

## WON'T YOU LET HIM INTO YOUR CHRISTMAS

His name is Matt. He is a grown man now, a 6'5" tall Texan, but each year his family remembers and celebrates something he did one Christmas when he was just a young boy. It happened in Tyler, Texas in 1966. Matt lived in the best of worlds or the toughest of worlds depending on how you looked at it because, Matt was one of six children, and he was the only boy. That's right, he had 5 sisters! Now, can you imagine being the only boy in the house with 5 sisters? Matt's family was then and still is today a devout Christian family deeply rooted in the United Methodist Church, and Christmas was always a special time for them.

As Christmas approached in 1966, however, Matt realized something. It hit him suddenly that: 1) His dad had always been the one who had taken all the children to see Santa Claus. 2) His dad had always been the one who had personally taken the children's letters to Santa and made sure they reached Santa's workshop at the North Pole in plenty of time so Santa would know where they were, and what all the children wanted for Christmas each year. 3) Matt's dad had always been their special link to jolly Ol' St. Nick, but in 1966, Matt's dad had a heart attack. He ultimately survived the heart attack, but that year dad was in the hospital in east Texas in the month of December, and had not been able to take the children or their letters to Santa. Matt became concerned. They had moved to Tyler that year, so Matt became convinced that not only would Santa not know what they wanted for Christmas, even worse, he wouldn't know where they lived now. Matt decided that he would have to cover for Santa Claus that year. He had to play like he was Santa. So, on Christmas Eve in Tyler, Texas in 1966, Matt hung five of his long, used basketball socks on the mantle and filled them with trinkets for his five sisters. Trinkets he had bought with money he had saved from his paper route. Trinkets he had thoughtfully and carefully selected for each of his sisters.

On Christmas morning, the family ran into the living room and found a double surprise. First of all, they discovered that the real Santa is so smart. He found them in Tyler, Texas, and he left all the right things. He left for them just what they would have asked for if they had been able to see and write Santa earlier in the season. And, as always, there was a note from Santa thanking them for the cookies and milk and encouraging them to be good children. And, then, they discovered those long, used basketball socks filled with Christmas trinkets for each of the five sisters. Everybody was delighted and touched because they recognized those basketball socks, and they realized what Matt had done. Attached to the socks was another letter, this one from the play-like Santa. It read like this: "Dear Children, thanks for the cookies and milk. Remember to be good children. Remember to mind your mom and dad say your prayers every night and go to church every Sunday. Love Santa." And, there was a P.S. it said: "Be nicer to your brother." Now that's understandable. When you have five

sisters, you have to resort to every measure at your disposal. You might be interested in a couple of more things about this true story.

First, to this day when that family gathers for Christmas, there are long basketball socks on the mantle for everybody, only now everybody in the family puts things in the socks for each other. Members of the family sneak into the room in the middle of the night and add something to the socks. The other thing I thought you should know is that one of Matt's sisters is now a member of the St. Luke's Mercy Hospital Staff. Her name is Jane Williams and she is the minister to children and their families.

Wasn't that beautiful how Matt as a young boy "rose to the occasion." He noticed something that needed to be done, and he took it upon himself to be the one to do it. When I read this story about Matt's action that Christmas Eve in 1966, it reminded me of the Shepherds in the Christmas story in Luke's Gospel because- that is what they did. They noticed things and acted. They noticed things and responded. They noticed things and they did something about it. They saw something that needed to be done and they rose to the occasion. Let me show you what I mean.

#### FIRST OF ALL THE SHEPHERDS SAW THE ANGEL.

They took notice of the Angel of Christmas. Now I know what you're thinking: well, of course they saw the angel! How could they miss that?? The angel appeared dramatically. The glory of the Lord shone around them brightly. The angel told them boldly about the baby in the manger in Bethlehem. And then, the angelic chorus broke into song: Glory to God in the Highest!

You couldn't miss that, could you? And yet, as powerful as that was, as glorious as that was, as dramatic as that was, no one else noticed. According to the Bible, Bethlehem and the surrounding regions were jam-packed with people that night but only the Shepherds saw the Angel; only the Shepherds took notice. Angels are messengers from God and only those with the eyes of faith can see them and only those with the ears of faith can hear them, and only those with the hearts of faith can sense and feel their presence. Listen! The Angels of Christmas are all around us. The question is: Do we have the eyes of faith to see them, and the ears of faith to hear, and the hearts of faith to sense and feel their presence? That's number one: The Shepherds saw the Angel, and they responded in faith, hope, and love.

#### SECOND, THEY SAW THE CHRIST-CHILD

You may say: How could they miss Him? There was that “Bright Star” in the sky. But, most everybody else did miss Him. Most people ignored the star and the baby, but not the Shepherds. They came to see the Christ-child.

W.E. Sangster, the noted British minister and writer, told a story about being invited to a party one day to celebrate a wedding. He arrived late. He really didn't know anyone there except the friend who had invited him. Everyone seemed to be in high spirits, dancing, laughing, singing, eating, and visiting. Apparently everyone was having a good time. However as the evening progressed, Dr. Sangster said he noticed a beautiful young woman sitting at a table all by herself. No one was paying any attention to her at all. When Dr. Sangster asked his friend who she was, the friend replied: don't you know? I must introduce you to her... she is the bride!!

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine being left alone and unnoticed at your own wedding party? Can you imagine being ignored on your big day? I wonder if Jesus sometime feels ignored at Christmas. Some people come to the Christmas party and ignore the guest of honor.

The Shepherds didn't make that mistake. They had their priorities straight. They dropped everything and rushed to the manger to see the newborn king of kings. The Shepherds are an inspiration to us today because they saw the Angel and they saw the Christ-child, and they responded in faith, hope and love.

### THIRD AND FINALLY, THEY SAW THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRISTMAS.

About this time each year they show the classic Dr. Seuss story, “The Grinch Who Stole Christmas.” The Grinch was a sinister character who despised the celebration of Christmas. The people of Whoville loved Christmas and their celebration of Christmas irritated the grouchy old Grinch. The people of Whoville would gather on Christmas day around their beautifully decorated trees. They would sing and laugh and play with great happiness as they opened their presents, tasted the sweets of their stockings and celebrated the great joy of the day. O how the Grinch hated the sound of it all.

So the Grinch hatched an evil plan. He would show them. He would steal their Christmas. That would stop all their laughing and singing and Christmas noise. He disguised himself as Santa Claus, and he went from house to house, and stole all the toys and presents and sweets of Christmas. He was so proud of himself and his evil deed, and on Christmas morning, he waited with baited breath to hear the sadness when the people of Whoville discovered that their Christmas had been stolen.

But to his amazement, what he heard was not the sound of crying and moaning. What he heard was the same sound of joy he had always heard, the people of Whoville were singing and laughing and celebrating as always the joy of Christmas Day.

The point is clear: If the Christ-child is born in your heart, no one can steal your Christmas! For, you see, the real joy of Christmas is not in material presents, as nice as they are; No, it is in receiving the only gift of Christmas that really matters, the Gift of God's Love in Jesus Christ. The gift that was wrapped in Heaven. The Shepherds saw it. Remember how the scriptures put it: "And the Shepherds returned, glorifying God and praising God for all they had heard and seen," they saw the angel, they saw the Christ-child, they saw the "Good News" of Christmas, and they rose to the occasion and responded in faith, hope and love.

In this Christmas Season, I pray that God will put the spirit of the Shepherds in us and the spirit of the wise men in us and the spirit of Mary and Joseph in us. But most important of all- may God put the spirit of Jesus in us. He wants to do that. He wants to come into our hearts, but we need to let him in.