“CHRISTMAS LIST”

O

ne of the nostalgic radio voices of my youth went dark this year at age 90. Only Ran, Glen, Nick and I -- and John Norden -- have ever heard of him. Harry Babbitt was a big band singer in the 40’s with Kay Kyser on radio’s *Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge.* His hits included "Three Little Fishies", "Slow Boat to China,” "Jingle, Jangle, Jingle,” “The Woody Woodpecker Song.” And, doing his Dan Rather lisp, he sang ……

***“All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth,***

***My two front teeth, see my two front teeth***

***Gee, if I could only have my two front teeth,***

***Then I could wish you ‘Merry Christmas.’"***

Not to be outdone, country music’s Kenny Chesney has a tune entitled “All I want for Christmas is a real good tan.” And there’s one about cell phones: “All I want for Christmas is a service plan.”

Looking back, I remember most vividly finding a Scottish Terrier puppy under our tree when I was about four. And at age 8 or so my first bike came at Christmas.

**QUESTION: In a sentence or two, what do you recall receiving as your all-time favorite Christmas present?**

**QUESTION: If there were no limits, and you could have anything, what would you want most for Christmas?**

***“On The First Day Of Christmas…..”***

The Library of Congress stocks 17,000 books about Jesus -- twice as many as on the second most popular personality, Shakespeare. Quickly, before we lose our right to do this in public…..**let’s read the story of God’s Christmas gift to the world. First, Matthew 1:18-2:23 (p. 717). Then Luke 2:1-20 (p. 762).**

**QUESTION: What caught your eye in that Christmas story?**

Old Nazareth, a town of 20,000, 90 miles north of Jerusalem, was on the main route between Egypt and central Asia. Living here unnoticed, a young couple is suddenly thrust onto history’s stage, becoming, along with Adam and Eve, the most celebrated parents ever. Joseph, a carpenter and a good, God-fearing citizen, is engaged to Mary, a lass of 16 or 17 whose virginity he’d preserved.

She knows the Scriptures and believes Gabriel when he says she’ll be impregnated not by just any Joe, but by God Himself! She *knows* the impossible will happen, that from her womb will emerge the Creator of the universe! He’ll be born to die, then live again to save you and me from our sins (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Joseph is descended from King David, a national superhero, yet Mary will get no royal treatment, delivering the Christchild on a bed of straw amidst animals. The irony is beyond “Beverly Hillbillies.” Having left heaven’s splendor, God’s Son plummets to society’s basement, lives a selfless, nomadic life, suffers the grizzliest death, and is buried in a borrowed tomb….so that we might escape the poverty of our sinful state, and enjoy heaven’s blinding grandeur!

Up to 24,000 troops are stationed in Palestine to keep the *pax Romana* (Roman peace), bloating that “deficit thing.” Caesar is gouging the Jews with heavy taxes. The populace is spiritually bankrupt, politically festering, primed to revolt.

Their best hope? Those 300+ pinpoint predictions, given over many centuries, that a descendant of King David would restore Israel to its former prominence, peace and prosperity (Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7). They crave a political emancipator to spring them from Rome’s clutches. Into this cauldron of expectations God takes His first breath of air!

The world’s top titan, Caesar Augustus, orders a census, so Joseph returns to Bethlehem, his hometown. Strange, huh, how God uses Caesar to fulfill Micah’s 700-year-old prophecy that baby Jesus will make landfall here in “the city of David” where its namesake was born 1,000 years earlier (Micah 5:2)!

King Herod has recently offed three of his close family, fearing they wanted his throne. He gets wind of a newborn “King of the Jews,” and orders all Jewish males under age 2 to be slaughtered. Others will want Jesus’ hide -- the religious suits, Judas, Gov. Pontius Pilate.

Touched by an angel’s warning, Joseph hustles wife and Baby to safety in Egypt. When Herod dies, they return to Nazareth where Jesus resides quietly ‘til age 30.

The whole nation *KNOWS* all the Messianic prophecies, schooled in them for many sabbaths. Yet few note His birth. Besides godly, old Simeon and Anna, there are shepherds, scared spitless by thousands of angels. And startstruck astronomers from Persia or Babylon who’ve been reading about this coming “king,” and following a mystery star which it seems only they had spied (Matthew 2:1-2).

QUESTION: Why did so few welcome this special Baby?

## Unwrapping God’s Gifts to Us

In Revelation Christ is seen standing at your door, knocking, asking to come in. Like any cool guest, He comes bearing presents.

One that He alone gives is **salvation**, saving us *from* sin’s penalty (eternal separation from God), and from a life at odds with the One who made us and loves us most, and saving us to spend “always” with Him on the other side of death’s door (John 3:16 and 14:6, Acts 4:12, John 3:5-7, Romans 3:21-25a, 2 Timothy 3:15).

He wants to bring lasting **peace** to our lives, removing all barriers between us and heaven (John 14:27, Colossians 3:15, Romans 5:1).

Happiness depends on circumstances, not always delivered by our sports teams or the Dow. But real **joy** flows from being put right with our Maker (Psalm 9:2 and 16:11, Romans 4:8).

God gives **strength** for each day (Deuteronomy 33:25, Isaiah 40:31).

Other heaven-sent gifts include a **fulfilling life** (John 10:10), enough **faith** to trust God in *everything* (Ephesians 2:8-9, Hebrews 11:1 and 6), the **Bible** to guide our steps (Psalm 119:105), a **fresh start**, putting the past forever behind us (2 Corinthians 5:17-19, Romans 8:1), His guarantee to **meet all our *needs*** -- not necessarily our *wants* (2 Corinthians 9:8), **freedom** from guilt and shame (Galatians 5:1 and 13), His **Holy Spirit** living in us (Romans 8:9), confidence that we can ***never* be separated** from Him (Romans 8:38-39), **protection** from evil (2 Thessalonians 3:3), and assurance that ***everything* will fit** perfectly into His plan to sculpt us into the person He hand-made us to be (Romans 8:28).

All these gifts and more for all who, by faith, accept Christ’s offer.

***The Gift That Keeps On Giving….and Giving***

Jesus may not be the deliverer you’re looking for. But He’s much more. Only He can forgive your sins, put you right with His Father; and assure you of a permanent home in His presence, instead of frying forever in a hellish, pitch black sin-pit, scarred by non-stop violence, locked up, the Bible says, with satan and his angels.

Instead, God kindly gives us “stars” to lead us right to Him. He comes loaded with gifts to help you live the life you were created to live. God’s most priceless Gift – paid for by His Son’s life – is yours to take today. The card reads, “Put your hope in me. Love, Jesus.”

To RSVP, just tell Him: “God, since life is just a short warm-up for a long, endless journey, You’re my only Hope. As much as I know how, I accept Your gifts of love and forgiveness. Thank You. As Mary said, ‘Take me; I’m Yours.’ Because of Jesus, I pray. Amen.”

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www.HisDeal.org

george@HisDeal.org

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