

Take a minute and be thankful for what we have

With all the hustle and stress of what we call "the holiday season," it's easy to lose sight of why we do all this, even for those who accept and believe in the message in the coming of the Christ child.

We get busy. There's a lot to do, presents to buy, homes and trees to decorate, parties and programs to attend, events to notice, sales and shopping, the list goes on. No one even knows exactly why we celebrate His birth at this time of the year, since scholars say the Bible gives no actual date for the birth.

Many speculate that Dec. 25 was chosen by the Roman church because a Christmas celebration then would overshadow traditional pagan observances in Europe keyed to the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year.

It's easy to forget that the day originated with a church service, the Christ Mass, and while many of us will be in church either Christmas Eve or day, it seems like more and more people in what we once called Western Civilization either question these beliefs or no longer know what to believe.

Perhaps, as a noted writer once said, we live in a cynical age. The wonder and promise of the Christmas story is just too much for many to accept, the whole idea of a Savior sent to forgive us our sins and lead us to everlasting life.

It is a lot to swallow when you look at it that way.

Or maybe it's the commitment required to accept the offer and try to live as Christ teaches us to live, recognizing that we remain nothing more than, as Nelson Mandela put it, sinners who keep trying.

Perhaps the idea of a judgment day, a winnowing time when the wheat will be separated and the chaff swept into unquenchable flames, bothers a lot of people. Like death itself, no one wants to face that prospect.

They say a lot of people feel left out, stressed and depressed this time of year. That's too bad. Christmas should be a time of joy, of love and giving. It can be, if we take time to remember where all this started.

On this Christmas Day, we hope everyone does just that. Take a moment wherever you are to think about how fortunate we are to live where we live, in the era we live in, when the condition of men is probably, while not perfect, better than it's ever been. Be thankful for these gifts and recall the promise, in whatever tradition you prefer, of God's grace.

To each and every one of you out there, we wish you a joyous holiday and some relief from the demands of the season.

Merry Christmas!

— Steve Haynes



Wrapped up and ready for Christmas

Close your eyes. Take a deep breath. Relax.

With Christmas just a couple of days away, now is the time to stop and enjoy it. I mean really enjoy it. Take a plate of those cookies you worked so hard to make to an elderly neighbor and stay for a cup of coffee and conversation. Go to a nursing home or hospital to visit a friend. Put Christmas music on the CD player and turn it up loud enough to hear all over the house. Wear a Santa hat to work. Have fun.

I get so wrapped up in getting ready for Christmas, I almost forget why we celebrate the day.

—ob—

It's with a measure of sadness and a whole lot of gladness that we have let the cat back into the house. Notice, I said "cat." Because, for the first time in our married life, we have only one cat.

Last summer we banned all three cats to the outside. They had been "naughty" in a corner and in the heat registers. "Out you go," I said, "and don't expect to come back in again.

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



that's Jim's lap she enjoys. Since she's been let back in, she never leaves his side. If he sits down, she is on his lap. If he goes to another room, she does too. When he climbs the stairs to bed, she follows and sleeps by his side.

That's the gratitude I get for arguing her case and winning her reprieve.

—ob—

It's been more than 30 years since I've taken little kids shopping. And after Monday, it may be 30 more before I do it again. But in a moment of weakness I told a friend's 9-year old son that I would take him and his 3-year old sister shopping so they could get their mother a Christmas present. I asked their mother if that would be OK with her and she sort of sheepishly said, "Sure, because I was going to ask if you could keep them for a few hours while I finish my shopping."

Children are what make Christmas fun. And family. I hope you have a big dose of both this week as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, who came to save us all.

Merry Christmas, everyone.

Ever!"

A neighbor's dog killed one of the Siamese. That left the other Siamese and the old, long-haired, black cat. It's been four days since we've seen the black one. I fear she's met her end.

Jim fixed them nice, insulated, padded sleeping boxes on the porch. In my head I knew they were fine. But in my heart I felt so bad for making them stay out in the bitter cold. Perhaps it was too much for old Missy, but I reasoned with just one cat, perhaps the one remaining would behave herself in the house.

So that is how Bootsie has found herself back in my good graces and back in the lap of luxury she used to enjoy. Actually, it's not luxury's lap,

Remembering true meaning of Christmas

Some people forget about the true meaning of Christmas — celebrating the birth of Christ, love, friendship and spending time with the family. As a youngster I have fond memories of Mom inside fixing turkey and dressing while my brothers and I would be playing outside throwing snowballs, playing "fox and geese" and just being kids.

One thing I'll never forget about this period of my life are some of my dad and his friend's favorite sayings. It seems like we always visited more during the holiday season and as children we had the opportunity to hear some of these words of wisdom more often during this time of year.

These sayings came from neighbors, brothers and cousins — folks he'd lived with for years, some as many as 70 years. A few were rare buddies, with special nicknames like, Cactus, Drawers, Baldy, Short Legs, Fuzzy — you get the picture.

Here are just a few — the gems — the ones I'll remember always:

* Your friends are the measure of your real worth.

* The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man.

* Why do you think the good Lord gave you two ears and one mouth? So

Insight

John Schlageck



you could listen twice as much as you talk.

* Wait until you get a little older, then you'll understand.

* If you're going to train your dog, you have to be smarter than the dog.

* Never be too quick to criticize yourself. It ain't fair to your friends and relatives who are itchin' to do it for you.

* If all of your friends climbed up the elevator and jumped off, would you have to too?

* If you haven't been bucked off a horse, then you've never ridden one.

* You can't listen too much when a friend needs someone to talk to.

* Some things aren't funny even to your best friend.

* If we have to love our enemies, we have to treat our friends even better.

* A friend is someone who dislikes the same people you do.

* The only way to have a friend is to be one.

* The best three friends a man can have are his wife, an old dog and ready money.

* A real pal will at least pretend to believe your lies.

* At the end of your life if you have two or three true friends, you've lived a good life.

* A true friend is someone who knows that when you've made a fool of yourself it generally isn't permanent.

* When a friend drops by about dinnertime and you ask, "What brings you by here at this time?" You still have to ask him to stay for a bite to eat.

* Good friends are hard to find and harder to lose.

Most of us have a few good friends. Be thankful for them. Remember them during this magical time of year. If you can't stop by to see them, call them on the phone or drop them an e-mail message.

Remember during this holiday season that joy springs from the heart of those dedicated to caring and helping others. The Christmas spirit dwells inside each of us.

Merry Christmas.

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Merry Christmas