

## Christmas 2003

Dear Family and Friends:

The older I get, the younger I am. As a child, I loved stories, all kinds of stories—of Revolutionary War heroes, of sports legends, of ancient lore, of medieval heraldry. I could read or listen to embellished yarns for hours on end. Now, I tell them. The little kid in me gets on his soapbox.

At present, this love of narrative is fixed on Middle Earth. On December 17th, the third part of *The Lord of the Rings* will be released and will be viewed by this set of eyes more than once, rest assured. Oh, I'll go through my analyzer phase—they did this particularly well, but they left that out; they captured this part of Tolkien's epic superbly, but they absolutely butchered that scene. In the end, I'll come back to the tale. Tell me the story. Just like a little kid.

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Which brings me to Christmas. How this old goat loves the story—like a little kid! Oh, the theology guy in me shows up and makes sure that all the boxes are checked off and all the details are stated correctly. But eventually, even he sits back and just enjoys the story.

Sometimes, I want to laugh. All these cuddly pictures of mother and child. What is really being commemorated is not some cooey silent night scene, but a daring raid by the ruler of the forces of good on the enemy's stronghold. It's spiritual D-Day. Only God's 82nd Airborne is a breathtakingly vulnerable little baby!

Sometimes, I'm just curious. Christmas commemorates the first of a two-stage coming. In this first stage, the Ruler of the Universe identifies Himself in skin and inaugurates His reign, but leaves it voluntary, so to speak. Many of those who ought to be His subjects (indeed, are His subjects, whether they know it or not), opt out. Much of the healing He offers is rejected, and things continue as they always have. When will He return and require all to acknowledge His rule?

Sometimes, I want to cry. The God of the universe, the Almighty, the qualitatively Other, the transcendent and luminous One, shows up so simply, so humbly, so helplessly, to serve, not to be served, and to bear our wounds that we might be whole.

But most of the time, I just want to listen. Tell me of God's love, of His redemption, of our reconciliation, of His good plan, of life, of healing, of joy—forever and ever. Tell me the story. And tell it again. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.