

## *My Very Favorite Christmas*

Let me tell you about my very favorite Christmas. We had some good ones and some bad ones. I remember a good one when the entire extended family was together, and our rich Aunt got me this really cool telescope and my cousin only got a stupid velour shirt. The prices were comparable, I'm sure, but he still brings it up.

I remember one year when a van from Little Rock pulled up in front of our house filled to the brim with toys and clothes and food for us. It was all the Christmas we got that year, but it was wonderful. And then there was the year I got a "Thingmaker" from the rich Aunt. It was so cool. We made our own rubber bugs with it.

The first Christmas after my sister died when I was 11 and she was 9 was pretty rough. It was my job to set the table before supper every night, and for months after she died in July, I'd forget and put down six place settings. Then I'd remember, and put the sixth setting back, and cry.

That Christmas, my parents went to a party and took my other younger sister and brother to a babysitter, but decided I was old enough to stay home alone. We had this really old, fragile, but authentic looking nativity scene that Daddy used to set up every year. Each piece was separately wrapped in toilet paper for protection. They would be very carefully unwrapped and arranged around the manger. Daddy made it seem like an art, or surgery.

That year, he decided I was old enough for that job. I was so excited and honored. So while they were at the party, I got to work on it. We had this fireplace-type mantle that was supposed to have a gas heater in the fireplace part, but didn't. I arranged the manger scene there, with all the thought and care for realism that Daddy always put into it. Then I strung a string of lights around the mantle. And set out all the wrapped Christmas presents around the baby Jesus and the manger scene. Then, with Christmas hymns playing, I turned out the lights and read the Christmas story to myself,

with no one in the house but me. And God.

God was there. For the first time in my life, it hit me what God had done -- what a miracle it was that he could reduce himself to a human baby -- and what a sacrifice it was. What awesome, undeserved, transforming, empowering love. We had very little money, no tree, few friends because we were new in town, my sister was dead, I was home alone. And my precious Jesus came down to me, and into me, and wrapped me in His arms and loved me as warmly and as deeply as I have ever felt in my life. And I was transfigured.

Maybe no one noticed but me. But that was my favorite Christmas.

*I pray, dear friend, that this will be your favorite Christmas.*

~ Brad Mercer  
Dallas, Texas, USA

*Oh Father,*

*With tears I plead, if only for this one day, let me become a child again. Remind me of the love, the joy, the peace, the hope I have in You. Oh, I know that I am no longer the innocent child of Christmases long ago. But, please, let me become as a little child, that I may know again the feeling of strong arms, the security in wonderful parents and the ecstatic wonderment of the beauty and pageantry of this season. Father, I DO want to enter Your Kingdom. Amen.*

### *Away In The Manger*

*Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,  
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.*

*The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,  
The little Lord Jesus asleep in the hay.*

*The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,  
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.*

*I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky  
And stay by my cradle til morning is nigh.*

*Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay  
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray.*

*Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,  
And take us to heaven, to live with Thee there.*

Today's Scripture Readings:

Psalm 45, 46 ~ Isaiah 59:15b-21 ~ AM: Galatians 3:23-4:7 ~ PM: Philippians 2:5-11 ~ Matthew 1:18-25