

Lancaster Farming

OPINION

Spirit Of Christmas

Late one Christmas Eve I sank back, tired but content, into my easy chair. The kids were in bed, the gifts were wrapped, the milk and cookies waited by the fireplace for Santa.

As I sat back admiring the tree with its decorations, I couldn't help but feel that something was missing. It wasn't long before the tiny twinkling tree lights lulled me to sleep. I don't know how long I slept, but all of a sudden I knew that I wasn't alone.

I opened my eyes and you can imagine my surprise when I saw Santa Claus himself standing next to my Christmas tree. He was dressed all in fur from his head to his foot just as the poem described him. But he was not the "jolly old elf" of Christmas legend. The man who stood before me looked sad and disappointed. And there were tears in his eyes.

"Santa, what's wrong?" I asked. "Why are you crying?"

"It's the children," Santa replied sadly.

"But the children love you," I said.

"Oh, I know they love me, and the gifts I bring them," Santa said. "But the children of today seem to have somehow missed out on the true spirit of Christmas. It's not their fault. It's just that the adults, many of them not having been taught themselves, have forgotten to teach the children."

"Teach them what?" I asked.

Santa's kind old face became soft, more gentle. His eyes began to shine with something more than tears. He spoke softly. "Teach the children the true meaning of Christmas. Teach them that the part of Christmas we can see, hear and touch is much more than meets the eye. Teach them the symbolism behind the customs and traditions of Christmas we now observe. Teach them what it is they truly represent."

Santa reached into his bag and pulled out a tiny Christmas tree and set it on my mantel. "Teach them about the Christmas tree. Green is the second color of Christmas. The stately evergreen with its unchanging color represents the hope of eternal life in Jesus. Its needles point heavenward as a reminder that man's thoughts should turn heavenward as well."

Santa reached into his bag again and pulled out a shiny star and placed it at the top of the small tree. "The star was the heavenly sign of promise. God promised a Savior for the world and the star was the sign of the fulfillment of that promise of the night that Jesus Christ was born. Teach the children that God always fulfills His promises and that wise men still seek Him."

"Red," said Santa, "is the first color of Christmas." He pulled forth a red ornament for the tiny tree. "Red is deep, intense, vivid. It is the color of the life giving blood that flows through our veins. It is the symbol of God's greatest gift. Teach the children that Christ gave His life and shed His blood for them that they might have eternal life. When they see the color red it should remind them of that most wonderful gift."

Santa found a bell in his pack and placed it on the tree. "Just as lost sheep are guided to safety by the sound of the bell, it continues to ring today for all to be guided to the fold. Teach the children to follow the true Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep."

Santa placed a candle on the mantel and lit it. The soft glow from its tiny flame brightened the room. "The glow of the candle represents how man can show his thanks for the gift of God's son that Christmas Eve long ago. Teach the children to follow in Christ's footsteps. To go about doing good. Teach them to let their lights shine before men that all may see it and glorify God. This is what is symbolized when the twinkle lights shine on the tree like hundreds of bright, shining candles, each of them representing one of God's precious children, their light shining for all to see."

Again, Santa reached into his bag and this time he brought forth a tiny red and white striped candy cane. As he hung it on the tree, he spoke softly. "The candy cane is a stick of hard, white candy. White to symbolize the virgin birth and sinless nature of Jesus and the shape 'J' to represent the precious name of Jesus who came to earth as our Savior. It also represents the crook of the Good Shepherd, which he uses to reach down into the ditches of the world to lift out the fallen lambs who, like sheep, have gone astray. The original candy cane had three small red stripes that are the stripes of the scourging Jesus received by which we are healed, and a large red stripe that represents the shed blood of Jesus so that we can have eternal life. Teach these things to the children."

Santa brought out a beautiful wreath made of fresh fragrant greenery and tied with a bright red bow. "The bow reminds us of the bond of perfection which is love. The wreath embodies all the good things about Christmas for those with eyes to see and hearts to understand. It contains the colors of red and green and the heaven turned needles of the evergreen. The bow tells the story of good will toward all and its color reminds us of Christ's sacrifice. Even its very shape is symbolic, representing eternity and the eternal nature of Christ's love. It is a circle without beginning and without end. These are the things you must teach the children."

"But where does that leave you, Santa?" I asked.

The tears gone now from his eyes, a smile broke over Santa's face. "Why, bless you my dear," he laughed. "I'm only a symbol myself. I represent the spirit of family fun and the joy of giving and receiving. If the children are taught these other things, there is no danger that I'll ever be forgotten."

"I think I'm beginning to understand," I replied.

"That's why I came," said Santa. "You're an adult. If you don't teach the children these things, then who will?"

— Author Unknown

❖ FARM CALENDAR ❖

Tuesday, December 25
Merry Christmas!
Lancaster Farming office closed.

Tuesday, January 1
Happy New Year!
Lancaster Farming office closed.

Thursday, January 3
Two-Day Basic Dairy Farm

Management Workshop, Lancaster Farm and Home Center, also Jan. 10.
Maryland Grain Marketing Meeting, Howard Johnson, Millington, Md.
Study Circle on Forcing Perennials, Kutztown Produce Auction, 7 p.m.-9 p.m., (610) 378- (Turn to Page A24)

Now Is The Time
By Leon Ressler
Lancaster County Extension Director

To Remember The Reason For The Season

Recently I have been reading accounts of how people have made major changes in their lives since the events of Sept. 11. The common thread in the stories is that most people are adjusting their other goals in life to make more time for family and serving others. Some have changed jobs, giving up the chance for large financial gain in order to achieve other goals of greater value.

Many of us working in agriculture and especially those on the farm have already chosen that profession because of a desire to seek to put family and service to God and mankind ahead of financial gain. However, even employment on the farm can become so demanding that if we are not diligent we may find our work is preventing us from reaching other life goals.

Take time to evaluate your life and make sure things are in a healthy balance. Make a special effort to make some Christmas memories with your family. Volunteer at an inner-city mission where you and

your family will have the opportunity to interact with people in very different situations and will grow to appreciate your blessings even more. Finally, give thanks for the birth of Christ, who brought light and joy to the world 2000 years ago.

To Understand Difference Between Soy-Diesel And Bio-Diesel

Depending on your definition of "soy-diesel," you may have misunderstood recent warnings from Dennis Buffington, professor of agricultural and biological engineering, on the dangers of burning soy-diesel blended with diesel fuel in engines.

According to Buffington, the term "bio-diesel" is the modern term for transesterified oil (whether its origin is vegetable, animal, or spent cooking oil). Bio-diesel meets ASTM Fuel Grade Standards PS-121 and it is perfectly safe and advisable to burn bio-diesel straight or blended with conventional diesel fuel in diesel engines. However, Buffington points out that in some regions of the country, the term soy-diesel is still being used to refer to bio-diesel that is derived from soybean oil. In these regions of the country it is also perfectly safe to use this fuel either straight or blended with diesel fuel since this meets ASTM standards and relevant government regulations.

However, in some parts of the country, the term "soy-diesel" is being used to refer to raw soybean oil that is blended with diesel fuel along with an additive. According to Buffington, "engines will run short term on this mixture, but the mixture does not meet ASTM standards. It does not meet government regulations and users risk damaging their engines."

Buffington warns it is "buyer beware" of what he or she is purchasing to use as a fuel in an engine. If you have doubts, check the owner's manual and a certified fuel supplier to determine the proper fuel for the optimal performance and service life of the engine.

To Respond To The EPA Drift Control Regulations

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is seeking comments until Jan. 19, 2002 on proposed pesticide product labeling designed to reduce spray drift.

Bill Hoffman, senior extension associate in Penn State's Pest Management Information Center, says crop producers could be affected by new restrictions on ground boom and air blast sprayers.

The proposed labeling targets application criteria to reduce wind-blown spray droplets and particles. Some potential restrictions for ground boom sprayers include nozzle height must be within 48 inches of the ground or the top of the crop canopy. All applications in winds greater than 10 mph will be prohibited.

With air blast sprayers, operators will be prohibited from directing sprays above trees or vines in orchards or vineyards. They would be required to turn off outward pointing nozzles at row ends and outer rows. Applications will be prohibited when wind speeds are less than three mph or greater than 10 mph.

The proposal is available on the Web at <http://www.epa.gov/opppmsd1/PR-notices/prdraft-spraydrift801.htm> or by "fax on demand" at (202) 401-0527 (select item 6142). Comments must be received by Jan. 19, 2002 and identified by the docket control number opp-00730 on the first page of a mail submission, or in the subject line of an e-mail. E-mail comments to oppdocket@epa.gov or mail them to PRIB Information Resources and Services Division, Office of Pesticide Programs/EPA, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20460.

Quote Of The Week:

"Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

— An angel appearing to the shepherds near Bethlehem

BY LAWRENCE W. ALTHOUSE

INCREASING HIS GOVERNMENT

Background Scripture: Isaiah 9:1-7; Luke 2:1-20.
Devotional Reading: Luke 2:8-20.

When Dr. Samuel Johnson demanded to know what good Oliver Cromwell had ever done England, Lord Auchinleck exploded, "God! doctor, he taught kings that they had a joint in their neck." Kings were mortal and their heads no more secure than others.

Despite our democratic ideals, we often forget that all human beings have "a joint in their neck." Unfortunately, in democratic as well as totalitarian lands, we look to human beings to do and be what is beyond human nature. We confer a near-perfection upon them and expect that they will rule in perfect wisdom and justice. When they fail us, some of us will stoutly deny their failure, while others will see only their failures.

Just one year ago, approximately one-half of the U.S. was happy with the outcome of the

presidential election, while the other half of the country was quite unhappy. I think politics may now be our true religion. For many the litmus test of character is not whether they believe in and serve God, but whether they are a Republican or Democrat.

The Anointed One

In ancient Israel, kings were ceremonially anointed as God's Messiah — "the anointed one" — and were regarded as semi-divine. Unfortunately, none of them lived up to those expectations.

King David himself was an imperfect ruler. Isaiah 9:2-7 might have originally been part of the royal anointing, signifying the model of the ideal king.

But again and again they were disappointed in their expectation. Christians see the prophecy fulfilled in the advent of Jesus Christ. His rule is spiritual rather than temporal, something which many could not accept. We hold that no temporal ruler can ever be the "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." But Jesus Christ for us is all of that and more.

Christ's advent as a "child... born for us, a son given to us," bursts upon this world as "a great light" that shines in the darkness of human affairs. Isaiah 8 describes in detail the darkness of the times: injustice, corruption, and the faithlessness of God's people. As at the creation of the world, God said, "Let there be light, and there was light" to vanquish the dark chaos, so the advent of God's Messiah was a brilliant light shined into the deep darkness of human society.

Messianic Expectations

Have we not yet learned that salvation does not come from kings, emperors, dictators, oligarchies, presidents, prime ministers, or anarchic mobs? As good citizens, we must choose the best leaders we can, but never invest in them our messianic adulation and expectations.

Our ultimate loyalty must be to Christ, not to a candidate nor to a party. This does not mean that we cannot or should not participate in parties, so long as we remember that "Christian" is the benchmark, not "liberal" or "conservative."

It seems incredible that Christian should look to this helpless child born in a stable as the "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace," but God has never pretended that his ways are our ways. When we are truly aware of what God wants and what he is doing, he astounds us every step of the way.

Christmas this year will not likely bring us God's Peaceable Kingdom, but just as Isaiah prophesied, "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end..." our joyous opportunity is to promote as much as we can the increase of his government in our lives and society. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder..."

Come Lord, Jesus, come!

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