

CHRISTMAS IS IN THE HEART, NOT IN THE TREE

HERE WE ARE TONIGHT, GATHERED IN CHURCH TO CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF JESUS. SYMBOLS OF THE SEASON SURROUND US, HANGING GARLAND, CANDLES, BEAUTIFUL POINSETTIAS, LIGHTS AND MORE LIGHTS THAN WE CAN COUNT, AND A CHRISTMAS TREE. THE SYMBOLS OF CHRISTMAS GIVE US MEMORIES AND A WARM FEELING INSIDE. THERE HAVE BEEN MANY SONGS WRITTEN OVER THE YEARS ABOUT THE CHRISTMAS TREE AND THE EVENTS AROUND IT.

IN DENMARK THERE IS AN EVENT CALLED THE “**CHRISTMAS HEART**”. IT IS A PAPER BASKET OF RED AND WHITE PAPER WOVEN IN THE SHAPE OF A HEART AND FILLED WITH CANDY AND OTHER GOODIES. IT IS SAID THE FIRST CHRISTMAS HEART WAS MADE BY HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN. THERE IS A FOLD RIGHT DOWN THE MIDDLE OF THE HEART TO REMIND US OF THE LOVE OF JESUS TO ALL AND THE CANDY INSIDE THE RED AND WHITE PAPER BASKET IS TO REPRESENT THE CHRIST CHILD IN THE MANGER. THE BASKET, LIKE ALL THE OTHER SYMBOLS OF CHRISTMAS – LIGHTS, CANDLES, PLANTS AND THE CHRISTMAS TREE REMIND US OF JESUS' BIRTH, BUT CHRISTMAS IS NOT ANY OF THESE SYMBOLS. **HOWEVER THE THOUGHT OF A “CHRISTMAS HEART” POINTS THE WAY TO THE REAL MEANING OF CHRISTMAS - LOVE, WHICH MANY PEOPLE ASSOCIATE WITH A HEART.**

WHAT IS A “CHRISTMAS HEART”? **FIRST, “A CHRISTMAS HEART” IS AN EAGER HEART.** REMEMBER THIS NIGHT AFTER THE ANGELS VISITED THE SHEPHERDS, LUKE TELLS US THE SHEPHERDS WENT IN HASTE. THEY WERE **EAGER** TO SEE THIS CHRIST CHILD. **A “CHRISTMAS HEART” IS OPEN TO SEE AND DISCOVER ALL THE WONDERS GOD HAS FOR US.** GOD HAS SOMETHING TO SAY TO EACH OF US, BUT DON'T EXPECT A MULTITUDE OF ANGELS, BUT YOU NEVER KNOW!

SECOND, A “CHRISTMAS HEART” IS A SHARING HEART. LUKE TELLS US AFTER THE SHEPHERDS SAW THE CHRIST CHILD THEY LEFT EXCEEDINGLY GLAD AND WERE PRAISING GOD. HOWEVER, FOR THE SHEPHERDS THIS NEWS THE ANGELS TOLD THEM AND SEEING THE CHRIST CHILD WAS TOO GOOD AND HAD TO BE SHARED WITH OTHERS! ***DO WE GO AND SHARE THE “GOOD NEWS” OF BEING A CHILD OF GOD WITH OTHERS?***

THIRD, A “CHRISTMAS HEART” IS A PONDERING HEART. LUKE TELLS US MARY PONDERED ALL THESE THINGS IN HER HEART. **THE ORIGINAL WORD, PONDER, MEANT “TO KEEP SOMETHING IN YOUR MIND SO THAT YOU DON'T FORGET IT.”.** A QUOTE OF PETER MARSHALL, CHAPLAIN OF THE SENATE SAID OF CHRISTMAS “MAY WE NOT “SPEND” CHRISTMAS OR “OBSERVE CHRISTMAS, BUT RATHER KEEP IT”. MARY WOULD NEVER FORGET THIS NIGHT AND “KEPT IT IN MIND AND HEART. KEEP THIS NIGHT ALL YEAR LONG AND “PONDER” WHAT THE CHILD IN A MANGER WOULD DO FOR ALL OF US, BECAUSE GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD. WE SHOULD NEVER STOP WONDERING, FASCINATING AND BEING OVERWHELMED BY THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS!

A “CHRISTMAS HEART” IS ABOUT CELEBRATING JESUS. IT IS NOT FOR JUST A DAY, BECAUSE CHRISTMAS IS A STATE OF MIND. **A “CHRISTMAS HEART” IS ONE THAT IS JOY-FILLED, NO MATTER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, BECAUSE OF THE BIRTH AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.**

WHEN CHRISTMAS IS IN OUR HEARTS THEN WE WILL EAGERLY SEEK OUT WHAT GOD HAS FOR US. WE WILL SHARE THE NEWS AND OUR BLESSINGS WITH OTHERS, AND PONDER AND KEEP CHRISTMAS IN OUR HEARTS

ALL YEAR LONG. THAT IS WHY CHRISTMAS IS IN THE HEART, NOT IN THE TREE. THE TREE IS A SYMBOL, BUT YOU AND I ARE CHRISTMAS IN THE FLESH, JUST LIKE GOD IN THE FLESH CAME TO US THIS NIGHT SO MANY YEARS AGO.

THERE IS A STORY ABOUT A CHILD, WHO HAD A "CHRISTMAS HEART" AND SHOWED IT IN A MOST UNUSUAL WAY....AS TOLD BY HIS MOTHER

We were the only family with children in a restaurant. I sat Erik our son in a high chair. Suddenly, Erik squealed with glee and said, 'Hi.' His eyes were crinkled in laughter and his mouth was bared in a toothless grin, as he wriggled and giggled with merriment. I looked around and saw the source of his merriment. It was a man whose pants were baggy and his toes poked out of would-be shoes. His shirt was dirty and his hair was uncombed. His whiskers were too short to be called a beard. We were too far from him to smell, but I was sure he smelled. His hands waved and flapped on loose wrists. 'Hi there, baby; hi there, big boy. I see ya, buster,' the man said to Erik. My husband and I exchanged looks, 'What do we do?' Erik continued to laugh and answer, 'Hi.' Everyone in the restaurant noticed and looked at us and then at the man. The old geezer was creating a nuisance with my beautiful baby. Our meal came and the man began shouting from across the room, 'Do ya patty cake? Do you know peek-a-boo?

Hey, look, he knows peek-a-boo.' Nobody thought the old man was cute. My husband and I were embarrassed. We ate in silence; all except for Erik, who was running through his repertoire for the admiring skid-row bum, who in turn, reciprocated with his cute comments. My husband went to pay the bill and told me to meet him in the parking lot. The old man sat poised between me and the door. 'Lord, just let me out of here before he speaks to me or Erik,' As I drew closer to the man, I turned my back trying to sidestep him. As I did, Erik leaned over my arm, reaching with both arms in a baby's 'pick-me-up' position. Before I could stop him, Erik had propelled himself from my arms to the man. Suddenly, a very old smelly man and a very young baby shared their love and kinship. Erik in an act of total trust, love and submission laid his tiny head upon the man's ragged shoulder. The man's eyes closed, and I saw tears hover beneath his lashes. His aged hands full of grime, pain, and hard labor cradled my baby's bottom and stroked his back. No two beings have ever loved so deeply for so short a time. The old man rocked and cradled Erik in his arms and his eyes opened and set squarely on mine. He said in a firm commanding voice, 'You take care of this baby.' Somehow I managed, 'I will,' from a throat that contained a stone. He pried Erik from his chest. I received my baby, and the man said, 'God bless you, ma'am, you've given me my Christmas gift.' I said nothing more than a muttered thanks. With Erik in my arms, I ran for the car. My husband was wondering why I was crying and holding Erik so tightly, and why I was saying, 'My God, my God, forgive me.' I had just witnessed Christ's love shown through the innocence of a tiny child who saw no sin, who made no judgment; a child who saw a soul, and a mother who saw a suit of clothes. I was a Christian who was blind, holding a child who was not. I felt it was God asking, 'Are you willing to share your son for a moment?' when He shared His for all eternity. How did God feel when he put his baby in our arms 2000 years ago? The ragged old man, unwittingly, had reminded me, 'To enter the Kingdom of God, we must become as little children. Christmas is in the heart. Sometimes, it takes a child to remind us of what is really important. We must always remember who we are, where we came from and, most importantly, how we feel about others. The clothes on your back, or the car that you drive, or the house that you live in does not define you at all; it is how you treat your fellow man that identifies who you are.

WHEN WE LOOK THROUGH GOD'S EYES IN A CHILD-LIKE MANNER AS THIS CHILD DID, THEN WE SHOW OTHERS THAT WE ARE ALL CHILDREN OF GOD. CHRISTMAS IS IN THE HEART, NOT IN THE TREE AND THAT IS AS IT SHOULD BE.

AMEN.