

A Single Red Bulb

By Lori Ries

A simple Christmas tree ornament reminded me of what Christmas is really about.

Christmas wasn't Christmas. Although I tried to be merry with carols playing in the background, I pulled out the storage bins with a heavy heart. The snowman cookie jar only reminded me that there was no one to bake with. The Santa figurine seemed to say that there was little reason to hang stockings, and the peppermint-striped wrapping paper reminded me that morning wouldn't bring the voices of excited children.

This year our youngest had left for college, and our house felt lonely and quiet. I chose only the non-Santa type decorations and placed everything else back in their boxes.

With my husband out of town, I decorated the tree alone. My daughter-in-law posted pictures online of my grandchildren hanging ornaments on their tree, and my heart yearned for yesterday. I wondered how time had slipped by so quickly. How had my children grow so fast? Lost in my thoughts, I looked down at the light bulb in my hand. It was a single red bulb.



I examined the color, a deep red. Crimson. I looked around at the simplicity of what was left of the decorations: a few nativities, a manger built from popsicle sticks, and a decoration that spelled out NOEL in gold letters. My eyes were wet. The bulb was red—red like the atoning blood of the Savior.

I thought about how I had always equated decorations, cookie cutouts, and children's glee on Christmas morning with what made me happy at

Christmastime. Then I thought about my children and their eternal families. I thought about all the joy I had in my family and the joy they had in their own. I pondered how the babe lying in the manger made that possible. A sweetness of warmth sprung in my heart as I contemplated the gift of the Savior—not just for me but for all mankind.

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to *all people*” (Luke 2:10; emphasis added).

As I continued decorating the tree, I meditated on the humble birth and life of Jesus Christ. He came to mend the broken, build the downtrodden, comfort the lonely, bring peace in imperfection, and give compassion for suffering. He was born and died that we might live with Him in our Father's kingdom once more. He came that man might know true happiness. My heart swelled and I found joy in Christ because Christ is Christmas. ■
The author lives in Oregon, USA.