

Come Let Us Adore Him

by

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Like some of you, I am in the Christmas *mood*. But many of you are being forced into a Christmas *mode*, even though you are trying to resist it. I have resisted the “mode” of Christmas for a while now, for I find it to be hectic and commercial. The *Christmas mode* diverts my heart away from what is really important about Christmas. The *Christmas mood*, however, gets me in a right place. Let me explain:

Through the years, I have prepared for Christmas by beginning with memories of past family gatherings, from my childhood to our children’s childhood, to our present day with our grandchildren. There are a lot of memories to consider. As a child, I remember times of getting some great gifts from my family, though they were hard-pressed to provide them. They were always generous to me. But, it is not the presents that I remember that come to my mind and helps me get into a *Christmas mood*. Rather, it is the remembrance of smiling faces that are no longer with me, meals together, laughter, and joyful reunions. It is the memory of waiting for older sisters to come home on Christmas Eve, or my Dad as a fireman being called to a fire, and waiting for him to come home. It was going to my grandmother Mu’s house to split and carry firewood for her, and wait for my family to arrive Christmas Eve in the small village she lived in. To me, it seemed that I did a lot of waiting on Christmas Eve. I was probably the only Mississippi child who was awake at midnight watching a Catholic Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. Two reasons why: I was waiting for all my family to arrive home, and in those days at midnight, I either watched a test pattern that a TV station leaves on the air when signing off, or I watched the Mass, which was the only thing on the air. Since the Mass was in Latin, I switched back and forth.

Waiting on, and anticipating Christmas to come began a little after Halloween for me, for I loved it. As the days grew closer to Christmas from that point, I couldn’t get my mind off it. I loved the songs, the lights, the church services that sang Christmas hymns, the old movies, the cold air, and the smells. By the time Christmas did arrive, my stomach was turned into a nervous knot. Most Christmas Eves found me at night by myself outside our house. I would build a little campfire to keep warm, and look at the stars. It started out that I was looking to see if Santa was crossing the sky in his sled, as the TV radar service said he was doing. Of course I gave up on that aspect of Christmas when I found out something that all children one day learn about him. Still, I kept looking into the nighttime sky on Christmas Eve, while I waited for my older siblings and Dad to arrive home.

One night, and I don’t particularly know which one, my perspective about Christmas began to change, and this is where my *Christmas mood* began to develop. It was on a cold Christmas Eve night around my campfire that I began to think about all those stories and songs about the baby Jesus and His birth. As I stoked the fire and looked into the sky, I realized that I was like those shepherds who were in the fields overlooking their flock at night. It was on a night like my night that those shepherds were likely around their campfires, when angels showed themselves to them. I imagined what it might have been like and I was one of those shepherds. The Bible says there was a multitude of angels praising God and saying wonderful

things about what was happening in a stable only a short distance from the shepherds. How did those Shepherds feel? The angel told them to not be afraid. Would I have been afraid? Shoot yeah I would be afraid! But in my young mind at the time, I got a sense of awe about Christmas that I had never had before.

While in the moment, I thought of the Christmas plays I had seen in my church and the nativity scenes in various places around our town. Before that night, those scenes and dramas were only snapshots, and part of my childhood anticipation of Christmas. But that particular night they took on a different meaning. Instead, I saw myself as a shepherd leaving my campfire and approaching a stable in Bethlehem to look at a newborn baby. The stories and dramas began to make sense to me, and the truth of Christmas began to overwhelm my ignorance.

As I thought on the scenes of that first night, I began to sing some Christmas carols as never before. What came to mind was a song that some of my friends and I had made fun of by singing it, "*We Three Kings of Orient are, we Three Kings smoked a loaded cigar.*" But that night I sang it right and thought of seeing those men who traveled from great distances by following a star to the stable in Bethlehem. I began to feel a magnificent awe that night similar to how an awe must have fallen on the three kings when they first saw Jesus. I was in the scene. I was watching it. I saw the precious child in the manger as a gift to mankind, and a gift to me, rather than just a historical figure. This is when the *Christmas mood* began in me, and why it is important to me, even to this day, that I nurture it. This brings me to the point of my words to those of you who are reading this message. Let the *Christmas mood* begin this year for you and your family, if it hasn't been so already. Now is the time to nurture it.

Men, nurturing the right *Christmas mood* in yourselves and your family is an essential aspect of spiritual leadership in your family. If you do not lead them to the truth of Christmas and go there yourself, the commercialism of Christmas will steal the purity of Christmas from your hearts. What does it take to nurture your family to a right perspective of Christmas? Something as little as finding a way to help them get into the drama of that night when Jesus was born, is a good start. Read the scriptures to them. Ask your family to interpret what they are seeing with their imagination, their mind's eye. Be patient. Enjoy the way the young ones see it. Sometimes they are more right than you think. Sing songs, make a campfire if you like. But make a memory by making it a special occasion; for I will tell you, after a lot of Christmases, it is the one when I connected the dots that stands out the most to me. It is when I connected all that I had heard and read about Christmas, to what my Savior did for me, that the *Christmas mood* began in me.

This Christmas Eve, guess where I will be? Sallie and I will be bundled up and sitting around our fire pit on a cold night while looking at the stars. Like it was for me sixty years ago, we will sing Christmas carols and imagine what that first night of Jesus' life was like. We will sing aloud those songs we have heard all of our lives. We will sing with joy. Like the angels that first night, let us join together as we sing our praise to our Savior. *Come. Come and let us adore Him ... Christ, our newborn King.*

Merry Christmas,

