



*“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”* Isaiah 7:14

*“This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.”* Matthew 1:18

One of the most popular traditions of the season is telling endearing Christmas stories that proliferate in books, media, movies, songs, and theater. Christmas stories captivate children and adults alike. Everyone loves heart-felt stories! What makes Christmas stories so magical?

Take the story of “[Christmas with Tucker](#).” Now it may not surprise you that Tucker is a dog. Not just any dog, but a big beautiful Labrador Retriever whose owner happens to be the town alcoholic, Frank, who is too self-absorbed to pay any attention to his penned up dog, whom he had not even named!

Then there is George, a middle-school aged boy who just lost his Dad. His grandparents are caring for him on their family farm, while his mother leaves home to grieve her loss with her daughters who are in college. Of course each family member is dealing with their tragic, unexpected loss in private ways.

George’s Granddad teaches him to drive the community’s only snow plow to help him clear the country roads, an around-the-clock task at Christmas time. Filling his father’s shoes is a tall order for young George since his Dad had run the family farm and the winter business with his Granddad. Out in the country their plowing service represents an essential life line to access food, medication, work and school so the endless clearing must be accomplished daily.

One day Frank lands in prison for a few days and George’s Granddad, as a good neighbor, offered

to care for his dog. George quickly adopts the dog as he eagerly plays with him. His kindly observant Granddad notices how tuckered out the dog is after frolicking in the snow, and George immediately pronounces his name to be, none other than, Tucker. George and Tucker quickly form a loving bond, inseparably working and playing together. When Frank returns home, Tucker too must return to his owner, only to be neglected once again. Needless to say, George and Tucker are quite unhappy with their forced separation.

The plot thickens as George devises a plan to “free” Tucker from his lonely circumstances in collaboration with an endearing school mate, who obviously has a huge crush on George! Failing to convince Frank to sell his dog, George regroups to try another tactic and gets involved in less than honorable actions that land Frank in the hospital with a life threatening reaction to bad booze. Tucker enthusiastically returns to George’s care. Feeling very guilty, George confesses his bad judgment to his Granddad, who is deeply disappointed and decides Tucker must once again go back to Frank upon his recovery. George is grieved by his own actions and the impending return of Tucker to Frank.

Before Frank goes home this time, Grandma takes it upon herself to transform his neglected house into a real home, even decorating for Christmas and baking a batch of holiday cookies. Upon arrival to his transformed abode, Frank is humbly astounded by her generosity and

that of George's family, especially given their recent loss. Not only is Frank a neighbor, but he was the childhood friend of George's father, who never stopped considering Frank his friend despite their divergent paths in life.

One day while driving the snow plow after a bitterly intense ice storm, George takes a nasty fall while climbing out of the plow's elevated cab. On command by groggy George, Tucker saves his endangered buddy by running for help. Frank, who has turned a new leaf, is led by Tucker to rescue George and take him home to his very concerned grandparents. After over 36 hours of unconscious rest, George recovers from his severe concussion and devours a hearty meal to everyone's astonished relief. Now everyone seems to be on the road to recovery.

By Christmas all is restored – George's mother returns home for Christmas with George's sisters, and Frank gifts Tucker to George out of gratitude to the family for helping him begin a more healthy, responsible, giving life. George's grandparents beam with joy for their family's reunion, and well, Tucker is hero of the home!

Fast forward ten years—the growing family gathers once again for a nostalgic Christmas. George is engaged to his childhood companion, and ol' Tucker is joined by two new Labrador Retrievers, gifted by Granddad. Everyone rejoices around the festive dinner table, steeped in their cherished Christmas traditions, giving thanks for the lessons they have learned in life's journey and for their God-given blessings.

The power of the Christmas story is in the fallible but loving family, the hope of renewal, and the continuation of life. Christmas reminds us that whatever the loss, mistake, or challenge confronted, the spirit of Christmas can change everything. Christmas transforms one's view of circumstances building character, and giving

hope for the future. The endearing theme of every magical Christmas story is never boring, never obscure, never passé'—it is of course, the spirit of Christmas found in *love, faith and hope*. The very first Christmas story over 2000 years ago is the most miraculous of all. God gave His Son Jesus to be born of a virgin and Savior of the world. Through the gospel's redemptive story we have a way to overcome all life's losses, disappointments, and failures through the boundless love of God. Faith in Him alone brings hope far beyond mere circumstances, gives us renewed purpose overshadowing our daily routines, and binds us to His eternal plan. No Christmas story is as magical as the very first.

Throughout the Old Testament Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection are prophesied; and in the New Testament they are fulfilled and celebrated. Just as shepherds worshipped Jesus lying in a manger, and angels heralded the new born King, we too rejoice in His birth. Take time this Christmas to read the amazing prophecies of the Messiah's first coming and the gospel accounts of His birth. Far more than a tender and touching story, the original Christmas accounts are the very fulfillment of scripture and God's eternal, redemptive plan.

The gospel message unfolds as Jesus grows, ministers, is crucified and resurrected. Salvation comes with a price paid in full by the ultimate gift-giver. God's precious gift to all mankind comes with no strings or ribbons of conditions attached. A gift of unearned grace, we have only to receive it to gain eternal life. This Christmas share the ultimate Christmas story. Marvel in the magic of Christmas—His all surpassing *love* that through *faith* brings *hope* in an everlasting destiny.

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