

The LCF Connection

December 2013

Have Yourself a Simple Little Christmas

by Phyllis Swartz

At this time of the year, I often hear calls for a simpler Christmas. These calls for simplicity make me remember Christmas when I was a young child—no Christmas tree, no Santa Claus coming down the chimney, and no Christmas stockings. Instead, we set up a wooden manger scene with straw from the barn, went to church on Christmas morning, opened a few gifts after church, and rode through the peaceful countryside to a big family dinner.

My husband's childhood Christmas was even less complicated. When



he and his ten brothers and sisters came down the stairs to a Christmas breakfast, they found a table set with an orange and a bag of nuts and maybe a dollar bill at each place. And that was it. After all, every day for a Christian should be a celebration.

This is not how it looks at our house on Christmas day. The first thing you'd see if you came into our house on Christmas morning would be a Christmas tree in the foyer—with lots of gifts underneath. With eight grandchildren, even a few gifts for each pile up. And outside, our house is lit up like a Christmas card. After all, we live on Main Street where London celebrates its Old-Fashioned Christmas. The refrigerator, freezers, and pantry are stocked with ham, turkey, casseroles, and Christmas cookies. That's part of being long-distance grandparents and welcoming home a growing family for days at a time.

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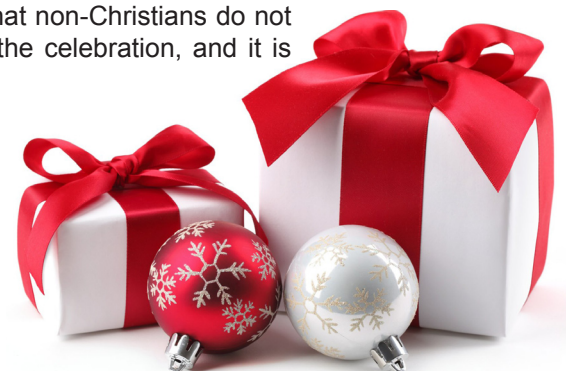
Holiday Contentment

by Jennifer Cooper

"What does Christmas mean to you?" That was the question posed by Pastor Rob to our small group on our first study on the topic of what the Bible has to say about Thanksgiving and Christmas. Some of the items that quickly came to everyone's minds were gifts, decorations, shopping, spending time with family, having time off of work (except for those in the group so blessed as to work in retail!), lots of delicious food, the nativity, Christmas plays, and of course celebrating the birth of Christ. However, we all agreed that, as Christians, the reason for our celebration is clearly the gift of Jesus' birth; God becoming man in order to sacrifice himself for our eternal salvation. Although we may bemoan the excessive commercialization of the holiday, we also understand that non-Christians do not truly comprehend the reason for the celebration, and it is up to us to spread the real joy of Christmas, the good news of the gospel.

Pastor Rob also asked each of us to anonymously write down how much we thought we would spend on immediate family members and how much we thought we would spend overall

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London Christian Fellowship seeks to develop authentic and passionate followers of Jesus Christ.

This all doesn't sound so simple, does it? Should we go back to an orange on a plate? To church on Christmas morning? To limiting decorations to a manger scene? What is a simple Christmas?

I propose that a simple Christmas is one with a singular purpose—to celebrate the incarnation of God almighty from the perfection of heaven to the imperfection of earth in the form of a vulnerable baby, Jesus Christ. So what does a Christmas with such a purpose include?

- **Worship:** On the first Christmas morning the great company of the heavenly hosts praised God saying, "Glory to God in the highest . . ." As a child I worshipped at my church on Christmas morning. This year, we will read the scripture with our children and grandchildren and sing and pray. Whatever our Christmas activities, they should include our attention to God almighty.
- **Peace:** On the first Christmas morning, the angels told the shepherds not to be afraid, wishing peace for those on earth. I remember feeling so secure, so peaceful at my grandparents' farm on Christmas day. We have no country home, but I want people who come to our home during the Christmas season to taste a bit of the peace of God. If Christmas lights and music help that to happen, I'm glad because we all get so many hard knocks and we all need to experience a little peace on earth.
- **Celebration:** "Good news of great joy" is how the angels described what happened on Christmas morning. And if we give gifts (oranges or iPads) to symbolize the great gift from God, if we practice for Christmas programs that show the good news, if we sing Christmas carols and deliver food baskets to share the joy, then we participate with the angels in celebration.
- **Incarnation:** "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you," the angel of the Lord said to the shepherds. When I was a child, my parents and my grandparents made it possible for people to be with people. They baked the pies and opened the table wide. Now it's my turn. When I make ways during Christmas for my family to come home and for people who need love to experience a little love at Christmas, then I am living incarnationally.



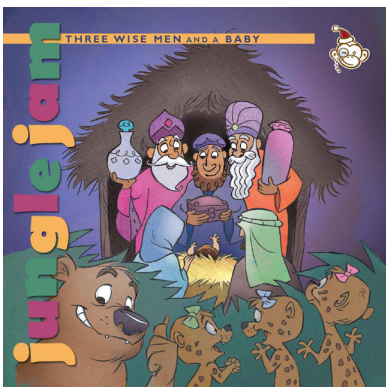
If you asked my husband, he would tell you that his childhood, orange-on-a-plate Christmases were worshipful, peaceful, celebratory, and incarnational. I think that if you asked him about our Christmases now, he would say they are worshipful, peaceful (well, maybe not with eight grandchildren), celebratory, and incarnational. One way isn't right, and the other way isn't wrong. What is important is the purpose behind how we celebrate Christmas.

And, to tell you the truth, It would be fun for me to one more time be a little girl with pigtails in Grantsville, Maryland, on a snowy Christmas morning. But, actually, here in London, Ohio, I'm doing the same things I did then—worshipping God, sharing some peace, celebrating, and being with people. In this way, Christmas is just as simple as it used to be.

Three Wise Men and A Baby

If you think that figuring out what to buy for the people on your shopping list is an unsolvable mystery, don't miss "Three Wise Men and A Baby", here at LCF on Sunday, December 15, at 6:30 p.m.

Finding the right gift for someone's birthday is often challenging. Finding the ideal Christmas gift can also be difficult. Finding the perfect gift for someone whose birthday happens to fall on Christmas day is nearly impossible. But what do you give someone whose birthday is the very reason for the season? If there were ever a time not to give a tie, this would be it. Or would this be the one time in all of history when a colorful paisley tie is not only appropriate but tasteful and considerate? Yeah, it seems unlikely to us too, but find out for yourself as the children of LCF, aka the Jungle Jam gang, help tell the story of Christmas from Luke 2:1-21.



Source: <http://fancymonkey.com/Web/JJam/ThreeWise.htm>



- Who Am I Answers:
1. Kendra Scheffel and Bryce Swartz
 2. Evan Hosteler
 3. Mandi Scheffel, Emma Hosteler and Amber Wofford
 4. Dave Stewart
 5. John Renninger, Rachel Troyer and Kaleigh Duncan

Getting to Know...Nicole Ayers

Interviewed by Candice Mast



Can you tell us a little about the place you grew up?

I grew up in a small town in Southeastern Ohio called Caldwell. We moved to a farm there when I was in 3rd grade. My mother is a teacher and got a job at the local school district. It literally has 2 stop lights and I graduated with 84 people in my class—very small! We had cattle, horses, rabbits and dogs. I moved to Columbus to pursue my degree in Graphic Design and Business at Bradford School, and lived all over Columbus.

So, what brought you to London?

I landed a job in West Jefferson and my father told me about London. He is a retired police officer and often taught and trained at the correctional facility and peace officer building in London. He knew that I would love the style of homes in town. So I found my first home and bought it!

If you could live anywhere in the world besides London, where would it be?

I would have to say either NYC or Ireland!

While we're dreaming, what's something you have never done but would like to do some day?

I would love to travel and do a mission trip; share the word of God through my singing and bring others to Christ.

What do you do for a living?

I am the Training Facilitator for Restoration Hardware Care Center in West Jefferson. I train all of the advocates they hire in for Customer Service and often train across site in our sister building in Tracy, CA. I also do freelance graphic design on the side: logos, business cards, and wedding invitations. I also have been singing my entire life and studied vocal performance for two years. I often record in my home studio and get hired for weddings!

And what are some things you enjoy doing in your free time?

Singing, music, art, bowling, hiking, camping, shopping and just sitting by the bonfire with friends. I also like to travel some.

Are you outgoing or are you more reserved?

I am very outgoing! I love life and love to have fun!

What's your favorite childhood memory?

I was visiting Niagara Falls with my family and I was so mesmerized by the falls, I ran into a light pole, got the biggest monkey bubble on my forehead and everyone around me felt so bad and thought I was so cute that they bought me ice cream!

What are some things you worry about?

I worry about finances a lot, I am single and live alone and it's tough sometimes. Living paycheck to paycheck isn't a blast. I try my best to give it to God and not worry, but it's hard.

Do you have a favorite Christmas tradition?

My family always goes to Amish Country and we buy cheese and meats and crackers. On Christmas Eve, we all gather and eat cheese, meat, wings, and watch "It's A Wonderful Life" and "White Christmas" We have never missed a year!

How will you spend Christmas this year?

Hopefully with my family, who I don't see often, in Caldwell!!!

Thank you for sharing, Nicole! It was fun getting to know you!



MEMBERSHIP

Be sure to mark your calendars for our 1st annual **Membership Celebration** on **Sunday, January 12th**. Everyone is invited!

The evening will include:

- A look back at this past year at LCF
- Taking in new members
- All members reaffirming their commitment to LCF
- Opportunities for participation
- And of course, some good food! :)

on Christmas gifts this year. There was consistency, somewhat surprisingly, in our estimated expenditures, and consistency also, though less surprisingly, in our reasons for wanting to give gifts. Several individuals commented about not wanting to disappoint children and other family members, but at the same time not wanting to overemphasize material gifts when the true reason for our celebration is the gift of our Savior.

We discussed the pervasiveness of our society's culture of consumerism. Several people pointed out that as soon as Halloween was over, Christmas marketing kicked into high gear. Christmas advertising seems to get earlier and earlier every year. It felt to many of us that Thanksgiving is altogether ignored these days. However, as Christians, we recognize the need for thankfulness all throughout the year, in all circumstances.

We ended our discussion with the reading of several biblical passages highlighting thankfulness. I encourage you to read over the verses we read together that evening: Colossians 3:15-17, Psalm 107:1, Ephesians 1:16-17, Philippians 4:12-13 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18.



The last two of these highlighted the importance of being grateful to God in all circumstances. Paul says in Philippians 4:12-13 *"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."* What beautiful faith it takes to be truly content in any circumstance!

Everyone in the group agreed that we should all strive to have such a grateful heart, and to share our thankfulness and blessings with others. It is up to each one of us to live out, and share with our community, the true messages of Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Who Am I? *A pictorial look back at some Christmas's past...*



1. Mary and Joseph in LCf's 2004 Christmas program
2. An LCF baby born in December 2006
3. Three adorable sheep
4. A Christmas Tree Graduate
5. Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus in 2007



The LCF Connection

A monthly newsletter designed to enhance communication at London Christian Fellowship

What did you think? If any of the stories in this Connection sparked an idea or opinion you'd like to share, email us at connection@lcfweb.org. Editors: Doris Swartz, Trish Eaton and Candice Mast
If you prefer that we do not use photos of you in the Connection, you may opt out by emailing us at connection@lcfweb.org.