

Special Issue

MOTIVATED

THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!



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Christmas means different things to different people.

For some it's a time to enjoy family and friends, a time to love and be loved; for others it's the warmth and security of hearth and home.

For some it's cause for deep reflection; for others it's a chance to give of themselves to needy strangers, expecting nothing in return.

For some it's beautiful lights and colorful decorations—a brief once-a-year escape into a world where all is merry and bright; for others it's hope in the promise that one day all wrongs will be made right and there will truly be “peace on earth, goodwill toward men.”

For me, Christmas is an opportunity to follow the example of the Baby Who was laid in a manger and grew up to become known as the One who went everywhere doing good.

This season—as you read the stories in this issue of *Motivated*—I hope you will experience Christmas in a new and joyful way, and that you will share what you experience with those you love and everyone around you.

May this Christmas be your happiest and most meaningful yet, and may your joy be so full that it will spill over into and throughout the coming year.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Christina Lane
For *Motivated*

My Christmas Discovery

By Norman Vincent Peale, adapted

One Christmas Eve when I was 12, I was out with my father doing some late Christmas shopping. He had me loaded down with packages and I was tired and cross. I was thinking how good it would be to get home when a beggar—a bleary-eyed, unshaven, dirty old man—came up to me, touched my arm with a hand like a claw, and asked for money. He was so repulsive that instinctively I recoiled.

Softly my father said, “Norman, it’s Christmas Eve. You shouldn’t treat a man that way.”

I was unrepentant. “Dad,” I said, “he’s nothing but a bum.”

My father stopped. “Maybe he hasn’t made much of himself, but he’s still a human being.” He then handed me a dollar—a lot of money for those days and for my father’s income. “I want you to take this and give it to that man,” he said. “Speak to him respectfully. Tell him you are giving it to him in the name of Christ.”

“Oh, Dad!” I protested. “I can’t do anything like that.”

My father’s voice was firm. “Go and do as I tell you.”

So, reluctant and resisting, I ran after the old man and said, “Excuse me, sir. I give you this money in the name of Christ.”

He stared at the dollar bill, then looked at me in utter amazement. A wonderful smile came to his face, a smile so full of life and beauty that I forgot that he was dirty and unshaven. I forgot that he was ragged and old. With a gesture that was almost courtly, he took off his hat. Graciously he said, “And I thank you, young sir, in the name of Christ.”

All my irritation, all my annoyance faded away. The street, the houses, everything around me suddenly seemed beautiful, because I had been part of a miracle that I have seen many times since—the transformation that comes over people when you think of them as human beings, when you offer them love in the name of a Baby born two thousand years ago in a stable in Bethlehem—who still lives with us, and makes His presence known.

That was my Christmas discovery that year—the gold of human dignity that lies hidden in every living soul, waiting to shine through if only we’ll give it a chance. ❤️

What Is Christmas?

Author Unknown, adapted

In the celebration of Christmas, a white-haired, white-bearded man in a red and white fur suit—Santa Claus by name—figures prominently. Is he what Christmas means?

Late one Christmas Eve I sank back into my easy chair, tired but content. The kids were in bed, the gifts were wrapped, the milk and cookies waited by the fireplace for Santa. As I admired the tree with its decorations, I couldn't help but feel that something was missing. It wasn't long before the tiny twinkling tree lights lulled me to sleep.

I don't know how long I slept, but all of a sudden I knew that I wasn't alone. You can imagine my surprise when I opened my eyes and saw Santa Claus himself standing next to my Christmas tree. He was dressed all in fur from head to foot, just as the poem *'Twas the Night before Christmas* describes him. But he was not the "jolly old elf" of

Christmas legend. The man who stood before me looked sad and

disappointed—and there were tears in his eyes.

"Santa, what's wrong?" I asked. "Why are you crying?"

"It's the children," Santa replied sadly.

"But the children love you," I said.

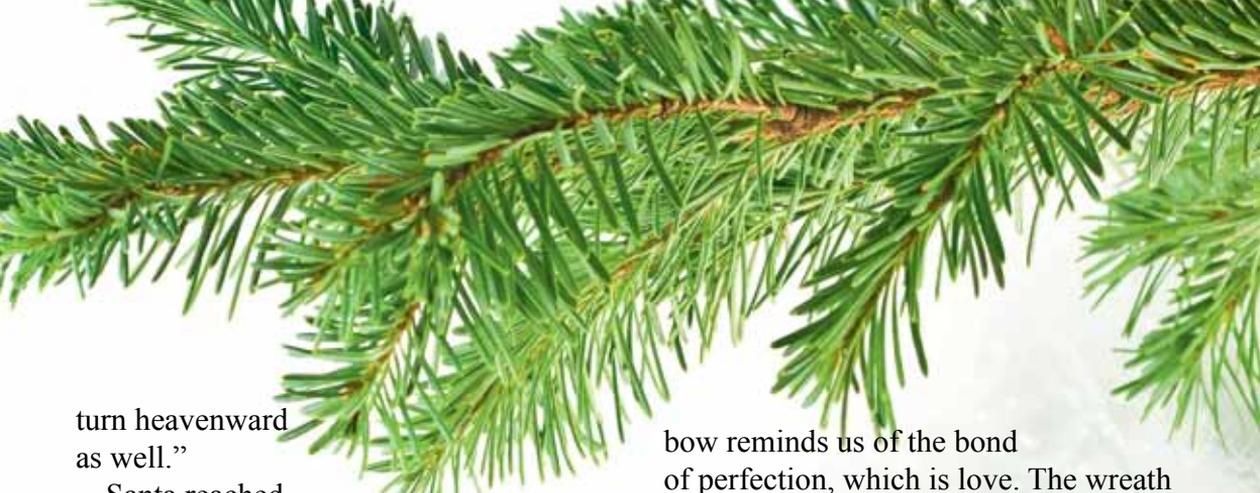
"Oh, I know they love me and the gifts I bring them," Santa said. "But children today seem to have somehow missed out on the true spirit of Christmas. It's not their fault. It's just that the adults have forgotten to teach the children. Many of the adults have not even been taught themselves."

"Teach the children what?" I asked.

Santa's kind old face became soft, gentler. His eyes began to shine with something more than tears. He spoke softly. "Teach the children the true meaning of Christmas. Teach them that there's much more to Christmas than the part we can see, hear, and touch. Teach them the symbolism behind the customs and traditions of Christmas we observe. Teach them what they truly represent."

Santa reached into his bag, pulled out a tiny Christmas tree, and set it on my mantle. "Teach them about the Christmas tree. Green is the second color of Christmas.

The stately evergreen with its unchanging color represents hope. Its top points heavenward as a reminder that man's thoughts should



turn heavenward
as well.”

Santa reached into his bag again, pulled out a shiny star, and placed it at the top of the small tree. “The star was the heavenly sign of promise. Teach the children that God always fulfills His promises and that wise men still seek Him.”

“Red,” said Santa, “is the first color of Christmas.” He pulled forth a red ornament for the tiny tree. “Red is deep, intense, vivid. It is the color of the life-giving blood that flows through our veins. It is the symbol of God’s greatest gift. Teach the children that when they see the color red, it should remind them of that most wonderful gift of life.”

Santa placed a candle on the mantle and lit it. The soft glow from its tiny flame brightened the room. “The glow of the candle represents how mankind can show his thanks for the gift of life God gave that Christmas Eve long ago. Teach the children to follow in Christ’s footsteps, to go about doing good and shine their light on all those they meet. This is what is symbolized when the lights twinkle on the tree like hundreds of bright, shining candles.”

Next, Santa brought out a beautiful wreath made of fresh, fragrant greenery and tied with a bright red bow. “The

bow reminds us of the bond of perfection, which is love. The wreath embodies all the good things about Christmas for those with eyes to see and hearts to understand. It contains the colors of red and green and the heaven-turned needles of the evergreen. The bow tells the story of goodwill towards all. Even its shape is symbolic, representing eternity and the eternal nature of God’s love. It is a circle without beginning and without end. These are the things you must teach the children.”

“But where does that leave you, Santa?” I asked.

The tears gone now from his eyes, a smile broke over Santa’s face. “Why, bless you, my dear,” he laughed. “I’m only a symbol myself. I represent the spirit of family fun and the joy of giving and receiving. If the children are taught these other things, there is no danger that I’ll become more important than I should.”

I must have fallen asleep again, and when I awoke I thought, I’m beginning to understand at last. Was it all a dream? I don’t know. But I remembered Santa’s parting words:

“If you don’t teach the children these things, then who will?” 

Angel on a Doorstep

By Shirley Bachelder, adapted (*Reader's Digest*, 1992)

When Ben delivered milk to my cousin's home that morning, he wasn't his usual sunny self. The slight, middle-aged man seemed in no mood for talking.

It was late November 1962, and as a newcomer to our town, I was delighted that milkmen still brought bottles of milk to doorsteps. In the weeks that my husband, kids and I had been staying with my cousin while house hunting, I had come to enjoy Ben's jovial chitchat.

Today, however, he was the epitome of gloom as he dropped off his wares from his wire carrier. It took slow, careful questioning to extract the story from him. With some embarrassment, he told me two customers had left town without paying their bills, and he would have to cover the losses. One of the debtors owed only \$10, but the other was \$79 in debt and had left no forwarding address. Ben was distraught at his stupidity for allowing this bill to grow so large.

"She was a pretty woman," he said, "with six children and another on the way. She was always saying, 'I'm going to pay you soon, when my husband gets a second job.' I believed her. What a fool I was! I thought I was doing a good thing, but I've learned my lesson. I've been had!"

All I could say was, "I'm so sorry."

The next time I saw him, his anger seemed worse. He bristled as he talked about the messy young ones who had drunk up all his milk. The charming family had turned into a parcel of brats.

I repeated my condolences and let the matter rest. But when Ben left, I found myself caught up in his problem and longed to help. Worried that this incident would sour a warm person, I mulled over what to do. Then, remembering that Christmas was coming, I thought of what my grandmother used to say: "When someone has taken from you, give it to them, and then you can never be robbed."

The next time Ben delivered milk, I told him I had a way to make him feel better about the \$79.

"Nothing will do that," he said, "but tell me anyway."

"Give the woman the milk. Make it a Christmas present to the kids who needed it."

"Are you kidding?" he replied. "I don't even get my wife a Christmas gift that expensive. The trouble with you is, it wasn't your \$79."

I let the subject drop, but I still believed in my suggestion.

We'd joke about it when he'd come. "Have you given her the milk yet?" I'd say.

“No,” he’d snap back, “but I’m thinking of giving my wife a \$79 present, unless another pretty mother starts playing on my sympathies.”

Every time I’d ask the question, it seemed he lightened up a bit more.

Then, six days before Christmas, it happened. He arrived with a tremendous smile and a glint in his eyes. “I did it!” he said. “I gave her the milk as a Christmas present. It wasn’t easy, but what did I have to lose? It was gone, wasn’t it?”

“Yes,” I said, rejoicing with him. “But you’ve got to really mean it in your heart.”

“I know. I do. And I really feel better. That’s why I have this good feeling about Christmas. Those kids had lots of milk on their cereal just because of me.”

The holidays came and went. On a sunny January morning two weeks later, Ben almost ran up the walk. “Wait till you hear this,” he said, grinning.

He explained he had been on a different route, covering for another milkman. He heard his name being called, looked over his shoulder and saw a woman running down the street, waving money. He recognized her immediately—the woman with all the kids, the one who didn’t pay her bill. She was carrying an infant in a tiny blanket, and the woman’s long brown hair kept getting in her eyes.

“Ben, wait a minute!” she shouted. “I’ve got money for you.”

Ben stopped the truck and got out.

“I’m so sorry,” she said. “I really have been meaning to pay you.” She explained that her husband had come home one night and announced he’d found a cheaper apartment. He’d also gotten a night job. With all that had happened, she’d forgotten to leave a forwarding address. “But I’ve been saving,” she said. “Here’s \$20 toward the bill.”

“That’s all right,” Ben replied. “It’s been paid.”

“Paid!” she exclaimed. “What do you mean? Who paid it?”

“I did.”

She looked at him as if he were an angel and started to cry.

“Well,” I asked, “what did you do?”

“I didn’t know what to do, so I put an arm around her. Before I knew what was happening, I started to cry, and I didn’t have the foggiest idea what I was crying about. Then I thought of all those kids having milk on their cereal, and you know what? I was really glad you talked me into this.”

“You didn’t take the \$20?”

“Heck no,” he replied indignantly. “I gave her the milk as a Christmas present, didn’t I?” 🍎



Only Human?

By Barbara Popyach, adapted

I stood at the kitchen sink washing cups and glasses for our annual Christmas party. This year I wished we could just skip it. It was my first Christmas without Daddy, and I dreaded gathering around the piano for carols without him. Someone was sure to request “Silent Night,” his favorite, and I didn’t think I could sit through it without crying.

The doorbell rang. It was an older man, impeccably dressed. “Good morning,” he said, tipping his hat, his smile as brilliant as his blue eyes. “I’m here to tune your piano.”

I’d made an appointment—but not for that day. No matter, I led the piano tuner to the baby grand and went back to the kitchen. I listened as the man tested and tightened the strings. Minutes later music swelled from the room. “Night and Day,” I’d always loved that one. The man followed with “Tenderly.” Then “I Concentrate on You,” another of my favorites.

Just when I thought he had finished, the piano tuner began playing “Silent Night,” soft and slow, just the way Daddy liked. I wiped my tears with the dishtowel. How could I be sad, knowing my father was enjoying “heavenly peace”?

When the last notes faded, I told the man, “Your concert was just what I needed. Can I pay you now with a check?”

“Call the store,” the piano tuner said, “and have a blessed Christmas.”

Later I called for the bill. “We didn’t send anyone out there,” the manager said. “We’ve fallen way behind schedule. I doubt we’ll be able to get to you before Christmas.”

“You can take me off the list then,” I said. “My piano’s already been tuned.”

Good thing, because the party was just about to begin, and I had some heavenly peace to pass on. 🕯️

The Best Part of Christmas

By Josie Clark

As I rushed around the streets of Morelia, Mexico, the stoplights were crowded with beggars. It was Christmas Eve, and I had gone out with my 10-year-old daughter for some last minute shopping.

“Look at her!” Cathy drew my attention to an old woman who had stopped begging momentarily and was rubbing her cold, bare feet.

“She’s someone’s grandmother,” I thought aloud, “but instead of being home with her family, she is out here in her bare feet, trying to scrape together a little money for Christmas dinner.” Then an idea struck me. “Cathy, let’s go home and get together some food for her.”

It was already getting dark, so she probably wouldn’t be working that stoplight much longer. We raced home, found a couple of sturdy bags, and began going through our well-stocked pantry and refrigerator. Rice, beans, dried jalapeños, a jar of salsa, corn tortillas, a cooked chicken. It was easy to fill the bags from our abundance. A loaf of bread, jam, cheese. I tied the bags with large bows, and we headed off to find the old woman.

At first we thought we had taken too long and missed her. Then we saw her trudging slowly down the street, her shawl wrapped tightly around her, probably on her way home.

“Hello!” Cathy greeted her and continued in Spanish. “We saw you at the stoplight and brought you some food for Christmas dinner.”

The old woman looked at us with wonderment, and tears welled up in her eyes. Then she took Cathy’s hands in hers and kissed them. “Thank you. Thank you. God bless you. You are beautiful. You are a Christmas angel.”

She took the bags and continued down the street.

Our own Christmas Eve was festive, as usual, and the next morning Cathy opened her gifts. When I asked her if she was having a good Christmas, she replied, “You know, Mommy, seeing that old woman so happy last night, and having her kiss my hands—that was the best Christmas present I got. I think giving is the best part of Christmas!” 🍷



Special Treasures

By Mary Roys

Each December I ask my children, Toby and Kathy, now seven and nine, to go through their toys and clothes and set aside what they have outgrown or no longer use. Then I check what they've selected, weeding out worn-out items, and after exercising my veto power in a few cases, we box up the best of the rest to give to others who have less than we do. Besides instilling in the children a spirit of giving, I have found this to be an effective way to trim down on clutter also, and put "gently used" items that they no longer need or want to good use.

Last Christmas both of my children seemed more materialistic about the holiday—more focused on the presents they were hoping to receive, and less inclined toward giving. I wondered why, as well as whether or not they were aware of their change in attitude.

I decided to take an indirect approach. "What do you think is the true meaning

of Christmas?" Of course, they knew that Christmas is a celebration of Christ's birth, but they stopped at that. "The true spirit of Christmas," I reminded them, "is to give of our best to others."

The kids thought about this for a bit and then came up with a plan to give away some of their favorite toys, rather than just the ones they were tired of. Toby chose to give some of his favorite Matchbox cars, and Kathy decided to give one of her dolls. We packed these with the rest of the items we had set aside, and I took the children with me when I dropped off our Christmas donations.

Instilling values in my children is one of my greatest responsibilities as a parent, and teaching them to think of others before themselves is a big part of that. Giving sacrificially shouldn't be a once-a-year occurrence, of course, but Christmas is a perfect opportunity. 🕯️

The Gift of Giving

A Christmas Carol, written by Charles Dickens and first published in 1843, has been retold in numerous versions and forms. A timeless story, it is much more than an account of a mean, miserable old man—Scrooge—who changes his ways after a Christmas Eve visitation by three spirits. It is a reminder that it is only when we give to others that we truly celebrate the spirit of Christmas. Giving may be material, like a beautifully wrapped present or a monetary gift to

someone in need, but true giving is more than that; it extends to sharing ourselves.

Why not make your celebration of Christmas extra special this year by sending a card, making a call, visiting, or sending a gift to people you know who are particularly lonely? Perhaps there is someone at work who will be spending Christmas alone. Or perhaps you have a neighbor who would appreciate some extra kindness. Isn't this what Christmas is all about? 

CAN YOU SPARE SOME LOVE?

By Evelyn Sichrovsky

Last Christmas a doctor invited my family to sing carols for about a dozen of his elderly patients. As it turned out, only five were well enough to attend, but the beautiful smiles on those wrinkled faces made it worth the time and effort.

Afterwards, we visited a few more frail seniors in their homes. One woman with a walker greeted us outside and led us into her dark little house, where I sat with her on her bed and we sang Christmas carols

together in the local dialect. When we left, she waved through her one small window and gave us a smile that brought tears to my eyes.

As we drove home, I thought about her and the others—alone, poor, ill, yearning for love—and my own problems seemed petty.

It's Christmastime again, and I'm reminded that there are millions like that woman. Can you spare a little love for one near you? 



Christmas in the Heart



He who has not Christmas in his heart will never find it under a tree.

—Roy L. Smith

Christmas is not a date. It is a state of mind.—Mary Ellen Chase

Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love!

—Hamilton Wright Mabie

Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.—Attributed to a seven-year-old named Bobby

Remember this December, that love weighs more than gold!

—Josephine Dodge Daskam Bacon

Christmas is not as much about opening our presents as opening our hearts.

—Janice Maeditere

The spirit of Christmas fulfils the greatest hunger of mankind.

—Loring A. Schuler

Open your presents at Christmas time, but be thankful year round for the gifts you receive.—Lorinda Ruth Lowen

The earth has grown old with its burden of care, but at Christmas it always is young.—Phillips Brooks

The joy of brightening other lives, bearing each others' burdens, easing others' loads, and supplanting empty hearts and lives with generous gifts becomes for us the magic of Christmas.—W. C. Jones

Christmas is forever, not for just one day,

For loving, sharing, giving, are not to put away

Like bells and lights and tinsel, in some box upon a shelf.

The good you do for others is good you do yourself.

—Norman Wesley Brooks, "Let Every Day Be Christmas"