

## **The Greatest Gift of All**

### **Oh Come, Let Us Sing with Joy to the Lord**

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoso shall believe in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” And so, the greatest gift of all was given to mankind.

Over the years we’ve come to celebrate that gift by giving presents of our own at Christmas time. Perhaps what we offer are small in comparison, yet they still reflect the profound and enduring love that was given to us on that night so long ago;

### **Song of Bethlehemtown - women with the children**

When we moved to Georgia, my neighbor came to our house with a gift of zucchini bread. That was her excuse to come and ask about the ironman triathlon sticker on the back of our van. When she learned that it was me who had done the triathlon, the gift of zucchini bread really became the gift of her friendship. We have spent countless hours of running, biking, swimming and paddle boarding, all the while talking to each other about everything! I am so grateful for this gift of friendship from a truly amazing person! – *Colleen Nicholls – 2014--2<sup>nd</sup> Soprano*

I received an engagement ring and a proposal on Christmas Day from my late husband. I thought I had opened all of my Christmas presents, but was told that there was *one more* hidden in the tree. I looked, and looked, and finally found a small box. I HOPED that the gift would be a ring, but was thinking it was probably just some earrings, or something like that. When I opened the box, and saw the diamond solitaire engagement ring, I cried tears of joy! The proposal came next, and of course I said yes! What a wonderful Christmas! I went out looking for a wedding dress the very next day! -- *Gale Franklin Riemann – 2012 -- 1<sup>st</sup> Soprano*

### **Rejoice, the Lord is King**

When I was a young teenager, I admired my older brother and his ability to sing and play his guitar. I asked him to teach me how to play and he began doing so. I was really enjoying it. Christmas morning, I was happy to see a guitar underneath the clothing and other things a young teenager likes. I was so excited! It brought me many years of enjoyment and I still have it to this

very day. - Janet McCloud -- 2004 -- Soprano

When I was a little girl, I wanted a playhouse really bad. I remember my dad and several members of our congregation working on something in the backyard. I thought they were building my dad a workshop. I didn't find until Christmas morning that they were building a playhouse for me. My Dad had taken time every day after work to build it and several men from our church had volunteered their time. It wasn't fancy by any means – but it was a playhouse. That evening in the chilly Christmas night air, my Dad helped me move all my play kitchen and doll stuff out there. It was always very special to me. -- Angela Burke – 2017 -- Soprano

### **Some Children See Him**

When I was 7 I wanted a bicycle for Christmas. I found it under the Christmas tree from Mom and Dad. My father took me out to teach me how to ride it. He kept his hand on the back wheel to stabilize it. And I happily rode down the street with Dad running behind me. After a while Dad stopped running behind me and I was riding on my own. Like Heavenly Father my Earthly Father had given me the tools and guidance I needed to start on my journey. Then I could make my own decisions as to where to ride until I returned back home. As we celebrate the birth of Christ this season may we commit ourselves to follow the path he has prepared for us so that we may one day return in glory to be with Heavenly Father. *Jeanne Angus – 2012 -- Soprano*

### **Children: Ding, Dong Merrily on High, Lullaby**

One year, when I was around 9, just when we finished Christmas dinner, we looked outside and it was snowing. We all went outside and Dad read the Christmas story as snow fell all around us. The kids made snow angels while my Mom sang “Angels We Have Heard on High”. Then we sat around in the newly fallen snow singing Christmas carols – making a game of trying to think of songs with “Angels” in it. I don't remember a single gift I got that year, but I remember those snow angels on the front lawn every Christmas Eve. – *Adam Poulsen -- 2010 -- Tenor*

When I was in High School the biggest dance of the year, bar none, was the Junior Prom in the Spring. I prayed all year that I would have a date but not only that, that I would have the most beautiful dress in the world to wear. I found the dress but it was so far out from the budget I knew I could never have it. Things were difficult financially for us that year so I just put the dress out of my mind but I dreamed about it at night. Coming down the stairs on Christmas morning, there was the dress with shoes dyed to match hanging close by the Christmas tree. I broke into tears of joy and it wasn't until much later as I reflected back on that day that I realized my parents had a very meager Christmas that year. All these years later, I have remembered what my parents gave up for me. P.S. I did have a date!!! – *Pamela Gates – 2004 -- Director*

### **Candlelight Carol**

I was born on Christmas Day and people always ask me if I felt shorted because my birthday was over shadowed by such a significant holiday. I never did feel that way. It's an honor to share my birthday with the Savior. The gift of my life was the best Christmas present I could ever ask for. And my Mother was often fond of saying that she gave my Father fishing boots Christmas Morning...and a fishing partner Christmas Night. – *Brad Beaton – 2009 -- Tenor*

After having our patience and faith tested for seven long years, we were blessed to finally give birth to our first child. Born two hours apart in the same hospital as his cousin a week before Christmas, he was the last of five cousins born within four months of each other. What an impactful visual it was on Christmas Eve to see five baby carriers in a row containing fresh spirits from Heaven. Such a beautiful spirit resided in our home that holiday season. Our son was a sweet reminder of the miracle and gift of life and the joy that must have been felt to hear the glad tidings that the long-awaited birth of the Savior, Jesus Christ, had finally come to pass. -- *Cindi Pickett – 2004 – Soprano*

### **Hear the Glad Tidings**

In 2008 my family didn't have a lot. At around 4am on Christmas Day we were preparing for a long day of travel to visit family. But when I awoke to a morning dark sky I heard beautiful Christmas music softly playing in the background. I went into the living room and saw our little Christmas tree all lit up -- and two small gifts for me and my brother. We were both so happy

that we were on Santa's Nice List. Those small moments of Christmas seem to be what we hold the dearest -- and become a gift in and of themselves. -- *Masa Ketchem – 2019 -- Bass*

### **Little Drummer Boy/Peace on Earth**

Christmas 1999 Dad was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and we knew it would be our last with him. We went about trying to make every moment count, to imprint everything in our hearts of this “last Christmas”. I remember thinking here we are celebrating a birth while watching a life slowly slip away. Yet, thru it all there really was peace – peace of knowing that because of the birth of the Savior and the resurrection that would follow, we would see our father again someday, that this wasn’t the “last Christmas” for our family. Now 20 Christmases later we celebrate and honor those special loved ones from our families who are no longer with us. We are grateful that these special Dads and Moms were part of our lives and influenced and taught us the gospel. – *Sarah Jensen – 2008 -- Alto*

### **O Come Emanuel**

One of the greatest gifts I received was the gift of recovery. For many years I was a slave to drugs and alcohol. During that period I lost the respect of those who were very close to me. There were times when I thought I could quit but to no avail. I credit my wife for helping me to finally recover. I have many years of sobriety thanks to AA, my family and my Savior. My life could not be better. The gift of another chance at life is magical, especially at Christmastime.

*David Neumiller – 2012 -- Tenor*

It was a week until Christmas. Although I was relieved to be home after I had been in the hospital with my sick 2-week-old baby, it was a difficult time. A month before the baby was born my husband was let go from his company. We had 5 small children, little to no savings and there were hospital bills and Christmas to think about. I prayed fervently to know how to deal with the stress of finances, fear and a Christmas with no Santa. A few days later, I opened the door and found a stuffed moose with \$300 in it. Enough to buy Christmas and a visit from Santa. I’ll never forget the kindnesses shown to our family. There was so much darkness, anguish and fear at that time. And then...the flicker of hope and power of prayer, ignited a light so bright that it was impossible not to see it. Friends, family, neighbors and church family engulfed us in their love and helped us remember the true meaning of Christmas. It wasn’t the

money that made that Christmas, but the people who stepped in to help and the light of the Savior who carried us! - *Becky Garfield -- 2009 – Alto and flutist*

### **Wishes and Candles**

Because there is no greater gift than giving, again this year our wish is for each of you to participate in the “Light Up Georgia with Kindness” initiative and take home one of the Light Up bags. At 6pm on Dec. 24 residents around our community are asked to display white luminary bags across their homes, representing personal acts of kindness given daily during the month of December. May these lights honor him who taught us all to give by giving us his all.

### **What Can I Give**

It was December 25, 1967. I sat in my room inconsolable because there had been no gifts for me under the tree. There was a knock on the door and my mother called out my name and asked could she come in. I said, “I don’t care”. She walked in and held me in her arms. Her soft voice was so kind, and the things that she told me are still imbedded on my heart. She talked to me about love, and the true meaning of Christmas, and how I was a big boy for my age and was probably the only one who could handle not receiving a gift. She talked to me of many other things that helped me through that day. Her talking to me was probably the best gift ever. Although I may not have received a toy, a game, or even a stupid pair of socks, I received the greatest gift ever. The one that will and has always stayed on my heart, “Words from my Mother.” – *Lorenzo Best – 2004 – Second Tenor*

When we lived in Morocco, we reached out to a shelter for homeless children and volunteered to help for an upcoming event. Little did we realize that the event would be scheduled for December 25<sup>th</sup>. I asked each of my kids, all of them teenagers, if they were willing to give up the day and our traditions and all of them wanted to do it. We decided to bring a camera, printer and clothes so the kids could dress up and take pictures. Many kids had never had a picture of themselves and when they were handed their photo, they were fascinated. In addition to giving up our traditions that day, we had to travel for three hours, all just to give what seems like such a tiny gift, and yet, I think my kids would all say it was one of the most meaningful Christmas’ they remember. *Marci Ladd -- 2004 – Alto/Director*

### **Carol of the Magi**

When I was still new to the church, I had the opportunity to serve our Bishop's wife as she battled the final stages of cancer. It was the first time I was involved in serving someone and she became very dear to me. A couple of weeks before Christmas she gave every family in the congregation a special ornament she had made just for them. To my husband and I she gave a beautiful angel. When she died on Christmas day we knew this gift was her way of telling us that she was still with us and looking over us -- just like an angel. We put it on top of our Christmas tree every year. It is the most precious gift anyone has ever given to me. - *Trudy Anderson – 2004 -- Alto*

When I was 8 my Dad's company went under and my family lost everything. We lost our beautiful home my Dad had built for my Mom, cars, all activities we enjoyed such as piano, dance, drill team, sports – everything was gone. We were the recipients of Secret Santa that year. I remember seeing so many large trash bags just full of gifts. I didn't realize until later how amazing that must have been for my parents. It took many years for my parents to rebuild their life, but once they did, they made it a point to make sure WE were the givers. I will never forget the joy I felt when I saw the joy on their faces of the families we helped that year. The best gift I ever received was learning how important it is to give at Christmas. *Nacy Jones – 2007 -- Soprano*

### **I Wish You Christmas – Warm Slow**

Before the birth of our second child I wondered if I could love another as much as I loved our first born. But then my son came wailing into the world on Christmas Eve, and I held him in my arms and felt such a genuine and unique love just for him. I know I am only one of billions of God's children, but that special Christmas Eve let me know that I am loved – by the perfect God and Creator of all good in this universe of ours, even my Father in Heaven. – *Shoji Ketchem – 2010 -- Tenor*

Profound and enduring love.

As we reflect on gifts received and given at Christmastime, may we never lose sight of His gift to us -- that of his son, a Savior, even Christ the Lord, The greatest gift of all. Good Night and Merry Christmas.

**Final - Christmastime - with the children**

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