were and asked the proprietor how much he wanted for the tree. He said he wasn’t selling Christmas trees that year.

It was a Christmas miracle! We never did find out how the tree got in the middle of the road, but somehow we feel we know. Incidentally, it was the most beautiful tree we have ever had. —Gertrude Albert, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Our carols hit the right ears

I was with a small group of young guys and gals caroling on Christmas Eve, in 1942 San Diego, California. We wandered downtown to Broadway, the main street, and stopped at a block of green grass with a fountain on the plaza.

The streets were streaming with aimless servicemen, all missing the joy and solace of being home for Christmas.

We began singing familiar Christmas songs, and in a short time, the volume increased markedly. I climbed up onto the rim of the fountain to an astonishing sight—a sea of servicemen on the plaza singing with all their hearts. When a song ended, I started another, just beginning the words, and it was immediately picked up.

We sang every traditional song I could think of and didn't leave the servicemen until near midnight, carrying a beautiful memory with us. —Winnie Phillips Stark, Modesto, California. Although the holidays should be about cheer and joy, it's still nice to enjoy a thoughtful gift. Finding the right one, however, is a Christmas miracle all by itself. Here are 30 last-minute Christmas gifts with free overnight shipping.

It takes a village

Johnny and I, along with our two young sons, Barry and Doyle, lived in a small rural community ^[1]in southern Alabama in 1959. ^[2]We had bought Barry a ^[3]bicycle and Doyle a tricycle for Christmas, and had hidden them in the carport, where Johnny would assemble them on Christmas Eve after the kids were asleep.

But on Christmas Eve day, Johnny had to go to Brookley Air Force Base in Mobile, an hour away, to repair a Thunderbird F-100 Super Sabre jet. I had my hands full with baking, preparing for Christmas dinner and caring for two energetic boys.

Just as I was making my favorite frosting for the chocolate cake, a neighbor knocked on the door. Beatrice was the only person on our road with a telephone. The base had called to say that a heavy torque wrench had come apart in Johnny's hand, knocking his elbow out of joint and chipping the bone. My sister-in-law Ruth and her husband, Otto, took me to the hospital while my mother-in-law stayed with the children.

We got there to find Johnny with a cast on his arm, raring to get home despite the doctor's orders that he stay. It was Christmas Eve, Johnny argued, and he had bikes to assemble for his boys. The doctor said he'd consider dismissing him the next morning if Johnny could find someone to drive him home.

On Christmas morning, Johnny contacted the base and was told everyone was off duty; there was no one to drive him home. Then he tried the motor pool. They said orders would have to come from higher up, so Johnny kept making calls. At last, a big blue car with the Air Force insignia rolled up to the hospital asking for the man who needed a lift home so he could put together Christmas bikes for his boys.

Johnny's mother and I were putting dinner on the table when we heard the car. We were thrilled to see Johnny, his arm in a sling, getting out, assisted by a uniformed Air Force officer. With Otto's help, Johnny assembled the boys' gifts, and they all had a jolly time playing together that afternoon.

Johnny would later require two surgeries on his arm, but those were in the future. That cold Christmas Day, our hearts were full of gratitude for the many people who had gone the extra mile to bring us together on the holiday. — Jeanette Dyess Ryan, Robertsdale, Alabama. Avoiding family stress during the holiday season is pulling off a Christmas miracle all your own. Here are 8 ways to enjoy the holidays with a blended family. (From Brandon Specktor article in [Reader's Digest](#))

10 MOST HEARTWARMING CHRISTMAS COMMERCIALS

Video: <https://youtu.be/OHjS2Z0Tl6M>

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER VIDEO

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdtU54vx-pc&feature=youtu.be>