

CHRISTMAS IN A FARMHOUSE

'Twas the night before Christmas in a little Tennessee farmhouse. The temperature had dropped into the teens, and a roaring fire in a huge fireplace was all the heat the house had, or needed.

A 3-year-old boy sat on the lap of his grandfather. The child was spellbound by the fire, but more so by the stories told by the one who held him.

The account that captured the most attention was of a figure dressed in red with a long white beard and a jolly countenance, including a hearty laugh. His name was Santa Claus, and he would bring gifts before the morning came, the storyteller related.

"But how would he do that? How would he get in the house?" the boy asked.

"Why, he will come down the chimney," the grandfather replied.

"Won't he get burned by the fire?" the youngster queried.

"Oh, no. Santa has magical powers. He knows how to come in without being hurt by the flames," the grandfather said.

Secure in his grandfather's arms and warmed by the fire in front of him, the little boy was soon asleep.

The next morning, awakened by his mother, the boy rushed to the living room, to a cedar tree in the corner decorated with strings of popcorn, tinsel, paper ornaments and candy canes. Beneath its limbs was a shiny red wagon, what every boy that age dreamed about. Inside it was a bag of oranges, apples and nuts.

Just like Grandpa had promised, Santa had been there. And, oh, what gifts he brought! The youngster jumped up and down with excitement.



(more)

My mind often goes back to that rustic farmhouse in rural Tennessee, and to that first Christmas that I can truly remember in detail. The grandfather was Beecher Hunter, and I am proud to wear his name.

In months after that Christmas, my mother read to me stories from the Bible about *the* central figure of Christmas – Jesus, whose birth in another plain and simple place, a stable, is what the yuletide celebration is all about. He was the ultimate gift from God, a demonstration of the remarkable grace and love flowing from the Heavenly Father.

Across the years, reflecting on that long-ago Christmas on the farm a few miles outside of Cookeville, some lessons were drawn. Christmas is ...

1. **About family.** With Lola's and my parents and grandparents all gone, I am keenly aware today of how truly magical were those holiday experiences we shared with them. The message is to enjoy – and fully appreciate – the opportunities of family gatherings in the present and rejoice in the love that binds us together while we still may.
2. **About giving.** The practice of exchanging presents is a hallmark of the holiday. But there are other important expressions of giving. Chief among them would be time spent with those we love, and with others who are lonely and relish the presence of company. Residents in our nursing centers are certainly in that category. Some people are in need of food. Thankfully, this is recognized by many churches and other organizations who respond during the months of November and December to accommodate that basic human requirement. We must be sensitive throughout the year to be certain that people in our communities don't go hungry. We are a blessed people, and our commission is to bless others.
3. **About Christ.** It's His birthday. My mother instilled in me very early that as energizing as the spirit represented by Santa Claus is, Jesus is the Lord of Christmas, of life, of eternity. Our worship of Him – on this holiday and every day of the year – must be our priority. He is the reason for every season.



As I travel back in my mind to relaxing in my grandfather's arms before the fireplace, the peace of that scene always radiates in my recollection.

And on this Christmas 2019, may you be cradled in the arms of our Lord and bask in the peace that only He can bring.

– Beecher Hunter