

Twas The Night Before Christmas

'Twas the night before Christmas,
when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring,
not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by
the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas
soon would be there;



The children have nestled all snug
in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums
danced in their heads;
And mamma in her 'kerchief, and
I in my cap,
Had just settled down for a long
winter's nap,

When out on the lawn there arose
such a clatter,
I sprang from the bed to see what
was the matter.
Away to the window,
I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters
and threw up the sash.



The moon on the breast of the
new-fallen snow
Gave the lustre of mid-day to
objects below,
When what to my wondering eyes
should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and eight
tiny reindeer,

With a little old driver,
so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it
must be St. Nick.
More rapid than eagles his cours-
ers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted,
and called them by name;



"Now, Dasher! Now, Dancer! Now,
Prancer And Vixen!
On, Comet! On Cupid! On, Donner
And Blitzen!
To the top of the porch! to the top
of the wall!
Now dash away! dash away! dash
away all!"

As dry leaves that before the wild
hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle,
mount to the sky,
So up to the house-top the
coursers they flew,
With the sleigh full of toys,
and St. Nicholas too.



And then, in a twinkling,
I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each
little hoof.
As I drew in my hand and was
turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas
came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur, from his
head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished
with ashes and soot;
A bundle of toys he had flung on
his back,
And he looked like a peddler just
opening his pack.

His eyes-how they twinkled! his
dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his
nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn
up like a bow,
And the beard of his
chin was as white
as the snow;



The stump of a pipe
he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke it encircled his
head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a little
round belly,
That shook when he laughed like
a bowlful of jelly.

He was chubby and plump, a right
jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in
spite of myself;
A wink of his eye and a
twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know
I had nothing to dread;



He spoke not a word, but went
straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then
turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his
nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney
he rose;

He sprang to his sleigh, to his
team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the
down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he
drove out of sight,

**Happy Christmas
To All, And To All
A Good-night!**



Christmas Thoughts

Already! My life's merry-go-round is spinning out of control. It's going so fast that everything is a blur.

I've figured out why you younger people think that we older people get confused, can't remember things, and get more annoying to you as time passes. It's because our merry-go-rounds have been stuffed so full of things that as new stuff gets packed in, lots of the old stuff falls out. Have you ever tried to pack a box too full of things, so that at some point each new item you stuff into it pushes something else out of it? That's exactly what our brains are like. And then the merry-go-round of time spins so fast that a lot of the overflow starts to fly off.

What does that have to do with Christmas? Not a lot, I guess, except now my life seems like a fast-moving parade of events streaming before me. New Year's Day, King of the Hammers Race, Valentines Day, Easter, Memorial Day (God rest their souls!), July 4 Independence Day (God help us as we trample all over the great gift He gave us!), Labor Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and finally, Christmas. By Christmastime, I'm dizzy!

Nearby is the poem "The Night Before Christmas", which I came across recently. For some reason, I took the trouble to look it up and read it again, for the first time. Many memories and warm associations of past Christmases flooded my mind as I read it: dark winter nights brightened by many-colored lights; midnight services in church on Christmas Eve; our high school's Christmas concert with its candlelight procession, ending with the Hallelujah Chorus; the thrill of the Christmas tree and getting up early Christmas morning; dinner at Aunt Ruth's old historic house in Indianapolis.

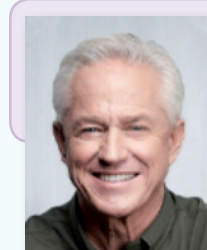
Maybe some of those beautiful memories are all the more appealing as the darkness of the evil gripping the present day steals our pleasure in



the simple traditions we used to enjoy. Maybe we shouldn't let it.

One of the legends about the origins of Santa Claus, aka St. Nicholas, is especially appealing. Apparently born in the third century (200's), the legend includes his "becoming an orphan at a very young age. Though his family had been rich, Saint Nicholas decided to distribute all of his possessions to the poor and to dedicate himself to serving Christ. It is said that he would toss little pouches of coins through the windows of the poor, and that sometimes the pouches would land in stockings that had been washed and were hung on the windowsill to dry. Once, finding all the windows in a house shut, Saint Nicholas tossed the pouch up to the roof, where it went down the chimney . . . he provided dowries to three young women who could not afford to marry (and who were in danger, therefore, of entering into a life of prostitution)." (learnreligions.com)

Although it seems apparent that we cannot pinpoint the birth of Jesus as being in December, much less the very day of the 25th, Christmas is firmly rooted in God's Spirit and the celebration of Jesus coming to earth to show us the way back to God. Typically, we humans distort things, wallow-



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Where Life Begins

Ray Bentley Ministries

"You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever."—Psalm 16:11

Our lives are messy, often full of chaos. While getting through daily living, we can be sure of one thing: God's presence is with us.

In the beginning, His Spirit "hovered" over an earth that was "without form and void" (Genesis 1:2). Now He hovers over our lives. His presence is ready to bring life into our disorderly world.

He wants us to know that He is with us, hovering directly over us, ready to speak words of light into our darkness. In the very next verse, God spoke light into existence. "Let there be light," He said. The original Hebrew language literally states, "Light be, and light was." I like that. It's direct. God speaks, it happens.

He will do the same for our individual lives. We need to open the doors and windows of our souls to allow the presence of the Holy Spirit to speak words of life and light into our lives.

I urge you to take the presence of God personally. It is not just about church or what you do. God's presence is about you, a son or daughter of the Heavenly Father. We all have areas of our lives that need the refreshing and healing of the Holy Spirit. We all need the presence of God.

Psalm 91 is a warfare psalm about God's presence. As I read the entire Psalm, especially the beginning, I realized the Psalm speaks of abiding in the presence of God to find safety in warfare.

"He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, we are engaged in spiritual warfare. We are all facing battles that can seem overwhelming. But God promises us His presence and His victory, where we will experience the "fullness of joy."

The path of life truly begins in God's presence. Don't miss it!

"We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere incognito."—C.S. Lewis

ing in the "sweet baby Jesus" narrative and conveniently forgetting that He called us out of this world, to become citizens of heaven by repenting of our broken lives and trusting Him to heal us and take us home with Him.

We also indulge ourselves with greed, gimmies, and the overflow of material goodies, almost completely crowding out the original CHRIST-mas Spirit of giving and of caring about others before ourselves. Pastor Ray Bentley, in his short article "Where Life Begins", says ". . . God spoke light into existence. 'Let there be light,' He said . . . God speaks, it happens. He will do the same for our individual lives. We need to open the doors and windows of our souls to allow the presence of the Holy Spirit to speak words of life and light into our lives."

That is the true Christmas Spirit, God's Holy Spirit, His great Gift to us! Let us celebrate that true gift rather than all the trivia of parties, "presents", and overeating. Let us give Thanksgiving to our Father for loving us in this way!

Linda Gimmel



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