

It's that special time of year again. December has come, and soon will be gone, taking with it the preceding year with all its joys, and sorrows. I'll talk about the sorrow first, because for many, Christmas is a time of sorrow. Perhaps they don't have the money to buy presents for their children or friends. Others are saddened at Christmas when they think of their loved ones who will not be able to come home for Christmas-- for many reasons. For those who mourn, fancy dinners and festive parties may be only a Christmas dream. But since this is Christmas Eve, it might be a good time to ponder the deeper meaning of Christmas. Surely, that would make us joyful! ^{would it not?} Can ~~we~~ ^{we} be found in the gifts under the tree? the colorful variety of lights shining in this dark season? the cards from friends near and far? the sights and scents of Christmas candles and trees...dinners with family and friends, snow in the yard (for Californians, snow in the mountains), stockings hanging above the hearth? friendly words like, "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays?" Rather than, "Have a nice day." Are these things *really* Christmas? Yes and No. Yes, because they create warm memories that give us comfort and cheer; No, because, wonderful as they may be, they are mere symbols for something deeper. The symbols beckon ^{of the season} us to probe for the numinous reality beneath the familiar sights, sounds and smells. The deeper meaning of Christmas is found in the mystery of the Word made flesh in a Bethlehem stable. This means God has come to live as a human, in order to make us more fully human. In other words, God became like we are, so we might become as God is. Yes! The babe in the manger, HE is the deeper mystery that undergirds the sights, sounds and smells ^{the} of this season. He is the ^{sometimes} mystery of love and sorrow: not that these are opposites, because love that is real, suffers long.

Why does the real meaning of Christmas touch our hearts? Because it's the story beneath the symbols that ^{reach deep} ~~touches our hearts~~. Jesus' birth brought great joy to those who first heard the good news. Shepherds were the humble working folk~~s~~ of the first century: they had little schooling, were often excluded from religious ceremonies because they were constantly watching their flocks, and were unable to serve as a witness in the courts of law in their time. Yet it was to them that the good news of ~~Jesus' birth~~ ^{the season} first came. The angels told them about the saviour's birth. And immediately, they ran to see the Christ child, finding him, not in a palace or five star hotel, but in a lowly cattle trough. Angels sang his praise, ^{the} shepherds flocked to see him; People are still flocking to see him... no longer a child in a manger, but a King who suffered for our joys and sorrows. *ohike*.

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment