



Kasilof Community Church

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What is the true meaning of Christmas? At first that seems like a very naive question, doesn't it. Within the church, I'm betting that without too much prodding you could ask most any child about the meaning of Christmas and they would answer that Christmas is about celebrating the birth of Christ. "And how do we celebrate," you could ask. "With presents!" they might respond. Balancing this often competing understanding of Christmas can be quite a challenge to parents. To better answer this question, I turn to no other than Charles Shultz's Peanuts characters. In *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Charlie Brown is not having a good day when tasked by Lucy with finding the perfect Christmas tree. When he returns with a spindly sapling, the ridicule he receives causes Charlie Brown to shout out, "Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about!" Enter Linus, who gives us the answer, "True Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about." He then walks to the center of the stage and says, "Lights please." In perfect unison, Linus quotes Luke 2:8-14 *"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."* Then Linus picks up his blanket and walks off stage left and over to Charlie Brown. He then says, "That's what Christmas is all about Charlie Brown." My response to that, "Well said Linus, well said." **Merry Christmas!**

A Winding, Waning Memory Lane

by Brent Johnson

I've always enjoyed retelling adventures. In fact, I tend to like that more than the adventures themselves. Adventures in the Advent are among those that have made life interesting.

When I was a freshman (1969-70) our wrestling coach took his family to Alyeska Ski Resort during Christmas break. He invited the local youth along and I was eager to go. Just one thing, I had only cross-country skis. To outfit with the bare minimum downhill skis required \$100. So I begged Dad with every whine and promised behavior alteration I could muster. And my Christmas present became a pair of wooden, downhill skis. I think my classmates, the McHone triplets and Jimmy Palmer, went on that trip.

The first day there was about 5 inches of newer snow, which had been rained on and a hard crust had formed. There was plenty of groomed area to use. Those of us who had never been "downhill" skiing before started on the rope tows. Sometime after lunch I skied off the groomed trail into snow that was abruptly about six inches higher. My ski tips went under the crust and



didn't climb to the surface. This made my ankles like icebreakers on the crusty snow. Inertia carried my body forward for a face-plant. I hadn't yet learned how to adjust the release mechanism in my bindings, so my boots stayed in the skis, while my nose came down like a sledgehammer. The force of which broke a ski and my heart in one fell swoop.

But Coach was resourceful. That night we got some epoxy, bent the ski back out straight and put it under the pop machine in the lobby. The pop machine clamped the ski to the floor, creating a flat surface and in the morning I was back in business. I soon found skiing to be absolutely

thrilling. Trips to Alyeska became a highlight of my high school life. I guess those skis may be my favorite present ever.

My favorite Christmas was 1973. I was in college in Oregon City. My best friend, Bruce Passe, and I were there, wrestling, while two of the McHone triplets were in Salem. Bruce had gone home for Thanksgiving but my family didn't offer me a similar ticket. The previous May, I had started dating Judy Blossom. Bruce received more tickets for home just ahead of Christmas. I bought tickets for Bemidji, Minnesota, where Judy and her parents were visiting her aunt, Laura Goodmonson. Somehow, I guess I hadn't made it clear to Judy that I was coming. I called her from the airport and after exchanging greetings I asked if she could come get me?

"Where are you," she asked?

"At the airport," I replied.

"Gasp! What? We'll be right there!"

A few minutes later she came running in the door. Her hair was long, straight, and blond. She had on a dark, fake fur coat, which set her hair off in contrast. She was 16, slender, and she was in my arms. I was 18 and happy.

Aunt Laura made me feel welcome and never complained about how much I ate. Being with Judy was better than skiing! My gift for her was Bridge Over Troubled Waters, the blockbuster Simon and Garfunkel LP-33 album.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson said:

The sense of the world is short, -
Long and various the report, -
To love and be beloved;
Men and gods have not outlearned it;
And, how oft soe'er they've turned it,
'Tis not to be improved.

For me that was the best Christmas. Judy and I were married in the Ninilchik Methodist Church in the spring of 1975. Christmases became mobile as we celebrated with her parents and family on Christmas Eve near Ninilchik, and with my family at sister Gail's house in Homer, on Christmas Day. Our first baby, Chris, arrived in March of 1977. During these years I was reading the

Bible and realized there may be more to being a Christian than the folks at the Methodist Church were experiencing. Jim Palmer had gone from being a fullflung heathen to a practicing Christian. I don't remember how that change transpired. I do know he was living in Anchorage. Jim ran a fish site near us in 1977. He was going to Abbott Loop Christian Center, a "full Gospel" gig in Anchorage.

"You should try Anchor Point Chapel," he told me. "I think the pastor there would be just right for you."

We did try that church and found the promise of a contemporary healing ministry to be exciting. Before long, though, I noticed something didn't fit. At nearly every service someone in need of healing came forward. But no one with a visible malady was ever healed. Still, life was good and our family grew. Samantha was born in 1978 and Nathan in 1980. We even joined a church commune and lived at Anchor Point the winter that Nathan was born. I think it was the 1979-80 year that we had no Christmas.

Russ Hicks was an "elder" there. He had previously been a Worldwide Church of God member. That group, led by Herbert W. Armstrong, followed parts of the Mosaic Law, kept the Sabbath and Holy Day feasts. They also didn't keep what they considered to be Christianized pagan holidays, such as Christmas. Russ visited me one day and told me he had gone back to believing that Christians should keep the Sabbath, feasts, and stay away from pagan holidays. And he told me he was soon to meet with Abbott Loop leaders and present his beliefs to them. I thought this could be the reason for no healings and decided to give it a try. So that winter we didn't keep Christmas at all. For the effort we got unhappy parents and didn't see a single miracle. Stupid me! Plenty of people have tried legalism and got no closer to God. Keeping the law is a trite trail. Russ never did make the presentation to the church and I soon abandoned his silliness.



By 1980 the 45-mile drive to Anchor Point had gotten tiring. Especially since we attended mid-week services and numerous special events. So we began attending Kalifonsky Christian Center, another Abbott Loop outreach, but only 25 miles away. The pastor was

a wonderful guy and I became an elder. By 1989 the church had changed pastors twice and I decided the whole "full Gospel" menu was half-baked. In 1990 we begin attending Kasilof Community Church — only 7 miles from home.

About five years later our eldest son, Chris, was sicker than a vicar on sauce. He had developed a type of asthma that acted up in cold weather. Dry weather, really. His sophomore year Judy and I took him to Kauai, where he boarded with a Filipino family. While that was wonderful for health, it was a tad expensive and Judy was apprehensive about his safety and the cohesiveness of our family.

So Chris endured Alaska his junior year and thankfully, his health was better. His senior year the autumn air brought asthma again. About a week before Christmas we had a crisis. Our son was breathing like a woman in labor and was puffy, pumped full of Prednisone. In desperation I grabbed him and his younger brother, Carey (who was in 6th grade, having joined us in 1982) and hopped a plane for San Diego. In hindsight I wish we had gone to rainy Seattle or Portland, maybe to the redwoods of California.

Be that as it may, we went to San Diego. We got a rental car and went looking for food. The boys saw a Subway and other fast-phewy outlets and were dismayed when I refused to stop. I was looking for a grocery store with real food and ignored Carey's wails of famine for forty-five minutes. I finally succumbed to the whining and submitted to Subway before I found what I was looking for. Then we got a hotel room and stocked it with our groceries.

The boys got a scare the first night. Our room was about five floors above the street. In the night a siren came along, showering us with tidings of emergency. I jumped up in my sleep and started screaming, believing the place was on fire. Chris and Carey thought I had lost my mind. Actually, I spent the winter of 1973-4 in a fire hall; part of a wrestling scholarship. There, fire alarms frequently went off in the night. Other young men and I would don fire-fighting fatigues and jump on the running boards of the engine as it responded with siren blasting. Fear of fire and memories of fighting them have become part of my unconscious, inner mind.

From San Diego we three boys went exploring; to SeaWorld; to Tijuana, Mexico; to Hoover Dam and Los Vegas. At Vegas I found a place to bet \$50 each on two NFL games and the following Sunday lost both bets. Other than that, we drove through the town and looked at the big buildings. We went anyplace I could think of that might be interesting, but probably should have limited ourselves to a humid path near the coast. Anyway, Chris breathed better and I began to think he was well enough to handle San Diego alone. Christmas was a-coming and time

was getting thin. So the day before Christmas we moved Chris to a cheaper motel and left him. Not being a very huggy father, I offered Chris a handshake. He rolled his eyes and hugged me. Somehow, leaving him felt wrong.

Carey and I boarded a plane and roared away. As we droned along aloft, seated in silence, Carey asked in his usual, loud voice, "Dad, did you fart?"

Those jets barreled on in baritone while I quietly wished I had left Carey in Alaska, San Diego, or Tijuana.

We reached home, unannounced, Christmas Eve. Judy's arms were warm and strong! Chris spent Christmas Day by himself, as I recall. But somebody who knew somebody in San Diego found out about his situation. They got some college kids to take him to a Mexican restaurant. About a week later Chris returned to Alaska and his breathing soon became labored. Not wanting to go back to the Filipino family and the anti-white racism of Kauai, we accepted a friend's offer and she took Chris to her nephew's place in Arizona. Big mistake! Arizona is dry as a fried potato. Chris's condition went from bad to desperate. So, he loaded on a plane and found his way again to the Filipino family. Health-wise that move worked, though the plane rides might actually have been dangerous. We didn't notify the airlines that they had an asthmatic on board who, at any moment, could go into a spasm.

I guess it all worked, but that Christmas with Chris in San Diego is a low point in my memory of Advent celebrations. Life deals in ordeals and choosing a course through them isn't always evident. We don't often get visited by the Spirits of Christmas for guidance. In the fall of 2010 Chris had the opportunity to visit San Diego again. He found several landmarks he recognized, but the motel he stayed in has been torn down.

Another year brought a pretty good adventure in auctions. Before computer bidding became the norm, government auctions run by the General Services Administration were handled through the mail. Never expecting to get anything, I would sometimes bid on 15 or 20 items. Each bid was low enough to entertain myself. I would look forward to the bid opening and find a certain satisfaction in seeing how close I could come to the high bid. I didn't actually want to GET the high bid because that would often require a trip to the states and a whole lot of inconvenience.

He that flirts with a line may find himself between the linens of disaster. On a bid opening in

early December, 2000, I was the high bidder on a dump truck and a box van at a Navy base near Port Townsend, WA; a huge semi tractor in Blackfoot, Idaho; and a Corsica sedan in Texas. I was in over my head! An event doesn't become an adventure until there are problems to be solved. This event was an adventure before I even left the house. How to handle four vehicles, none of which I had ever seen, seemed like a pretty good challenge. Samantha was by then married and living in New Orleans. She and her husband fetched the Corsica and drove it to their home in New Orleans. I flew there, picked up the car and headed northwest, into miserable weather.

I found freezing weather by Dallas. By Amarillo I couldn't get the window squeegee out of the tray at a service station. The crazy thing was frozen in a block of ice! My mode of operation was: drive till I couldn't keep my eyes open, pull over and sleep till I woke up, frozen; and get back behind the wheel. Just before I hit Idaho my windshield suddenly cracked from one side to the other. It did that when I stopped for gas. I guess the heater got a grip on one side and the cold on the other. The opposing forces were too much for the glass.

Nathan was living in Pocatello, maybe 7 miles from Blackfoot. So I visited him, but he had young friends boarding with him and I didn't actually find shelter under his roof. Instead I got right to business inspecting the truck. Measuring from the outside of the hubs on the rear axle, the truck was over 11 feet wide. I needed a pilot car just to drive this thing down the road! It was indeed a beautiful machine with a spiffy paint job. The lady in charge told me it had been used in some uranium mine in Idaho. Completely at a loss for a plan of action, I asked if I could simply leave the truck there till spring, citing the awful weather as an excuse. The kind lady complied.

Crossing the mountains in a snowstorm that had big trucks stopped to chain up, I chased on to Seattle and Port Townsend. The dump truck was a navy surplus job with tandem axles, but of a rather light design. Or maybe the Idaho truck just dwarfed everything else I looked at. The box van was just big enough to fit the Corsica in through the overhead door on the back. So I bought a couple planks and found a spot close to the Navy base where I thought I could load the car. I had to leave the car, drive to get the planks, and park the van. I chose a spot beside a driveway, which dropped down sharply, but looked safe in regard to getting stuck. I walked back and got the car, then I laid the planks as a ramp and stacked rocks and whatever I could find under them so they wouldn't break under the weight of the car. The rock stacking took over an hour, since I thought a broken plank might be a inconvenient hang-up. Finally, I was ready to drive on board and my heart was in high gear since the lanky, plank ramp was just a

skoosh short of OSHA standards.

That's when the rain cloud burst! It was just what I needed to make those planks an adventure. And I thought of what a blessing all the lower-bid folks had...

In driving around looking for a loading spot, I had found a place where I could pay to park my dump truck. It was maybe 3 miles from the navy base (I think the truck and box van were actually at different places). So, I got my dump truck, leaving my van there by the base. When parking the truck, I noticed the lot was a "park-and-sell" lot. I wasn't very familiar with those things, but I decided to stick a 'for sale' sign in the window. Walking back to my box van, I bee-lined for Alaska.

Driving at night I missed the turn for the shorter route, to the boarder at Sumas. About 2 a.m. I made the border near Vancouver. The person in the booth didn't like my proof of insurance paperwork, which had been faxed to me in a hurry-up deal back in Alaska. I had Alaska plates on the car and the van. I was directed to a lady in charge and she told me my paperwork didn't mean anything. I was tired and frustrated.

"I have insurance," I told her. "I got a policy before I left and the agent faxed me this paper."

She seemed totally inclined to let the matter rest until morning, but suddenly changed her mind and said, "Okay. Have a safe trip."

For the next few hours I climbed some steep hills where semis were having trouble in the fresh, slushy snow. I didn't have chains and was kept awake by the sheer strain of driving in those conditions, my own summer-tread tires behaved a little squeamishly. Again, I drove till my eyes were lead, pulled over till I froze, and got back behind the wheel. I took the Cassiar Highway and managed to fall asleep about 600 feet from the intersection with the Alaska Highway, near Watson Lake. My wheels caught the snow on the right and I jerked awake and to the left. For a moment there was a



tug-of-war with the snow sucking me toward the ditch and my steering pulling for the road. The trick is to find the angle for the front tires that offers the most traction. Turn too sharp and the front tires just slide; not sharp enough and the front end won't veer away from the ditch. The battle was "won for the road" as I broke free of the snow and was under way again.

The Alaskan boarder didn't complain about my papers. I stopped at Peters Creek where we have setnet friends. There I got my first shower since the Port Townsend cloudburst. In about five hours I was back home, in the happy arms of Judy, just a few days before Christmas. The next day I called our insurance agent to cancel our policy on the box van, since I planned to park it until summer.

"You don't have a policy," my agent said.

"But I have this paperwork..." I insisted.

"That was to inform you about the policy. You never activated it."

That first Christmas at Bethlehem must have been an adventure. I wonder if Joseph delivered baby Jesus, or if a midwife was found? At about 2 a.m. on December 14, 2011 our first grandson arrived in the Soldotna Hospital. I held him and was amazed at how tiny a newborn is! He joins four granddaughters, but is Carey and his wife, Brittney's first child. Now I'm glad I didn't leave him in Tijuana.

A Modern Day Miracle

by Pat Shields

This past Thanksgiving, Lea and I were able to travel to Bellingham, WA to spend a couple of days with all three of our children, including our daughter in-law, Kumi (Joel's wife), and Kaleb's girlfriend, Jamie. While enjoying the visit, Kumi approached me and asked if I would like to look at some pictures. I agreed and was handed 5 or 6 black and white images on thin pieces of paper. The subject matter of the images wasn't readily apparent at first, but I soon realized I was looking at pictures of a sonogram (ultrasound). As I studied the photos, what at first just appeared to be blurry shadows soon began to form the outline of a child. The more I looked, the more vivid and clear the images became. A couple of the photos clearly showed a child lying on its back with an arm and hand extended outward. But the photo that really captured my attention was one which captured a hand reaching out from the womb, all five fingers open in an expression of "here I am." I stood there in silence, completely awestruck. Kumi was only 3 months pregnant when the images were captured, but it was very evident I was looking at my grandchild. Please note, I didn't say my future grandchild, but I was looking at pictures of a child that was alive, right then and there. I wanted to say something that would powerfully communicate what I was thinking. How do you use words to describe a miracle?

One of Charles Wesley's best-known songs is titled, "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing."

*Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn king.
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled."
Christ by highest heaven adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come, offspring of the Virgin's womb.*

*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.
Mild He lays His glory by, born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.*

Just like the picture I was holding, God reached out to mankind in the form of a child, "Jesus our Emmanuel." Why was Jesus born? Well, he was "Born that man no more may die." He was born that "God and sinners be reconciled." Look at the picture again. It really is a miracle, isn't it. He was "Offspring of the virgin's womb." He was "Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth." Jesus was and is our modern day miracle. Merry Christmas!

FR 22Hz
RS
Z 1.4
2D
45%
C 58
P Low
HRes



Quilt Leaves

submitted by Brent Johnson

Behind the musicians in Kasilof Community Church hangs a cross. Beside the cross is a quilt, constructed by Jean Evenson. Columns of leaves lead in descending order toward the cross. A single portion of a leaf is alone, blown by the wind. The quilt commemorates autumn.

Perhaps you are the lonely leaf at the mercy of the wind? Maybe everyone is? The following poem by Emily Jane Bronte (1818-1848) is also about leaves:

Fall, leaves, fall

Fall, leaves, fall; die, flowers, away;
Lengthen night and shorten day;
Every leaf speaks bliss to me
Fluttering from the autumn tree.

I shall smile when wreaths of snow
Blossom where the rose should grow;
I shall sing when night's decay
Ushers in a drearier day.

To me, Emily Bronte has a downcast outlook that even words like "bliss" and "smile" can't conceal. A happier classic leave poem comes to us from a Christmas mouse called "Anonymous."

The Leaves

The leaves had a wonderful frolic.
They danced to the wind's loud song.
They whirled, and they floated, and scampered.
They circled and flew along.

The moon saw the little leaves dancing.
Each looked like a small brown bird.
The man in the moon smiled and listened.
And this is the song he heard.

The North Wind is calling, is calling,
And we must whirl round and round,
And then, when our dancing is ended,
We'll make a warm quilt for the ground.

Anonymous

Grandma Got Won-Over By a Manger

(a parody to Randy Brooks' original) by Brent Johnson

Grandma got won over by a manger
Walking home from our house Christmas Eve
She could see the newborn baby Jesus
And that's what made dear Grandma—just believe

She'd been singing Christmas carols
All the classic ones you know
But she wanted her collection
Of Bing Crosby, and went out in the snow

When she woke up Christmas morning
And remembered what she'd done
She had Jesus as her Savior
And invigorating love for everyone

Why, Why?

Why do we press harder on a remote control when we know the batteries are getting weak?

Why is it that when you see a wet paint sign, you have to touch the item to see if its wet?

Why doesn't Tarzan have a beard?

Why does Superman stop bullets with his chest, but ducks when you throw a revolver at him?

Why did Kamikaze pilots wear helmets?

Whose cruel idea was it to put an "s" in the word "lisp"?

Is there ever a day that mattresses are not on sale?

Why do people constantly return to the refrigerator with hopes that something new to eat will have materialized?

Why do people run over a string a dozen times with their vacuum cleaner, then reach down, pick it up, examine it, then put it down to give the vacuum one more chance?

Why is it that no plastic bag will open from the first end you try?

How do those dead bugs get into enclosed light fixtures?

When we are in the supermarket and someone rams our ankle with a shopping cart, then apologizes for doing so, why do we say, "It's all right"? Well, it isn't all right, so why don't we say, "That really hurt, why don't you watch where you're going?"

Why is it that whenever you attempt to catch something that's falling off the table you always manage to knock something else over?

Why, in winter, do we try to keep the house as warm as it was in summer when we complained about the heat?

Opening My Eyes

by Brent Johnson

I woke up this mornin'
and as thoughts started formin'
all my troubles came scurryin' back.
But my heart was still squeezin'
so I got on my knees an'
said really, I was thankful for that!

There are nasty diseases
I'm thinkin', Lord Jesus,
there's a host that I never have had.
I don't much like winter
but we've plenty of dinner,
and actually, a pretty nice pad.

Iraq is a wreck
warred to the deck
being born there would certainly suck.
In China the air
is "fu" in despair
to breathe it requires good luck.

The border's a sieve
where Mexicans live
it leaks to the north far and wide.
By some miracle
I'm American,
and my breast is a bastion of pride!

I have troubles, it's true
but I can never be blue
when I think of how lucky I've been.
My family's here gabbin'
it's shaken the cabin

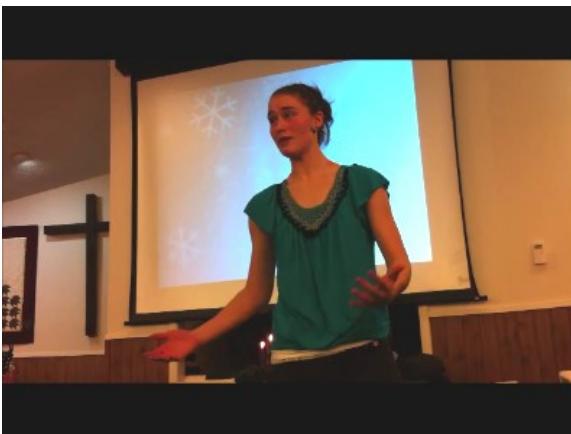


On Sunday, December 18, a number of our young adults led the music segment of the morning worship service.

Pictured above, left to right: Zach Schwartz, Rheanna Bell, Kaillee Skjold, Seth Davey, & Drew Schwartz. In the background, Seth Hutchison on drums and Heather Davey on piano.



Next, we were treated to two monologues that would have had Jay Lenno or David Letterman shaking in their shoes.



Above is Heather Davey and to the left is Kaillee Skjold.

Thank-you to our talented youth for all they do.