

## CHRISTMAS JOY

Time was with most of us, when Christmas Day, encircling all our limited world like a magic ring, left nothing out for us to miss or seek; bound together all our home enjoyments, affections, and hopes; grouped everything and everyone round the Christmas fire, and made the little picture shining in our bright young eyes, complete. ~ Charles Dickens

The Christmas season is upon us and one can feel a certain sparkle in the air, a hopeful joy, a peace of heart, sweet anticipation of family gatherings and the fun of hearts knit together to enjoy the spirit of this wonderful time of the year. But most importantly, it is the time to rejoice as we celebrate the birth of Baby Jesus and the true meaning of Christmas. It is that special time of the year when hearts are full of praise and worship for the gift of love that God gave us—His Son, Jesus—who is the connection from earth to heaven and who, through His life's sacrifice, provided access to our Heavenly Father. What greater gift could mankind receive than the gift of salvation?

It is a time to rejoice and to celebrate your faith with family and friends. It is time to share with others your blessings as eager smiles are seen on the faces of children as Christmas Day approaches. It is fun to see the smiles of anticipation on the parents' and grandparents' faces as joyful thoughts dance in their heads—as the family gathered together to watch the children opening their presents. Yes, it is a chaos of laughter, excited shouts of joy, Christmas wrappings scattered about and the shouts of Grandma as she shouts, “Save the bows!”

Christmas is a season of joy and hope, as we pray to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus throughout the season. We purpose to not let the holiday commercials threaten to overshadow the real meaning of Christmas in hearts as we are reminded of the gift of Hope that God sent to earth on that silent night so long ago.

This is Christmas: not the tinsel, not the giving and receiving, not even the carols, but the humble heart that receives anew the wondrous gift, the Christ. ~ Frank McKibben

**Food and holidays go hand-in-hand!** How many of you can remember grandmothers, mothers, and aunts laughing and talking at the table exchanging recipes during the holiday season? Each of them eager to share a new receipt gleaned from a friend and excited to create or recreate a special dish for their family. It is a special and cherished time in the kitchen as laughter rings out from the kitchen to fill the house with merriment, thus, bringing the men to the door to find out what was causing the excitement before they were quickly shooed away.

I remember my mother-in-law's answer one Christmas when I asked her and my aunts to give me their recipes for Christmas dinner and all the goodies. Being raised by my father, I had never learned the fine art of cooking and baking and it was new and confusing to me. Laughter erupted around the table as smiles danced upon their lips and her eyes twinkled as she looked at me and said, *“Honey, you will just have to watch what I do, because I don't use a receipt—never have. It is just a pinch of this, a shake or two of that, and a hand full poured slowly as you add a dash of this and that and so on.* Talk about being confused before I asked... I guess the look on my face was priceless for they immediately went into fits

of laughter. Then Mom wrapped her arms around me and whispered, *Honey, it's okay, we will do it together; you'll learn to cook, bake and fill the holidays with delightful meals and treats! I promise!*

She had a remarkable talent of making ordinary things seem special, both in the kitchen and elsewhere, well, it took some time for me to learn how to cook and bake from a pinch to a squeeze to a hand full, and yes, I watched, and I learned by working with her how to make the special dishes. Today, my grandchildren ask me the same question and I give them the same answer that given to me—a pinch here, a dash there and then laughing as I see the puzzled looks on their faces; I will add the measurements in for them, but only after I let them stew for a while. Christmas candy and cookies were my favorite things to make and I filled up the candy dish and cookie plates with them and my heart is blessed when I see my children and grandchildren doing the same or hear them talking amongst themselves as to which goodies they hope Nanny will make this year.

May you be encouraged to explore new recipes and ideas for holiday gatherings. Be willing to expand your entertaining horizons and stretch out into new delights for the holiday table as well as exploring new crafts to make. You just might uncover what will become a treasured tradition in the years to come.

From home to home and heart to heart, from one place to another, the warmth and joy of Christmas brings us closer to each other.  
~Emily Matthews

Would you agree with me that we must be careful to guard against the flesh warring with the spirit as our time seems to quickly run out, and our to-do- lists becomes longer during the holiday season, and we find ourselves becoming grumpy and out of sorts. Please forgive us Lord Jesus for yielding to the frustration of trying to get everything done, keeping up and losing it in the process of what is supposed to be a joyous time. Jesus, would you please restore the joy of Christmas to my heart and help me to relax each day as I make time for YOU—for you are my one true source of joy. May the joy that you give to me fill my heart to the place of overflowing out to others, and not only during the Christmas season, but let that joy touch hearts all year long.

What is Christmas? It is a fervent wish that every cup may overflow with blessings rich and eternal, and that every path may lead to peace.  
~ Agnes M. Pharo