

Christmas 2024

Dear Family and Friends:

I have a pen and ink drawing that our daughter, Jessi, did early in high school. I have kept it at my office for almost thirty years. I pulled it out from time to time just to look at it and smile. When I retired this past October, I brought it home, had it framed, and hung it next to my desk in my cubby study. You might say it has grown on me a bit!

It is a sketch of a little boy seven or eight years old, hair all tangled, like mine when I first get up in the morning. His wire-rim glasses seem over-sized, but somehow you do not really notice that. It is the infectious grin that leaps off the page and makes you want to laugh. He is holding with both hands a large glass of chocolate milk. He is so enchanted with his simple treat, that you cannot help but share his delight. Life is good and simple pleasures display its quality best!

We enjoyed a most pleasant year. The highlight was going to Austria in October to visit with Jeremy, Stephanie, Eliana, and Caleb. What a delight! And simple pleasures show that best—mountains of ketchup for Caleb to put on his fries, Eliana nursing an ice cream cone so assiduously, the pride of daring to go down a salt mine slide near Salzburg, playing games together at the Oasis mission house. The time just flew!

Back to my fascination with my young friend in the sketch. When Christmas rolls around each year, I am like that little boy. It is such a poignant season, and its annual celebration keeps growing on me. At first, I am taken with the Christmas drama itself, the baby in the manger so sweet and cuddly, the shepherds, the angels on high, the Magi, a ferocious king thwarted. Then the story's import unfolds for me. This baby was God in the flesh—how condescending, how humble. This child was born on purpose. He assumed full humanity to bear the full guilt of humanity. The Incarnation points beyond itself to the Cross. His birth anticipates his death and his redeeming favor.

Now, increasingly I reflect on how the Incarnation and the Cross inaugurates a new creation. He is not only Emmanuel, God with us and for us, but we are with him and will be with him into glory. The Lord Jesus heads a new creation of which believers are part. We have new life in him, are and will be raised with him, even in some way exalted with him and reign with him as co-heirs into eternity. Our humanity will be and redeemed. As amazing as the truth of God in the flesh is, that is only the beginning of a fabulous story.

So, this year, I will hang wreaths, decorate our tree, and enjoy looking at our Dickens village set out on the window ledge. I will sing Christmas carols, send out cards and gifts, and do all the simple things that continue to delight. My expectations and anticipation seem so childlike that I must laugh at myself. I am kin with the lad in the sketch. A child again—yes, in so many ways, and an increasingly delighted child in Christ.

Our prayer is that your Yuletide celebration will help the truth of Christmas to grow on you as well. From our home to yours, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.