



By Elder
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Of the Quorum of the
Twelve Apostles

Christmas WITHIN YOU

*Keep your faith.
Look for the good
in your situation.
Do something
kind for someone.
Seek Christ devoid
of wrapping and
tinsel.*

I suppose everyone remembers his or her first Christmas away from home. The reason for being away might have been mission or military service, student life, or employment. Whatever the reason, that first Christmas away is a poignant memory for all of us. To those who have been away from home at Christmas, or who may be away from home this year, I dedicate my own such remembrance.





ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL MANN

In my case it was my service as a missionary. For 19 years I had enjoyed Christmas surrounded by family and friends. I suppose in my youthful self-centeredness I had never considered spending it any other way.

Then, as the Yule season approached in 1960, I found myself half a world away from all that. I had been in England less than three months when, on the first of December, I was summoned to the mission office to meet Elder Eldon Smith, newly arrived from Champion, Alberta, Canada—my first junior companion. We were sent to open missionary work in the conservative city of Guildford, in the county of Surrey, an area that had never had Latter-day Saint missionaries and, to our knowledge, had only one member hidden somewhere within its boundaries. We were young, inexperienced, and a bit overwhelmed, but we were not fainthearted.

We registered with the police, arranged for lodging, and, initially unable to locate our lone member of the Church, threw ourselves into the only thing we knew to do—knock on doors. We knocked on doors in the morning, we knocked on doors at midday, we knocked on doors in the afternoon, and we knocked on doors at night. We rode our bicycles through those streets in what must have been

the rainiest British December in history—or so it seemed to us. We were wet in the morning, we were wet at midday, we were wet in the afternoon, and we were wet at night, but we kept knocking on doors. And we got in almost none of them.

So it went until Christmas Eve, when people were even less inclined to hear a couple of missionaries “from the colonies.” That evening, weary but devoted, we retired to our one-room rental and had a Christmas devotional. We sang a Christmas hymn and then offered an invocation. We read from the scriptures and listened to a tape recording titled *The True Story of Christmas*. Then we sang another hymn of the season, said a closing prayer, and went to bed. We were too tired to have visions of sugarplums dance in our heads.

On Christmas morning we kept our morning study schedule and opened the two or three packages that had caught up with us following our transfer. Then we went out to knock on doors. We knocked in the morning, we knocked at midday, we knocked in the afternoon, and we knocked at night. We didn’t get in any of them.

For such an uneventful Christmas—clearly the least festive of any I ever had before or since—it says something that those special days in December of 1960 remain in my heart

(after more than 50 years!) as one of the sweetest Christmases I have ever had. I think that is because for the first time in my life, I found myself understanding Christmas rather than just enjoying it. I think for the first time in any truly significant way, I was getting the message of Christ's birth and life—His message and His mission and His sacrifice for others.

I should have made that connection at an earlier age, but I hadn't—at least not strongly enough. But that Christmas in England—as a cold, wet, somewhat overwhelmed 19-year-old—I “got it.” I can truly say that because of my mission, Christmas, like so many other aspects of the gospel, has meant more to me every year since that experience.

On this Christmas I send my love to every missionary, every man or woman in the military, every student, and every employee and traveler who won't “be home for Christmas,”¹ as the carol says. Keep your faith. Look for the good in your situation. Do something kind for someone. Seek Christ devoid of wrapping and tinsel. You will find that despite external circumstances, Christmas—like the kingdom of God—is “within you” (Luke 17:21). ■

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NOTE

1. James “Kim” Gannon, “I'll Be Home for Christmas” (1943).

