

## **“Christmas Stories”**

Date: 12/25/2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Hebrews 1:1-6; Luke 2:13-20 Occasion: Christmas Day

Theme: Gifts, giving, Christmas

Christmas is a time for telling stories. Human beings love to hear a good story. Some people are better at telling stories than others. But all that’s really necessary is the storyteller’s personal investment in the story being told.

In fact, every person is a walking storybook, full of anecdotes and happenings, some humorous, some tear-stained, some life-altering, some of no consequence. Some are full of hope, others laden with despair. But whatever their nature, two things are true.

First, these stories are important to tell, and two – they are delightful to hear. If you have any doubt about that, let me invite you to go to a nursing home and sit with some residents as they talk to about when they were young, or about their family, or their faith.

Let me invite you to a family reunion, as the youngsters are the audience to the older folks. There, the only thing better than the food are the belly laughs at the stories being told by the old-timers. Let me invite you into the hospital room, where the terminally ill patient needs to verbalize their life coming to a close. Stories matter.

There is a beautiful legend told during the Christmas season. It tells of the Holy Family spending the night in a particular cave. Inside the cave, a little spider saw the baby Jesus and wished that it could do something to keep the Holy Child warm during the cold night. The spider decided to do the only think it could, and spun a web across the entrance of the cave to make a type of curtain there.

During the night, a detachment of Herod's soldiers passed by the cave. They were seeking children, to carry out the king's order to kill all the children under the age of two.

When they came to the entrance of the cave, they passed by when they saw the spider's web. "Surely," they said to one another, "no one would be in that cave." The soldiers passed on and left the Holy Family in peace, because the little spider had spun its web across the entrance to the cave.

The lesson of the legend is that there is no gift too small or too insignificant to give to Christ. The gifts that we give to each other during the holiday season are not as important as the gift we give to Christ.

The gifts we give to Christ come not with ribbons or with bows, but come from the heart. The gift of a phone call or a visit to a lonely or elderly person; the gift of spending more time with our family; the gift of forgiving a grievance; or the gift of a kind word: these are among the most precious gifts we can give to our Lord.

Which reminds me of another story, told by a mother: She remembers, "One Christmas we had an interesting experience that I'd like to share. Halfway through December we were doing the regular evening things, when there was a knock on the door.

We opened it to find a small package with a beautiful, ceramic lamb inside. When we looked at the calendar, we realized there were 12 days till Christmas. Was this a coincidence? We wondered.

The next night we were delighted to have another visit, and another surprise. The gift was a matching shepherd and we realized the lamb was part of a nativity set.

Each night we grew more excited to see what piece we would receive. Each was exquisitely beautiful. The kids kept trying to catch the givers, as we slowly built the scene at the manger, and began to focus on Christ's birth.

On Christmas Eve, all the pieces were in place, all but the baby Jesus. My 12-year old son wanted to catch our benefactors and began to devise all kinds of ways to trap them. He ate his dinner in the mini-van, watching and waiting, but no one came. Finally we called him in, to go through our family's Christmas Eve traditions.

But before the kids went to bed, we checked the front-steps – no Baby Jesus. We began to worry that my son had scared them off. My husband suggested that maybe they dropped the Jesus, and there wouldn't be anything coming.

Somehow, something was missing that Christmas Eve. There was a feeling that things weren't complete. The kids went to bed and I put out the Christmas gifts, but before I went to bed I again checked to see if Jesus had come. No, the doorstep was empty.

In our family, the kids can open their stocking when they want to, but they have to wait to open any presents until Dad wakes up. So, one by one they woke up early and I also woke up to watch them.

Even before they opened their stockings, each child checked to see if perhaps during the night the baby Jesus had come. Missing that piece of the set seemed to have an odd effect. At least it changed my focus.

I knew there were presents under the tree for me, and I was excited to watch the children open their gifts. But first on my mind was the feeling of waiting for the ceramic Christ Child.

We had opened just about all of the presents, when one of the children found one more for me, buried deep beneath the limbs of the tree.

He handed me a small package from my former visiting teacher companion. This sister was some-what less active in the church. I had been her visiting teacher for a couple of years, and then, when she was asked to be a visiting teacher, she requested to go with me.

I had learned over time they didn't have much for Christmas, so that their focus was the children. It sounded like she didn't get many gifts to open, so I had always given her a small package – new dish towels, a devotional book – not much, but something for her to open.

I was touched, when at Church on the day before Christmas; she had given me this small package, saying it was just a token of her love and appreciation. As I took off the bow, I remembered my friendship with her, and was filled with gratitude for knowing her, and for her kindness and sacrifice in this year giving me a gift.

But as the paper fell away, I began to tremble and cry. There, in the small brown box, was the baby Jesus. He had come!

I realized on that Christmas Day, that Christ comes into our lives in ways that we don't expect. The spirit of Christmas comes into our hearts as we serve one another. We had waited and watched for him to come, expecting the dramatic “knock on the door and scurrying of feet.”

But he came in a small, simple package that represented friendship, gratitude and love. This experience taught me that the beginning of the true spirit of Christmas comes as we open our hearts and actively focus on the Savior.

But we will most likely find him in the small and simple acts of love, friendship and service that we give to each other. This Christmas, I want to focus on loving and serving. More than that, I want to open my heart to Jesus all year, so that I may see him again.”  
(Author unknown)

Can the preacher get an Amen? Merry Christmas, to one and all!