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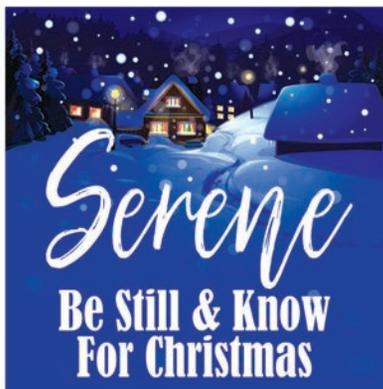
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Christmas...

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“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.” Isaiah 9: 2

When I was a kid, I used to countdown the days before Christmas. Every year around the first of October the Christmas sales brochures would start arriving, and I would start counting down the days. Now that I am much older, I have started a new Christmas countdown. You see I am now 71 years old, so I realize that I may not have a lot of Christmases left. Please don't misunderstand, I am not on some death watch, it is just that statistically I know my Christmases are running out.

Does that seem a little morbid? It isn't meant to be, after all who could complain about spending Christmas in heaven. I guess when Sherry and I depart for greener pastures, they will sell the house and a new family will move in and they'll change everything. They'll probably start by backing a dumpster up to my study window and tossing seventy years of priceless treasures, *which they will quickly identify as an accumulation of junk*, into the trash heap.

Next, they may venture into our various Christmas storage areas. We usually put up about six trees each year. All those trees along with their unique decorations takes up quite a bit of space that

normal people might use to store something silly like their clothes. In short order, they will reorder the house just the way they like it and every trace of the Worthington's will be eradicated; well, almost every trace.

One day they'll venture into the attic and there, tucked away in the corner, under the rafters, they might find more Christmas decorations. These are the ones that were too worn for us to use anymore, but too filled with memories to throw away. Once again, these mementoes of a by-gone era of Holiday joy will be the center of attention. They may even bring someone a smile for one final time, just before they are unceremonially placed in a garbage

bag and escorted to the local land fill.

Please do not misunderstand, that is the way it should be. One generation ends as another begins. It is just kind of sad when some of the greatest memories of your entire lifetime end up as mulch. Most of those decorations were faithful to us for decades. They stuck with us through thick and thin. Anytime we wanted a little Christmas spirit, they were there for us. I can't say that about a lot of people. So, yes, we are somewhat attached to them.

Am I being morbid again? Sorry about that. Actually, looking at the statistics, I can feel good about this year because the track record for the past seven decades has been if I lived until November 1st, I always made it until Christmas. And since you can't argue with a track record like that, I think I'm on solid ground to go ahead and plan my yuletide celebrations.

Of course, it could be Christmas itself that ultimately takes me to the Promised Land. If I don't fall off the ladder placing the ribbon on the tree top, I may perish from my annual fruit cake binge. I have also read that Christmas is also a great source of stress related maladies. At least one study suggests that it can literally give you a heart attack. I guess that's understandable, because if you look at the modern manifestation of Christmas, it turns out there are a surprising number of elements that can, and probably do, lead to an increase in stress.

That my Christmases are running out is an undeniable truth, so I am determined to savor every one that

God grants me. Actually, it is kind of neat knowing that every gift you receive, even if it doesn't have a life-time guarantee, will still last you for the rest of your life. It used to be furniture and books. Then, it became clothes and flashlight batteries. Soon, fresh cut flowers and my carton of eggnog may outlast me. Thoughts like that can change a person.

My senior years may have prompted me to think a little deeper about Christmas, but one feeling hasn't changed. I am always a bit sad when it is over. Even when I was a child, I remember walking outside on Christmas night looking up into the sky and being flooded with emotion. I was happy about the Christmas I had just enjoyed, but I was sad that it was all over. It wasn't just the gifts and the decorations, but more than that, it was the spirit behind the celebration that I would miss. It was almost like all the peace and good will were being boxed up along with the decorations and tossed up into the attic. All that joy and happiness placed up there in the darkness. It just didn't seem right to a young

child. Now that I think about it, it doesn't seem right to an old man either. Yet, as a pastor who is always looking for illustrations, perhaps there is a vivid illustration in all that joy and light hiding up there awaiting Christmas.

Do you remember the story of Gideon? Do you recall how his small band of fighting men hid their torches in jars until instructed to reveal their light? When they crashed their jars, the torches blazed brightly in the night sky causing the enemy to panic. Of course, this was all God's initiative, so that all would know that the victory was God's doing.

Likewise, a small baby, the bearer of light, was also God's initiative. It was all His doing. Through this child, joy, deliverance, and victory would be brought to the people. In the fullness of time, the Son of God came to bring light to the dark places. The coming of the Christ-Child granted us a continual source of light to dispel darkness. This is the message that was proclaimed long ago and is announced afresh today. We should proclaim and





illustrate this light all year. It just seems we have more object lessons at Christmastime. You see, some of our best object lessons, like our lights and manger scenes, are boxed up most of the year.

It is no wonder when we come to the story of the birth of Jesus, it is attended by light. Shepherds were dazzled by the light of God, reassured by angels, and then they find the Christ-child lying in a manger. Wisemen see the star, follow it, and recognize the significance of the light of the star heralding a newborn King. Jesus will later teach His followers that they are to be the light of the world as reflections of His light. Until the first century, Jews would have understood the light of the world to be found in the temple. A giant menorah stood above the temple compound, all nine branches lit to the glory of God, while inside the temple the sacred candlesticks

burned with the light of God's presence.

But now, Jesus tells his followers they are the light of the world, not the temple menorah. They are the light, because they reflect the glory of God in their midst. That glory is now personal, not symbolic. That glory is not contained in a person, not a place. That glory is now Jesus, the light that came into the world.

Maybe retrieving my lights and shiny decorations to bring light for all to see is just another way of reminding me of the Light of God that came to dispel the darkness.

***“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.*”**

And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side.”

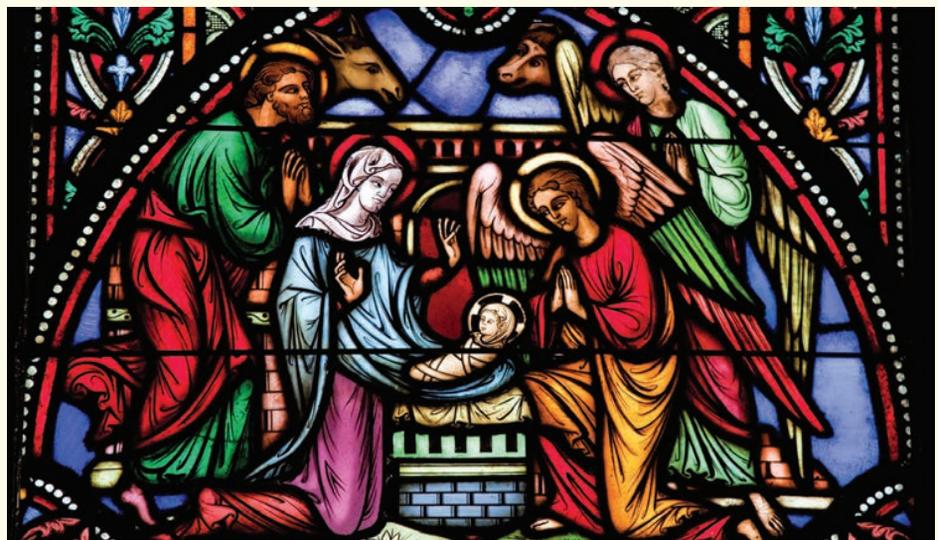
Isaiah 60: 1-4

Don't tell anyone, as it may confirm their suspicions that I am losing my mind, but I always like to say a few words when I pack up our decorations. As I thank our Lord for His blessings over the season, I also look at our boxed-up decorations and say something like: *“Thank you for another year of memories. See you next year.”* I know that's silly, but I have done it for years. No, I am not praying to a glass ball or a string of garland, these are just objects that my Lord has given us to help celebrate His birth. It is just that every twinkling light helps to remind me of the

birth of my Saviour, the true light of the world. Sometimes, I get the message better from a twinkling light than I do from some liberal pastor's message. As an old man, perhaps telling our decorations I will see them again is a good thing. Maybe, in some unexplainable way, I feel an obligation, almost like I would be betraying a trust, if I am not there to unpack them all next Christmas. You see, Christmas is a time that God calls us all to rise up and make a special effort to display the light of Christ.

I remember reading of an elderly man of God who moved back to his old hometown in the years of his declining health. One of the things that bothered him most upon his return was that the church where he had received Christ was now closed. It had been sitting empty for years. One Christmas, burdened by the loss of the old lighthouse where the gospel was once preached, the old man remembered the beautiful stained-glass windows that still adorned the building. Those windows faced main street and many people passed by the church every day. After seeking permission from the caretaker, the old man recruited some help and had numerous floodlights placed inside the church a few days before Christmas. The lights were positioned to shine directly through the stained glass. There for all to see were the timeless portrayals of Jesus:

- *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph at His birth in Bethlehem;*
- *Jesus the good shepherd carrying a lamb;*
- *Jesus the searching Saviour rescuing the lone lost sheep while*



the ninety-nine rested safely in the fold;

- *Jesus praying in Gethsemane;*
- *Jesus on the cross;*
- *Jesus risen from the dead.*

It was Christmas, and once again the light from the old church presented the message of Christ. These windows became silent sermons, all they needed was light; and the resourcefulness of someone who cared enough to let it shine. People who usually passed by the darkened church usually paid it no attention, but now they would stop reverently, silently, thoughtfully. They found themselves filled with new determination and encouragement. In the darkness that filled their lives, the light streaming from those windows gave new meaning to these words: ***“...the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended”*** Isaiah 60:20.

That is the very nature of light. Some of the rays are absorbed, others are reflected. Thus, it is with you and I. The clouds that lie over the sunset, though in themselves they are nothing but vapor, when smitten by the radiance of the sun, they preach volumes about the

glory of God. So, it is with us. Our life is but a vapor, but when Christ comes to be our light, the beauty of His glory can be dramatically displayed.

When the wisemen bowed before Jesus, they realized that the brilliance of the star they had followed was nothing compared to the light that God had sent into the world. Jesus is the one who will meet you in your deepest darkness, whatever that darkness is for you. He is the light!

As you countdown the days before Christmas, or as you countdown the number of Christmases you have left, please determine to let the glorious light of Christ shine. Yes, it may shine through your window, but also make sure it also shines in your life year-round.



Dr. Worthington has been in the ministry for over forty five years and serves as President of Pathway Ministries and Christian Bible College.



Bells Were Ringing Early At GoMix

(A Word of Welcome to Our New Partners)

One of the most exciting moments during our recent **Share-A-Thon** was when we were able to acknowledge a new partner. During 2021, over 300 first time contributors were welcomed to our team. When a new partner joins our fellowship, we like to *“ring the bell”* as an act of honor and recognition. It is also symbolic of the church bell which called people together for worship, which is exactly what we are doing as a new **Faith Partner** joins the ministry.

Traditionally, bells have announced the coming or arrival of an event, activity, or occasion. They toll for good times.

They sometimes toll for bad times. They also ring out warnings or calls for help. Bells are sometimes rung to announce the marriage of a man and a woman. They are rung during Christmas to announce the arrival of the season and to proclaim the birth of Christ.

Ringling of bells can be traced back to pagan winter celebrations. During those times, noisemakers were used to scare away evil spirits in the night. Among those early noisemakers were bells. People had fun ringing the bells and making noise. It was too much fun to just use bells to scare demons away. So over time, bell ringing was incorporated into other events and activities. Bells or chimes are rung at churches to call people to gather, as warnings, and to bring people together. Sometimes the bells play a familiar tune to encourage those who are able to hear the beautiful melody.

From these ancient roots, the ringing of bells began to be used in the Christian Christmas season. The soft, cheerful tones blended well and enhanced the sounds of the season. Today, they play an important, traditional role during the holiday.

As we welcome our new **Faith Partners**, we are proud to ring the bells as you accept the call to join us in the service of our King.



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Making A List

You've got your list ready! You've been asking family and friends for months what they would like to have for Christmas. Maybe you have a game-plan ready for which shops to go to and what days you're going. Perhaps you'll soon make your way to the big discount store or maybe even the mall. Many of us prefer to do as much shopping as we can online these days. No lines. No crowds. No fuss.

While all of these options are viable and convenient, might we suggest Christmas is an excellent time to show your support for our **GoMix Business Underwriters**? In most cases, you will be shopping with friends and fellow-believers in Christ. You might even get to hear **GoMix** playing in the background. Talk about a great shopping experience!

Why don't you begin the search for the perfect gifts in small town shops where the store owner is personally concerned about your satisfaction while not being ashamed to wish you a "*Merry Christmas*" as you exit their store? Even better, you will also know your purchases will be helping a fellow believer in a time of economic concerns of inflation.

Why not choose to shop where your dollar will make a difference and where Christmas shopping can become an enjoyable event again? As you regain your passion for supporting your Christian brothers and sisters, you might actually find there is still some peace and good will left out there after all.

Merry Christmas and Happy Shopping!



Every Christmas there is a time when I reflect on past Christmases. I think back to when I was a child. I remember my life as a young married person, the addition of every child, and now my grandparenting years. I especially cherish the times with my husband as our years together are dwindling.

No matter how bad or how good times were, Christmas was always good. The memories from my earlier years are all in pictures. One of the images was a picture of me beside a silver tinsel tree and a color wheel. It was a black and white picture, but I do remember the wheel. Do any of you remember those days?

There were pictures of my family together around the tree. My youngest brother was there. I miss him. He is in Heaven now. We would all spend Christmas Eve at my aunt's house. My uncle and my dad had this reoccurring joke at Christmas. They would each have a prank gift for the other one. We would laugh so hard. Christmas was always special at our house. We had all kinds of goodies. My grandmother made the best chocolate cake. I learned to make it through trial and error. It is a family hit. My grandmother is in Heaven now. My mom made all kinds of goodies, too. I love her strawberry cake. It was always delicious.

Of course, marriage changes things. Things are especially different at Christmas time. You are the one that is doing the planning and trying to figure out how to make new family traditions, but keep the old ones. Now that five children have changed into ten and twelve grandchildren later, we have made our own traditions. They have developed and changed over the years. As each child married, we had to be flexible and figure out a way for all of us to get together with our own families and grandparents on both sides.

When our children were at home, we had some lean years, but we made Christmas goodies of our own. I still make my grandmother's cake every year. The gifts were small, in fact, they received more from other family members than they did from us for several years. But that did not matter, because we were together at Christmas. We celebrated our Savior's birth at home and at church.

My father-in-law's last Christmas with us was a very special one. We knew his health was failing, but during his last few years he insisted on coming to our house for Christmas Day. He liked my fried turkey and enjoyed being with the children. So he and Grandma would come over for lunch and be with the seven of us. We have a picture of him with a stack of presents in his lap at his last Christmas. His lap is so full of gifts he is grinning around the packages. Each child had given him something or made him something that year. Grandma and Granddad Worthington had a special Christmas that year. They are both in Heaven now.

Over the years we have added more decorations, more gifts-though not extravagant, more goodies, and more people to love. Adding grandchildren to the home has made more laughter, and of course, more noise. The amazement on the children's faces lights our hearts with joy. They love Christmas, not just for presents, but for the very idea of Christmas. Each one knows what Christmas is about. They look forward to the traditions we have established, and the excitement each new year brings.

My parents moved out here in 2016 for different reasons, but one was to enjoy the young children that have come into their lives. Daddy was such a kidder. He would make faces and pretend to chase them all over the house. He would tell the cutest stories, and they would hang onto every word. He would include their names in the story, and they loved it. Mom would always do the shopping and cook all the goodies, and Dad would be the toy to play with. They loved Christmas in so many ways. It was their favorite time of the year.

As you may know, my dad is in Heaven now. He went to be with Jesus in August 2019. The last two Christmases have been hard without him, but he is celebrating with Jesus now. My mother passed away in July of this year. Both of my parents are gone now. My mom is in Heaven with Daddy. Her death was more unexpected than Dad's, even though she was in poor health. We just did not see it coming until the last few weeks of her life.

There will be a sense of sadness with them gone. My brother and

I are left now to tend to her things and mourn her passing. As we looked through her things recently, the memories flooded. We laughed and cried together. We still have more to look through at Christmas. They are sweet memories, but a sense of loss still prevails.

As my brother and his wife left to go back to Texas, I began to think of all that transpired. I was so grateful they had been here to help with this task, and I was going to miss them.



I was exhausted and my emotions were conflicted. A lifetime of memories had passed through my hands and heart.

A sense of sadness overcame me. My parents would not be here for Christmas. Fortunately, after a good night of rest and some reflection, the Lord tapped me on the shoulder as He often does.

He whispered in my ear as He wrapped His arms around me. He reminded me, "Isn't this what Christmas is about? I came to save the world from their sins. I came to save you! I came so your family

could be in Heaven together. I came to comfort you in the loss of your loved ones. I came so that others might be saved. I will comfort you as you lose others along the way."

Jesus Christ was and is the perfect gift. He is all-encompassing. Every need we have was wrapped in swaddling clothes. Every burden we have was hung on the cross. Every sin was covered with his precious blood. He lived so that we could live abundantly (*John 10:10*). That covers our sins, hurts, needs, and burdens. Our future home in Heaven was guaranteed when He arose from the dead.

Don't wait until it is too late to witness to someone you love and those around you. We don't know when any of us will draw our last breath. Share His love today. Be sure to have Jesus in our thoughts and hearts every day, not just at Christmas!

Merry Christmas!

Side note: *Many of the memories I have been able to relive were caught on film. Don't wait until it is too late to print your pictures. Having them in your phone is no substitute for having them in your hand.*



Mrs. Worthington has five children and twelve grandchildren. She serves as Principal of Pathway Christian Academy in Goldsboro.

No Greater Gift

Tiffany W. Johnson



I love Christmas music! Actually, I love EVERYTHING about Christmas. Christmas music, in particular, has always had a way of putting me in a good mood as it reminds me of how thankful I am for family, friends, and the gift of Jesus.

Recently, I was cleaning around the house and listening to the holly, jolly tunes of the season when an oldie came across my playlist. Originally recorded in 1970 by The Jackson 5, the song “Give Love on Christmas Day” eased its way through the speakers in my kitchen. As I sang along with Michael and the crew, I couldn’t help but think how true the message was and still applies over 50 years later.

*“Why don’t you give love on Christmas Day?
Oh, even the man who has everything,
Would be so happy if you would bring,
Him love on Christmas Day.
No greater gift is there than love.”*

These are not profound words of wisdom or anything you don’t already know. It’s just a simple reminder for myself and maybe you can get something out of it as well.

Retail lines were long months before Christmas with the decreased workforce of employees. Don’t let it affect the way you treat the cashier or others in the checkout line. Have patience. Give love. The self-checkouts

were aggravating long before I began buying Christmas gifts. When the register malfunctions and I have to ring up everything all over again, it’s not the manager’s fault. I need to be kind. I need to give love. We are all pinching pennies a little tighter with the current inflation rates. Christmas can add to our stressfulness which can lead us to having unintended bad attitudes towards family and friends, but only if we let it. Smile and don’t take for granted the loyalty of those around you. We need to give love.

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity (love), these three; but the greatest of these is charity (love).”

I Corinthians 13:13

I’m so very glad that God gave His love through the gift of His Son when I didn’t deserve it. There are people we come in contact with each and every day that need His love. Share it and remember,

*“Every Tom, Dick, and Harry, every Susie too,
Needs love every bit as much as you.”*



Mrs. Tiffany W. Johnson serves as Editor of PathPointe Magazine. She and her family reside in Snow Hill, NC.

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And Finally...



Christmas...

One of our family's favorite things to do at Christmas is to set aside some funds for charitable contributions and let the kids decide to whom they should go. We started this when our three sons were little. They were always sworn to secrecy! How they loved dropping off envelopes of cash here and there after dark on Christmas Eve! They have kids of their own now, but the tradition continues.

J. J.

I remember how much I loved Christmas lights as a child. In fact, I still love them! We would always drive through different neighborhoods and downtown areas at night to look at all of the beautiful decorations. Everything seemed so big, bright, and colorful. It's amazing how something so simple could bring such excitement.

A. D.

Christmas is the most wonderful time of year at our home. I am 67 and my husband is 74. We have been married 49 years. Our children are grown with children of their own. They all look forward to coming to our home. Along with other family members that visit, we have a total of 19 people that come for a Christmas meal. It takes days of preparation, but we really enjoy it. It's a busy day that we love. We talk about God sending His Son to this earth so we could have life. We discuss this with our family and make sure we take time to

celebrate His birth. To us, Christmas is family, love, joy, and happiness. Thank God for Christmas!

S. D.

The most Christmas fun to me is looking at Christmas lights, decorating, seeing family, sharing memories, wonderful food, and thanking God for His Son, Jesus. I also like opening presents, seeing the faces and reactions of others as they open presents, and spending time with family. Just being together is the best!

T. B.

“My Love”

We'd like your help for an upcoming edition of “And Finally...”

Write to us in 150 words or less and tell us about the love of your life!

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December 31, 2021.

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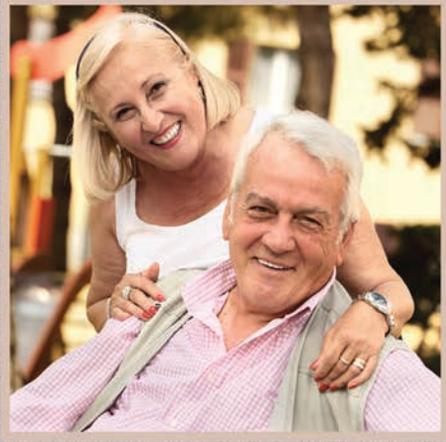
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