

**LAKESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**Rev. Terence A. Lucarelli**

**December 24, 2007**

**CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE MORNING**

**The Gospel Stories of the First Christmas**

**Christmas Eve**

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*'Twas the night before Christmas,  
when all through the house  
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;  
The stockings were hung, by the chimney with care;  
In hopes that...*

*"In Hopes that ... In Hopes that..."* On this night, of all nights, we wait in anticipation of the *Gift* that is to come for us all – the gift of the Child in a manger. We wait *HOPING* to find our God wrapped in swaddling clothes...



Several years ago, a woman who died in New York City left a sizeable estate, but in a very strange will. Her will bequeathed *everything* "To God." The attorneys set about to settle the estate by carrying out all the many legal requirements. To begin the proceedings, the lawyers filed a case naming "God as the party thereto". The court duly wrote out a legal summons issued to God, and proceeded to attempt to act as if it could be served, which, of course brought chuckles to many as the farce was played out.

After going through the necessary legal steps, a final report was given which read, *"After due and diligent search, God cannot be found in New York City."*

It may take some doing to find God in any large city ... but you *WILL* find God if you look.

*"T'was the night before Christmas..."*

Have *you* found what you're *HOPING* for in the Babe in a manger? Have *you* discovered the *JOY* of Christmas? Have *you* discovered the *LOVE* of Christmas? Do you *understand* the significance of the event or is it just a cute story about a cuddly kid? For you see, the gift of the Child is a Gift of Love to *YOU* and to *ME*.



It is said that Henry David Thoreau once spent a whole day in Walden Pond up to his neck in the water. His idea was to *see the world* as a *frog* sees it.

Now, I don't know about you, but my immediate response to that is: *"Who cares? Who cares how the world looks to a frog?"*

Imagine then, that when the God of all the universe decided to see life through the eyes of a human being, if God had had advisers up in heaven, they would have surely protested: *"Who cares! Who cares what those wretched creatures on planet earth are thinking or feeling or searching for? Who cares!"*

Well, strangely enough ... *God* cared. He cared enough to become one of us.

Do you remember that little poem by Christina Rossetti that expresses it so well? Just four lines:

*Love came down at Christmas,  
Love all lovely, Love divine;  
Love was born at Christmas;*

*Star and angels gave the sign.*



An old pioneer traveled westward across the Great Plains until he came to an abrupt halt at the edge of the Grand Canyon. He stared at the incredible sight before him – a vast chasm one mile down, eighteen miles across, and more than a hundred miles long! And then he gasped, “Wow! *Something BIG must’a happened here!*”

An alien visitor to our world at Christmas time, seeing the lights, the decorations, the trees, the parades, the festivities, and the religious services, would also probably say, “*Something BIG must’a happened here!*”

Indeed, something *BIG DID* happen! God invaded our world. The Baby Jesus lying in a filthy manger, surrounded by the *smells* and *sounds* of the barnyard, was much more than just a cute, cuddly kid as Christmas cards portray Him. *That Babe of the manger was God Himself come down*. He grew into a man and He would die to set men free ... free from the bondage of sin ... free to love and be loved like never before. Yes, that first Christmas Day was just the *BEGINNING* of a *NEW* kind of *LOVE* ...

*“The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, in hopes ...”*

*WHERE do we find hope? WHERE do we find God?*

The choir sang the song ...

Imagine standing on the shore ...

All you see is the vast ocean ...

Nothing except water ...

You’ve been waiting ...

For a long time ...

Hoping ...

And then ...

I saw three ships come sailing in  
On Christmas day, on Christmas day;  
I saw three ships come sailing in  
On Christmas day in the morning.

And what was in those ships all three,  
On Christmas day, on Christmas day?  
And what was in those ships all three,  
On Christmas day in the morning?

Our Savior Christ and His lady,  
On Christmas day, on Christmas day;  
Our Savior Christ and His lady,  
On Christmas day in the morning.

The waiting is over ...

*WHERE do we find God?*

In the *Babe of Bethlehem*.



The rising star of Christmas has given birth to countless legends and tales. Here is one of the most beautiful I’ve encountered over the years. It is entitled *Christmas Day in the Morning*, and written by one of my favorites, Pearl S. Buck. It’s a story of love:

He woke up suddenly and completely. It was four o’clock, the hour at which his father had always called him to get up and help with the milking. Strange how the

habits of his youth clung to him still! His father had been dead for 30 years, and yet he waked at four o'clock in the morning. He had trained himself to turn over and go to sleep, but this morning, because it was Christmas, he did not try. Yet what was the magic of Christmas now? His own children had grown up and gone. He was left alone with his wife. *Yesterday* she had said, "Let's not trim the tree until tomorrow, Robert. I'm tired." He had agreed, and so the tree remained out in the back entry.

Why did he feel so awake tonight? For it was still night, clear and starry. No moon, of course, but the stars were extraordinary! Now that he thought of it, the stars always seemed larger and clearer before the dawn of Christmas Day. There was one star now that was certainly larger and brighter than any of the others. He could even imagine it moving, as it had seemed to him to move one night long ago.



He was 15 years old and still on his father's farm. He loved his father. He had not known it until one day a few days before Christmas, when he had overheard what his father was saying to his mother.

"Mary, I hate to call Rob in the mornings. He's growing so fast and he needs his sleep. If you could see how he sleeps when I go in to wake him up! I wish I could manage alone."

"Well, you can't, Adam." His mother's voice was brisk. "Besides, he isn't a child anymore. It's time he took his turn."

"Yes," his father said slowly. "But I sure do hate to wake him."

When he heard these words, something in him woke: his father loved him! There would be no more loitering in the mornings and having to be called again. He got up after that, stumbling blind with sleep, and pulled on his clothes, his eyes tight shut, but he got up.

And then on the night before Christmas, that year when he was 15, he lay for a few minutes thinking about the next day.

He wished he had a better present for his father. As usual, he had gone to the ten-cent store and bought a tie for his father. It had seemed nice enough until he lay thinking, and then he wished that he had heard his father and mother talking in time for him to save for something better.

He lay on his side, his head supported by his elbow, and looked out of his attic window. The stars were bright, much brighter than he ever remembered seeing them, and one star in particular was so bright that he wondered if it were really the Star of Bethlehem.

"Dad," he had once asked when he was a little boy, "what is a stable?" "It's just a barn," his father had replied, "like ours."

Then Jesus had been born in a barn, and to a barn the shepherds and the Wise Men had come, bringing their Christmas gifts!

Then the thought struck him. Why should he not give his father a special gift too, out there in the barn? He could get up early, earlier than four o'clock, and creep into the barn and get all the milking done. He'd do it alone, milk and clean up, and then when his father went in to start the milking, he'd see it all done. And he would know who had done it.

He laughed to himself as he gazed at the stars. It was what he would do, and he mustn't sleep too sound.

He must have waked 20 times, scratching a match each time to look at his old watch – midnight, and half-past one, and then two o'clock.

At a quarter to three he got up and put on his clothes. He crept downstairs, careful of the creaky boards, and let himself out. The big star hung lower over the

barn roof, a reddish gold. The cows looked at him, sleepy and surprised. It was early for them, too.

He fetched some hay for each cow and then got the milking pail and the big milk cans.

He smiled, thinking about his father, and milked steadily, two strong streams rushing into the pail, frothing and fragrant. The task went more easily than he had ever known it to be before. Milking for once was not a chore. It was something else, a *gift* to his father who loved him. He finished, the two milk cans were full, and he covered them and closed the milk-house door carefully, making sure of the latch. He put the stool in its place by the door and hung up the clean milk pail. Then he went out of the barn and barred the door behind him.

Back in his room he had only a minute to pull off his clothes in the darkness and jump into bed, for he heard his father up. He put the covers over his head to silence his quick breathing. The door opened.

“Rob!” his father called. “We have to get up, son, even if it is Christmas.”

“Aw-right,” he said sleepily.

“I’ll get on out,” his father said. “I’ll get things started.”

The door closed and he lay still, laughing to himself. In just a few minutes his father would know.

The minutes were endless – ten, fifteen, he did not know how many – and he heard his father’s footsteps again. The door opened and he lay still.

“Rob!”

“Yes, Dad...”

“You son of a gun.” His father was laughing, a peculiar sobbing sort of a laugh. “Thought you’d fool me, did you?” His father was standing beside his bed, feeling for him, pulling away the cover.

“It’s for Christmas, Dad!”

He found his father and clutched him in a great hug. He felt his father’s arms go around him. It was dark and they could not see each other’s faces.

“Son, I thank you. Nobody ever did a nicer thing...”

“Oh Dad, I want you to know...” The words broke from him of their own will. He did not know what to say. His heart was bursting with love.

“Well, I reckon I can go back to bed and sleep,” his father said after a moment. “No – the little ones are waked up. Come to think of it, I’ve never seen you children when you first saw the Christmas tree. I was always in the barn. Come on!”

He got up and pulled on his clothes again and they went down to the Christmas tree, and soon the sun was creeping up to where the star had been. Oh, what a Christmas, and how his heart had nearly burst again with shyness and pride as his father told his mother and made the younger children listen about how he, Rob, had got up all by himself.

“The best Christmas gift I ever had, and I’ll remember it, son, every year on Christmas Morning, so long as I live.”



Outside the window now the great star slowly sank. He got up, put on his slippers and bathrobe, went softly upstairs to the attic and found the box of Christmas-tree decorations. He took them downstairs into the living room. Then he brought in the tree. It was a little one – they had not had a big tree since the children went away – but he set it in the holder. Then carefully he began to trim it. It was done very soon, the time passing as quickly as it had that morning long ago in the barn.

He went to his library and fetched the little box that contained his gift to his wife, a star of diamonds, not large but dainty in design. He tied the gift on the tree and then stood back. It was pretty, very pretty, and she would be surprised.

But he was not satisfied. He wanted to tell her – to tell her how much he *loved* her. It had been a long time since he had really told her, although he loved her in a special way, much more than he ever had when they were young. *That was the true joy of life, the ability to love!* He was quite sure that some people were genuinely unable to love anyone. But love was alive in him, it still was.

It occurred to him suddenly that it was alive because long ago it had been born in him when he knew his father loved him. THAT WAS IT: LOVE ALONE COULD WAKEN LOVE.

And he could give the gift again and again. This morning, this blessed Christmas Morning, he would give it to his beloved wife. He could write it down in a letter for her to read and keep forever. He went to his desk and began his love letter to his wife:

*My dearest love...*

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*'Twas the night before Christmas,  
when all through the house  
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;  
The stockings were hung, by the chimney with care;  
In hopes that...*

Dear friends, our HOPES have been REALIZED! All in a Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

If you are looking for something that's *missing* in your life...  
If you are *hoping* that you'll find the answer to many of life's tough questions...  
If you've tried to *work it out* on your own but you've failed miserably...  
If you are *looking for love*, maybe you've been looking in all the wrong places...  
For...

*Love came down at Christmas,  
Love all lovely, Love divine;  
Love was born at Christmas;  
Star and angels gave the sign.*

“...long ago it had been born in him when he knew his father loved him. THAT WAS IT: LOVE ALONE COULD WAKEN LOVE.”

Amen and Amen.