

Opinion

'Tidings of great joy'

By HARTLEY COLES

For me Christmas is fundamentally religious. Although I enjoy the secular and the profane parts of the holiday it is the religious message I try to keep paramount.

I like all the fluff about falling snow and Dickensian characters singing carols under flickering gaslights, but my mind tells me it is the icing on the cake. There has to be a lot more to Christmas than these customs.

I've heard all the stories of how Christmas customs originated in ancient Greece and Rome, how the Druids cut holly and used it in their ceremonies at Stonehenge and other megalithic stone circles in olde England. I've enjoyed the stories of how Santa Claus originated from some old Norse god and was transformed into a jolly old elf by writers such as American Washington Irving and his successor Clement Moore.

I turn mellow when the late Bing Crosby croons one of his most successful hits, 'I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas'. I enjoy those Christmas dinners with the turkey and all the trimmings followed by the pudding which everyone tries to cram into stomachs already burdened by feasting. I love singing the carols which never seem to lose their appeal.

In deference to my neighbors I install outdoor lights on the bushes and the house so the street resembles a fairyland each Christmas season. I love to see the snow falling on the evergreens, big soft flakes which caress the branches and cover the lawns and roofs with a sparkling blanket.

I love to see the faces of children as they creep down the stairs before the stars have gone to bed to see what Santa has brought them. I enjoy meeting old friends and new during the holidays and basking in the good will everyone seems to radiate during the Yule season.

And yet, if all these customs and music of Christmas were to disappear into some dark void the real message of Christmas would still be there for us to ponder and reflect on each season.

Many writers have tried and some have succeeded in relating the force of events which occurred in Bethlehem, in that space of time between BC and AD. But few have succeeded with such simplicity and with such brevity of language as did Luke in the New Testament.

AND IT CAME TO PASS in those days, that here went out a decree from Casar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

2. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria).

3. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David):

5. To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

8. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying:

14. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

20. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

- Luke, chapter 2.
K.J.V.



Searching for that special present

Christmas — it's a time for giving, caring, sharing, and in some cases even tearing (the house down).

That's the way it was in my house as a kid growing up. Every year I went ripping through the house looking for a certain precious box that mother had hidden.

Don't get the wrong idea. I really could wait until Christmas Day but most of the fun was beating my mother at her own game. I could find her hiding place. No matter where it was.

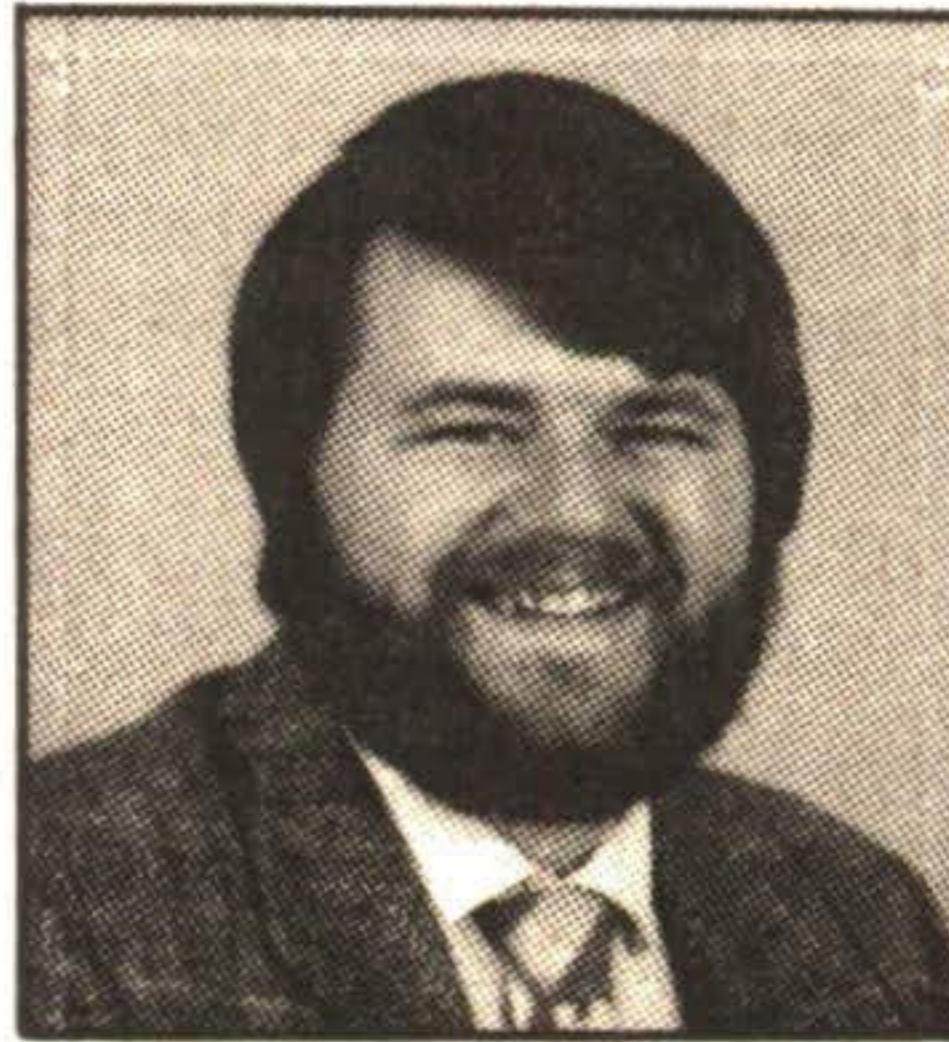
Thinking back I must admit that my mother had some pretty ingenious hiding places. I really had to give her credit, but none of those special spots escaped the nose of this future newshound. I could sniff these parcels out a mile away.

And one year I darn near had to sniff a mile away.

You see, my mother was getting sick and tired of me finding the 'newest' secret hiding place. The closet, under the bed, and even the attic were out. Inside clothes drawers, in the garage or even our freezer were out of bounds; she'd already used all of those spots.

She needed some place new. Some place I couldn't, wouldn't or shouldn't look. She knew if it was in the house I would smell it out.

Well, I knew she had it. After all she made me stay out of the kitchen that eventful Saturday morning.



By
ROBIN
INSCOE

My being banned from the room left no doubt in my mind. She'd have the package done up in a bright box and hidden by the end of the day.

My mission: Find that package before Christmas Eve.

To my surprise it took me more than the usual couple of hours to find the secret spot this year. In fact it took me more than a couple of days. I was really getting worried.

Christmas was approaching fast and I'd been shut out. Not a crumb had I been able to detect. This was getting serious. I'd looked everywhere.

It wasn't in any of the usual places; it wasn't even in any of the unusual places. I even took my own room apart thinking that maybe she'd doubled back and hidden them right underneath my nose. Naw, she wouldn't do that. My nose would have smelled it out as soon as I'd walked into the room. Unless.... nope, no cold.

Just when things started looking hopeless I got my first clue. The neighbors dropped in for a pre-

Christmas drink and I seemed to detect that something was up. They showed up with a few little goodies... Goodies that had my name marked on them.

That was it. I was looking in the wrong house. What I was after wasn't anywhere to be found at my place. But let's go see what the neighbor's house has to offer.

With a little help from one of the neighbor's kids, Mission Impossible turned out to be like a walk in the park. I didn't even have to build up a sweat.

The first stop was the freezer. An unlikely spot to hide such a precious package. Not so.

There they were right on top of the neighbor's freezer. My mother's homemade SHORTBREAD COOKIES — the highlight of the Christmas season. Fresh, tantalizing morsels that I could down by the pound.

Oh, I couldn't tell my mother the jig was up. I just grabbed a dozen and let them defrost in my bedroom. The next day I went back and got a dozen more. Thankfully Christmas was only two days away.

You can't imagine the shock on my mother's face on Christmas Eve when she returned from the neighbor's, cookie tins in tow ... half empty cookie tins that was.

I told her I could smell them out a mile away.

Halton Hills

WEEKEND

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