

# Embracing the Spirit of Christmas



## Christopher News Notes

**CHRISTMAS. THE WORD CAN CONJURE UP SO MANY WARM, NOSTALGIC MEMORIES AND FEELINGS. Peace on earth, lit trees, wrapped presents, red and green decorations, laughter with family and friends, and then, a Silent Night. But what about courage?**

**“Be not afraid!” proclaimed the angel to the shepherds in the Gospel of Luke. And that begs the question, “What is it that we should not be afraid of?”**

**The answer is quite simple: do not be afraid of love. We shouldn’t be afraid to open our hearts to others, to forgive, to embrace the blessings God sends our way.**

## The True Meaning of Christmas Love

Mary was only 17 when she began working at a factory in a small rural town in Michigan. The region was economically depressed and jobs were scarce. The teen felt shy and overwhelmed working with men and women who spoke roughly, told raucous jokes in the break room, and mercilessly mocked anyone who annoyed them or whom they saw as below them.

The favorite brunt of everyone's scorn was a tall, gangly old man named Bob. He had a scraggly beard and a vacant stare, and it was clear he didn't bathe very often. Even worse, he often floated in and out of storerooms aimlessly, knocking things over and forgetting tasks during a day's rush.

No one hated Bob more than Sue, an angry shift manager who used every opportunity to scream and curse at him. Yet Bob was always cheerful. He seemed completely oblivious to the insults and sarcasm heaped upon his head.

Then, the snow began falling and the factory's workload grew as Christmas drew near. Mary was cleaning equipment towards the end of her shift when she saw a scruffy, skinny, Santa Claus walking backwards into the entrance of the storefront.

It was Bob, dragging a large cardboard box brimming with presents for the whole staff, colorfully and carefully wrapped in Christmas paper. He wore a shabby Santa's hat perched on his head, and a faded red sweatshirt. He pawed through his makeshift sleigh until he found what he was looking for. "Here you go!" he said, beaming with joy as he handed a bewildered woman the prettiest-wrapped package. "Merry Christmas, Sue!"

In that moment, when Bob sincerely and happily gave a gift to the woman who hated him the most, Mary realized the true meaning of Christmas love. Just as the Lord of the universe came down into a remote town to be born into a cold and smelly stable, so was the love of a pure soul shown in a dusty, dirty factory to a girl who had thought only ugliness existed there.

## Happy Birthday, Jesus!

When Michelle Cox's grandchildren began peppering her with questions about which gifts under the tree would go to which child, she realized that since it's Jesus' birthday, she needed to give Him a gift, too! As recalled in an article for *Guideposts*, here are the four GIFTS this wise grandmother decided to get the Christ Child:

**G**—"I'm going to **GIVE** unto others in His name. And as I do, I'll share about God's goodness and faithfulness and His most perfect gift that's available for all—His gift of love wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

**I**—"I'm going to **INVITE** others to share Christmas with my family. God's welcome mat is out for everyone. Why shouldn't I do the same? Senior citizens, single parents and those far from home and family are often alone at Christmas. I can easily set extra plates on the dinner table and offer a warm welcome as we celebrate the reason for the season."

**F**—"I'm going to **FIND** opportunities to spend time with Him. That's one of the most special gifts I can give. Finding time to read His love letter to me, to talk with Him and to be still long enough so that I can hear His whispers to my heart."

**T**—"I'm going to give Him **THANKS** for all He's done. God's been so good and blessed my family so much that I could never thank Him enough, but I can try. And I hope that my words of praise will be music to His ears, almost like a Christmas carol from my heart to His."

## Hope For Those Who Have None

It can be very difficult when life circumstances are cold or grim to focus on the beautiful. But the story of the Nativity offers hope for those who have none. Who would have ever thought that the birth of an innocent baby in a stable would bring the most powerful message the world has ever known? "Do not be afraid," the archangel told bewildered shepherds—and Linus told Charlie Brown.

"[I] was in my parents' den, in Rockville, Maryland, watching an 18-inch Philco black and white TV. The person proclaiming the gospel wasn't a priest or deacon or minister. It was a little boy with a blanket. It was *A Charlie Brown Christmas*," recalled Deacon Greg Kandra in a Christmas sermon.

Though the classic show found immediate popularity, it almost didn't make it on air. Deacon Kandra said, "The executives were nervous about not having a laugh track...nervous about using real children for the voices...and they were REALLY nervous about having that piece of Scripture

included...but [creator Charles] Schulz stuck to his guns. The result is one of television's most beloved and most popular Christmas specials."

In fact, that call to courage, to not be afraid, holds true, says the Deacon, no matter who you are or what tragedies have touched your life. "Even in this darkest of nights, there is light. A savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord. Here is our hope," said Deacon Kandra. "He didn't come in grandeur or majesty, to intimidate us. He came as the most helpless and dependent creature of all: a baby, in a manger, in Bethlehem. He loves us so much, God came to us as someone we could not help but love."

Bob from the factory in the story above may not have understood this concept philosophically or theologically, but he most surely understood it in his heart and through how he lived. His courage shone true through his fearless act of love toward his cruel coworkers. He was not afraid; he said "yes" to love!

## Saying “Yes” to Love

Any married couple can tell you that to love truly and purely involves a constant “yes.” A vow before God to say “yes” to each other every day through sickness and health, for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse. To say “yes” to children, to say “yes” to a lifelong commitment.

Similarly, the miracle of Christmas—the greatest act of love ever revealed to mankind—also involved a “yes,” when Jesus embraced His Father’s request that He become flesh and blood to save a broken world.

“War, disease, poverty, and the senseless loss of innocent life can make us ask, ‘Where is God?’ Sometimes it can even seem like the darkness might swallow us up,” wrote Brother Silas Henderson in a blog post for Aleteia.

“But what we, as people of faith, celebrate at Christmas is the reality that God is here, present among us, working within us, now. So, the question we must ask ourselves this Christmas is how we will allow that ‘Yes’ to shape our lives so that the Gift of Christmas isn’t forgotten or lost after a day or even a season.”

Saying “yes” isn’t a stagnant act. Love grows and keeps giving, as Connie Casaras discovered through a simple basket left on her porch. A single mom, struggling to raise teenagers and pay the bills, she was exhausted from working two jobs and taking college courses at night.

She went to the bank to withdraw enough cash to get her family through the holidays. When she got home, she saw a Christmas basket sitting on her front porch.

She searched for a card in the basket, “filled to the brim with all sorts of holiday foodstuffs.” She had no clue where this unexpected blessing had come from. Was it a neighbor, or a charity drive? The timing was perfect; it would help stretch the money through the holidays. But then, she says, she became overwhelmed with guilt. Could someone use it more?

“Yes, my kids and I were struggling, but my grandparents and Aunt Shirley, who was deaf, relied solely on Social Security and disability checks, sometimes pooling their resources to get by. At least I could always pick up extra hours at work. And when I finished my degree, things would improve a lot,” she recalled in an article for *Guideposts*.

Eventually, she said her conscience won the debate. She drove to her grandparents’ little two-room home, across the street from her Aunt Shirley’s, and presented the basket. Her grandmother was thrilled and shared that the timing couldn’t have been better. They, too, were struggling to make do over the holidays.

“On the way home, thinking about Grandma’s smile, I knew the basket had gone to the right place. But...I still worried about how I could afford to make Christmas special for my kids. Then I saw it in front of my house, in the same spot as before—an identical Christmas basket, every bit as lovely as the first.”

This Christmas, choose courage! Do not be afraid to open your heart up to love and to Jesus; to say “yes” to the miracles that He places into small moments in each day. You will never regret sharing that love with others, and will be awed at the blessings that will come back to you!

  
**“It’s better to light one candle  
than to curse the darkness.”**

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*“I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to  
keep it all the year.”*  
—Charles Dickens