

Celebrating Christmas all the Year Through
(Rev. Dr. John Bartol)

There have been many stories about the 'Night before Christmas', now let us consider the reflections of a father on the 'Night after Christmas.'

"The house is quiet. The children are in bed. Soon the clean up will begin. Decorations will come down, Christmas trees thrown out. Size 14 will be exchanged for size 18. The hardest part is when I look in my wallet and find it empty.

But this year, for our family, Christmas was different. We decided early that we would give generously to those less fortunate, both near home and overseas. As a family, we attended the Christmas Eve service at church. As minds and hearts were open to receive a blessing from the music and message, many of us had a sense of the presence of God. Many memories of home and childhood were awakened as I recalled the innocent faith I once had, in contrast to the cynicism and carnality of our world today. I even made a resolve to be more than a Christmas/Easter church-goer."

Yes, we can agree with that father that there are more precious memories, along with goodwill and generosity expressed at Christmas than any other time of the year. So I ask, why confine Christmas to just one day out of 365? For a few days most of us were happy. Why? Because we were focused on others. We thought about the blind lady down the street and the needy family across town.

But after Christmas we may feel sad. Why? Could it be because we are thinking of ourselves again? But wait a minute, when Christmas is over, the blind lady is still without sight. People at the nursing home and hospital still need visits. And if we are honest, we would admit that happiness is not found in expensive gifts or lavish entertaining. It is not found in receiving but in giving the gift that made someone happy.

At the first Christmas, Christ brought into the world of principle which is the very opposite to the selfish greed which seems to be all around us today. It is only the love of God in our hearts that will bring the desire to share with others.

God placed his Christmas gift on a tree – the old rugged cross. This gift of salvation is freely offered to all who come in heartfelt repentance and faith. Instead of trying to celebrate Christmas without the one whose birthday it is, let us all receive his gift of eternal life. He alone can fill our hearts with joy, peace, and make Christmas what it ought to be.

So, if Christmas for you means asking: "What's in it for me, what am I going to receive?" Then you will celebrate Christmas one day of the year. But, if you want

to give to others and to God, you will carry the Christmas spirit the entire year through, all 365 days.