

ON THE BOOKSHELF

"Christmas In My Heart 26: A Treasury of Old-Fashioned Christmas Stories"

Compiled and edited by Joe L. Wheeler (Pacific Press)

So why is there is 26th edition? Because there were thousands of wonderful stories from the 1880s through the 1950s in popular magazines which no longer exist, or are still published but in a much different format. These stories would have vanished forever, and their authors would be forgotten, if not for this incredible series. Each volume contains 15 fiction and non-fiction short stories, plus one novella written by Joe (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit). Each story views Christmas not merely as a seasonal activity but a Holy Day (which is what "holiday" originally meant). It is based on the actual incarnation of God as the flesh of Jesus bar-Joseph, the stepson of a carpenter and son of a virgin named Mary. That's what Christians believe, and that drives the behavior of the holy season.

This year's stories, as always, feature accounts from soldiers, orphans, widows, the dispossessed, the disenfranchised, the lonely, the lovers, and the dreamers. They are created by some of the favorite authors of their day, and by some whose lives are obscure and little-known. However, because their creations are still able to be read, their life-work still has the power to move us, to make us weep, to make us laugh, and to make us aware of the awesome power of God.

My favorites stories this year are from a variety of sources and authors. Th Editors of David C. Cook contributed "Mary: Blessed Among Women", which brings the Mother of Jesus into sharp focus. Frank Bennett brings a story of great sacrifice that will touch the heart of every musician, amateur or professional, in "A Wise Man". Catherine Britton offers maybe the best Western Christmas story ever, "Listen to the Bells", about a new cowboy who needs to learn to trust Someone bigger than himself when making vital decisions. Ruth Comfort Mitchell tells "Something in the Sock." The story of a young veteran whose loving heart touches a jaded young lady reporter during the Great Depression. Then there's "Old Ironpuss", a nurse in the catastrophic injuries veteran's ward post-WWII who is deliberately tough and gruff so they will muster the will to defy her and find a reason to survive. A story from the Korean War, Paul McAfee's "The Three Strangers", shows 3 weary and wary GIs how to find the peace of Christmas again.

Joe always closes the anthology volume with an original story, and this year Is his best of the 26 seasons! He creates a play within a play based on the iconic Christmas author Temple Bailey.

It wouldn't be Christmas at WTBF Radio without a visit from Joe Wheeler. My friend made his 26th annual visit, which you can hear this Sunday ON THE BOOKSHELF on WTBF-AM/FM and on my website.