

Christmas 2007

Dear Family and Friends:

Each December Dottie sets up a Dickens village on the windowsill of our dining room. The ceramic pieces jut out in interesting angles along an imaginary lane recapturing a Yuletide celebration of yesteryear. The trail begins at the Parish Church with a crèche just off the nave, winds past a group of friends pulling a Yule log by the Ashbury Inn, before cresting over a quaint stone bridge to join the revelers at the Old Curiosity Shop. A slight left takes you to the Leacock house with a front lamppost worthy of Narnia just before the lane runs down to Bob Cratchit's bungalow.

While I enjoy gazing at this wintry scene, I especially relish what the artful display invokes in my mind's eye. I am off on my Dickens tour of Christmas past, Christmas present, and Christmas future, in a personal recasting of the author's famous *Christmas Carol*. I rifle through the Christmases of my memory and beyond. What was it like in 1918 or 1945 after the great wars? What of the first Yuletide of my forebears in America back in 1855? Or I get entirely whimsical and dial back to Candlemas, 972 and enjoy the confounded reaction of the German nobles to their new Queen Theophano's frightful personal habits—she read books, ate with a fork, and bathed daily. There should have been an imperial edict issued, but the wimps let it pass.

A simple rearrangement of space can trigger the most curious connections. Imagining Christmas celebrations through the ages summons a sense of God's presence and mercy. His mercy is for those who revere Him from generation to generation. And I find myself linking arms with kindred spirits of every era and coming to a manger to bow low before a little child, the centerpiece of the Lord's redemptive plan. My soul's kin learned to live into their need for God in their respective times, as I must now do in mine. We join our voices with those of angels in wonder and song and give thanks to the Father of lights for this One and Only, His most precious gift.

From our home to yours: Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.