

Four Roads to Christmas

"Where is Christmas?" asked the little boy. "Where it is?" said the old nurse, collecting her wits, as well as her sewing, for no one had ever asked her where Christmas was before. Rather put out, she snapped, "I'll tell you where Christmas is. It's over that hill yonder, 3 whole weeks away. That's where Christmas is!" Still not satisfied, the child asked, logically enough, "But ... how you and me gon' git there?" "How we gon' git there?" snorted the nurse – feeling more helpless by the minute – the way children can make you feel, when they ask such questions, and indeed the old nurse was more accustomed to thinking of Christmas coming to her – than of her having to get up and go to it.

She thought a minute. "I'll tell you how we gon' git there," she finally said, pleased with herself at having thought of an answer, "we gon' sing and play our way, we gon' send and cook and ... pray our way there. That's how we gonna git to Christmas!" Then the little boy took the old woman by the hand and said, "Let's start now – so we be sure to make it."

"Go 'long with you," replied the nurse, shaking herself loose, "Go 'long with you. I got work to do." Later on, as she fed the chickens, she kept asking them the child's questions and kind of chuckling to herself, "Where is Christmas, and how we gon' git there? Humph!"

As a matter of fact, there are a lot of grown folks in this world who never thought to ask, "Where is Christmas?", much less, "How do we get there?" For they, like the old nurse, think of Christmas as something coming to them – automatically, according to the calendar – so they may ask, "When?" it is, but it never occurs to them that they have to get up and go there – so that maybe they ought to be asking, "Where?", where it is – and, "How?", how to get to it.

The first question isn't too hard, for I'll tell you right off where Christmas is. It's where God comes in, and where's that? In deep South language, it's over yonder – way over beyond the hills of all our human fears and envies – quite a piece beyond the mountains of our towering conceits – far, far past the pitfalls of our lies and lusts, our vying with one another – there Christmas is, in any quiet Bethlehem place, where the good God comes in, where young and old have learned – like the very angels – to fear not one another, not any more – but to share, with all people, the great joy of living – because they give glory to God in the highest way – by working together in peace on this earth – as men and women of good will should.

Where then is Christmas? Why, that's not hard to tell you – it's "over yonder" – where God comes in and where men and women and little children have learned to live in love with one another – so that the glory of the Lord shines 'round about them. That's where Christmas is.

But, for some of us here, that is a long way off – if you take into account the way we feel toward one another, the way we act, it's a mighty long way! So if this Lord of Christmas won't come to us, how are we going to get to it?

Well, I'll tell you about four roads people take to Christmas. Some of us will take one road; some will take another. Trouble is, three of 'em won't quite get you there. Or, as our Mattie used to say, "Leastways, I don't think so." Though most of us do travel them all – at one time or another – trying to find the way to Christmas.

(a) One is the road of the sentimentalist – the sentimentalist, and it looks like a fairly good road, particularly if you are very young. Indeed, this well-worn way just seems made for children and adults with childlike minds, for people who haven't quite grown up. On the secular side, this route is lined with sugarplums and Santy Claus and reindeer on the roof – and when it takes a religious bent, it's all about the baby Jesus and his mama, quite comfy in a lighted creche with wooly sheep and the cutest angels, wings unfurled. This road is traveled dewy-eyed to strains of "Jingle Bells" or "Silent Night" – and all seems sweet and, oh, somehow just right.

But, one wonders, good as it is, if this road really takes you to Christmas? Where God comes in and men, women, and children live in love with one another?

(b) Well, the sophisticate doubts it – and tries a second tack. The sophisticate, he's older – 16 at least – adolescent and may remain that way. So he counts on debs and balls, and parties by the score – on punch and puns and fun and – especially proper dress and décor – to get him through to Christmas. But, once again, attractive as his way is, one wonders if he'll make it?

(c) The scholar doesn't think so, so he takes a more serious, more studious road. It's number three. The scholar's route to Christmas, he's been to college, you see – and is up on things like God. So he carefully explains to his wondering parents who have paid dearly for his knowledge, that Jesus was really born in the spring of 3 B.C. as the 18th century @ said, that no one ever heard of Christmas until at least 4 A.D. when the Christians adapted the Roman Saturnalia for the birthday of their Lord, that wreaths and yule gifts and lighted trees are all customs pagan to the core, with no connection to the messianic fulfillment of the Jewish nation. And on and on he goes – and all he says is serious and true.

But one wonders, if in his intellectual peripatizing, he may not miss Christmas too?

For if Christmas is where God comes in, so that his glory shines 'round men and women and little children who live in love with one another – can it be found in just a sentimental journey (down the road with good ole Santy Claus or even the sweet little creche)? Or can you really find Christmas if you travel only with the sophisticate and his slick stock in trade, or with the scholar and his head crammed full of facts?

(d) Or does it take the 4th route – the road of the saint – to truly come to Christmas?

The sentimentalist, the sophisticate, the scholar – all may be on the way – but I do think it takes the saint to get there, be this saint dirty-faced shepherds or dignified magi – for the road of the saint is the road of faith. What sort of faith? What sort of faith? Only faith that mankind is worth saving and life is worth living, because God believed in us enough to become one of us; faith that God so loved the world, he became a part of it to save it from itself; faith in God's original Christmas purpose – to overcome the worst in us by bringing out the best in us – to overcome – by his own coming – our hates and greeds, our fears and prejudices, our turmoil and our strife – to bring out in us and between us – that peace and goodwill which takes the very presence of God to unloose – God's Christmas presence. That the Christ of Bethlehem, Christ of joy and Christ of peace might be born again – even in the musty stable of hearts like ours, even in times like these – so that life is no longer a burden, or a bore, but a blessing and daily work a challenge, not a curse.

You see, really to arrive at Christmas is like being born again.

But it happens to all God's saints.

If Christmas is where God comes in – let him in this year and live in love with all men – so that someday others looking back on us may say: “and the glory of the Lord shone 'round about them.”

That's the way to Christmas, then, “Let's start now,” as the little boy said, “so we be sure to make it.”

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