



A Most Precious Holiday Blessing By Steve Garrington, Davenport, Iowa As appeared in on Guideposts.org.

A married couple is reminded of the value of faith and family, thanks to a treasured Christmas gift.

"Will you set up the Nativity?" my wife, Linda, called from the kitchen. I could "smell" that she had her hands full with the Christmas baking.

"My pleasure," I called back. And it really was. Our Nativity was one of the few Christmas decorations we'd had since we were first married 25 years ago. I would never forget the day it was delivered.

We were newlyweds in our first very modest apartment, and we couldn't afford any Christmas decorations.

The future seemed so uncertain back then. Would I find a good job? Would we have children? Would we be good parents? I didn't want to make any mistakes. I was distracted from my worries when the mailman delivered a package covered in foreign postage.

"It says it's from Italy," I'd told Linda as I handed it to her. "We don't know anyone in Italy!"

"That must be from my uncle," she said, taking the package from me. "He was stationed there during the war."

"Open before Christmas," the package said.

Inside we found a beautiful Nativity. Each gold-painted piece had the word Italy embossed on the bottom.

"Oh, my," Linda said. "What an extravagant gift."

"It looks so elegant," I said, turning the angel over in my hands. "What do you suppose it's made of?"

"Porcelain," said Linda. "Maybe painted glass. Whatever it is it's very delicate."

We set up the Nativity in a place of honor. It was the most precious possession we owned. Every year after that we set up the Nativity with great care. I found a job; we had kids. We made mistakes no matter how hard I tried to avoid them. But we'd made it through with God's help and so had our Nativity.

As Linda bustled around in the kitchen, I got a stepladder out from the garage. *I'll arrange the Nativity on the mantel above the fireplace this year*, I thought. It was amazing we'd had it so long without even chipping a single piece.

I brought the box inside and unwrapped the pieces. One by one I placed them on the mantel. Joseph, Mary, the angel, one wise man, two... "Oh, no!" I said. The third wise man tumbled out of my hand—right onto the hard stone hearth below. Everything seemed to happen in slow motion. I grabbed at the air, but I was too late. I braced myself for the sound of shattering whatever. The wise man's head hit the ground. But to my astonishment it didn't break, it bounced—not once, but twice—and then came to rest on the carpet.

I picked up the tiny gold wise man I'd spent so many years handling so delicately—and gave him a good hard squeeze. *Rubber. It's made of rubber!*

"Honey," I called. "Come in here. I want to show you something."

Linda came walking out of the kitchen, her hands covered in flour.

I held out the wise man for her to see. Then I drew back my arm and, as hard as I could, I threw it against the wall.

"Agh!" Linda gasped, covering her mouth in horror—and getting flour all over her face.

"It's made of rubber!" I said, picking it up off the carpet. I don't know exactly how long we stood there laughing.

"And we always considered the Nativity so precious!" Linda finally managed. "It is precious," I said. Not because it was made from fine glass or porcelain, or came from Italy. But because of the memories we had made with it all those years.

We placed the wise man on the mantel. We'd thought our Nativity, like our future, was easily broken. But with God's love protecting us we had always been resilient.



A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones. Proverbs 17:22

This time of the year is special in so many ways. We just celebrated one of the most beautiful and meaningful holiday's— the Thanksgiving holiday and the winter holidays are just around the corner. It seems like so much is packed in about one month worth of time.

My next health topic to be discussed in the Health Corner was about temperance. It seemed a little strange to talk about this topic just now in the context of such a joyous and food filled holiday time. It is not that it cannot be done, but it seems more appropriate to try to approach it next month when we are ready for resolutions.

In the meantime, let us talk a little about how the holidays can impact our mental and emotional health positively or negatively. We may try to see what we can do to minimize the negative impact and enhance the positive one. It is a little ambitious I know, but it is worth trying. These two main winter holidays Thanksgiving and Christmas are centered mostly around family, fellowship, time together, and of course food. Growing up in a different culture and a different time I am fairly new to this type of celebration. I come to love and appreciate not only the holiday itself, but especially the meaning behind each one of them.

What we make of each holiday is how it will affect us. We all make choices knowingly or unknowingly, aware or not. There is a lot of things beyond our control, but how we respond to what happens to us makes a whole lot of difference. We live in a totally different society than we lived 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, or 60 years ago. It seems like each decade added a different dimension to human ties and relationships. However, we all are created by the same Creator with the same basic need to fellowship with Him first and then with each other. Family ties that were so strong not long ago; now take a totally new turn with each phase of life and each generation. Nevertheless, we all still yearn for relationships. This is why holiday time makes us think and return to these basic connections for those who still have them. In addition, friendship adds new dimensions to our life and human relations.

For those who lost them, or never had them, or are separated by time and space there is still hope. We can open our home and heart, humble as it may be, and make new connections and new traditions for this special time. We can change the focus from us and try to get involved in helping others, less fortunate than we are, and bring a ray of hope and sunshine. In place of feeling sorry for ourselves we can gather a group of friends and share time, food, conversation, and make new memories.

You see, we all have something to be grateful for, if not for the life and health we still have along with countless blessings we take for granted each and every day at least for the gift of our Lord and Savior which humbled Himself to become one of us in order to prepare a way of life and salvation for us, undeserving sinners. Make a habit of seeing the beautiful part of life, count your blessings, see the good in people, smile. It may be hard in the beginning, but persevere.

The holiday time is known to be one of the most depressing times for many people, especially ones that are missing these vital human connections. We do live in a world of sin and bad things can happen; some we can control, some we cannot. Despite all these, it is and it can be our choice to do things differently, to trust in God, to make new friends, to reconnect with old ones, to lend a helping hand and listening ear.

At the same time if we are blessed to be around the table full of food and surrounded by loved ones let us be careful how we celebrate. Nothing spoils a good time as a trip to emergency room not to mention more serious health consequences.

In the end I would like to leave with this thought I find comforting found in 3 John 1:2 KJV - Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. Gabriela

“Mary may have known, But her mother did not.” by: *taming-trents*. This time of year, we talk about Mary a lot. But what about Mary’s mother? Someone had to raise Mary to find favor with God. Someone had to raise Mary to treasure purity. Someone had to raise Mary to honor Joseph. Someone had to raise Mary to know the voice of the Lord, even though they were living in the silent years. Mary’s mother, we don’t know her name. We don’t know what her life looked like. We don’t know who she was married to, or what he was like. All we know is, she raised the mother of Christ. She raised a daughter, highly favored of the Lord. She raised a daughter to fear the Lord, when the Lord was silent.

This is what we know. Mary’s mother didn’t have an encounter with Angel, telling her to raise Mary carefully because of how the Lord was going to use her. Mary’s mother chose to raise Mary wisely so that the Lord could use her. Mary’s mother didn’t have an encounter with Angel, telling her to honor her husband, because Mary would need to honor Joseph when he told her to travel to Bethlehem while she was great with child, when he told her to flee Herod’s wrath (before it came to pass) in the middle of the night, Mary’s mother just honored her husband, obeyed, and submitted to him because she knew that’s what she was called to do. Mary’s mother didn’t have an encounter with an angel, giving her a word to cling to in those dark, silent years. But she clung to the word of God that she had. She trusted his word, even during his silence. And her home shone with divine favor, because she made choices in the dark, that affected the whole world.

Mary did you know? She knew some, she knew what the Angel told her. But Mary’s mother? She had no idea. But she chose to raise a daughter that the Lord could use. And that choice still affects us all today.

Who you raise can affect eternity. The example you set in marriage, can affect eternity. Your home can make the gates of Hell tremble. But it starts with you.

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy
Has come to make you new?
This child that you delivered, will soon deliver you

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will give sight to a blind man?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will calm the storm with his hand?

Did you know that your baby boy
Has walked where angels trod?
When you kiss your little baby
You kiss the face of God

Mary, did you know? Mary, did you know?
Mary, did you know? Did you know?
The blind will see, the deaf will hear
The dead will live again
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak
The praises of the Lamb

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy
Is heaven's perfect Lamb?
That sleeping child you're holding is the great, I Am
Mary, did you know? (Mary, did you know?)
Mary, did you know? Oh...

Song & lyrics by Mark Lowry: The lyrics evolved from a series of questions that Lowry scripted for a Christmas program at his church. I just tried to put into words the unfathomable. I stared thinking of the questions I would have for her if I were to sit down and have coffee with Mary. Just sharing something that a fellow class mate had posted on Facebook and then the words to Mary Did you Know... Giving the Pastor a break. Have a good month, Brenda

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STRANGER IN OUR HOME—Author Unknown

A few months before I was born, back in the 1950s, Dad met a stranger who was new to our small town. Dad was fascinated with this enchanting newcomer and soon invited him to live with our family.

The stranger was quickly accepted and was around to welcome me into the world a few months later. Growing up, I never questioned his place in our family.

Now, Mom taught me to love the **Bible**, and Dad taught me to obey it, but the stranger became our storyteller. He could weave the most fascinating tales. Adventures, mysteries, and humorous stories were daily conversations. He could hold our whole family spellbound for hours each evening. We would cry, laugh, and even get angry at his amazing tales. He became a close friend to the whole family. He took Dad, my brother, and me to see our first football game. He was always encouraging us to go to the movies, and he even made arrangements to introduce us to several celebrities. I could never forget those experiences, even if I tried.

The stranger was an incessant talker. Dad didn't seem to mind, but sometimes, while the rest of us were enthralled with one of his stories of faraway places, Mom would quietly get up, go to her room, read the **Bible**, and pray. I wonder now if she ever prayed that the stranger would leave.

You see, Dad ruled our household with certain moral convictions, but this stranger never felt an obligation to honor them. Profanity, for example, was not allowed—not from us, from our friends, or from the adults. Yet our longtime visitor used occasional four-letter words that burned my ears and made Dad squirm. To my knowledge, the stranger was never confronted.

My Dad had a strict no-alcohol policy in our home, even for cooking. However, the stranger believed in broadening our horizons and introduced us to alternative lifestyles. He offered us alcoholic beverages, glamorizing cigarettes, portraying cigars as symbols of manhood, and presenting pipes as a mark of sophistication. He talked freely about sex. His comments were sometimes blatant, sometimes suggestive, and generally embarrassing. He spoke of homosexuality and other sexual deviancies as though they were totally acceptable.

As I look back, I believe it was only by the grace of God that the stranger did not influence us more. Time after time, he opposed the values of our parents, yet he was seldom reprimanded and never asked to leave.

Nearly fifty years have passed since the stranger moved in with us, but if I were to walk into my parents' home today, I would still see him sitting there, waiting for someone to listen to his stories.

His name?

We just call him by his initials—**TV**.  

I Corinthians 13—Contributed for the Newsletter by Elizabeth Rodriguez—December 2014 edition.

A Christmas Version: If I decorate my house perfectly with plaid bows; strands of twinkling lights and shiny balls, but do not show love to my family, I'm just another decorator. **If** I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime, but do not show love to my family, I'm just another cook. **If** I work at the soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home and give all that I have to charity, but do not show love to my family, it profits me nothing. **If** I trim the spruce with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes, attend a myriad of holiday parties and sing in the choir's cantata but do not focus on Christ, I have missed the point. **love** stops the cooking to hug the child, **love** sets aside the decorating to kiss the husband. **love** is kind, though harried and tired. **love doesn't** envy another's home that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens. **love** doesn't yell at the kids to get out of the way, but is thankful they are there to be in the way. **love** doesn't give only to those who are able to give in return but rejoices in giving to those who can't. **love** bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **love** never fails. Video games will break, pearly necklaces will be lost, golf clubs will rust, but giving the gift of **love** will endure.

MERRY CHRISTMAS GOD LOVES YOU ALWAYS!.

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Sam Smith wanted to share this picture with everyone. Memories are wonderful and especially of lost loved ones. This was in May 1964... 10 years after getting married on 11/18/1954.

Tentative Speakers Schedule: Dec: 2 - Dr. Bob Kane, 9 - Pastor DeOliveira, 16– Brian Halley, 23 - Pastor DeOliveira, 30 - Shawn Smith

CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

Saturday, December 23 @ 5:00 PM. Singing and Vespers, Christmas Themed Church Talent– music, poems, skits, reading, etc. Please get with Shawn or Gary to know what you would like to share. Please bring soup, salad, bread, fruit, drunk or dessert. Board games and socializing. Clanton SDA Church

This is reminiscing we did back in December of 2011 in the Newsletter. How many of you remember Ingathering? Well, now it is called Hope for Humanity. Well, if you were at church this past Sabbath (in 2011), Bill Wiese for the Personal Ministries period presented how it all started. (If I took my notes correctly). Back in 1903 Jasper Wayne ordered 50 “Signs of the Times”. Right before Christmas time they arrived in the mail. He decided to put them in the Post Office where he worked to give out. He did ask for a donation from those that appreciated them. When he had almost given all of them out he had collected \$4.00. He in turn ordered some more and did the same thing. Sometime later he was at camp meeting and met Willie White and told him about what he had been doing. Willie had him talk to his mother and when you get Ellen G White behind something it moves onward. By then he had collected \$100 to turn into the General Conference. By 1908 the General Conference adopted the Harvest Ingathering program and in the pursuing years 688 million dollars has been either collected or donated.

How many of your remember going out in singing bands and enjoying the singing and knocking on doors and asking for contributions. I remember riding in the back of a truck playing the Christmas Carols on my accordion and having to stop in between to warm my hands up. I remember having an Ingathering can that played Carols one year. Through the years there have been all kinds of ways to collect monies. Now, donations from each church member are needed to help especially at this time of year, let’s do our part and give as God leads you to help others. (reported by Brenda Davis from notes taken during church and phone calls to the conference in 2011)

Today (in 2023) I looked up Ingathering on Google and it gave me the Trans-European Division policy on Ingathering: The Ingathering programme provides an opportunity each year for church members to be active participants in the annual Ingathering campaign. To visit in the homes and businesses of people, sharing the love and hope of Jesus Christ. To present specific project needs and to invite a response in financial support, donations in kinds, or contributions of volunteer labor. To share with the public the humanitarian work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Just me again, Brenda

CHRISTMAS CRANBERRY CAKE

Ingredients: 2 cups unbleached flour, 1 cup sugar (I use F Turbinado), 4 tsp baking powder, 1/2 tsp salt, 3 Tbsp cornstarch, 2 Tbsp water, 1 cup silk original almond milk, 1/4 sunflower oil, 1 tsp almond extract.



Topping: 3/4 c. flour, 6 Tbsp margarine, 3 cups fresh cranberries, 3/4 cup sugar.

1. In a large bowl, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, and cornstarch. In a separate bowl, combine the water, milk, oil and almond extract. Stir into dry ingredients.

2. Spray a 9-inch spring form pan with non-stick cooking spray. Pour batter into a prepared pan.

3. For topping, combine flour and sugar in a small bowl; cut in the butter until crumbly. Add cranberries.

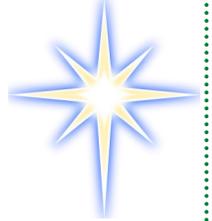
4. Sprinkle topping over cake.

5. Bake at 375 degrees for 50-60 minutes or until edges begin to pull away from sides of the pan. (I use a toothpick to make sure it comes out dry).

(Glaze: 1/2 C. powdered sugar, sifted, 2 tsp almond milk, 1 tsp vanilla extract, and drizzle over the top of cooled cake) It is very good. Note: It is not a big cake.

From: Mirtes FELIZ NATAL! MERRY CHRISTMAS!

The Real Christmas - by Helen Gregory, Florissant, Missouri - When I was just a little girl, Christmas was to me; Carols, lights, toys, delight, anticipation just to see what lay beneath the tree for me. Mounds of snow, sleighs and bells, Christmas was to me: Stocking, candy, fire-places, long weekends with friendly faces, but most of all, my tree: green and red decorations, an angel all aglow, but I confess what I liked best were gifts that lay below. I thought I knew the meaning of Christmas and His birth. But as a child my thoughts gave way to trees and toys of worth. But Christmas trees soon dry out as present are unwrapped; what's left behind is hard to find, though riches are untapped. If everyday were Christmas and the love we shared that day could be given to the lonely to bring a golden ray, Then the world could be a Christmas tree, shining near and far, bringing hope to all who need A Special Christmas Star.



To be an atheist,
I would have to believe...



... nothing produced everything,
... non-life produced life,
... randomness produced precision,
... chaos produced order.

I simply do not have
that much faith.

We have a website!! **UPDATED - Church Website:** <https://www.clantonsda.com/> Tony Plier has posted sermons, music & a lot of info, look under Newsletters to find this publication on line each month. Tony has also added a link at the bottom of every page for Adventistgiving. Thanks to those that do contribute, Until next month! ... Brenda

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