

Did you put up a Christmas tree this year? Buy presents? Decorate the house, if not the yard?

I read in the newspaper recently that people of the Baby Boomer generation are getting to be of an age that they no longer want to go to all the trouble to put out elaborate house and yard decorations. Bah-humbug! But their children, many of them, urge their parents to keep the Christmas traditions alive.

Maybe, if you are of the parents of Boomers, you long ago have given in to changing physical realities and have had to let some of the Christmas customs and traditions go.

But the question for all of you tonight, no matter what generation you are from, is this: Have you found the wonder and the joy of Christmas, this Christmas? Have you found the Christ Child, baby Jesus, who can always be found in the most unexpected places? If so, great; you are in exactly the right place to share your joy. If not, great; you are in exactly the right place to receive joy. And the wonder is all around us, in the very air here tonight, available for the taking.

The shepherds were in exactly the right place for wonder and joy. They were working, keeping watch over their sheep all night. Ho hum; just another night. But then, an “angel of the Lord” visited them and absolutely radiated joy. Not their own joy, you understand, but the “glory of the Lord” that shone all around them. The joy of being alive, the joy given to us by God-our-creator. The joy that is a sure sign of the Christ Child, a sure sign of God-among-us.

What was the shepherds’ reaction? Initially they were TERRIFIED. I like the King James’ version better, which says, “They were SORE AFRAID.” Apparently, not everyone thinks meeting angels and being surrounded by great joy are good things.



But then the angel told the shepherds, “Don’t be afraid. What I’m here to tell you is that the Messiah is born today. God has come to be with you.”

Now here is where the shepherds had a decision to make. Would this remain—ho hum—just another day? Would they receive this wondrous news with great joy? Would they dive in to the wonder of Christmas? Or would they just go see the new Star Wars movie instead?

The angels told the shepherds what they had to do to find the joy that was told to them: “find the Christ child. And, oh by the way, the child won’t be where you expect to find him.”

The angels could no longer contain themselves. Before they had just radiated the glory of the Lord. But now they burst into song, the likes of which has never been heard before or since. They began to sing, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

That’s when the angels’ joy jumped to the shepherds. Have you noticed? Joy is like that, greatly contagious. At any rate, the shepherds got the message. They got excited; THEY had been favored. So they took off for Bethlehem, and found the Christ child in the most unexpected place, in a stable, just as the angels had told them. And then THEY told everyone they met about the wonder of the angels, their joy, and the baby in the manger. Their joy spread through space and time, all the way to us tonight: “BEHOLD, I bring you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born THIS DAY ... a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

Ah, but you KNOW this story. You know about the shepherds and the angels and the Christ Child and the whole holy family. But do you know the wonder and joy of Christmas?

Here are some Christmas stories for you that you might not yet know. Ready? Someone I know who doesn’t have any children bought clothes and toys for young children and gave them away this Christmas. The funny thing is that this giving brought great joy to the giver. I daresay the giver found the Christ Child, and in the most unexpected place.

Then, too, a man I met yesterday told me that he had put up a tree this year for the first time in a decade. And not just a small tree, either—a 12-foot tree. “You know,” he said, beaming, “as soon as those lights were on I remembered the church I grew up in and I have decided to attend church on Christmas Eve.” This made both of us very happy, even though the man is a Baptist. <GGG>

Where have you—where will you—find the Christ Child this Christmas? To find the Christ Child, seek out your joy, and don’t be surprised if your search ends in a most unexpected place.

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!*

*Therefore we praise you, Baby Jesus, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who forever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.*

