
THE CURRENT

Christmas

- December 2025 -





*"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."
Luke 2:11*

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Nativity

Did you know that the first nativity wasn't a set of figurines, but a live, dramatic scene enacting the Christmas story? It is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi in the year 1223. It took place in a cave in the Italian town of Greccio. The scene inspired other such dramatizations as well as countless sculptures that quickly spread across Italy and eventually the world.



From the Pastor's Desk

It's funny how Christmas changes as you get older. From an early age, my favorite part was the parties. Seeing cousins I only saw a few times a year was a highlight of the season. I especially loved the years when the cousins from Georgia made the trip. My cousin, Micah, and I were only six months apart in age and she was one of my best friends as a kid. Seeing her at Christmas was always something I looked forward to.

As I got older, the presents began to take the top spot. I'd spy the gifts under the tree with my name on the tag. All throughout dinner, I'd imagine what could be inside the perfectly wrapped gifts. On the way home from Grandma's house I'd hold my favorite gift in my hands, studying the box it came in. If there were instructions, I'd carefully read them cover to cover in the glow of the streetlights as we drove home.

Today, I find myself more drawn to the decorations. I love reminiscing as we put the ornaments on the tree. I think back to where each one came from and the season of life it represents. Our tree is now a couple decades of memories as a couple and young family. There are ornaments from other countries, handmade treasures from our kids and a few that remind us of places we used to live.

It's one of the reasons I've grown more fond of nativity sets. They also send my mind back to days of long ago. Days when wise men searched for a king. Days when shepherds' sleep was interrupted by a choir of angels. Days when a young couple were the first to hold the savior of the world. This Christmas, no matter what your favorite part is, I hope it draws your heart back to the first Christmas. I hope it draws you back to Jesus.

- *Justin Fluhr*



I Wonder as I Wander

Reflections on a Christmas Carol

I first heard the song “I Wonder as I Wander” in the 1950s, while a student at Lafayette High School, when the song’s composer, John Jacob Niles, performed there. Most of us students had never heard of him, even though this famous singer, composer and collector of folk songs lived with his family not far away in Clark County, on a thirty-two acre farm adjoining Blue Grass Christian Camp.*

But when we’d gathered in the school auditorium to hear him, we were captivated by his delightful personality, his engaging stories and the wonderful songs he had composed or had discovered in his research. At first, his high-pitched singing voice sounded strange to us, but we were soon drawn in by the intensity and drama in his singing, and by his own accompaniment with a dulcimer he had handcrafted.



Ever since, “I Wonder as I Wander” has been one of my favorite Christmas songs. Mr. Niles recorded this account of the song’s origin: “The place was Murphy, North Carolina, and the time was July, 1933. The Morgan family,

revivalists all, were about to be ejected by the police, after having camped in the town square for some little time, cooking, washing, hanging their wash from the Confederate monument and generally conducting themselves in such a way as to be classed a public nuisance. Preacher Morgan and his wife pled poverty; they had to hold one more

meeting in order to buy enough gas to get out of town.

“It was then that Annie Morgan came out – a tousled, unwashed blond, and very lovely. She sang the first three lines of the verse of ‘I Wonder As I Wander.’ At twenty-five cents a performance, I tried to get her to sing all the

*About ten years after Mr. Niles's death in 1980, the camp purchased the property from his widow, Rena.



song. After eight tries, all of which are carefully recorded in my notes, I had only three lines of verse, a garbled fragment of melodic material—and a magnificent idea. With the writing of additional verses and the development of the original melodic material, 'I Wonder As I Wander' came into being."

Since the late 1930s, the song, with its simple, yet thought-provoking, words and hauntingly beautiful melody has been performed and recorded by soloists, choral groups and orchestras all over the English-speaking world.

That word "on'ry" in the verse that begins and ends the song comes from the dialect of the people of the Appalachian mountains, where John Jacob Niles spent years collecting songs. Many of the songs had been brought to America long before by immigrants from England and other parts of Europe. The word, pronounced "AWN-ree," is an Americanization of the English word "ordinary." The King of Heaven, the lyrics say, was born in a cow's stall for poor, ordinary people like you and I.

That's who we are, even if we should claim, as did Napoleon Bonaparte, "I am not an ordinary man, and the laws of morals and of custom were never made for me." Napoleon was created by the same and only God as were we, to be His and to live worthy of His dwelling with us. And like each of us, Napoleon rebelled against God and lost fellowship with Him. We do well, then, to wonder why our Creator would come to die for such as we are.

The Apostle Paul answers, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). And to each of us who will accept this gift of love, God promises eternal life with Himself, as a truly extraordinary being: "Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

So, as C.S. Lewis explains, with regard to what each person is *becoming*, there are no ordinary people. In his sermon, "The Weight of Glory," he says, "The dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare..."

"There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal... it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors."

Even someone as "on'ry" as poor Annie Morgan may be revealed in eternity to be an "everlasting splendor," while the most beautiful, wealthy and influential woman in the world may be revealed to be an "immortal horror." For each of us, how we shall appear depends on our response during this life to God's gift of His Son.

I used to ask my Indian Bible students, "How did Jesus' birth prove He was the Son of God?" The answer, of course, is that His birth fulfilled so many Old Testament prophecies. Often, though, a student would answer, "Because He was born in a cow shed." Yes, He was, I'd tell them, but that couldn't prove His deity, for many a child has been born in lowly circumstances.

My husband, Phillip, was one of those. On the bitterly cold Tibetan night before he was born, robbers invaded his family's poor hovel for

the eleventh time that winter and stole nearly everything they had. At dawn his mother gave birth to him on a bare bed, for all their bedding had been stolen. Then she had nothing to wrap him in, for the robbers had taken even the few baby clothes she had prepared for him. Some might say her child was even less than ordinary.

But some of God's people on the other side of the world had learned of Tibet's people, living in spiritual darkness, unbelievably poor and oppressed. So, they journeyed there to live among them, to show them in word and deed what they were created to be.

As a youth, Phillip heard those foreigners, and he watched them. He experienced in their love for him and for his people the very love of the one true God they spoke of. And he believed that this God became a man named Yesu, who came down to earth to live among ordinary people and to die, so they could be with Him forever. Those Spirit-led men and women gave him the hope of a glorious eternity and a lifelong desire to follow their example.

As we wander here under God's sky, wondering at the miracle of Christ's coming down to us, may He grant us the power, as Paul prayed, "*to grasp how wide and high and long and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge*" (Ephesians 3:17-18).



I WONDER AS I WANDER
by John Jacob Niles

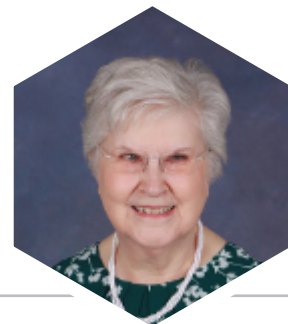
I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die
For poor on'ry people like you and like I . . .
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

When Mary birthed Jesus 'twas in a cow's stall,
With wise men and farmers and shepherds and all,
But high from God's heaven a star's light did fall,
And the promise of ages it then did recall.

If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing,
A star in the sky, or a bird on the wing,
Or all of God's angels in heav'n for to sing,
He surely could have it, 'cause he was the King.

I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die
For poor on'ry people like you and like I . . .
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

Margaret Ho





Finding Joy in the Manger

A Christmas Reflection

Christmas. The word itself evokes images of twinkling lights, festive gatherings, and the joyful anticipation of presents. But beneath the surface of the holiday cheer lies a deeper truth: the profound joy that comes from encountering the Christ child.

This Christmas, let us peel back the layers of commercialism and tradition to rediscover the true source of Christmas joy: the humble birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem.



The Unexpected Joy of Simplicity:

In the midst of our bustling lives, filled with endless to-do lists and the pressure to create the "perfect" Christmas, it's easy to forget the simplicity of the first Christmas. Imagine the scene: a stable, a humble manger, a young mother, a bewildered father, and a divine child.

There was no pomp or circumstance, no grand announcement. The news of Jesus' birth was first revealed to shepherds, ordinary men tending their flocks by night. This unexpected simplicity of the event should humble us and remind us that true joy is often found in the quiet moments, in the unexpected places, and in the embrace of the ordinary.

The Joy of Hope:

The birth of Jesus ushered in a new era of hope for humanity. A hope that transcended the limitations of human understanding, a hope that offered forgiveness for our sins, and a hope for eternal life.

Isaiah, centuries before the birth of Christ, prophesied, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

This message of hope, born in a humble manger, continues to resonate with us today. It offers a beacon of light in the midst of darkness, a promise of peace in a world torn apart by conflict, and a source of comfort in times of sorrow and despair.

The Joy of Love:

At the heart of the Christmas story lies the profound love of God for humanity. God, in his infinite love, sent his own Son to dwell among us, to share our joys and sorrows, and to ultimately offer us the path to salvation.

The apostle John wrote, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). This verse encapsulates the essence of the Christmas message: God's unwavering love for each and every one of us, a love that knows no bounds.

Finding Joy in the Present Moment:

In our pursuit of happiness, we often chase fleeting pleasures and material possessions. But true joy is not found in the accumulation of things, but in the cultivation of a grateful heart.

This Christmas, let us focus on the present moment. Let us savor the joy of being with loved ones, the beauty of the season, and the simple pleasures of life. Let us cultivate gratitude for the blessings we have received, both big and small.

Sharing the Joy with Others:

The Christmas season is a time for giving, not just of material gifts, but of our time, our talents, and our love. Let us reach out to those who are lonely or in need, offering a helping hand, a listening ear, and the warmth of human connection.

Let us share the joy of the Christmas story with others, not just through words, but through our actions. Let us be a light in the darkness, reflecting the love and compassion of Christ to the world around us.

Cultivating Inner Peace:

In the midst of the holiday hustle and bustle, it's easy to lose sight of the true meaning of Christmas. Take time for quiet reflection. Spend time in prayer and meditation, allowing the peace of Christ to fill your heart.

Practice acts of self-care, such as spending time in nature, listening to calming music, or engaging in a favorite hobby. These practices can help to quiet the mind, reduce stress, and cultivate a deeper sense of inner peace.



Rediscovering the Magic of Childhood:

One of the most beautiful aspects of Christmas is the sense of wonder and excitement it evokes, especially in children. Let us recapture that sense of childlike wonder this Christmas. Look at the world through the eyes of a child, filled with curiosity and a sense of awe. Embrace the magic of the season, the twinkling lights, the joyful carols, and the anticipation of Christmas morning.

A Christmas Invitation:

This Christmas, I invite you to rediscover the true source of Christmas joy: the birth of Jesus Christ. Let us peel back the layers of commercialism and tradition to encounter the humble child in the manger. Let us allow the message of hope, love, and peace to fill our hearts and transform our lives.

May this Christmas be filled with joy, peace, and the enduring love of God.

Further Reflections:

- How can you simplify your Christmas this year and focus on the true meaning of the season?
- How can you share the joy of Christmas with others in your community?
- What steps can you take to cultivate inner peace and reduce stress during the holiday season?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for the gift of your birth. Thank you for your love, your grace, and your unending mercy. Help us to rediscover the true meaning of Christmas and to share your love with the world. Amen.

I hope this has prompted you to explore the deeper meaning of Christmas, encouraging you to find joy in the simplicity of the event, the hope it offers, and the profound love it embodies. Providing practical tips for cultivating inner peace, sharing the joy with others, and rediscovering the magic of the season.

*Robert Vela
Executive Minister*



Christmas Time's a Comin'

*Ernie Perry
Connections Minister*



Yesterday, November 5, I got a reminder that my assigned Current article for the Christmas issue is due next week. I thought, "Already? I just went trick or treating with my grandkids a few days ago and I haven't even read the Current October/November issue yet!"

Every year my family and church fall schedule can be challenging. There is a lot to plan, prepare, and execute, and I get this reminder, "Ernie, 'Christmas Time's A Comin'!"

Pam grew up loving hearing her country grandmother sing that song in her apron in her farmhouse kitchen. Since the early eighties, Emmy Lou Harris's version of that song is an annual favorite played often in our home.



As much as I love and look forward to “the most wonderful time of the year,” I know from past experiences, it can sometimes be the most stressful and frustrating time of the year. For me, it has also been disappointing as it hasn’t always lived up to all the festive, merry Christmas hype. I won’t go into all the reasons why, but I think you probably have some reasons why your Griswold old-fashioned family Christmas doesn’t always work out the way you hoped.

Can I suggest a possible solution that is pretty simple? Here it is - STOP!

At least nine times in the gospels our Lord Jesus stopped and cut out time in his busy schedule to be still and be with his Father.

While we are hopeful there will be fun, laughter, and rich conversations in our season of hustle and bustle, there can also rise a subtle joy killer if the season is not intentionally kept in a spiritual perspective. To choose to actively embrace God’s holy presence beats any of man’s physical presents. But sadly, it’s often the earthly that takes precedence over the heavenly.

While doing some incredible healings and ministry to multitudes of hurting people, Jesus

often withdrew to solitary places... gardens, mountainsides, boats. Why? He knew his strength came not from his great works, but from being with the One who sent and empowered Him. See Mark 1:35, 45; 3:13, 6:31-32, 46; Luke 5:15-16, 6:12-13.

Earlier today, I was feeling bothered by all the tasks and what people needed me to do. So, I decided to do what Jesus did... I withdrew to a quiet, solitary place... which is often hard to do most days in the church building. Since it was a beautiful day, I went outside and found a quiet place... I lay down in a freshly mowed ravine on the back of the church property, about fifteen yards from the dumpster! Thankfully the dumpster was new and didn’t smell.

With the warm sun in my face, I exhaled a deep sigh and said, “Lord, what do you have to say to me this afternoon, because I am struggling?”

Do you know what a small, still voice said to my spirit? “Do all things without whining or complaining (which comes from Philippians 2:14). The Nigerian Christians have it so much worse than you right now. Count your blessings.”

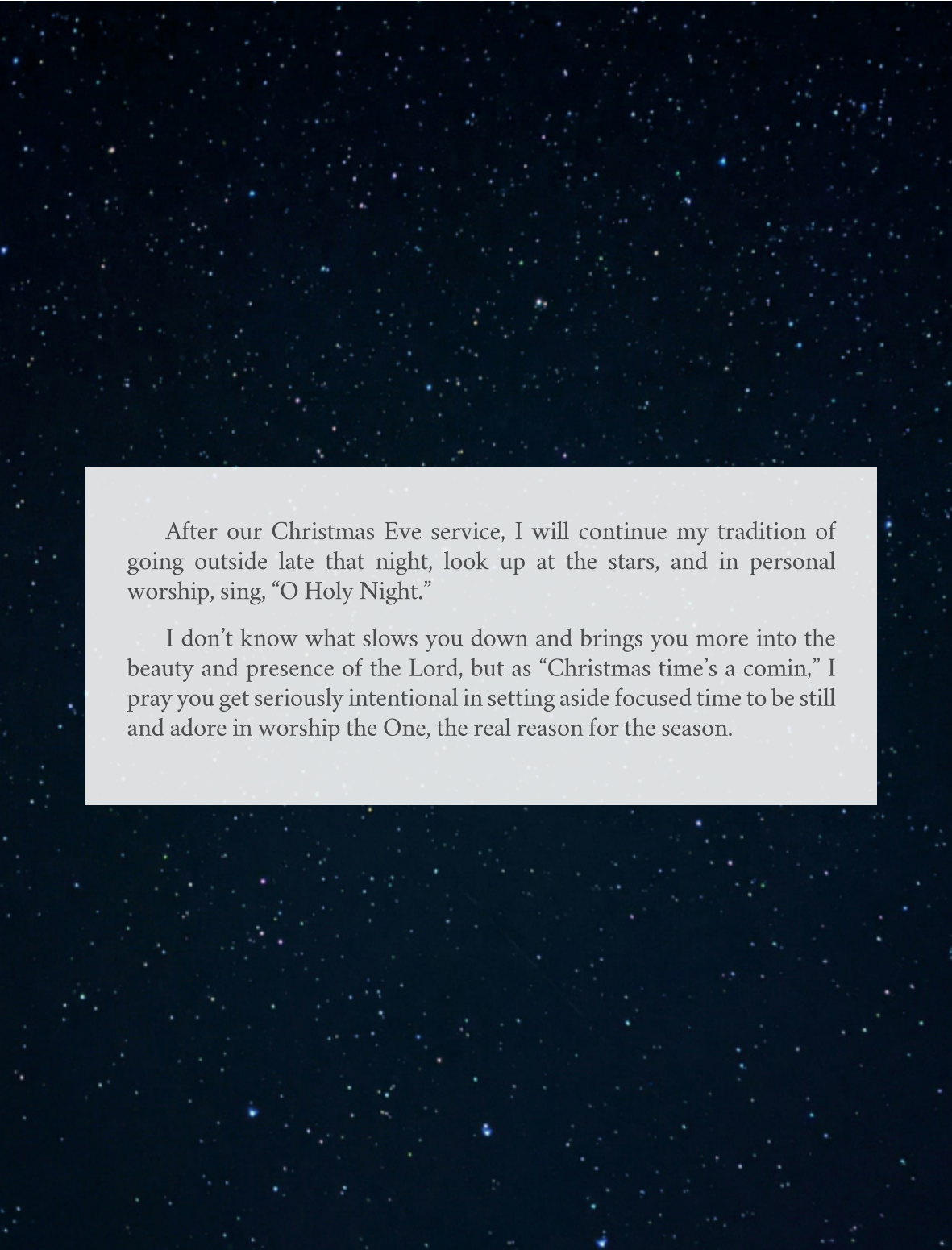


Ouch! That stung. So, I did. I started counting my blessings and my heart and mind became calm, and after about fifteen minutes I went back to the office with a new attitude and worked until it was time for Refresh. Calm came because I stopped, carved out some time to be with the Lord, and He made good of it.

I know my December will be probably like yours, packed full and busy. But I have intentionally marked in my calendar my annual trip to my childhood home and church in Indiana. I go there to spend time with the Lord at my special tree in the woods. Me and my brother's names are still carved there since 1964. I am also setting aside Christmas devotional books to read in the morning and evening in my solitary man cave at home.

Pam is putting together a Christmas song list for us to play and be still before our decorated tree in our family room, for the purpose to focus on Jesus, his birth, and the blessings his coming brings.





After our Christmas Eve service, I will continue my tradition of going outside late that night, look up at the stars, and in personal worship, sing, "O Holy Night."

I don't know what slows you down and brings you more into the beauty and presence of the Lord, but as "Christmas time's a comin," I pray you get seriously intentional in setting aside focused time to be still and adore in worship the One, the real reason for the season.



Missionary Recap

We have been fortunate this year to have had visits from four of our global missionaries. It is both inspiring and humbling to hear them report on their work in Ethiopia and Mexico.

The Alvarado family was in the missions house for several months while they visited churches to raise support for their next church plant in Mexico. They are hoping for some year-end gifts that will let them take full advantage of a matching gift from one of their churches. They are back in Mexico working on plans for the new church and are looking forward to having Holly's brother, Andrew, join them as soon as he has raised his needed sustaining support. He will work with youth and worship.



The Aaron Weeks family spent a weekend with us in June. They had only a two-month furlough in order for the children to be back in Addis at the start of the school year and for Morganne to continue her work with the Bingham Academy. Since they returned to Ethiopia, they have hosted a work team from their home church and welcomed a new team member, Anne. She was an intern two years ago and has now joined the CMF team in Addis full time.





The Travis Weeks family was with us for a week in July. They had planned to take a two-month furlough as Aaron and family did, but another opportunity came up. They stayed in the States for the fall semester as Missionaries in Residence at Milligan University. This is a blessing for both the college and CMF. Travis is teaching a class in missions, and the family is involved with students who can learn what missions work really entails. Missionary in Residence programs are one of CMF's best recruiting methods. The students touched by the missionary will graduate over a four-year period. In this one year alone, five of the 2025 CMF Reach interns were recruited as a result of the last Missionary in Residence that Milligan hosted.

The Gutierrez family has been in the missions house since early June. They are here to raise sustaining support for their work in Mexico City. They have presented their work in many churches and are waiting for year-end decisions from various missions committees. They hope to return to Mexico in December.

Carolyn Nipper
Global Missions



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