





# The Christmas I REMEMBER BEST

By Sherilyn Clarke Stinson

**C**hristmas in 1960 brought my first fashion doll, complete with a wonderful wardrobe crafted in secret by my mother. But the best surprise was yet to come. In our Christmas morning oblivion, we kids didn't realize Mom was in labor. She managed to endure until every gift was opened before going to the hospital to deliver our new baby brother. My new doll couldn't compete with Matthew, a real-life 10-pound doll with big brown eyes. He quickly became my special charge, and I assumed the role of "assistant mother." At the age of six, I believed I had found my mission in life. Matt was followed by a sister and then another brother, and I mothered them all.

In my early twenties I married with full expectation of becoming the mother of a large family. But life takes unexpected turns, and after two years of trying, we were diagnosed with infertility. It was a severe blow. Feeling bewildered and betrayed, I struggled to make sense of the hand I had been dealt. Finally, after many doctor visits, medical procedures, and prayers to heaven for a child, we began to consider adoption. Not wanting to give up my dream of having my "own" children, I was somewhat indifferent in the beginning. But as we completed our adoption study, my enthusiasm grew, and I began to believe that my dream of motherhood would actually come true.

December 22, 1981, started out like any other work day. My brother Matthew was due home from his mission the next day, and I was full of Christmas anticipation. But at about 11 a.m. my world changed forever with a simple phone call.

"Sherilyn? This is Ione Simpson, your adoption worker. How would you like an early Christmas present? We have a baby boy for you!"

Two hours later, my husband and I were sitting in an office at LDS Family Services in complete shock and disbelief. Our worker processed the necessary paperwork and then asked, "Are you ready to meet your son?" I don't know what I expected, but an 11-pound baby fullback wasn't it. Weighing 10 pounds at birth, he was now three weeks old, and all of the clothes we'd purchased on our way to the agency were too small for him. His little face was all broken out in baby acne, and he wore a forlorn expression of resignation. For a fleeting moment I was tempted to ask, "What else have you got?" But as soon as I held him in my arms, I fell in love and I knew he was our own.

Two years later, on December 15, I was wrapping the last of my Christmas gifts when Sister Simpson called again. "How would you like a baby girl?" Three frantic hours later the adventure began again with a beautiful, dark-haired daughter.

Each Christmas as I reflect on the birth of the Christ child, I also pause in gratitude for the precious gift of motherhood that came to me through the miracle of adoption. Amid the holiday flurry, my thoughts always turn to each of my children's amazing, courageous birth mothers, whose selfless love made my dreams come true.

Although I have never met my children's birth mothers, each Christmas and at each milestone of my children's lives I say a prayer for those women, that they may have continued peace in their decisions and joy in their lives. How I wish they could know that the children they placed so trustingly with my husband and me became wonderful adults. How I wish they could know the exquisite joy their Christmas gifts have brought into our lives. ■