



*...where your treasure is,
there your heart will be also.
Matthew 6:20-22*

The traditions of Christmas are treasured by families around the world. Whether in the US, Canada, Europe, Africa, Asia, South America, or the North Pole, Christmas is a magical time in many homes. To cherish the memories from year-to-year and celebrate each Christmas with anticipation, families create their own unique traditions for trimming the tree, stringing the lights, hanging garland, giving gifts, going caroling, celebrating candle-light services, and many more cherished traditions to share the joy of the season. In all the anticipated activities, families focus extravagant attention on their young children who awaken early Christmas morn and still pajama-clad eagerly investigate the brightly wrapped gifts about the Christmas tree. What imbues these honored traditions with meaning is the love associated with each one. Remove the love of Christmas, the heart of Christmas, and traditions become insignificant tokens, valueless trinkets, and meaningless tasks.

The most treasured tradition of all is centered on the nativity scene. Placing the manger at the center of Christmas honors our Father who sent Jesus as Savior. It is a universal story that captures the imagination of every child and adult throughout life – it is a story that never grows old or boring. Indeed we can never quite fathom the love of God, who chose so humble a birth for His only begotten Son. Children embrace baby Jesus as one like them. Adults marvel at the virgin birth.

We cherish the songs of Christmas that tell the irresistible story of Mary and Joseph who as humble, observant Jews, journey to their ancestral home, Bethlehem. There as the story unfolds shepherds abiding in a field behold in

amazement a heavenly host of rejoicing angels; a brilliant [star](#) traversing the constellations guide journeying wise men who bear precious gifts to honor the miraculous birth of a King born in a lowly manger.

Though we covet and enjoy the plethora of gifts, decorations, foods, music and parties, without the Christ of Christmas, all are fleeting pleasures. Centering Christmas on Jesus elevates all our traditions to glorify the one whose name is above all names. The heart of God is redemptive love. When our traditions honor this sacrificial love, the reality of Christmas transforms our hearts and lives, not just one day a year or for a season, but throughout the whole year.

Recently I saw a poignant movie, [The Boy in the Striped Pajamas](#). A World War II German officer's family is moved from Berlin to a country estate where the father commands a Death Camp. Though isolated in the gated estate, from a bedroom window his two children glimpsed beyond the forest the distant camp. Their eight year old boy, Brutus, was fascinated by the camp he believed was a farm. With natural boyish curiosity and adventuresome spirit, Brutus found a secret escape from the walled estate and ran free through the dense woods. Drawn inexorably to the electrified fence of the camp, he met another boy his age clad in stripped prison garb who sat remorsefully inside the fence. Over repeated visits, Brutus played with him and seemingly separated only by the foreboding fence, they became friends.

One day the little Jewish boy, still in striped prison garb that Brutus called pajamas, was

brought to the estate home to polish crystal. Brutus affectionately greeted him and offered him some tempting Danish sweets. When a German soldier appeared and demanded to know who gave him food, the Jewish boy said that his friend Brutus had. Frightened by the indignant guard, Brutus denied the gift of food and even knowing his friend. The soldier escorted Brutus from the room, and later while returning the Jewish boy to the camp, out of pure hatred, beat him unmercifully.

Unaware of his friend's beating yet anxious to see him again, day after day Brutus went to the fence. Finally, suffering a nasty black eye, the Jewish boy reappeared. In shame, Brutus apologized for having betrayed him and without hesitancy the Jewish boy forgave him. Sorrowfully, he then shared that his father was missing in the camp. Brutus empathized and offered his help to find him.

Soon after, Brutus' parents decided to move the children and mother back to Berlin, as she deeply agonized over her husband's inhuman Death Camp assignment and grieved over its influence on her children. As they prepared to leave the estate, Brutus made one last visit to the perimeter fence where his friend expectantly waited for him. In a redemptive plan to help his Jewish friend find his father, Brutus donned the stripped "pajama" garb and dug a hole under the fence through which he slithered into the camp. Together they run off to the barracks, only to be herded with the male prisoners to the infamous "showers." Frightened, they were told to strip "only for a shower."

Meanwhile, Brutus' parents frantically searched for him in the forest outside the Death Camp. After discovering Brutus' clothes beside the hole under the electrified fence, they were consumed with despair. Hurriedly Brutus' officer father entered the camp only to realize in stunned horror that his son became one

among the Jewish prisoners. Clutching each other's hands, Brutus and his little Jewish friend died together, never understanding their tragic fate or that of the Jews imprisoned merely for their heritage. All were silenced by the deadly gas pellets.

This tragic story starkly contrasts with the warm, joyous, happily-ending Christmas stories repeated year after year by families gathered around the fireplace, contentedly consuming hot cocoa and sugar cookies. Yet in a pure and innocent way these two little boys, who embraced each other despite their contradictory circumstances, reveal the heart of Christmas.

Ironically 70 years later, history repeats itself as anti-Semitism escalates once again, with many countries denying the right of Israel to exist. "...Let us destroy them as a nation, so that Israel's name is remembered no more." [Psalm 83:4](#) Iran seeks to control the region with nuclear weapons and leaders ignore the signs of the times. More than a political problem, the chaos and persecution around the world are at its root a spiritual challenge. This Christmas it is more vital than ever to remember that Jesus was a Jew. His Hebrew name, *Yesuah*, means Salvation. While singing Christmas carols and rejoicing in the Savior's birth, acknowledge that He is Savior of every nation, creed and ethnicity. ([Isaiah 53: 4 - 6](#), [John 3: 16 - 21](#), [Romans 11](#))

This Christmas the body of Christ is called to rise up, speak up and stand up for the oppressed. Declare the heart of Christmas by renouncing persecution of Christians and Jews around the world. Indeed, let your voice be heard for the persecuted. Let your hands reach out for those in need. Let your feet traverse our land proclaiming the good news of Christmas. Treasure the Christ of Christmas and your heart will rejoice as an heir in Him! [Galatians 4:4-7](#)

By Sheryl Dawson
Christmas 2013

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Music Video: [for KING & COUNTRY – A Baby Boy](#)