

STORIES AT CHRISTMAS TIME

By John F. Hall

The front porch of my Antebellum home is 53 feet long and eight feet wide. The concrete floor has a crack at the front door. I have two swings on the covered porch. I took one swing down when I built a deck on the east side of the house. The swing on that side of the house was in the way leading onto the deck. As Christmas was a few weeks away, I put up the Nativity using the swing that I had taken down. I used two 16-inch concrete blocks to raise the swing off the porch floor. This is the first year that I moved the Nativity to the west side of the porch. I put it in front of the living room window. I use painter's thin plastic sheets to cover the swing. I have lighted statues of Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus, and a lamb. We can see Mary and Joseph from the inside of the living room. After Christmas, I will store the Nativity and leave the swing in place.



Some of my Christmas stories will have some humor and some will be very serious. This year has been a mixture of unimaginable tragedy and unexpected joy. For anyone reading



these stories, that might have doubts about Jesus Christ, I've written before that Christ does not speak to us directly. He speaks to us in our dreams and through others. Remember the words in Mark, Chapter 12, Verse 30: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." In Luke, Chapter 2, Verses 8 thru 14, are these words:

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause you great joy for all the people. Today, in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rest."

This December, 2021 we have seen historic destruction from tornadoes. The month started with unusually high temperatures reaching 70 degrees. I walked in my front yard and looked out at the farmer's fields of winter wheat. I call the fields "God's green carpets." Walking past the front porch, I noticed the concrete floor was wet from the high humidity. Then storm warnings came over my cell phone. Trigg County was under a Tornado Watch until 11:00 pm. The winds increased in intensity and one end piece of the metal roof on the west side of my house started to pull lose. The winds caused it to start banging and banging. The next morning around 1:00 am a tornado smashed into the Candle Factory in Mayfield, Kentucky. The night shift of over 100 workers seemed to be

doomed as the 135 to 165 mile an hour winds slammed into the factory. The devastation of the building was total. The news reports first indicated that 70 workers were killed. Eight workers died that morning. The tornado stayed on the ground for 250 miles through three states. The city of Mayfield was heavily damaged. The town of Dawson Springs was destroyed as the tornado moved towards Bowling Green. Seventy four people in Kentucky were killed and hundreds were injured by the deadly tornado.

Several days after the tornado, The President of the United States flew into Fort Campbell. From there, he was taken by helicopter to survey the damage to the devastated cities of Mayfield and Dawson Springs. The same day as the President's visit, my wife, Paula had a doctor's appointment in Nashville, Tennessee. After leaving our house at 7:00 am, we drove onto to highway 68/80. I noticed in my rear view mirror a caravan of approximately 20 vehicles moving at a high rate of speed. They had their bright lights on. Three large two axle grocery size trucks sped passed me. Each white truck was numbered: 1, 2, 3. On the side of each truck, in large letters: URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE. The doors on the trucks had letters: Memphis Fire Department. The dozen or so white pickup trucks also had, in smaller letters: Memphis Fire Department. In the middle of the caravan was a chartered bus with a large banner: SEARCH AND RESCUE. I was surprised to see such assistance from the Memphis Fire Department. As I turned onto Interstate 24, the caravan continued towards Hopkinsville. I believe the caravan was on its way to Dawson Springs, Kentucky.

On the way to Nashville, a storm warning came over my cell phone. It was about high winds and gusts up to 50 miles an hour for Trigg County until 4:30 pm. I called my son who was working in Murfreesboro, Tennessee and told him about the high winds. He told me that he would repair my roof as soon as he arrived back in Kentucky. To avoid the gridlock when Interstate 65 and Interstate 24 merge just north of Nashville, I drove off Interstate 24 at Joelton and took highway 41-A to the Briley Parkway which is Route 155. That road goes to the Saint Thomas West Hospital. Paula had her regular cancer check up with Dr. Shepard. First she had to have a mammogram and an ultrasound in the morning and the office visit after lunch.

Because the office visit was an hour away, we went to the hospital cafeteria for lunch. The cafeteria supervisor met us at the front door. She told us that the cafeteria was closed.



They were only serving a Holiday Meal to the hospital care workers. She told us that we are welcome to join them, but we would have to pay \$7 for the pot luck meal. I told her that sounded good to me. She told me to go pay the cashier and get in line. I showed the lady taking head count our receipt for the meal. We sat next to a table that had four hospital workers. Four more workers joined them at the table. They began laughing and joking and having a good time. After we finished our meal, I went over to their table and wished them a Merry Christmas. An elderly maintenance man had cleaned up a pie desert that a hospital worker had accidentally dropped in front of me. I told the

man that he was doing a great job and I wished him a Merry Christmas. He was smiling and was truly happy with his job. He told me to have a blessed Christmas and we shared a fist shake. It seemed that he knew all the hospital workers. The hospital staff served the pot luck meal.

After we left the hospital, I pointed out to Paula that the three restaurants that we frequented, Wendy's, O'Charley's, and Shoney's, near the hospital, had all permanently closed. Over 110,000 restaurants in the United States have permanently closed since the start of COVID-19.

On the return trip to Cadiz, we observed large pieces of metal barn roofing, ripped into pieces from the tornado out of Tennessee. Many pieces were entangled in the trees along the highway. Twenty eight years ago, on December 15, my nephew, Dale Garner, age 16, was killed in a car accident in Trigg County. His parents, Marsh and Roger have lived with the loss of their only child. I knew that as I was driving back from Nashville, they would be driving to the cemetery to visit Dale's grave. They consider our grandchildren to be their grandchildren, and our son as their son. I tell others to cherish the family and the friends they still have. For no one has the promise of tomorrow.

My son was able to repair the loose section of my roof. As expected, the next day, wind gusts of 30 to 35 miles an hour hit my roof, but my son's repairs held. As I was working on this story, the weather forecast was calling for three days of rain. Sharon Fuqua wrote a short piece called "The Riches of His Grace." These are her words: "Abundant in mercy and bountiful love, God gave us what we did not deserve; the greatest gift in all the world-His Son, Who came to serve. No longer enslaved in Satan's chains, we're no longer children of wrath, for God raised us up with Christ's saving work that leads us to a heavenly path. The power of His grace upon sinners like us reveals what God can do and what a difference it makes in a person's life to have their heart renewed. Secured by Christ we now live life anew, running the Victor's race. And how thankful we are to God above for the riches of His love."



Many years ago, I purchased a paper "Wise Man" for twenty five cents on a clearance table. Several times, Paula would try to throw my dirt cheap "Wise Man" away. After having to pull the "Wise Man" out of the trash can several times, I wrote these words in jest on the base of the "Wise Man": "Paula, keep your hands off the wise man." From joy to sadness, Paula's best friend, since childhood, is Judy Clark. They graduated from Trigg County High School. Judy worked for Paula at the Fort Campbell Army Hospital when Paula was the Chief of Administrative Services. Judy's husband, Anthony died on December 16th. Visitation will be on December 19th in Dover, Tennessee, with the funeral in Bumpus Mills, Tennessee on December 20th. We will be there to comfort Judy. On December 21st, this old writer has a regular check-up with my friend and physician, Dr. Daniel Butler.

On the 17th of December, I was helping Paula put the ornaments on our Christmas tree. I



had one ornament left to put on the tree. It was a flat medal angel with a date on the back of 2007. It was made in the USA. The front of the angel's dress has these words: "With God all things are possible." The angel is holding a lantern with a jewel in the lantern representing a flame. I decided to keep the angel with me. The angel's message is timely and true. Christmas is about Jesus Christ and all the gifts of grace that he has freely given to all of us. Be thankful and grateful to Christ for each day of your life. Share your faith, your happiness, and your hope with those that need encouragement in these difficult and hard times. To those that I

love, and to those that love this ole writer, I wish you a Blessed and a Holy Christmas.

*Read other stories by John F. Hall at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>