



# St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ, December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012  
*Commonly called Christmas Day*

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son  
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

It's amazing how many people grumble about Christmas. I'm not just talking about those poor benighted souls who devote so much energy to preventing the public display of Nativity scenes, dismantling public war memorials in the shape of the Cross and banning school kids from praying on sports fields. There are plenty of Christians who moan about it too.

Back in late September a good friend was grouching to me about the "Shop early for Christmas" advertising campaigns. "Soon they be starting it in August, before the 'Back to School' sales," he said. I reminded that when we were children – him during the Depression and me at the end of the Second World War – shopping for next Christmas started soon after January 1<sup>st</sup>.

Not only was money in short supply, but in Britain war time rationing continued into the early 1950s. Dads and granddads would secretly start the serious business of making toys – dolls houses, wooden trucks, board games – and repainting and rebuilding second hand ones they'd picked up cheap. Mothers and grandmas would begin hoarding the ingredients of the special Christmas desserts they planned to cook. Candied fruit, currants,

raisins and the like were always in short supply.

In war torn Germany, folks desperately tried to raise their own Christmas dinners. My friend, Wolf, lived in Berlin where his father, a Social Democrat, who had heroically opposed the Nazis, was a Professor at Humbolt University. The city was largely in ruins, but the family's apartment was still habitable. Food was in desperately short supply, and geese, the traditional German Christmas dinner, were quite unobtainable.

Wolf's dad decided, early in the year 1946 that the only way to get a traditional Christmas meal would be to buy a gosling and raise it in the living room of their cramped apartment. The professor was a city boy who knew next to nothing about caring for livestock. Even so, the gosling prospered and grew into a fine fat goose

A couple of days before Christmas, he realized he didn't know how to slaughter the unfortunate beast, so he consulted his colleagues on the Science Faculty. They were equally ignorant, but, after much debate, they decided the kindest way to dispatch the bird would be with chloroform.

The day before Christmas Eve, he did the deed, plucked the feathers off the bird and stored it on a large dish in the larder ready for the oven. The next morning, however, the family was awakened by a dreadful honking noise coming from the larder. On inspection, they discovered a Christmas miracle: The goose was not only still living, but outraged at its nudity.

The family couldn't face a second round. So a can of spam served as that year's Christmas dinner. And Wolf's mom spent Christmas unpicking an ancient sweater, which she knitted into union suit to serve until the goose's feathers grew back. And I'm happy to report the bird lived on for many years, a cherished family pet.

So next time you are tempted to complain about Christmas music in September, just remember it's an age-old Christmas tradition. And, indeed, it should be. Just think about the way we'd react if the Ravens won the Superbowl or if the Oriels swept the World Series. Well, Christmas in an even more important cause for celebration.

Christmas celebrates of the fact that God – ineffable, infinite, eternal, omnipresent, all powerful, who created not just a world, but the whole universe by merely uttering a word – loves each and every one of us, beings he created, to a degree that is far beyond our imagining.

We can say this for certain because his notion of a Saviour was not a righteous judge, terrible in judgment. Nor was it a mighty warrior with a razor sharp sword to keep us in line. And nor, for that matter, was it that of a terrifying magician whose mighty wonders left us no option but to cower in fear.

Instead he came to us in the most vulnerable condition imaginable: a human baby. He loved us so much he entrusted his only begotten son to our loving care. All you need to do to grasp the enormity of God's love is to think of

humanity's murderous track record over the centuries.

The reason he gave us his Only Begotten Son is precisely because of that ghastly track record. God loves us so much that when we had dug ourselves a hole so deep we had no chance of digging ourselves out of it, he sent us the only person capable of paying the penalty for the crimes we had committed – not only against one another, but, most importantly, against him.

This probably seems are rather strange idea when judged by human standards. But then it would, wouldn't it. We find it difficult to love any one other than ourselves. But that's our standard. Not God's. God tells us that we must love our fellow men just as much as we love ourselves. What's more, he says that if we do this, it will count as actually loving him.

That's absolutely stunning when you pause to think about it. But, then, God made us not because he simply likes to love, but because he actually is love. It is his very essence. He made us to love us and to give us the pleasure of loving him.

Christmas, for all its warmth and good cheer, confronts us with the enormity of the gulf between our human standards and the standards of God our creator. The greatest of all God's mysteries, you see, is not the creation of heaven and earth and all that therein is. It isn't the parting of the Red Sea, the raising of Lazarus, the virgin birth or the resurrection. St. John explained the great mystery in these words: "So God loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Now that's something to be really merry about. *AMEN*

*And from all of us at St. Stephen, here's wishing a very merry Christmas and the happiest of New Years.*