

## Our Family Memories of Christmas

**(R) NARRATOR:** Christmas. It is the time when we decorate our homes, share gifts, go caroling, eat way too much and – of course – go to church. But it is also the time to tell stories and share the memories that bind us together as Christians.

There is the story of that first Christmas, of the birth of Jesus – a story that we have retold for two thousand years.

Together, our memories form the story of a greater family to which we all belong: the family of Christians, the family of this church.

Our memories have much in common. Old and young, in biblical times or modern times, we have always felt the excitement of anticipation, the joy of celebration, the warmth of sharing and reaching out to others. It makes no difference when we were born, does it *Natalie*?

*Natalie:* “I was born in Hanover, Pennsylvania in my Grandmother’s house (my mother’s father and mother). I was born on December 15, 1931. My birth name was Sara Mae Angell.” Now she is Sara Noyes.

*Olivia:* “I came right from the hospital to our house in Sykesville. Mom lost a baby in 1921, so she went to St Agnus to have a baby instead of at home.” From Dorothy Clarke Schafer

*Laura:* Mary Pobletts was born in Taneytown, in her grandma’s bedroom in 1933 on October 2<sup>nd</sup>. And Don Smith was born in Baltimore on Easter Sunday!

**(K) NARRATOR:** Certainly the world was very different long ago. One important aspect of sharing our stories is to help younger people understand how some things have changed. Why, Jeanette Vasbinder rode a horse to school!

*Alyssa:* That’s right and all of their meals were cooked from scratch. There weren’t any cans, boxes or freezer bags of vegetables from Martin’s! And Peggy Robbins remembers when church and the story of Christ came first and the gifts and presents took a back seat to remembering Christ.

*Emily:* “Everything was different. We had the radio – Jack Armstrong, the All American was my favorite. Kids shows were between 4 and 6 at night. We ran around outside more than kids today. Everybody played baseball. Football wasn’t big, but we played keep away with the ball,” says Mr. Henry Hornug

*Jessica:* Sam Warfield’s dad had Tuberculosis when Sam was a child and died at age 41 when Sam was 14. Christmases were very meager. Sam looked forward to getting fruit – apples and oranges – for Christmas. He and his siblings also looked forward to a box of had-down clothes sent by his aunt and uncle to the children at Christmas time.

*Wynn:* Sara Noyes shared, “I remember at my Grandfather’s and grandmother’s houses there were lanterns and lamps lit at night. However, most of the houses we lived in had one light bulb hanging from the center of the ceiling. The only entertainment was radio. We would listen to the news and music, and my grandmother Angell would listen to sermons, and every day at noon, she had a special religious program and music she never missed. My sisters and I heard the news by Walter Cronkite that World War II was declared. I remember this as my mother and father were not there since Mother was in the hospital having another child. Telephones were few and far between. We seldom had a phone but in later years we did have a wall phone with the crank on the side to ring up the operator. Instead of refrigerators we had Ice Boxes to keep food and milk cold. It took a 50 pound block of ice each week. We had an Iceman, Breadman, and sometimes after my father died, we had a milkman.

*Bridgid:* Marion Garrsion remembers when the Depression hit and people were losing their jobs, all the ladies in the community would get together a bushel basket of food to take to the family. People were much more thoughtful and really took care of each other back then. She says, “My mom would never turn away any hobos that came to the door for something to eat. She could always find a little something for them.”

**(R) NARRATOR:** But the remarkable thing is that despite these differences, so many of our experiences of Christmas are the same, no matter what the age. For instances, Christmas is the season when we encounter that merry old gent, Santa Claus.....

*Grant:* Delores Kelly told us “We visited Santa in department stores. He got me lots of stuff I wanted.” And Lois Woodwell said, “I was always afraid Santa would get burned up coming down the chimney. But my parents said that God took care of good people.”

*Dylan:* Henry Hornug didn’t recall Santa ever coming to visit. Stores were all downtown, so it meant taking a streetcar down. ” I don’t remember going as a youngster, “he said. “The tradition was to go to Howard and Lexington to look at the store windows. This was before the time of supermarkets.”

*Morgan:* “Church had him come “HoHoHo” with oranges and a box of candy for each child.” That’s from Dorothy Schafer. And Peggy Robbins remembers her Dad on the roof shoveling snow. She was afraid he would get it in the chimney and block it and Santa wouldn’t be able to come down.

*Morgan:* Mary Pobletts’ oldest sister Jane would bring them around the table to look at the Montgomery Ward catalogue to see what they wanted. Sarah would always get dolls; Mary would always get things to build. She was pretty sure Santa didn’t come down the chimney because there was always a fire.

**(K) NARRATOR:** Christmas memories are so powerful because they come alive again through each of our 5 senses. The images, tastes, and smells of the season have made such a deep impression that they are not easily forgotten. We remember the cold of winter, the feeling of wet snow on our faces and the heat of the fire. We remember the music of the season.

*The First Nowell (verses 1, 2, and 6)*

**(R) NARRATOR:** And Christmas is the one time of year when everyone is a bit more willing to sing! Even shy people. Even people who can't carry a tune. As a Christian family, we accept the music of Christmas as a normal part of family business. We learned the songs from our parents and pass them on to our children. As small children we may have been confused by phrases like "In eggshells is day-oh" or why we sing about someone named "Round John Virgin," but the carols of Christmas are a part of our common heritage.

*Aaron:* Hazel Moxley loved "Jingle Bells." She was in Christmas pageants at school. And Frank LePage's favorite carol was "O Holy Night." Peggy Robbins loves all the Christmas songs. One of her favorites was "Away in a Manger" – her mother taught it to her.

*Alex:* Don Smith remembers the band music and ballroom dancing. He went caroling. And he was fond of minstrel shows, comedy shows and skits.

*Nicholas:* Sara Noyes says "I was always in Christmas plays at church and at school.: It was so delightful to go caroling from the church, and coming back for hot chocolate and cupcakes. In school once, we had a play, "Littlest Angel" and I sang a solo about angels. I loved all the singing and plays."

*Hark the Herald Angels Sing*

**(K) NARRATOR:** But before there could be any sort of a family Christmas, there was baking and decorating to be done. Our memories of Christmas are filled with smells of pine and berry-scented candles, of candy and spiced drinks; the mouth watering aromas from the kitchen, carrying the promise of warmth, love and.....good things to eat!

*Alyssa:* Many of our members, like Mrs. Jeanette Vasbinder and Sara Noyes, remember the popular tradition of getting oranges and candy canes from church during the Christmas season.

*Josh:* Orene Fox's favorite special food at Christmas time was the little cardboard boxes full of chocolate crème candies that she got from Sunday school. Her mother would also send her brother out to get a special country ham from a store down on Charles Street. They would always have ham and turkey.

*Lindsay:* Nancy LePage's dad made eggnog and Frank LePage once had homemade ice cream! Don Smith's mother made fruitcake and Sunday school gave out boxes of chocolate. Peggy Robbins' mother always made mincemeat pies.

*Spencer:* "My family was big on cookies and fruitcake. I think that was the time Tollhouse came into business. I remember peanut butter cookies, but I don't remember specific names. I think we got a peppermint stick at church, both straight sticks and candy canes." From Henry Hornug

*Wes:* Dorothy Schafer says "At the family dinner, the turkey was alive! It came as a gift with a guest at the dinner, picked from the turkey farm. Cranberries, cranberry jelly, pumpkin pie, fruitcake, coconut cake. Twelve people came for Christmas dinner."

*Laura:* Marion Garrison shared: There was always a big turkey Christmas dinner and homemade apple pie. If there were neighbors that didn't have turkey or couldn't afford a big meal, my mother and the other ladies would all scrape together enough money to get a turkey for them. My favorites? "I like meat. Any kind of meat." My mother used to make frozen jello in ice cube trays, and put whipped cream or ice cream on top. That was a special treat." We didn't make special Christmas cookies or anything—my mother wouldn't let us in the kitchen! That was her territory. That 's why I never could bake much."

**(R) NARRATOR:** Our homes were decorated.....

*Olivia:* Hazel Moxley remembers lots of fragile, store bought decorations and sometime they had lights. Her parents decorated after the kids went to bed Christmas Eve. And Sam Warfield remembers that they always had a Christmas tree, but they made their own decorations of perchains, etc.

*Natalie:* Orene Fox told us that they didn't decorate a lot of Christmas, but her father would put cardboard stencils in the window and put spray snow on them to make them look frosty.

*Wynn:* Mary Pobletts never brought the tree in until Christmas Eve and took it down on new years day, since stoves provided the heat everyone was scared about fires. They made paper chains to decorate with and always had a lighted angel on top of the tree; mom kept ornaments to put up on tree, Mom would always send huge stack of cards because you never got to see anyone, to mail coast 5 cents and a postcard was 1 cent.

*Alex:* “We did decorate. Some decorations were handmade and you should know that with so many kids, there was a variety. My mother and oldest sister were in charge. My father would go out and cut a tree from the farm where we lived. The colorful bulbs were very old since my mother inherited a lot to trimmings from her mother,” said Sara Noyes.

*Emily:* Henry’s grandfather like to fool around with Christmas gardens, especially trains. He says, “The first train I remember was a Lionel modeled after a German electric train he received from his father. He never bought anything but tracks; the trains were all unclaimed at the post office and he made his own buildings. He set it up a month before Christmas in the basement and left it up for 2 months so the neighborhood kids could see it. My brother continues this tradition.

**(K) NARRATOR:** But Christmas isn’t a time for just presents, good food, and decorating the house. It is the time when we, as a family, share that special story: the story of the miraculous birth of Jesus in that stable in Bethlehem. Throughout Advent, we hear portions of the story at church on Sunday, and again in our homes. It is a story we never grow tire of. It is a story that never loses its mystery.

*Nicholas:* “In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you!” Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

“How will this be, “Mary asked the angel, since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.”

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her. From Luke 1:26 – 38

*Aaron:* Mr. Henry Hornug says, “If you didn’t go to Sunday School, you didn’t get to hear the story. I was there just about every Sunday of my life. I remember being very impressed by the kings. Those three men made up the men in the choir. They were part of the Sunday school presentation.”

*Alex:* From Sara Noyes “ I always read the Sunday school papers and many times, I would read to my sisters, and I love playing “Sunday school” Mother would play the piano and she taught us many, many Christmas songs. Sometimes we made our own plays, putting up sheets in the living room for a stage. My mother and father would watch. I remember the smile on my father’s face; my mother, of course already knew much of it as she helped us get ready.”

*Spencer:* Every night, Mary Pobletts’ mom would read from the Bible and she heard a lot of stories from that. In first grade she was Mary in the play at school (Sykesville). One time when she was in charge of the pageant at Springfield Presbyterian Church they brought a baby lamb who was a day old to use in the pageant-- it was so quiet

*Wes:* “We all went to Sunday school. I had a Christmas book to teach me about it. Mother bought it for me.” From Dorothy Schafer. Peggy Robbins thinks having a younger brother made the story of Christ’s birth even more special. She remembers teaching him the story – and then quizzing him afterwards to see how much he learned!

**(R) NARRATOR:** And then as Christmas approached, there was the pageant! Some of us landed the coveted role of the “Herald Angel” and got to stand in the center of everything, crying out, “Fear not! For behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy!” But many of us got stuck being the “third shepherd,” quaking before the glorious angel, but with no lines to say. Yet, whether we took part in the pageant or just watched, we all know the story.....

## THE INNKEEPER SCENE

**(K) NARRATOR:** So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born.

**(E) JOSEPH:** Are you tired, Mary? It's been such a long journey. We are in Bethlehem now.

**(I) MARY:** Oh, Joseph! I think it's time to have the baby.

**(E) JOSEPH:** Oh no! I'd better get us a room – fast!

**(I) MARY:** I wish I were at home. I'm all alone here with no friends or family.

**(E) JOSEPH:** (*Knocks on real or imaginary door.*)

**(K) INNKEEPER:** Just a minute, just a minute. OK, what do you want?

**(E) JOSEPH:** Sorry to disturb you, sir, but my.....

**(K) INNKEEPER:** Before you go any further, I'm all booked up. I've got people sleeping on the roof, I'm so full. Look someplace else!

**(I) MARY:** But Joseph, what will we do?

**(E) JOSEPH:** Please! You don't understand what's going on. We've come so far, and my wife is.....

**(K) INNKEEPER:** I don't have a room. It's as simple as that. Look, everyone's here for the census. There's nothing I can do.

**(E) JOSEPH:** But my wife is going to have a baby!

**(K) INNKEEPER:** She is?

**(E) JOSEPH:** Any minute!

**(K) INNKEEPER:** Yikes! Well, why didn't you say so before? Look – I don't have a room, but you could stay in the stable. I know it's not the nicest place, but it is warm, and it's the best I can do.

**(E) JOSEPH:** We'll take it, and.....thank you.

**(I) MARY:** Joseph! Help me – it's time!

**(K) INNKEEPER:** Ho boy. You two go ahead. (*To the congregation*) I'd better get the wife.

## THE SHEPHERD SCENE

**(R) NARRATOR:** So Mary gave birth to her first-born, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

**(B) SHEPHERD 1:** Have the sheep quieted themselves down?

**(T) SHEPHERD 2:** Yep. It's gonna be a pretty calm night, I figure.

**(B) SHEPHERD 1:** Awful cold, though.

**(T) SHEPHERD 2:** Quit your belly achin'.

**(R) SHEPHERD 3:** But look at that star – the bright one right above us. I've never seen it before.

**(R) NARRATOR:** Then an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

**(B) SHEPHERD 1:** Have mercy on us!

**(T) SHEPHERD 2:** Pity us! We are just poor shepherds!

**(R) SHEPHERD 3:** It is from God! It's an angel from heaven.

**(A) ANGEL:** 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 Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

**(R) NARRATOR:** And suddenly there appeared 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.

**(B) SHEPHERD 1:** Did you hear what the angel said? We must go and see this child right away!

**(T) SHEPHERD 2:** We must bring gifts! *(Shepherds 1 and 2 exit)*

**(R) SHEPHERD 3:** But I have no gift. Oh well, maybe he'd like to hear me play me drum.

*Piano and drum: Little Drummer Boy*

■ *Just the first couple of lines*

■ *(No Singing)*

**(K) NARRATOR:** “Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring..... But that didn’t mean we were really asleep. That long night seemed to creep toward morning. The excitement of waiting to get up Christmas morning is something we all know about, don’t we *Grant*.”

*Grant:* Yes, we do. Hazel Moxley said “We had Christmas Eve service at church and then supper. I had a hard time sleeping.”

*Dylan:* Sara Noyes told us “We always went to church with our father and mother. The mother would put us to bed. You know, I really thought I heard Santa and his sleigh on the roof. I remember once I got up to look and I saw a beautiful moonlit night sky with many stars. It seemed very quiet. Christmas morning we had to eat breakfast before opening presents. It was much fun!”

*Morgan:* Dorothy Schafer says, “Breakfast on Christmas morning was huge in our big family. I went for the stocking first. On Christmas night we’d go to another relative’s Christmas party.”

*Brigid:* Elwood and Emma LaBrosse remember Christmas of 1974. They were in Paris where Dr. LaBrosse was conducting cancer research. They got together with the assistant pastor and some families they’d met at the American church in Paris. It was a memorable American style Christmas in Paris – except that the turkey had a meat stuffing! They still exchange Christmas greeting with the senior pastor from that church 35 years later.

*Jessica:* And Marison Garrison remembers,” One Christmas, I don’t remember what she had done, but my sister had coal in her stocking, and that was all she got! Later in the day mother let her have her gifts. Mother said she (sister) would never do that again, she sure learned her lesson. It nearly ruined Christmas for all of us, my sister was so upset.”

**(R) NARRATOR:** But not all of our Christmas memories have to do with the wonderful story of the birth of Jesus. Some Christmases were forever marked by other joys and sorrows, by births and deaths, by glad arrivals and sad departures. Sometimes we were occupied with the chore of simply staying healthy.

*Alyssa:* Hazel Moxley remembers being very excited when she was 7 or 8 to get a special toy. It was toy kitchen furniture; white with flowers painted on it and dishes. She had seen it in a catalogue.

*Josh:* Lois Woodwell says she remembers well how she and all of her cousins would all pile up together in the same bed under all the covers because it was cold in the bedrooms. The living room was warm because of the fireplace, but that's where the adults would stay.

*Lindsay:* Mrs. Orene Fox remembers one Christmas traveling to her grandmother’s down in Virginia where they put REAL candles on the tree with real flames! She also remembers the year Pearl Harbor happened around Christmas time.

*Olivia:* One year, Frank LePage got a small metal wagon and his brother got a racing wagon! Jeanette Vasbinder remembers getting a pretty doll. And Delores Kelly's husband was in the military service. It was the first time being away from family.

*Laura:* Marion Garrison shared a beautiful memory with us: "One Christmas that really stands out is the last one my father was alive. He was sick in bed for a year before he died. That Christmas, he bought me a new bike. It was just after balloon wheels came out, with white walls. The bike was black. My mother was so mad that he bought a new bike for me! But he said if I was going to die on a bike it should be my bike. I had been riding the neighbor boy's bike. My sister got new bedroom furniture, and he bought my mother a fur stole. That was a special Christmas. I went everywhere on that bike. After we moved to another town, I rode my bike to Camden on Saturdays and spent the day with friends. Christmas wasn't as festive during the war. Everyone was always worried about their sons off in the war, or had sons that had died in the war. Sometimes there was black outs, too, to save energy."

*Natalie:* Dorothy Schafer remembers the year she was asked to play the piano for St Joe's Catholic Church for Christmas Eve service, which was very flattering because she wasn't catholic and it was almost unheard of to be invited to be part of another denomination's service. The Presbyterian Church didn't start Christmas Eve services until the 1940's.

**(K) NARRATOR:** And sometimes we wished for the simplest of Christmas gifts.

*Song: All I want for Christmas*

All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth  
My two front teeth,  
See my two front teeth

Gee, if I could only  
have my two front teeth,  
then I could wish you  
"Merry Christmas."

**(K) NARRATOR:** Christmas is also a time for visiting, to reach out and make contact with others – for family members to get reacquainted, for friends to renew their relationships. We travel great distances to see them sometimes, and always bring gifts along.

*Dylan:* From Hazel Moxley: "The neighbors always came over on Christmas Day to see the toys and have dessert." And Dorothy Schafer said they all got together as a big family.

*Emily:* Orene Fox said they had a lot of visitors during the war. They had 3 family members in the service. Some lived in New Jersey and some in Virginia and when they traveled back and forth, they would stop and visit in the middle in Baltimore at her house. Her mom sent Christmas cards and then she did also.

*Wynn:* Marion Garrison shared, “We always went around and visited all the neighbors on Christmas Day, and provided for them. There was a lot of thoughtfulness with the neighbors. I always sent a lot of Christmas cards, still do, about 100. We didn’t have a big dinner with extended family on Christmas. Sometime during Christmas week we would visit my relatives, my grandmother and great aunt and uncle because they all lived together.”

*Jessica:* Sara Noyes remembers: “We shared with our neighbors and friends with cookies and cakes. Many cards were sent. My aunts and uncles were usually on our visit list. We never worried about what the neighbors and others had, we just enjoyed praising God and baby Jesus. It was a majestic and glorious time.

**(R) NARRATOR:** And when Christmas day was done, it was time to savor the memories and reflect on the meaning of the season.

It is a time for wishing like children, and a time having those wishes fulfilled. It is a time to pamper our senses with the good things around us: the music of Christmas, the scent of pine trees and good things baking in the oven, paintings on windows and bright wrapping paper, the taste of those special oranges and Christmas candy.

It is a time for special births – welcoming a new baby brother or sister – or the most special birth of all, in the manger in Bethlehem.

It is a time to stay warm and become well again.

**(R) NARRATOR:** And for all of us, it is a time to share our family memories, to pass on our common stories of Christmas from one generation to the next:

The story of that first Christmas family adoring a newborn baby while an angel appeared to shepherds to bring the good news.

The stories we have heard from those who came before us. The stories of Christmas past. And the stories of Christmas present, that we share in our families of today.

**(K) NARRATOR:** We want to thank all of our senior members who have helped bring this program alive by sharing your memories. In the ageless family of the church, how old your stories are just doesn’t matter.

Together, all of the stories we share at Christmas comprise the greater story of a much greater family; our family as Christians, the family of this church. This story is both our heritage and our endowment.

*Angels from the realms of Glory*