

NAVMARCORMARS - Central Area

# The TRIAD

Pride - Tradition - Service

*This is all about you  
and for you!*



December 2011

Be The Best!

Volume VII, Issue 4

“...And Joseph...went up from Galilee...unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David...and so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered...”



“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

# A Memorable CHRISTMAS

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The following articles are stories about unforgettable Christmases that made a lasting impression upon each of our NAVMARCORMARS who are sharing their memories with us. Some of us have spent more than one Christmas away from home while on deployment. Yet at home or abroad, we've managed to celebrate the birth of our Lord and rejoice in His coming to tabernacle among us. Read now, and enjoy.

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I have a different designator for Christmas: **GPS** = **G**od, **P**resents and **S**anta. I'm sure you will find people that think of those three things, but not necessarily in that order.

In the many years that I have enjoyed the Holiday Season, three Christmases always come to mind. The **first**: I must have been five years old, maybe a little older, when my Dad asked me to get my pony out of his stall. He told me we were going to take a very important sleigh ride. Up in the Maine woods, in those days, there was always snow for Christmas. Dad hooked up the sleigh and we were off. The sun shone brightly casting sparkles on the deep snow and the air was crisp and cold. I could smell the warm, animal odor from Neddy and as he trotted along, the air from his nostrils making vapor trails. Oh what a morning and where were we going? I soon learned that I was to pick out a Christmas tree from our woodland. My choice, what a thrill! With Dad's coaching I found just the right tree and in addition was able to convince him that my dolls, cat and dog needed one also. That year we ended up with the family tree at one end of the room and the "other" tree at the foot of the stairs that led to my bedroom. Both were lovingly decorated. Christmas Eve I left a cup of coffee and a doughnut for Santa. The next morning when I came downstairs, the tree was lit, presents surrounded the tree and the coffee cup was empty and the doughnut was gone. Santa had come as promised!

The **second** Christmas was thirty-two years later, and our daughter was three years old. We had recently moved to California and I was determined to find a Maine Christmas tree for her. We found one, but what a difference from when I was a child! The trees were

standing under garish bare light bulbs strung from a long wire, loud music and car horns were blaring around us. I was devastated until I saw the gleam in her eyes and how excited she became. Wendi selected her tree and helped decorate and was so proud of it. We went through the same coffee and doughnut ritual. That year Santa brought her a special gift that played Silent Night while displaying the Nativity scene. The gift let her see the Christmas Story that was one of her favorites, and hopefully in some way I made her understand why Christmas is celebrated. That was her last Christmas but she believed in God and she believed in Santa, and I have always kept that gift.

The **third** Christmas I will always remember! It was spent in Germany. I retired in 1997 and we were due to fly out the day after Christmas. Imagine Christmas Eve in an empty house. Everything was packed out, although we did have a Gov issue bed to sleep in, as I recall. Imagine this if you can: We had just opened a package that held a very small hand-held TV (with about a 3" screen) that Scott (our son) had sent for Christmas. We were sitting on the floor, singing Christmas Carols. I don't think we ever felt so alone, but we laughed about it and have joked about it many times since.

Do I still believe, you ask? Oh, yes - I believe in God, in Santa Claus and in myself. I'll hang my stocking as I do every year, pray for peace, and put out a doughnut for Santa! To all Navy-Marine Corps MARS members and their families I wish you a very MERRY CHRISTMAS and a safe, healthy and HAPPY NEW YEAR!

---"Mike," NNN0IBM FL

# A Memorable *Christmas* That Brightened My Life!

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It was during the depression years of the 1930s that I was born. My dad came out of the Navy in 1928, and he and my mother were married that same year. The stock market crashed in October 1929, and things got really bad. My dad lost his job and ended up taking any work he could find to make ends meet.

When I was five years old, my parents managed to scrape together enough money to make a down payment on a 40 acre farm, and the balance on a land contract was to be paid at the rate of \$20.00 per month, quite a hefty payment at the time. Mom told me in later years that there were times when they could not come up with the twenty dollars; however, the owner of the mortgage would accept whatever they had in payment.

When I was five or six years old I remember a big green bowl on the dining room table with little red and green candies on display at Christmas time. What a treat that was!

On Christmas eve when I was eight years old, I had just finished my chores when Mom sent me across the field to Granny's house to pick up some Christmas cookies Granny had baked. When I arrived there I could smell the warm aroma that filled her kitchen; an aroma that came from her wood cook stove and a plate full of still-warm ginger bread cookies, and these were my favorite cookies!

Being invited to help myself to some of them, without hesitation I took a handful and experienced joy-divine as the warmth, the sweetness and the delicious flavor filled my being. Much as I wanted to, I could not linger any longer. It was time to go back home across the field with this still warm treasure of Christmas cookies. I

went in through the back door, into the kitchen and as I did I heard a strange noise coming from the parlor. We lived in an old farm house, and it had, from time to time, some strange noises, but this noise was different.

Being a child and full of natural curiosity, I forgot for the moment the cookies, and set them on the kitchen table, then walked into the parlor and, to my utter amazement, saw my Dad sitting on the floor and running the most beautiful Lionel electric train I had ever seen! It would go forward, then reverse, then go down a siding over a little device, and when a button was pushed, it would uncouple a car. Fantastic!

Well do I remember that Christmas eve. Sometimes it seems like it was only yesterday. I sat down and played with that train until bed time, and then could not go to sleep thinking about it. Without a doubt, that was my most memorable Christmas ever. ---Bob, NNN0BTG KY

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*Christmas waves a magic wand over this world, and behold, everything is softer and more beautiful.*

---Norman Vincent Peale

*I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come around, as a good time, a kind, forgiving, charitable time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.*

---Charles Dickens

*The best of all gifts around any Christmas tree: the presence of a happy family all wrapped up in each other.*

---Burton Hillis

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace....And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. ---Isaiah 9:6; 11:1-2.*





## “It’s more blessed to give...” A Memorable Christmas.

My most remembered Christmas had to be around December 1971. As a small kid I remember my dad building an enclosed area in which he installed a washer and dryer from Westinghouse. He probably got it for a good discount in view of the fact he worked for Westinghouse. It worked well for a while; it had to because it had a heavy workload doing laundry for a household of six. One day it broke down, and my dad had someone come and see about fixing it. To repair it would cost more than my dad could afford, consequently my mother began making trips to the laundry mat, taking us children along with her. Every time she went she would treat us with drinks and crackers from the vending machine. The drinks were ten cents and so were the crackers. No candy bars, just the drinks and crackers. This routine went on for many years until we were old enough that mom didn’t have to take us. However, she continued going to the laundry mat to wash & dry our clothes.

When I was in the eighth grade, we moved into a new house, and it had a built-in area for a washer and dryer. I thought sure we would get these appliances so our mom wouldn’t have to make any more trips to the laundry mat. But it didn’t happen. We didn’t even have furniture for the living room for about three years.

After I graduated from high school, I went to a Tech School about 50 miles away. I had a part time job and it paid all of \$1.50 an hour. I came home on weekends. My brother and sister also had part time jobs. I worked at an appliance repair shop working on radios and record players. My sister worked in a grocery store and my brother worked at Sears. This meant for the first time that we all had some money.

When Christmas rolled around, we kids got together and we decided to get our mother a washer and dryer for Christmas as a surprise. My brother could get a good deal from Sears for the pair. In view of the fact we had gas at our house, we had to decide on getting an electric or gas dryer. Not knowing what our Mom would like, we had to get Dad involved. I was elected to see Dad about it. I told him of our surprise and asked his advice, and it was, go electric! So our plan was put into operation. I think Christmas was on Monday that year. We decided to get both appliances to the house on Saturday to be ready for Monday. We asked Dad to get Mom out of the house that Saturday, and he came up with a plan to do so, but he told us he could not guarantee how long he could keep her away from home. Of course we wanted to get the washer and dryer hooked up while Dad had Mom away from home, but, not knowing how long Dad could keep her away, we simply got both appliances inside the house, in the

laundry room, settled into their respective places. We closed the door to the laundry room and waited.

Soon Dad and Mom returned, and it was obvious Mom knew something was up. We led her into the laundry room, and the look of surprise on her face is something I will never forget. She hugged all of us like we had never been hugged before. She looked at my Dad and he said, “It was all the kids doing.” That was the time I learned it is more blessed to give than to receive. This Christmas will be twenty-seven years without my Mother. I still miss her so much.

To contrast things, a couple of days after Christmas the first year we were married, my wife said to me, “Honey, the washer is broke.” I asked, “How long has it been broken?” She said, “Two weeks.” I said, “Two weeks? Why are you telling me now?” “I didn’t want to get a washer for Christmas,” she replied. I guess that is one of the differences between a Mother and a wife. But times have changed. This year for my wife’s birthday I did get her a weed trimmer. When the UPS man delivered it, she told him it was her birthday present. He said, “What is he going to get you for Christmas, a chainsaw?” Well, we do need a chainsaw.

---Mike, NNN0AHE GA

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Three phrases we hear at Christmas: Peace on Earth; Goodwill to Men; Batteries not Included. Author Unknown

# *It Happened on a Christmas Night*

It was late Christmas night. We were driving home from Grandpa's farm where we shared Christmas with my grandparents, aunt and uncle and cousins. We had gone there after finishing the evening milking and chores on our own farm. (There are no days off for a small dairy farmer.)

We were driving home in a blizzard (well, maybe not a real central Vermont blizzard, but it was snowing hard and very cold). My brother and I were bundled up, asleep under a buffalo robe (anyone remember those?) in the back seat of an old Reo four door sedan. The car was old. I can't say when it was built but I remember wooden spokes and a flat grill. There was an accumulation of a several inches of snow on the ground, enough to obscure the edges of the road making driving difficult. The snow plows weren't out yet....I mean, what's the point of plowing while it is still coming down hard and blowing into drifts?

Then, up ahead was a car, dead in the road with no lights. Dad saw it and pulled up and got out to see if he could help, when along came another car driving too fast and plowed into back of the Reo, sending it, in turn, into the disabled car ahead. The rear window was knocked out and Mom was thrown through the windshield, cut and bruised but not seriously injured. (or if the injuries were more severe, they certainly weren't about to discuss it with a frightened four-year-old boy).

Waiting in that old car with the snow blowing through, I don't think I have ever been so cold and scared. Just when it was seemed unbearable, someone carried us to a farm house with a nice warm wood fire going and a cup of hot chocolate (cocoa to us). We made it home eventually. Driving that old car without a windshield must have been pure torture for Dad, but Martin and I went back to sleep under that heavy buffalo robe and

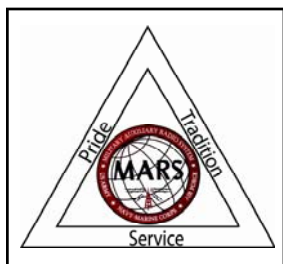
that was a Christmas I'll never forget. Merry Christmas to one and all!  
---Bill/NNN0TJC AL

Some Christmases have been memorable for less than happy experiences due to sadness, sickness and deployments & situations over which we had no control. The one you've just read by Bill was unique in its own way. Now read the one below by Edwin, NNN0TDA WI.



The following is not be a typical Christmas story, but this kind of situation does occur, and it hurts:

This is a rather painful memory of a Christmas that is memorable. It happened when I was 12 years old, and during our Christmas school vacation. At that time I had come down with the mumps - of all times to do so! - and I was recovering. When you've got cousins with sleds who are active, and who got after me to come out and play with them, what can you do? I went out and played with them and had a good time - at that time. However, that night I got payback for doing such a dumb thing. I came down with a sore throat, and it was a doozy! In addition certain parts of my body began swelling and causing me tremendous pain and discomfort. I spent the next two weeks in bed and underwent intensive care by my mother as I was unable to sit up or move about. I was a near basket case. Because of my foolhardy playing out in the snow another problem I encountered was having to learn how to walk again. It was not the happiest Christmas I've ever had. Edwin, NNN0TDA



The Central Area Newsletter, **The TRIAD**, is published for the enjoyment and edification of Navy-Marine Corps MARS members. The contents **do not** reflect official Navy positions. EDITOR: Ben NNN0JQC/NNN0ASG EIGHT. 3301 Shannon Rd, Albany, GA 31721-1541. E-Mail: ka4rhh@bellsouth.net. Central Area Director: Dave NNN0ASG MI. Deputy Director Central Area: Steve NNN0ASG ONE IL. Director Region Four: Jack NNN0AS4 GA. Director Region Five: Tim NNN0AS5 MN. **This is your Newsletter. Your input is wanted!**

# *The Significance of Christmas 1966*

In 1943, I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, and had never been away from home until 1961. I had many fond memories of Christmas but it was not until I left home that it really meant more to me. Two friends and I decided one afternoon while talking that it would be a great idea to join the Marines as not much was happening in our lives at that time. We talked to the recruiter and found out we could go to California which we thought was great as we had never been out west (even of the Mississippi).

We headed out to San Diego on September 5th 1961 and when we were awakened that next morning the first that came to my head was, "What have I just done?" We made it through boot camp the latter part of November and went on to ITR at Camp Pendleton, Calif and were able to complete the training before Christmas 1961.

We were allowed to go home on leave and made it home for that Christmas 1961, so I still had not missed any Christmas. A big note: I was the second oldest of what turned out to be 9 children, so Christmas was always exciting to say the least. When I got back to San Diego after leave I was assigned to the staging battalion for a 13 month tour on Okinawa and spent Christmas 1962 on the Rock as it was called.

On returning to the states I was assigned to Quantico, VA, from where I was able to get back to Cincinnati every other week, so it wasn't a real big change. Later in 1963 I extended for a year to go to electronics school, so was back out in sunny California again. Having trouble with the studies, I was reassigned back to my old company and sent back up to Camp Pendleton. I missed Christmas 1963 with the reassignment to Calif. I had several things that I helped some friends with, and in doing so I used up my leave; as a result I missed Christmas 1964. I then decided I would try to get home the next year, but the Viet Nam war broke out and all leaves were cancelled, so I really didn't know when I might get home. In May of 1965 I was informed that I

was getting a paid vacation to South Viet Nam by way of Okinawa. The 3rd Mar Div had been moved from Okinawa to DaNang and part of the 1st Mar Div was going over to replace them on Okinawa.

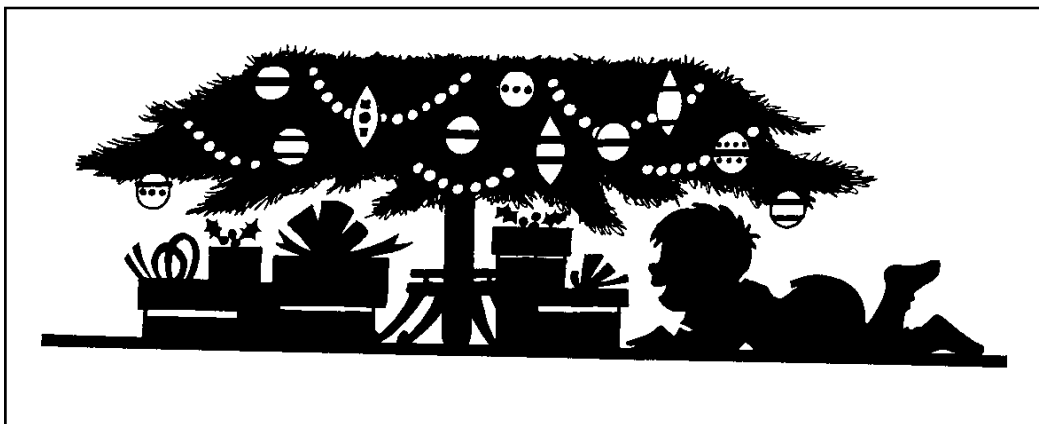
When I got to Okinawa in 1965, I decided to send a bunch of things home that I might use when I got home. During the first month I was sending china, rings, and silverware home, and it sure came in handy. I ended up going to Chu Lai South Viet Nam in June with FLSG-B which was a maintenance battalion and spent Christmas 1965 in Viet Nam.

One of the biggest things that I have asked myself was how I was able to make it home while so many others did not. I was very fortunate in that I did not do any fighting as it was early in the war that I was there. Finally I was sent back to the states in July 1966.

When I returned to the States I was extended so did not get discharged until, I think, late October 1966, but was able to get home in July before returning to Camp Pendleton for the last few months.

While being away for those three years I had been writing a very lovely young lady from my church and while on leave in July 1966, we started going steady. I have said all this just to say that Christmas 1966, has meant the most after missing four Christmases, and the young lady accepting my proposal to be my wife that Christmas of 1966. We were married in July 1967, and have been married now for 44 plus years, with three children; 2 boys and 1 daughter, who have blessed us with 8 grandchildren; 7 grandsons and one granddaughter. May God Bless everyone, and may you have a very Merry Christmas, and remember all your Christmas blessings. ---Jerry, NNN00ON OH

In Christ, not in ourselves, lies the source of all our joy in this Advent season, **and always!**



*When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts...and...God has made you also an heir.*

---Galatians 4:4-7

# Memories & Family & Christmas

For some time now I have been reflecting on the topic at hand and am having a difficult time pinning down a particular event or pegging it to a known year. After experiencing sixty-six Christmases, soon to be sixty-seven, the memories flow like a river rather than the stillness of a lake. I have done some canoeing in my past on the serene rivers in Indiana. I tend to remember a lot of scattered and wonderful experiences but have a hard time pegging those experiences to an exact place on the bank of a particular river or stream.

When I was a child, all was enveloped in a magical sense of reality. There was listening for reindeer on the roof, looking for a spot of soot on the carpet or listening for the muffled sound of a Ho-Ho-Ho. I remember that every year my parents and I would leave a sandwich and glass of milk for Santa. Joy! It was always consumed when I checked in the morning. Of course, each year there was the realization of a long anticipated dream of a stash of toys left under the Christmas tree. I grew up in a middle class family and only much later realized just how much work and sacrifice my parents put into establishing my trove of memories. Childhood is a wonderful place but like the river, life flows on.

Later came the long between years. At about age seven or eight, I remember scouring the house for hidden Christmas gifts. I knew by then that my parents were involved even though they did not know I knew. I found some of those gifts including a cool ray gun that would send different colors of light depending on where the filters on the front were dialed. Big mistake! I remember that Christmas being a little dryer and much less magical than those of the past. This was my first lesson in the reality that it is best not to know what the future will bring. In the next decade or more, I always looked forward to Christmas but it was about what I would receive. It was all about me.

The third stage came after I was married and had children of my own. I remember many years reliving the joys of my early childhood in my children's faces. Every year seems like a blur as my wife and I spent long hours trying to give our children that magical experience that we had enjoyed in our youth. I grew to realize that the children would not fully appreciate our sacrifices until they had children of their own. Again, I was growing in wisdom and experience while my children were doing the same.

Now the children are out of the nest and the river has passed the rapids and rushing waters of my journey upon it. I am learning to enjoy the still waters and to just let the river take its course. Oh sure, I now enjoy the gleam of Christmas time on the faces of my grandchildren but the anxiety is much lessened. I have entered a stage where it is much clearer as to what the journey was all about. I have learned that the joy of giving is much greater than of receiving. I have a much deeper understanding that my parents learned the same as will my children and grandchildren after them. Especially I now more fully understand what Christmas is all about. We who understand, celebrate

the gift, even the gift of the whole life we are given with those we love. Jesus Christ came and gave his all, his life so that we could live with God and our fellow man in peace, not just one day a year, but forever. Forever is a long time. We celebrate the ultimate gift of God's love. What a gift it was given for us! This is what my parents were the prototype of when I was a child. This is a gift not to be experienced or enjoyed once a year, but celebrated each day of our life. This is why we have been given the breath of life. What is my best & most memorable Christmas? This Christmas and all that have gone before. **Merry Christmas** to all, and to all, a good life!

---Jim, NNN0GAQ/NNN0KBP IN



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 and about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

---Luke 2:8-12

On Christmas Day, 1955, I was stationed aboard the USS GREAT SITKIN off the coast of Cannes, France. That was my first Christmas away from home, as it was for many of the younger crew members. I was an electrician and the electrician group wondered what we could do to make this a memorable Christmas. We talked to our Lieutenant and told him that we wanted to do something special. We wanted it to include some young children. He got back to us and told us there was an orphanage in Cannes, France, and that he had



discussed our idea with the upper levels, and they saw no reason why something could not be done. The electrician group would take our films and cut out all the cartoons and afterward we would put them back together. One of the officers obtained a Santa Claus suit and there was a fellow in another department who would be Santa Claus. It was ok'd by all departments that all the money for gifts for each child would come from the crews' activity fund.

The officers arranged with the orphanage for about a dozen children, boys and girls, to be brought aboard the ship for a day, which would include a meal with the crew, movie cartoons, and a visit with Santa Claus who would give each child a gift.

All departments had a roll to play for this event. Duties for the crew were arranged so that all crew members would have a chance to participate in this party for the children.

This turned out to be a very rewarding day for the children, and, very much so for the crew, especially those of us who had children of our own. We talked about it for months, for it had made for all of us a very memorable Christmas.

A year later, on Christmas Day 1956, we were back in the States, and I had nowhere to go and nothing special to do to celebrate this Christmas. However, one of my shipmates invited me to spend Christmas with him and his family. I had visited with them before, so I knew them and they knew me, and I felt so honored to be included in their Christmas celebration. It turned out to be for me a very good Christmas.

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Another memorable Christmas that I so well remember was when I was 9 years old. I had two sisters, one was seven and the other was two. This Christmas would really be the first Christmas that she would remember. This was Christmas Day 1942. It was wartime, not much money, so not too many gifts would be forthcoming. My parents informed me of their problem involving gifts and that I would get only one gift, and it could not be very expensive. I had been wanting an X-acto knife so I could work on building airplanes. I had these airplane kits, and I need this knife to shape the plane parts and then assemble them. As it turned out that was the only gift I got, and my sisters did not know why I only got one, and probably didn't even realize it. They were happy, and so was I.

---Jim, NNN0HAC IL/NNNOGAP IL

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Christmas is the season for kindling the fire of hospitality in the hall, the genial flame of charity in the heart.

---Washington Irving

Christmas is forever, not for just one day, for loving, sharing, giving, are not to put away like bells and lights and tinsel, in some box upon a shelf.. The good you do for others is good you do for yourself. From, "Let Every Day Be Christmas," 1976, by Norman Wesley Brooks

In the old days it was not called the Holiday Season. Christians called it Christmas, and went to church. The Jews called it Hanukkah, and went to synagogue. Atheists went to parties and drank. People passing each other on the street would say "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Hanukkah."

---Dave Barry

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Let us judge wisely the things of earth, and hold firm to the things of heaven.

# *Christmas in Bethlehem, 1976*

Christmas Eve, 1976, I was stationed aboard the USS SIMON LAKE, AS-33, a submarine tender, homeported in Rota, Spain. That day a lady from Special Services at the Naval Air Station, Rota, came aboard to my office with a proposition I couldn't refuse. She had nine people signed up to go to Israel the day after Christmas and they wouldn't go unless a clergyman was going with them. As the ship's chaplain I was asked if I would be willing to go with this group. Of course I was elated to be considered, so told her I would call her as soon as I could see my CO. She practically begged me to go on this trip so her tour group could leave the day after Christmas.

After she left I hot-footed it up to the skipper's sea cabin, knocked on the bulkhead by the hatch and was told to enter. He was a fellow Presbyterian, had been an Elder in his church back in Virginia. After some short pleasantries I told him of my visit by the Special Services lady, and how much this trip would mean to me. I pulled out all the stops, trying to impress upon him what this visit to the Holy Land might mean to my ministry. During all this time the skipper just sat there looking at me in a deadpan way, showing no emotion, no real interest, and that made me try even harder to win his approval for me to take advantage of this offer.

Finally I wound down. I simply ran out of things to say. The skipper sat there, silent, inscrutable, unresponsive to my plea. For what seemed like a long, long time, but only for a few seconds. neither one of us spoke. Then, all of a sudden he said, "I'd like for you to see Sunny, (his wife whom I knew) and see what she would like for you to bring back to her." I almost passed out with relief!. I was going to the Holy Land tomorrow. Thanking the skipper, I stopped by the XO's office and told him & asked if he wanted anything. The XO and I were good friends. I called the lady at Special Services, told her the good news, after which I went to the ship's office to get leave papers done up and began packing. I called Sunny, the Skipper's wife, and she rejoiced with me over this great news. She said she'd think this over and call me with a list.

That night we had a Christmas Eve candlelight communion service in the conference room aboard ship that was well attended. Christmas day there was only the duty section aboard, for almost all the married members

had their wives and children with them. To their credit they invited single crew members to spend Christmas with them, although a fair number of the singles opted for liberty instead. My wife had flown home to be with her father who was seriously ill. I stayed aboard ship with the duty section.

The next morning ten of us met at the air station and boarded a bus to Puerto de Santa Maria. From there we flew to Madrid, deplaned and in due course boarded another plane to Barcelona. Again we deplaned, were ushered into a large waiting room to await a flight that would take us to Ben Gurion Airport outside of Tel Aviv. After quite a wait, we boarded an Italia flight and arrived in the Holy Land airport just at dark. A bus was waiting for us and took us to our hotel. We checked in, ate, and turned in for the night.

After a good breakfast the next morning, we boarded our small bus and began an exciting tour. Just before dark we arrived in Bethlehem, two days after Christmas. We walked solemnly to the church that had been built over the cave where Mary and Joseph had taken shelter since there was no room for them in the inn. We had to bend down to enter through the doorway (the way this doorway was built is a story in itself) and then make our way to the steps that lead down to the cave entrance. We were among a fair number of people but this did not detract from being here at such a holy place. We came to the steps, made our way down, entered through the large cave opening and just a few short steps brought us to this holy spot where our precious Lord was born.

Two days after Christmas we were here, inside this cave protected by the church built over it, standing where Mary and Joseph had taken shelter, where our Lord Jesus decided to come into this world in such a humble place. All kinds of thoughts come to mind standing here. The Christmas story in Luke 2:1-7 came to mind. A felt need to pray was honored, after which an awesome wave of humility and joy and excitement flooded over me in successive waves. I was mildly thunderstruck, and then bowed down by the felt holiness of this revered place. It was not Christmas day, but it was close enough to feel that it was, for it was a most memorable way to spend Christmas. ---Ben, NNN0JQC GA

# Life's Disappointments

We deal with symbols everyday. Just think about banks and companies. AT&T, CBS, Shell, Texaco, Bank of America and cars have their own symbols, i.e., Mercedes, Lexus, Ford, Chrysler. Marriage uses engagement and wedding rings. We even have symbols for this season of the year: Christmas trees, lights, ornaments, chrismons and manger scenes.

Things have tongues and voices and speak to us of happy times: A wedding dress or a favorite dress worn on special occasions; an old pair of well-worn trousers a wife cannot get her husband to throw away; pictures. Many years ago it used to be that fathers would have their child's baby shoes bronzed and mounted as book ends, or on a pen and pencil set for his office desk.

So, too, does the manger speak to us that some things happen from time to time over which we have no control, but are part of God's plan for us. God made sure that Mary and Joseph would be in Bethlehem in time for Mary to give birth to Jesus in order to fulfill prophesy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. You can be sure that it was not to their liking for them to make this long, arduous journey in Mary's condition. But they made it safely in time for God's plan to be fulfilled.

The manger speaks to us of the inevitable disappointments in life. You know there was a cradle back in Nazareth, built by Joseph on which he spent many hours for his dear wife. Mary would have spent long hours searching for the kind of cloth which she wanted

to line the cradle, and she would have done a lot of sewing to have the kind of arrangement in the cradle in which to lay her promised child. Her friends would have volunteered to be with her during delivery, and to provide meals for her and Joseph.

If there was a smile on Mary's face as she looked down upon her new born baby, there must have been tears in her eyes as she looked upon the straw-filled manger and remembered the cradle back home.

Life has its disappointments and God knows and understands that. Many of us have had tragic, life-changing disappointments; yet it is well to remember that God shapes all things for good to them that love Him, or, "...we know that all things work together for good to them that love God..." as recorded in Romans 8:28. Surely many of you can testify to the absolute truth of this verse in view of things God has allowed and brought about in your own life. Jesus, speaking to His disciples in the upper room just before He would lead them out and go down into the Garden of Gethsemane said, "*In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*" John 16:33.

If we can do anything this Christmas season, we can look beyond our own disappointments and rejoice that God has visited us with His love, that He has purchased our salvation through the sacrifice of His only begotten Son. If He would do that for us, He certainly is able to take care of our needs. MERRY CHRISTMAS dear friends!  
---Ben, NNN0JQC GA



Merry  
Christmas, and  
Happy  
New  
Year!