

*For God so loved the world that he
gave his one and only Son, that
whoever believes in him shall not perish
but have eternal life.*

John 3:16



COCOA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A Daily Devotional for Advent 2025

“Christmas is a time of giving, of loving, and forgiving. Our aim in sharing our thoughts in this booklet is to bring us closer to each other, helping us celebrate in community the gift God sent us in his Son, Jesus.

Jesus, whose life brought **light** and **hope** into a world of darkness and who, out of **love** and **obedience** to the Father, made the ultimate sacrifice for all of us.”

We pray that as you read this and meditate on the words of your fellow worshipers, you will search your own heart and receive in a profound way, God’s love and gift to all of us.

~ The CPC Editors ~

I love the weeks leading up to Christmas where families come forward during CPC's worship services to light the Advent candles.

We listen to the first message about **HOPE**, a message that emphasizes Jesus is the ultimate source of hope, who has come to save us and provide meaning in life.

The second message, **PEACE**, encourages us to find peace in our own lives and be peacemakers in our community.

JOY is the third message, focusing on the divine joy of salvation and of Christ's birth allowing our souls to be filled with the light of Christ and sharing His joy with everyone.

And **LOVE**, this message not only focuses on God's eternal love for us but encourages us to love others as God loves us. His love for us is fully realized in the gift of Christ unfolding God's grace for us.

Grace given to us through a baby lying in a manger.

Grace, a free gift that cannot be earned and completely undeserved.

Grace is God's love, mercy, forgiveness, and blessings to all of us.

While all of these messages are important year round, Christmas is a profound time of year for Christians to share the Good News that a Savior is born. It is a time to step away from our busy lives and allow God to use us to share His hope, peace, joy, love and grace with our family, friends, community and world. Wishing you a blessed Advent season!

Terri Friend

DAY TWO

Kelley Christmas Memories

This is a repeat from 2018 Advent – and Megan now has 2 little girls of her own. We are very blessed to say Christmas mornings for the Kelleys are about the same, except Megan with her girls read to us. The Kelley family are very grateful and blessed that we are still together and have our traditions!!

Merry Christmas, and we are very blessed for our church family and friends. God Bless you all!

“About 20 years ago (seems like yesterday), my granddaughter Megan Kelley was around 6 years old. We had a wonderful Christmas morning eating and opening Christmas presents. We all started to clean up, and Megan said, ‘No, everyone stay seated. I have something to read.’ She has already lain the Bible beside her and marked the place. She read Luke 2: 8-20.”

My grandchild, so fair and blond, with her hair falling down in her face, looked like an angel with the Christmas lights and sun coming from the window.

What a beautiful memory I have of a Christmas morning and my granddaughter!!!!!!

Blessings to us all!

Joyce Kelley

DAY THREE

“Can Anyone Tell Me What Christmas Means?”

Charlie Brown: ...Everything I do turns into a disaster. I guess I don't really know what Christmas is about. Isn't there anyone who understands what Christmas is all about?

Linus: Sure I can tell you what Christmas is all about. *(Linus goes to center stage)*

Linus: “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 tidings of great joy which will 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. Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in the 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.’” *(Linus picks up his blanket, walks back to the piano)*

Linus: That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.

(End scene)



DAY FOUR

The Meaning of Christmas

The meaning of Christmas to me is the celebration of the birthday of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It is the time to renew family and faith; plus food and fun.

I was born in Bethlehem, PA; famously known as the “Christmas City”. It was founded by the Moravians in 1741, as they landed on the banks of the Lehigh River on Christmas Eve. My father and grandfather were Moravian and I graduated from Moravian College as a music major.

Christmas was always special. The entire city celebrated on Christmas morning, we sang Happy Birthday to Jesus and had breakfast along with Moravian Sugar Cake.

There is a big Moravian star in my home to remind everyone who enters: Jesus is the light of the world. As my grandfather would say:

“Merry Christmas to all and to all a ‘good sprite’”.

Judy Burke

FROM THE BOOK OF CHRISTMAS VESPERS AT THE
MORAVIAN SEMINARY AND COLLEGE FOR WOMEN, 1939

*O Come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant
O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him, born the King of angels;
O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.*

- John F. Wade, 1751

DAY FIVE

What Christmas Means to Me

Matthew 18:2-5

He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them (the Disciples) and said "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like the little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

As a child, Christmas meant excitement and presents 🎁.

As an adult, Christmas means preparing for the Christ Child and celebrating Him. Christmas Eve is a magical time with family joining together in worship and fellowship with my church family, both held dear to my heart. ❤️

God bless you as you prepare for the Christ Child. 🙏

Laurie King

DAY SIX

Peace on Earth

The birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

My prayer is that the whole world will go from war to peace and for all Christians to help the people, including those who lost loved ones during the Holocaust.

Please let all of us go from anger to peace.

Love to all,

Joey Scoles



DAY SEVEN

God is With Us, God is For Us

God with us, God for us. These two notions, embedded in the Christmas story, began to take hold in my mind and heart in 1970. These affirmations couldn't have come at a more opportune time for me. I was seventeen years old, trying to find my place in the world. The country was at war, and Dad was in Vietnam, his second tour there. We worried about his safety and missed him dearly. I was attending my tenth school in 11 years. We had fairly recently moved from Germany, and I was making new friends again. I was feeling all the stresses of figuring out how to grow up and, on top of that, the anxiety that military families face in a time of war.

Oh, and there was a girlfriend, Kathy.

It was Kathy and her family who gently exposed me to "God with us, God for us". It became apparent to me that they found great comfort, encouragement, and strength because they believed that God is with us, and God is for us. I started going to church and began reading the Gospels. In the Gospels, I saw, in Jesus, God with us and God for us, embodied. Later, I would learn theological ideas like incarnation, but in those early days, I began to feel that God is with me and God is for me.

In those days of turmoil and uncertainty, the assurance of the presence of God and the love of God moved me forward in my life, connected me to those who likewise were also captivated by that reality.

For me, Christmas is about God with us and God for us. We live in contentious times. We live in times with their own set of anxieties. I'm glad to know that there is more than the circumstances we find ourselves caught up in. God is with us. God is for us.

Bob Hartley

DAY EIGHT

Peace in Christ

Christmas time is a time to remember that the birth of Christ is what brings me peace.

Mark Radler

Isaiah 9:6

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.



DAY NINE

The Creation of Christmas

Two millennia ago, God who created all things, chose to be born a human being. And the angels announced it not to the king, not to the high priest, but to shepherds.

They said peace to men of good will.

Now once a year we remember that God so loved the world that he became a baby in a manger.

That is what Christmas means to me.

William Hubbell

DAY TEN

Friends of Christmas Past

At this time of year, I tend to think of the friends and especially family that have passed, some during this season, and feel comforted that my Christian friends are in heaven and at peace.

Mary Jo Riddle



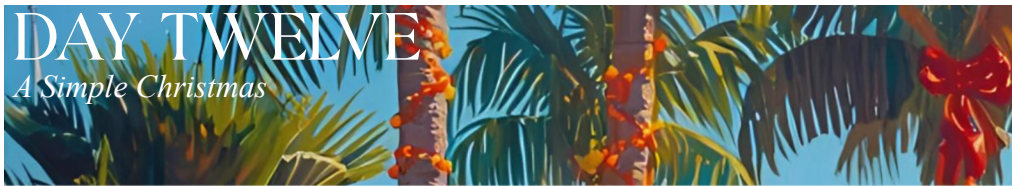
DAY ELEVEN

*The Family You Have
And the Family you Make*

My most memorable Christmas time is spent with my church family since my children are so far away.

I love them all and they make my heart happy.

Lois Russell



Happy holidays to all!

I was blessed to be born in Rockledge and grew up in the '60s. I had both a loving mother and father who made my childhood really special. We had many special holiday seasons.

I recall my mother loved to decorate the house and did a great job. She was also a great cook. We were blessed with many great holiday dinners.

How I miss the simpler times of those days.

We loved playing in the orange groves and catching speckled trout in the river. We attended Rockledge Presbyterian in those days. It was a beautiful church with many great people. I really loved the traditional Holiday music of the day. We were truly blessed. Wishing you all a happy, healthy holiday season!

Mark Rainwater

A Christmas Blessing

*May love come alive within your heart As Christmas time draws near.
May hope fill each room you decorate And bring joy to those you hold dear.
May peace be before you at every meal And faith ring through every song.
For Christ is alive, the light of the world May he bless you all season long.*

- Author Unknown

Christmas has always been a time of joy for me, despite the busyness of the season. I love Christmas music; I love cooler temperatures; I love all the decorations. One fond memory from childhood is riding in the back of a truck filled with hay to go caroling to shut-ins from our church. We kids thought it was great fun and the people always seemed happy to have us come. And when we finished we went back to the church for hot chocolate and goodies.

As an adult I have truly marveled at the beauty of the story of Christmas, that God's son came to earth not as a king, but as a baby. The story of the shepherds and the angels and the manger in Bethlehem is so beautiful. God with us—so amazing and comforting to ponder.

May all our Christmases be filled with wonder! Joy to the world; the Lord is come!

June Hartley



DAY FOURTEEN

Perry Christmas Traditions



One of the many wonderful things in our modern Christmas season is the tradition of watching Christmas movies, and the best keep (more or less in various ways) Christ in Christmas. Among these are “The Bells of Saint Mary’s”, “It’s a Wonderful Life”, “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer”, “The Grinch Who Stole Christmas”, “A Charlie Brown Christmas”, “Home Alone.”

My go-to every December is “A Christmas Carol.” My favorite is the 1970 musical “Scrooge” starring Albert Finney (the songs and dances are wonderful), with 1984’s “A Christmas Carol” featuring George C. Scott as Ebenezer Scrooge a close second. In the musical, old Ebenezer is comically tragic, as he peers sneeringly at all around him, eyes squeezed nearly shut as though literally blind to the festivities celebrating our Lord, and the wonder and goodness that God put in the people around him. His tight squeaky voice conveys his reluctance to give even his words to others. George C. Scott’s old miser is completely humorless, supremely rational in his small world that is all business, fully dedicated to avoiding material harm to himself. He is a picture of the coldness of heart in which the fire for living and relating to others has been extinguished. These two Scrooges are reminded in a visit from their closest acquaintance and partner-in-crime in self-interest, departed business partner Jacob Marley, that their ways have them bound for hell. Ebenezer will end up, as our lives would be without God, exactly where his sorry steps will lead him, to a dark and isolated end.

But then come God and His redemption. Our God is good and He meets us where we are. God meets old Ebenezer in his cold, lonely bedroom by sending three messengers. These three break in to show Ebenezer truth, goodness and beauty – gifts from perfect God – that he has long forgotten. The first messenger brings Ebenezer to his memories – of being rejected by his earthly father and left alone at school during Christmas; of the sweetness of a caring sister; of the joy of loving and being loved by a girl in his youth – and thus says, “God sees this. He knows where you’ve been. He knows your hurts. He knows the precious love you had - and lost.”

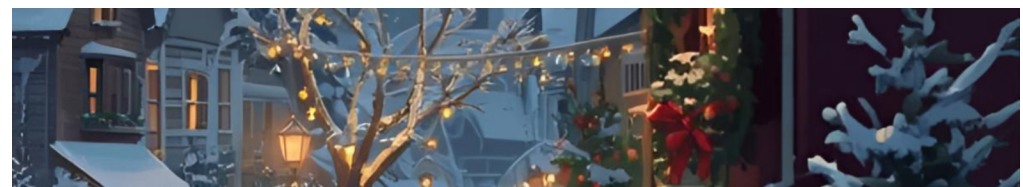
But the second messenger makes Ebenezer aware that the story does not end in the past sadness, by taking him to the present, with realities that life goes on and has merriment and kindness.

The lost sister has a son much like her, Fred, who can offer his uncle friendship and the happiness of a social circle. Ebenezer has regarded his clerk Bob Cratchit as an object, worth less than the cost of coal so they he may have a warm fire – in the present, Ebenezer sees that this man, so materially poor, is rich, in his gratitude for his wife and children and in his interest and encouragement of them, who bless him with their personalities, industry and love. Ebenezer sees the great value and wonder of life, too, as he comes to care about the perilously ill innocent child Tiny Tim, realizing how special and irreplaceable are the people God gives us. Finally, the third messenger reminds Ebenezer of our sad fate if we cling to our sins – Death indeed has a sting! - a life without spirit or generosity to others will leave Ebenezer recalled only in snide jokes on earth, and eternally alone hereafter.

God is the God of second chances. He came to earth as Jesus to redeem us, and He claims us in the love and friendship He wants for us. Ebenezer awakens from the visits of the three messengers joyfully astounded and grateful that he has the second chance to live the life God intended for him. His intelligence turns outward to clever mirth with others, his material wealth given to bring comfort and joy to those who suffer, and especially to show that he sees Bob Cratchit and all his family and wants to do all he can for the best for them. In doing these things, Ebenezer truly becomes rich, as only loving others as God would have us do, makes us rich.

This Christmas may we all share God’s truth, goodness and beauty, in the special, different ways that God has gifted us to do so, and so share God’s message of peace and love, joy and redemption. In the words of Tiny Tim, “God bless us, everyone!”

Mary Perry



DAY FIFTEEN

A Brubaker Family Tradition

As a child growing up in the Brubaker household, the holidays—especially Christmas—were always a sacred time for family, faith, and tradition. My father, Joe, served in the Navy, and our family moved often during my early years. From San Francisco to Naples, Italy, and places in between, one thing remained constant: our Christmas Eve tradition.

No matter where we lived, we gathered as a family to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Dad would read aloud from the Book of Luke, recounting the story of Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem, the humble birth of Jesus in a manger, the shepherds in the fields, and the wise men who came bearing gifts. That story, read in my father’s voice, touched me deeply year after year.

On December 24th, 2022, our family gathered once more to hear Dad read the story—for what would be the last time. That night, the torch was passed to my siblings and me, and now we carry on the tradition in our own homes.

Though I miss hearing Dad’s voice, the tradition lives on in my heart. Each Christmas Eve, I read from Luke and reflect on the miracle of Christ’s birth. It’s a moment that strengthens my faith and connects me to the generations before me.

May your holiday season be filled with peace, love, and the joy of traditions that remind us of what truly matters.

Merry Christmas and God Bless,

David Brubaker

DAY SIXTEEN

The Music of Christmas

Being a musician, as well as a pastor, I always look forward to the music which fills our lives during the holidays. While we are already being serenaded with everything from “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” to “Santa Baby” on the airwaves and in the stores, I look forward to that remarkable treasury of sacred music which tells the story of the Bethlehem birth.

Traditionally, Advent worship music holds back from being too “Christmassy” until perhaps the Sunday before Christmas. While I understand that Advent is a season of “longing” and “preparation”, there is always a part of me that wants to throw liturgical correctness out the window and proclaim, “let’s get to the good stuff!” After all, we only get to sing this stuff once a year and there is so much of it! Especially in our current social and political climate, “we need a little Christmas right this very minute”!

In any event, I pray this upcoming Advent/Christmas/Holiday season is filled with your favorite holiday music, sacred and popular alike. May it call to mind memorable Christmases (and loved ones) past, and renew in you the Hope, Peace, Love and Joy that our weekly Advent candles represent.

And may God bless us, everyone!

Rev. Rick Oppelt

Christmas is Jesus' birthday.

It's also a time for family together, sharing the love that God gave us to share with our family, friends, and other people that we may see walking down the sidewalk downtown.

We should teach others what Jesus taught us, and is still teaching us. As the followers of Jesus we should continue to follow His instructions. We should help others, including seniors.

Love to all,

Joey Scoles

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

For us, the meaning of Christmas has always been rooted in the story of Jesus' birth—the long-awaited arrival of the Messiah, God's gift of hope and redemption to the world. The events in Bethlehem, humble yet filled with divine purpose, remind us that God often works through quiet, ordinary moments to bring about extraordinary grace. The birth of Jesus fulfilled centuries of promise and revealed the depth of God's love for humankind.

As children, we were captivated by nativity scenes. Those small figures—Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, the angels, and the Christ Child in the manger—brought the story to life in a tangible way. Each year, setting up the nativity became an act of reverence and wonder, a way of entering again into that holy night. It was through those simple displays that we first began to grasp the beauty and mystery of God coming to dwell among us.

When our own children were young, continuing that tradition felt essential. Over the years, Christmas pageants and church celebrations deepened that meaning—each one serving as a renewal of faith and a reminder that the message of Christ's birth is as vital today as it was over two thousand years ago.

Christmas, for us, is both memory and renewal—a time to celebrate the miracle of God's love made flesh and to share that enduring hope with the next generation.

Bud and Beth Timmons

DAY NINETEEN

The Importance of Christmas



The most important and beautiful part of the Christmas Season is celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. It is the story that never gets old and over the years we have loved sharing it with our children and grandchildren. Seeing our church all decorated, worshipping during Advent and attending the candlelight service on Christmas Eve is the true feeling of Christmas.

We love Christmas trees, packages wrapped with bright ribbons, and excited faces as everyone opens gifts. Gathering on Christmas Day with all the family to eat, laugh and share all the blessings we have received during the past is truly a joy. During this time, when you feel such love, Christmas reminds us that Jesus was the greatest gift of all, and his gift to us is salvation.

Merry Christmas and God Bless,

Jim and Alyce Dillingham

A Blessing of the Christmas Tree

Lord our God, we praise you for the light of creation: the sun, the moon, and the stars of the night. We praise you for the light of Israel: the Law, the prophets, and the wisdom of the Scriptures. We praise you for Jesus Christ, your Son: he is Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Prince of Peace, who fills us with the wonder of your love.

Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we illumine this tree. May the light and cheer it gives be a sign of the joy that fills our hearts. May all who delight in this tree come to the knowledge and joy of salvation.

DAY TWENTY

The Blessings of Memories



Some of my favorite Christmas memories are at our church on Christmas eve when we had lots of children.

We had the manger set up and Feliciano was Jesus one year. Then we had the most meaningful candle lighting and the congregation stood all around the sanctuary in a circle.

God blessed us with memories.

Kitty Gell





Christmas taught me to sit still in the presence of wonder.

As a child, I'd sit with my grandmother in the dark, watching the tree lights shift through the color wheel—silent, attentive, learning to let beauty be enough. As a teenager, I found that same stillness in our sanctuary during Advent, a peace I've carried for over thirty years even when I can't be there in person. The joy in my grandchildren's eyes, the memory of candlelight on familiar walls, the unbroken thread of attention that runs from my grandmother's living room to this moment.

Christmas keeps teaching me the same lesson: we can hold both the sorrow of absence and the gift of presence. We can miss what we love and still find light in the dark. That's not a compromise. That's faith.

Courtney Eaton

As a military brat, I have spent Christmas in many churches in many places around the world. But I would be lying if I told you that Christmas is only a holiday for Jesus, because to me it isn't. It's more. Christmas is a "Family" holiday. Family can be a complicated word because it means so many different things to so many different people.

What I have come to realize is that throughout my Christmases, I have always been with people that I love and cherish. THAT is family. It may not always be family by blood but they are my family. YOU are my family. I have spent the last six (soon to be seven) years at Cocoa Presbyterian Church on Christmas Eve celebrating the birth of Christ through worship. These celebrations look different than the Christmases I spent with my family growing up, but the underlying message is still the same after all these years: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

May you have Hope in the new year and years to come.

May we have Peace amongst the nations and all peoples on the earth.

May there be Joy in your own life so you may share that light with others.

May you have Love in your family, no matter what your family may look like.

May God bless you and your family throughout your Christmas journeys this year and for years to come.

Love to all,

Sarina Zaremba



**Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright**

DAY TWENTY-THREE

Christmas Together



As time goes on for us together, Christmas means we have time together to celebrate with family and friends. Jim's birthday is Christmas Eve so we have an extra event to celebrate. (His favorite joke is that he likes to think he was the front man for Jesus)

Then we take a breath to remember it is the time to celebrate and remember the birth of Christ. What a wonderful time of year!

Marcia Helms

Happy Birthday!

Dear Jesus, a most grateful and glorious "Happy Birthday!" to you. Though you have existed forever in joyful, intimate relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit, this is the day we celebrate your coming to us and for us.

Jesus, only you are the Good Shepherd—the one who laid down his life for his sheep. As surely as you were born in a stable, you were destined to offer your life for us as the Lamb of God—the perfect sacrifice for our sins. And now, alive forevermore, you shepherd us with relentless engagement and perpetual kindness. We are so well cared for.

Happy Birthday, indeed, Jesus. You are so easy to love and so worthy to be adored. Now, help us busy ourselves today with loving and serving the people you've placed in our lives. So very Amen, we pray, in your matchless and merciful name.

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

Fellowship with Family



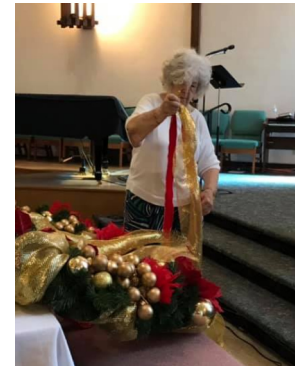
Christmas is about so many things...

Your church family, your home family, and bringing those two together in the celebration of the birth of Christ.

Joining together to fellowship at Christmas time with the people you love to sing Christmas carols, decorate your home, and your church is one of my favorite things about the Christmas season.

Traditions may change but the message of Christmas is always the same: The Good News! God sent his son to save us. We celebrate that Good News every year!

Lori Lautenslager



DAY TWENTY-FIVE

*God's Greatest Gift
Christmas Eve*

Christmas means celebrating God's greatest gift - Jesus.

Reveling in His peace and joy with friends and family. Release the stresses of the world and enjoy the blessings and beauty that surround us every day.

David Griffith



DAY TWENTY-SIX

*A Christmas Memory
Christmas Day*

Certainly on December 24, 1945 there was nothing to recommend my grandmother's new, drab, small house on the outskirts of the small Mississippi Town. From California and South Carolina my grandparents had come home with savings from good wages made working in the shipyards and bought this little house with cash. My father had just accepted a call to pastor the community's small Baptist church, and we were temporarily living with my grandparents until a suitable home could be found for us.

This past summer my grandmother had planted flowers everywhere and climbing roses and petunias served to bring needed beauty and cheer. My grandfather had planted a garden in the back which supplied our extended family with delicious fresh vegetables. Now with the first frost the flowers were gone, the garden withered, and the black barren branches of the surrounding forest served as sad sentinels against the pewter sky and the coming winds of winter.

The house was World War II era with small rooms and little decoration. The Christmas tree sat in a corner with a homemade star I had made from a cereal box and aluminum foil at its top as my mother had once again nixed the purchase of a beautiful celluloid Angel ornament available at the five and ten for one dollar and for which I longed with all my heart. My favorite part of the Christmas story was the appearance of the angels to the shepherds, and I believed that one of these days I would see beautiful angels in the silent skies around the house. If they could come to shepherds in the hills of Judea, they could come to the cotton fields and one day I knew I would see them.

I was ten years old and hoping for the third year in a row for a bicycle that never came. But I was happy, for my mother's siblings were coming for Christmas and the little house would soon echo with laughter and music and food to die for. For they were a jolly bunch - There would be good natured ribbing, jokes and tall tales, and recounted family history. They were a mixed bunch, my mother was the oldest and had practically raised her three younger brothers, who were now returning soldiers from Europe, Africa, and the Gulf Coast.

Continued on next page

Her oldest brother, a high school football hero, was supported by his Swedish schoolteacher wife, and attended the University of Arkansas. As the first person from the family ever to go to college, he knew everything. The next brother was a left-handed virtuoso pianist who led a band, made his living by tuning pianos and played everything from Beethoven to Count Basie. His wife was a beautiful woman, a model for the department stores in Memphis. She would arrive in her mink coat reeking of channel #5 and a hush would fall over us as she took her place of honor in the gathering. She made fusses over me, styled my hair, and let me rub her mink. She had personality plus, and my uncle adored her, buying her expensive clothes and taking her out to dinner almost every night.

My mother's youngest brother was the glamour boy, a pilot who charmed the ladies, worked sporadically, and got by by the seat of his pants.

My mother still thought it was her duty to make them behave, and the results were sometimes hilarious.

One thing the family never lacked was food- They grew it or caught it and prepared it expertly with techniques and tricks learned from their elders, and woe to anyone who messed up. The smells from the kitchen had begun early in the day, as everyone pitched in to make the favorite dishes – my father and grandfather grating the coconut for the fresh coconut cake they loved, my mother and grandmother making the apple, pecan and lemon meringue pies to meet everyone's requests. In the oven a clove studded ham baked away, while my mother made cornbread dressing, and my grandmother rolled the dumplings, both to be served with the succulent fat hen baking with home grown sage, celery and onion. On top of the stove an assortment of garden grown vegetables from the freezer bubbled away, and pickled peaches, sweet and sour pickles, pepper sauce and chow-chow relish were carefully set out in seldom used fancy dishes. After such a meal, everyone sat around in a stupor until it was time for supper, for which my grandmother would make the famous fried apple pies to add to the dessert roster.

But even more important than food was music. My grandfather, an orphan, had managed to obtain musical training from country singing schools, and wrote gospel music published by Stamps Baxter. About 4:00 o'clock pm the music would begin.

My uncle would play our requests, the latest popular songs, whooping it up with his left hand bass and the room would rock with even the most reserved joining in the clapping and stomping. He would sometimes stop to point out his original chord progressions – he had unbelievable talent – and we loved what he did.

A halt was called for supper, after which my grandfather would pass out the gospel songbooks and we would all sing his latest composition, which he led standing in the midst of us, stopping up to correct our mistakes, and not giving up until we got it right. He had a rich, clear tenor voice that came out of his mouth in a clear stream of beauty that transcended his rumpled overalls and rough appearance, and a transformation took place when he sang.

Then my mother would prevail – insisting we sing hymns and old favorites. The books were passed out and the music swelled as we took our parts, soprano, alto, tenor, and bass and it was a thing of beauty – all of us moved except the glamorous fly-boy pilot who excused himself and went into an empty room to sleep.

On this special night “Oh Holy Night” was a new song to us. To help us get our parts my father sang his mellow baritone, my pianist uncle sang the melody, and my grandfather the soaring tenor. As the music progressed, one by one we all dropped out to listen to the words and these three, singing their hearts out in truth and spirit, a gift to the rest of us! The message:

“Oh Holy Night, the stars are brightly shining! It is the night of the dear Savior's Birth! Long lay the world in sin and error pining, Till He appeared and the soul felt his worth! A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks the new and glorious morn! Fall on your knees, oh hear the Angel Voices... Oh night Devine, oh night when Christ was born...oh night divine...oh night when Christ was born!”

The piano was soft and caressing, the three voices swelled, and the angels I so longed to see were there! All around us and out all around the hillside they stood in rows, soft wings rustling in time to the music... They were there! I felt their invisible presence, and my prayers were answered. It is something I will never forget, a thing of comfort for my lifetime! The little bare house was a thing of beauty, and the surrounding hills gleamed gold and silver!

Sue Perry

I SAID TO THE MAN WHO STOOD AT
THE GATE OF THE YEAR,

'GIVE ME A LIGHT THAT I MAY
TREAD SAFELY INTO THE UNKNOWN.'

AND HE REPLIED,

'GO OUT INTO THE DARKNESS, AND
PUT YOUR HAND INTO THE HAND OF
GOD. THAT SHALL BE TO YOU
BETTER THAN LIGHT, AND SAFER
THAN A KNOWN WAY.'

-Minnie Louise Haskins

