

A Christmas Story



Jim Belnap

The celebration of Christmas in the United States was not something that has been a part of our traditions for as long as most of us think.

In fact, most of our holiday traditions have been transplanted from European countries or various religious traditions.

While this has allowed us to “pick and choose” which celebration traditions we are going to use, Christmas had a rocky start here.

George Washington our first president, never celebrated Christmas. James Madison, was president when we fought the war of 1812, he never celebrated Christmas.

Martin Van Buren was president in 1840. He never celebrated Christmas.

For our first 70 years as a new country we never celebrated Christmas.

This is a story about how a group of English immigrants taught their American neighbors how to celebrate Christmas.

A Christmas Story

“Nut’s it’s snowing already!” was all Adaline could think of as she tried to hold her scarf tight, to keep the windblown snow from hitting her directly in the face. October was not even over and here is the second snow storm this year.

She hated the snow, and the darkness, and the wind, and everything else about the winter season. The truth be told, the whole year was pretty much a bust for her. She thought that moving to Nauvoo would finally be a place where her family could get settled, find a place to stay and rest for a while but it had not worked out that way.

When they moved into the red brick house on Main Street, her father had built in 1840, she was sure that meant they would be staying a long time and just be normal for a while. But the first winter was windy and cold, and miserable. It was so cold they canceled school for weeks at a time. When spring finally came,



her father who had been sick all winter, lost his battle with his illness and passed away at age 38.

Their happy home seemed empty and she had missed her father all spring and summer.

The loss of her father's income had forced the family to move all their things upstairs so they could rent out the downstairs. As it would turn out, that was the best thing that had happened since her father died.

The Leftguard family rented their downstairs. They had come from England where they had embraced the church and decided to come live with the Saint's in America. Brother Tom was a brick mason and found work the very day they arrived in Nauvoo. Sister Betty, his wife, was a skilled seamstress, and there were 2 boys in the family that had given her younger brother something to do rather than torment her. Bessie, the only daughter was 10 and just one year younger than her.

All summer they had done everything together, and Adaline loved the thick English accent that made everything Bessie said sound like she was reading from a book. They spend all their time together, Adaline listening to her stories of England, and she would help Bessie learn what things were called in America. Even though they both spoke English nothing had the same name. They called cookies, biscuits, a baked potato was a jacket potato, a baby diaper, was a nappy, and a sentence ended with a full stop instead of a period. There was a different name for everything that Bessie would have to learn.

Adaline spent all summer teaching Bessie to "talk American" and it helped her deal the death of her father. She missed him terribly, but this summer with Bessie was helping her to heal. They went to school together, the Knight' and the Leftguard family shared the kitchen, and ate meals together. Adaline and Bessie were so close they shared their deepest secrets with each other. In just one summer they had become best friends.

But enough of that, it was snowing... Again!

With the first snow, Bessie started talking about Father Christmas. That puzzled Adaline because she had no idea what she was talking about. When she quizzed Bessie, she said Father Christmas came every year when they celebrated Christmas, you know the day Jesus was born right? Adaline was puzzled, Jesus was born over 1800 years ago. No one knew when it happened, and she had certainly never been to a birthday party for that.

Just 35 years earlier, the American Colonist, had won their complete independence from England in the War of 1812. There were men living in town that had fought in that war and the last thing they wanted to do was to celebrate anything from England.

Yes, it was true, in her entire 11 years, Adaline Knight had never celebrated Christmas. In fact, none of the American Saints living Nauvoo in 1842 had even heard of Christmas, besides it sounded like something the Catholics would do.

The summer had seen an emigration of nearly 4,000 converts from England. They were great Saints, hard workers, and happy to be living with the Saints. They had skills that were badly needed in the new city of Nauvoo, they were put to use almost from the first day they arrived, and Nauvoo would double in size each year for the next 3 years.

It was true they had different names for things but there was no term in American English for Christmas. It was unheard of in America, but for some reason the Brit's wanted to celebrate a traditional English Christmas. All the British children worried they would never have another visit from Father Christmas. The Church of Jesus Christ, was barely 20 years old, there was no reason to adopt an old British tradition.

Well the gossip and the arguments soon started. Some said since they changed when they became Saints they should leave their old traditions behind, too, Others were saying they had always been taught to keep old traditions that taught them to love the Savior. This community buzz was so strong, soon it attracted even their leader Brother Joseph.

It is said one afternoon Brother Joseph had a meeting with some of the English Saints to find out what this Christmas thing was all about. Brother Tom, Bessie's father was in the group that spent one entire afternoon telling about Christmas and what they did to celebrate it. Brother Joseph listened, asking questions at times. But, at the end of the meeting he was convinced that any celebration about the Saviors birth was worthwhile, making the cold winters a little less dreary and more tolerable for everyone. Brother Joseph gave his blessing to celebrate Christmas Day, and said he was all for anything that celebrated the Savior. He asked them to be sure and include him and his family in the celebration and the preparation that would be needed. The British Saint's agreed to teach him and anyone that wanted to learn how they celebrated Jesus' birth.

Adaline finally reached her house. She opened the door and Bessie practically knocked her down with the news that they were going to have Christmas in America! Here Adaline was nearly "frozen to death" and Bessie was babbling about a party. She was frozen to the bone, and there was no fire place upstairs in their apartment. That's when it hit her, "Bessie can you take me over by *your* fire and tell me all about it? Don't leave anything out, just tell me while we stand by the fire."

Adaline got to spend the next 20 minutes in front of a glorious, warm, fireplace filled with red embers while she half listened to Bessie talking about Christmas and what an incredible time it was. Secretly Adaline was saying in her mind, "You're in Nauvoo now, nothing is magical especially during winter!"



It was like Bessie could not stop talking about Father Christmas for the next 3 days. She learned that in celebrating Christmas, the Brit's had this character that on the night Jesus was to be born, he would sneak into the houses with children and bring all children a gift. If the children were kind to one another they got a treat from Father Christmas all for themselves, if they were unkind and selfish Father Christmas would leave them a gift that could only be shared with others.

What kind of gifts?

Bessie told her, kind and obedient children got nuts and candy and fruit, just for themselves as a reward for being Christlike. Okay so what do the bad kids get? Bessie corrected her, "Unkind and rebellious children." Okay so what gift do they get? Well, usually it was a stocking full of coal.

Now coal was certainly something that was prized and expensive, but what a strange thing to give to a child. Bessie explained that coal was only good for warming others, and that's all it could be used for.

"So, let me get this straight, if you've been a good kid, Father Christmas, gives you a treat, and if you have been bad kid you get coal?" No Bessie corrected again, "If you are kind and Christlike you get a treat, if you're unkind and selfish you get coal. Everybody knows there is no such thing as a good or a bad child."

Okay, so what makes you think Father Christmas will make it to America?

Bessie's reply was, "Well, my whole life I have learned that if you wash your stockings on Christmas eve, and place them on the fireplace mantle to dry, that is a sign that you believe in Christmas, and Father Christmas is welcome to leave you a gift in the middle of the night."

Adaline was convinced in the back of her mind, Bessie really had some growing up to do if she was going to live in Nauvoo. Father Christmas was not going to make it this year. Yet,

Bessie was so excited, she decided silence was the kinder thing to do, so let Bessie dream for now.

By the time the middle of November came around, the English Saints were organized like an army getting ready for battle. School was still held every day, so the girls would go together. But usually Bessie was waiting for Adaline to finish her work because she had to share a chalk board. Adaline's family was only able to afford one that had to be shared between her other two siblings.

Did I mention that Adaline had an older sister Rizpah Jane, and a younger brother Rodolphus Elderkin? She loved her older sister, hated her younger brother, and was thankful she was given a "normal" name.

It took her longer to do her school work because every third day she had to wait her turn to use the chalk board. If she wanted, she could do her work on the class room chalk boards that covered two walls in her classroom. This got her done quicker, but if she made a mistake in the work everyone in class could see. How embarrassing is that?

You might ask why not just write it down on a piece of paper and hand it to her teacher? At this time paper was available



but it was far too expensive to be used for school work. Adaline's family could not even afford the ink needed to write with. You see the pencil would not be invented for another 30 years. So, in her entire 11 years she had attended school with perfect attendance, and had never written on paper at school, even though she had beautiful hand writing, and later in life she would be asked by others to do "fancy writing" on formal invitations and cards.

School was one of the reasons she hated her brother. Every time she made a mistake on the chalk board he would announce it to the whole class, even when the teacher would hold him after class for speaking without raising his hand. Adaline knew he was on earth just to torment her and make her life miserable, but then her name wasn't something like Rodolphus either which gave her a real sense of getting even.

After school, two days a week there was music training that had been organized. The Seventies' Hall would be filled with people, young and old and the English Saints taught them the songs of Christmas. Sometimes there were instruments to help them learn the notes, but most days this was just a single guitar or violin.

The songs were so wonderful that she would have gone to practice every day if it was offered. These are songs we know and sing as Christmas Carols still today. They were all new to Adaline. She loved "*Away in a Manger*" and "*Little Town of Bethlehem*". She thought it was fun to sing "*Joy to the World*" as loud as she could, in fact, they taught her it should be sung so loud they could hear it in heaven. "*O Holy Night*, was to be sung like a lullaby. She learned all the tunes and all the words and loved every minute of it. But her favorite of all was a German Carol that the English had adopted.

As she sang, *Silent night, holy night*, it gave her goose bumps on the back of her neck. *All is calm all is bright*, she could feel the hair of her arms stand up. *Round yon virgin, mother and child*, and the tears could start. *Holy infant so tender and mild*. What an incredible thing to imagine, she could close her eyes and

imagine the scene in front of her. *“Sleep in Heavenly Peace,”* what reverence and love she felt. That feeling would return to her every time she sang the song for the next 70 years.

“How fun were the Carols of Christmas?” She learned they were sung to remind us of the songs the angels sang to announce the Saviors birth to the Shepard’s. She had never thought about that but once she learned the words and the tunes, the snow didn’t matter. She was warm and happy the rest of the day.

Brother Tom, asked the children if they would work together to decorate the house. It was the middle of

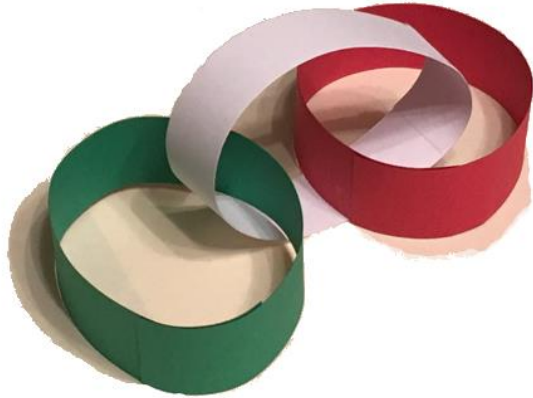
winter, if the house was warm and sheltered from the wind that was good enough for Adaline. But Brother Tom gathered the children together

and produced what looked like fine cloth strips.

She would discover that it was actually strips of paper, and they were bright Red and Green and White.

Adaline thought all paper was a creamy amber color. She did not even know that red and green and snow-white paper even existed. She found out it had come clear from England with a few of the Saints and they had shared strips with everyone in town.

Brother Tom told them he wanted them to make Christmas garlands. Bessie and her brothers knew exactly what that was but Adaline thought for sure it was something they didn’t do in America. Brother Tom had made a mixture of flour and egg whites, in a small shallow bowl. He carefully took a Red paper strip, dipped the very end in the mixture and drew up the strip



making a circle or a ring. He held it for a minute till the “glue” set and it stayed in a circle.

Next, he took one of the White strips, dipped it’s end in the mixture, passed the strip through the Red ring, and drew up the White stripe into an interlocking ring. He now had two interlocking rings. Next it was a Green strip. He dipped the end, passed the paper through the White ring and drew it up into a ring. This made a short chain, and he explained their garland needed to be so long it could be hung from the ceiling, in loops that looked like bunting and go all around the room.

“Can I trust you children to finish the garland?” They all said they would and Adaline said since red was her favorite color, she would make her chain solid red. When everyone stopped talking, she knew she had said something wrong, but had no clue what it was.

Brother Tom, came back, and said he needed to explain what the message of the garland, was to remind them.

He said “The garland is to remind us about the life of Christ and what it would mean to each of us.”

He started with the Red ring. He said “Addie, do you know what this bright Red ring is to remind us of?”

It was her favorite color, she thought it would be stunning to surround the room with a Red chain, but she just decided it would be better to shake her head “No”

“Well Red is to remind us that the savior would shed his own blood for us, he came to earth to die so he could atone for our sins.”



“Yuck, her favorite color was to represent blood?”

“He came to earth to sacrifice his life for us, so he would have the power to forgive our sins. Because of his life and death, we can have our sins forgiven.”

Adaline remembered her baptism, and said “So he can take away my sins just like when I was baptized?”

“Yes,” said Brother Tom “It is true, That’s why we love him and try to be like him” “Now no one help her, can you guess what the White circle is supposed to remind us of?”

Adaline thought hard, and finally said, “Is that to remind us of the clean, White baby in the song Silent night?” By everyone’s expression she knew that was not right, but why not have a ring to remind us of the baby? Brother Tom quickly came to her aid. “Well I guess it could be, I have never thought of that, but see how the White ring passes though the Red ring in our Christmas garland?”

Adaline had no idea why he would ask that but she could clearly see the White ring passing through the Red ring. She nodded “Yes.”

“If the Red ring is to remind us of the Atonement, when anyone passes through the Atonement, they can have their sins forgiven, and they become pure and white and their sins are forgiven because of it.”

“This first White ring in the chain is for you. It is to remind you that we can be cleansed from sin and made pure and clean, if we pass through the atonement.” “See how the White ring always passes through the Red ring?”

“Now let’s go to the Green ring. The Green ring in our Christmas garland is there to remind us that the Saviors gift to all mankind was eternal life, so the Green ring represents eternal life. If we are clean and pure because of the atonement, eternal life means you can live with father in heaven forever.”

“Next, we start all over. We add a Red ring because the atonement and eternal life always go together.” “Then we add

another White ring. Addie who is this ring going to remind you of?”

That caught Adaline a little off guard, but the tone of the conversation made her think of her father. She almost was whispering when she asked, “Can this be my father?”

Brother Tom smiled from ear to ear and said “Miss Addie, that is an outstanding choice!”

So, here let’s pass your Poppa, through the atonement, so he can be made clean and pure, and then we’ll add a Green ring so he can live with you and Father in Heaven, forever.

Next, we’ll add a White ring for your mother, and your sister, and your brother.

When he said, your brother she almost screamed, “No not Rodolphus!”, but it was her luck she just said it in her mind, that would sound terrible out loud.

Your whole family goes in the Christmas garland, as White rings, because the Savior promised, our families could be together forever in Heaven.”

“Now Addie, here is a trick question. Once there is White ring in the chain for everyone in your family, who is the next White ring for?”

Her mother always hated it when she answered this way, but it seemed to be okay here. So, she just said “I don’t know, who is it?”

Brother Tom, smiled wide, and said, “Here we call each other Brother and Sister, because we are all children of Father in Heaven. So, if we had enough time and paper strips we could make a Christmas garland with a White ring for everyone. The power of the Atonement is strong enough to save all of God’s Children, every one of them, if they pass through the Red ring.”

“While the decorations are very pretty to look at, try to never forget what each ring in the chain is meant to remind us of. Red for the atonement, White to have our sins forgiven, and Green to live with God forever. Red and Green, eternal life and the atonement always go together. Addie, that’s the secret message in the decorations.

The rest of the evening was spent interlocking rings of Red, White and Green. They were talking with each other the whole time and every time the chain grew longer the story of the secret of the garland repeated, and finally when the chain grew long enough. It was fastened to the wall near the ceiling, and draped like “Christmas bunting.” The room was crowned with a look she had never before witnessed.

It was as if her father was there whispering that they would see each other again without question. Maybe, just maybe, she could stop being mad and learn to celebrate something. Maybe Brother Joseph was right, it would be a good thing to spend some of the winter excited about Christmas.

It snowed again.

All the way home from school there was the crunch of snow on frozen ground under foot, in fact, crunch was not the right word to describe it, it was so cold the snow squeaked when you stepped on it.

As they came home, Adaline was glad to see the preparations that were going on. It usually meant that she could stay downstairs next to the fire rather than going upstairs to the family’s apartment under a blanket to keep warm. Once again, they were dipping candles.

Candle making was something Adaline was sure would become a lost art. With all the trade going on up and down the river, it meant the lamp oil was in great supply. They had converted most of the home lighting to the modern oil lamps the year before her father passed. They were cleaner. They did not melt wax all over everything, and they were adjustable.

Yet today as she entered she could smell the melted wax, in the air. It was the children’s chore to dip the candles. Candles were made by heating wax in a long thin metal cylinder called a dipping pot. You would start with a wick, a thick strand of yarn,

that was made of flax and cotton. Wool yarn would go out too often and would burn too fast.

A wick was cut to about 14 inches in length and a weight was tied to the bottom. The weight would allow the wick to sink directly to the bottom of the pot. Then one would slowly remove the wick from the pot, trying to deposit as much wax as you could in layer of wax on the wick. This was then allowed to cool and the process was repeated.



The trick to good candle making was to quickly dip the growing candle in the pot, so the layer from the last dip would not be re-melted. Then one would hold it over the pot till it stopped dripping, and place it in the coldest spot in the room while the second coat of wax hardened. Then the whole act would be repeated over again and again. After a dozen or so dips when the candle grew to about 13 inches in length and about an inch in diameter the candle was done.

Winter was a good time for candle making you could set the curing wicks outside where they cooled faster and were icy cold for the next layer. Cold candles grew faster than trying to do it in the heat of summer.

If she had told Brother and Sister Leftguard once, she had said it a dozen times.... We have lamps, we don't need smoky, melty, messy candles. They just smiled and asked her if she would rather help make candles downstairs or if she would like go upstairs to read or something.

"You mean upstairs to freeze, don't you?" "I'll be fine here by the fire making candles" She secretly though she would make

so many candles that Sister Betty would say we have enough but she never did, so candle making, warm candle making, warm by the fire candle making was not really that bad.

By the end of November, the river started to have floating sheets of ice on the water, so the paddlewheel boats on the river moved slower both up and down river, it meant the traffic down Main Street was always in a hurry to load and unload at the two Nauvoo docks. Every paddle wheeler would stop at Nauvoo, to remove the passengers and cargo so the boats would be light enough to power up the DeMoines Falls as they were known as they went upriver. Down river boats needed a shallow draft to ride the rapids, they needed the boat to ride high in the water so the bottom of the boat was not damaged by hitting the hard-stone river bottom in the shallow water.

There was never a day in the summer and hardly a day in the winter that Adaline didn't see travelers walking the mile between the docks to catch their boat at the other dock and continue their voyage. Adaline's family would try and listen when the boats docked. If they could hurry, there was just time to put a large pot of apple cider to warm on the fire in the winter. Since their house was just about half way between the two docks they found a market for a warm cup of cider. The tourists paid top dollar for a warm drink of cider as they walked the street in the freezing cold.

The catch was to have the cider ready by the time the passengers walked by. When the boat whistle blew, it was a race to get the cider on the fire warming. If the cider got to the street and had a great cloud of steam rising off it that was more than enough to attract the business. A cup of cider sold for two pence, British, or one centime, French. America at the time had no national currency so they traded in Pounds, or Franks Martha Knight could raise enough money by selling warm cider and baked goods to the boat passengers, that when the

Leftguard's rent was added to her budget she could support her family. While it was easy to sell warm cider on cold winter days, there was less traffic up and down the river in winter, so the Knight's would jump into action whenever they heard the whistle from a boat to announce they would be docking.

Many was the night that Adaline was awakened during a completely warm and wonderful sleep to race downstairs to start the cider on the fire and then race upstairs to get dressed warmly so she and her family could stand by the road, sometimes at 2 or 3am in the morning to entice the strangers with a steaming warm cup of cider. She learned she could blow into the cup to make the steam billow in a big cloud to help with sales.

The march of passengers past her house always fascinated Adaline. When it was not cold outside she could practice her "people watching" hobby, but now Main Street was abandoned, it was winter and dark, and it was snowing again. She longed for summer when she could watch without freezing.

With the coming of the Christmas celebration, school was dismissed and the children were all put to work making the final preparations for the celebration of Adaline's first Christmas. On the 21st of December, the longest night of the year, the brick oven compartment that was next to the fireplace went into high gear. Bessie and Adaline were put to work to help their mothers.

It was like magic to see all the cooking ingredients the women had somehow stock piled. The whole house smelled of cinnamon, nutmeg, yeast starter and warm sugar. The preparation area in the back of the house became a baker's manufacturing plant. Baking was a common occurrence but for Christmas they were making her mother's special recipes. Sister Betty was teaching them how to make some really great "English Crackers". The cookies were filled with cherry and raspberry fillings. Others were filled with raisins and nuts. The girls learned how to fry a certain cookie in oil very fast, which caused the special crust to flake up and expand to twice its size. She learned

these fried cookies were called turnovers and care had to be taken to make sure they were cooked only for a short time so they did not soak up grease. Topped with cinnamon and sugar while they were still hot made them look just great and they tasted like nothing she had ever had, they were so light.

As each batch of cookies came out of the oven and were cooling, it made the whole house, even the upstairs, smell more like heaven than Nauvoo in the middle of winter. Once cool, the cookies were packed in portions, and wrapped in muslin pieces that had been turned bright red by boiling them in water with crushed cranberries. Every time Adaline thought they had baked enough cookies to feed the two families for a month, the women started another baking project. For three days straight, there was a batch of bread always rising or needing to be kneaded.

On the first day of cooking they started the Christmas pudding. It had thirteen ingredients, to represent Christ and the Twelve Apostles. Once it was mixed each member of the family took a turn stirring. It seemed a little silly, but as Sister Betty explained, each family member was to stir the pudding from East to West, to remind them of the journey of the Magi.

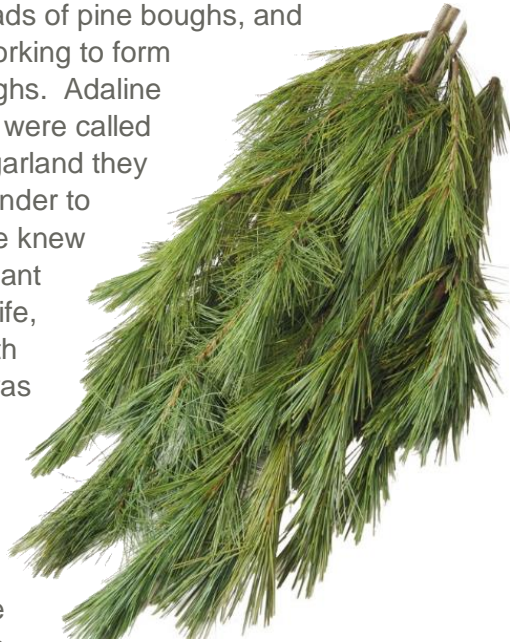
“Okay so, what is a Magi?” She was reminded about the wise men. “Oh, I remember, the three wise men from the Gospel of Mathew.”

“Well yes, but you see we don’t know for sure how many there were, so we call them the Magi or Kings because there might have been a whole caravan of people that came”

“So, each of us stirs the pudding from east to west, to show that we would be willing to come find the Christ child with the Magi if we were given the opportunity.” It was becoming clear that there were many traditions that had developed over the years in celebrating an English Christmas.

Cooking bread for 3 days straight they had a mountain of loaves, what in the world would they do with all this bread, it would be hard before they could possibly eat it all.

Brother Tom and the boys were also busy. Someone had brought in three wagon loads of pine boughs, and the boys and men were working to form circles out of the pine boughs. Adaline learned these decorations were called wreaths. Like the indoor garland they had a meaning and a reminder to add to the celebration. She knew that a green circle was meant to remind them of eternal life, and they were adorned with red ribbon bows, so that was to remind them of the atonement, but why put them on the front door. Brother Tom explained it was meant to tell the whole world that they were Christians and had chosen to live their lives as Jesus had taught. It was really a site to see a pine wreath on the front of every house she passed. And the green color made them stand out as if to declare to all the world that they intended to follow the Savior. Her parents had been committed members of the church from before she was born, but it gave Adaline goose bumps to see everyone, declaring they were followers of Christ and his teachings right out in public like that.



After three days of just baking and sleeping and baking and sleeping, it had finally arrived. It was Christmas Eve, whatever that meant. It seemed like the British Saints were all excited, and the American Saints were just waiting to see what happened next. About 2 o'clock in the afternoon just as the sun was past mid-day, the Knight's and Leftguard's prepared to celebrate Adaline's First Christmas supper.

It started with Brother Tom, trimming all the oil lamp's down low and lighting a row of candles that went down the middle of the large table the boys had set-up. The whole room flickered in the candle light. She had to admit the way the candle light made everything dance as the candle flickered, said that something special was about to start. Everyone stopped what they were doing and Brother Tom opened the large family bible that the Knight's had and turned to the second chapter of Luke.

That bible had followed her family from Pennsylvania, to Ohio, to Missouri, and finally to Nauvoo. She knew that recorded in the front pages of the bible was the story of her family. Her name was written there with the date she was born. There was a short story about why she was named the name she was. There was an entry for the day she was her baptized by her Father.

It had recorded her father's birth, his marriage date, the day he was baptized and sadly the day he died and where his final resting place was to be.

Before Brother Tom started to read he took a moment, looked right at her mother and thanked her for the privilege of letting him use the Family Bible. Before Adaline had never thought of it as being a privilege to read from that Bible, but today she would learn there was a sweet spirit and comfort she could find every time she would read it from now on.

Brother Tom started reading, and it was as though time stopped. Brother Tom's thick British accent made the words sound as though she had never heard the story before, but here in her mind's eye she imagined everything as it was read with a new awareness, The trip to Bethlehem, the Inn, the Stable, Joseph and Mary, the Angels, the Shepherds, and of course the Baby in the Manger. It was wonderful, so simple and beautiful, it was as if it was the first time she had heard it.

The candle light, the garland that ringed the room like a crown, the smell of baking and cooking. It was as Bessie would say “Bonkers!” Why in the world was this just her first Christmas?

She had not noticed, but as the Christmas story was read the women had slipped away and she found they had placed a feast on the table. It was time to eat, her first Christmas dinner, by candle light. They seated, joined hands, and said thanks for their blessings.

Then it was time to eat. Roasted chicken, since they did not have a goose. British mashed potatoes, with butter, carrots, and parsnips, were all familiar to her but there was a new dish, it was called dressing. What a peculiar name that was, it must be British. It was brown, and crispy on the top, and as it was placed before her she had no idea what to do. During the time Bessie’s family had lived with them she had been offered more than one “traditional British dish” and for the most part they all tasted funny and needed salt. Now here on her plate was a brown goo mixture that just sat there staring back at her. Oh no, mother covered it with chicken gravy, don’t waste the gravy!

She determined to wait and see how the new dishes went with the others before she tried them. She had learned Bessie’s family was not a good gauge of taste, so she watched. Rudy was across the table next to her mother, so she exchanged pleasantries of conversation waiting for him to try the dressing goop.

After what seemed like hours, she noticed mother had eaten her dressing and was getting seconds. She cut off a tiny bite and just held it on her tongue. Oh, my goodness it was great, sage, and rosemary, and thyme all mixed together and baked. It did not even need salt. Every other British dish needed salt but not this stuff, it was perfect. “Can I have more dressing and please pass the gravy?”

As the meal was coming to the end, Sister Betty, announced that the meal would end with a bowl of “Christmas Puddin”. Well, all right then bring on the “puddin”. Bowls were fetched, Bessie and the other children in her family started to clap, and Sister Betty, spooned a large portion of dressing into the bowl and her mother covered it with a thick, dark brown or even black sauce.

She put just her pinky finger in the brown, warm sauce and tasted it.

First it was tart, then sweet, and then she could tell it was made of raisins. Wow, what a fun sauce. But once again you had to translate. The Brit’s called plums, prunes, and raisins were called plums, so the Plum Pudding was really raisin pudding, but once you got the name straight, it was a really great taste.

But there under the steaming plum, no raisin, sauce was a big lump of dressing. Those two tastes can’t go together and come out good. She watched the others. And finally had the courage to take a small bite.

Wait a minute, that’s not dressing. It was really, really good and sweet, and tangy, and warm and wonderful. Later she would learn she had just gotten her first taste of Bread Pudding, and plum, no raisin, topping. It was great, it was made with sweet cream, and eggs and nutmeg, and cinnamon, and walnuts and hard bread. Thank goodness, they had baked a ton of bread.... she would need more. In fact, Adaline would celebrate her Christmas Eve dinner for the next 50 years with bread pudding!

When they finished eating, everyone took the dishes and the army that had eaten the meal all worked and cleaned every dish that was dirty and filled the dish shelves. All by the dance of the candle light. It seemed like every two minutes the children would ask Brother Tom if it was time yet? Time for what? Brother Tom always asked “are the stars out yet?”

Well finally the stars were out, and the house became a beehive of dressing activity. She noticed two or three candles were lighted and set on the window sill of each window, and

everyone began to dress with their winter coats and caps and gloves.

Are you guys crazy? After the greatest dinner of her entire life, everyone was going to go outside, in the dark, in the middle of winter.

Nuts, it was snowing again!

Bessie took it on herself to instruct Adaline. Warmest coat, socks inside your mittens, a cap, or your bonnet, will do if you have to, and dry shoes. Once she was outfitted properly Bessie placed a metal cup with a long yarn string through the handle, over her head and around her neck. “Is this cup supposed to keep me warm?”

So, out the door they all bounded, and into the street. The moon was nearly full so it made the snow look bright and pure white and it glistened, if the moon hit it just right. The sky was full of stars, and as she looked around, every window she could see was lighted by candles. Each window flickered, and the light danced across the snow. She had never seen anything like it before, it almost made it look like it was not freezing.



“What are all the candles for?” Everyone had a candle in every window, it looked really great, but why had she never seen it done before? Brother Tom stopped, and told her the candles were to welcome the Christ child into the world and to light his way. He also said they were to tell Jesus, if he were to come again tonight, there was room for him at any house with a candle in the window.

Wreaths on the house, candles in the window, bread pudding in her stomach, and a night that looked like a fairy land. Of course, there was room in her house and her heart for the Savior.

Wait, there were hundreds of people outside, walking in groups, singing. It was wonderful. Sister Betty, said “Now everyone, we are going to sing tonight, just like the angels sang on the night of the first Christmas. What song shall we start with?” They walked to the neighbor’s home and sang their first song, one of the new songs she had learned called *Joy to the World*. She could see her mother eyes, glistening as if she were about to cry. She could feel the goose bumps on the back of her neck and she was singing as loud as she could. Tonight, she was an angel, doing what every angel does, and it felt as though she was on her way to Bethlehem to see the Christ child.

Sister Young opened the door and bid them come up on the porch. Her husband was away in England, and she was there with her six children. The door came open and a steaming pitcher of cider brought out. Now she knew what the cup was for. The smell was great, but Bessie told her not to take too much.



Just a little would do in the bottom of the cup. That was right, the Young’s were struggling like everyone else in Nauvoo so leave the family some cider for themselves.

Bessie was watching her, hands on her hips, and shaking her head. "So, what did I do so wrong, now?" Bessie leaned over and whispered in her ear. "We will have dozens of homes that will give us warm cider to drink tonight, and we have no place to go to the bathroom." Well, there was the ever-practical Bessie, but it would prove to be valuable advice for the evening.

They walked toward the south dock singing and wishing everyone peace on earth, and drinking hot cider. It was magic, just for this night the birth of the Savior was all that was spoken and celebrated. Adaline would remember every minute of it, she loved Christmas after just one night.

Once they got to the dock, there was a big river boat that was loading the passengers and freight to continue down river. But tonight, the boat would not leave until the middle of the night after the passengers had a full helping of this strange Mormon custom of Christmas. All of the passengers were refusing to leave till they could see what the celebration was all about. The deck of the dock was glowing with oil lamps, making it almost as bright as day. On a big fire there was a steaming kettle of cider, and the passengers were all in amazement of the wonderful new songs they were hearing. The strange way every window was adorned with lighted candles, and the pine bow circles that was displayed on the houses

A family of passengers by the name of Lewis, walked with their family as they walked the other side of the street to return home. They wanted to learn the words to Silent Night. So, that was the song repeated at each house, finally the strangers had learned the song and O' Come all ye Faithful was next. Both songs were memorized by the time they reached the Knight's house. They were invited in for a helping of bread pudding, and the strangers asked if they might have us write the words to the some of the other carols they had heard. They had

fallen in love with Christmas too, and they had a hundred questions about everything that they saw and heard.

We told them about the garland, and the wreaths, and the candles, and the carols. Bessie insisted on telling them about Father Christmas. They were fascinated, but before long the steamer whistle was blowing over and over, so they knew they needed to leave, or they would miss their boat.

They said a rushed good bye and wished everyone Peace and Merry Christmas. Before the strangers left Adaline and Bessie promised if they would provide paper and ink the girls would be happy to write down the words



to the all songs, why they decorated with the garland, how the candles and the wreaths were used to remind them. As it turned out the Lewis' lived in St Louis and traveled up and down river three or four times a year.

On their next visit, they stopped by with a supply of paper and ink. Before they were done, the girls would fill over fifty pages of instructions on how to have your very own Christmas. The girls were thrilled to practice their penmanship, and for the next two years the girls would see these folks every time they came to Nauvoo.

It was still snowing as the Lewis Family said their goodbye's and slipped into the street. There in the street they joined another group of carolers, walking back down to the dock. It had been quite a day for the Knight's and the Leftguard's. At 91/2 o'clock Adaline was already past her usual bedtime, her first Christmas was just like she was living in a dream, and now it was

time to dream for real. As she looking around, Bessie and her brothers were wide awake and she realized they were in the process of removing their shoes and socks.

Bessie looked over and said “Don’t just sit there get your socks off. Tomorrow is Christmas!” Adaline knew that nothing that would happen tomorrow could even come close to what had happened today. “Quit daydreaming and get your socks off!” There was Bessie, hands on her hips looking annoyed at her. She thought the only thing missing was her tapping her toe. “Nothing can be that important on such a wonderful evening.”

“Get your socks off so we can wash them and get to bed.” “You twit, did you forget Father Christmas?” “Quit your dawdling and get your socks off!”

“Okay, Okay, here take the socks I wore inside my mittens tonight.” “No” replied Bessie, “you have to wash them yourself and hang them by the fire to dry. You can’t fool Father Christmas.”

So, they started the last chore of the evening, Adaline noticed how serious Bessie and her brothers were and she noticed how puzzled she and her brother and sister were, but she did what she was told, after all this English Christmas had been grand and wonderful so far, so watch and listen and do as your told.

The children finished their jobs and went to the task of placing the stocking on hooks that Brother Tom had made in the mantle. Then came the protests from Rudolph, “I washed 2 stocking I want to hang them both up. If I hang up just one I will only have one dry sock in the morning, and I do have 2 feet you know?”



“Maybe Father Christmas could stuff one in your mouth to keep you quiet,” Adaline interjected.

Have you ever done something that you knew was wrong, just by the way others reacted around you? Adaline looked around and saw real terror in the faces of all the Leftguard children. The adults were all looking and Adaline knew she had really goofed up, but Rudy was just being a pip!

Bessie, with sheer panic on her face, put her finger to her lips and in a quiet whisper announced, the very worst thing that could happen tonight was for Father Christmas to hear children arguing on Christmas Eve. If you don't stop he will pass our house by and not leave us anything!

She was tired, she was worn out, Rodolphus just could not close his mouth for anything, it was past her bedtime, her stocking was hung, Father Christmas was in England and not America, and with that, she raised her hand like a stop sign, turned and walked to the stairs without saying a word.

It seemed like she had just gotten to bed when

Adaline was awaked by a start.... something was wrong. What in the world is that banging? She looked over and Mother was already out of bed. In fact, she could see that her night cap was on the bed stand and the quilt had been rolled up on the foot board. That meant that she was up for the rest of the day. But what was that banging?

She knew that it would be cold, as soon as she got out from under the covers, so she reached up and brought her coat down from the bedstead and pulled it under the covers with her. It was freezing, and that was dumb. She didn't want to get up because it was cold in the upstairs apartment so she pulled a cold coat under the covers? What was that banging? Sometimes she did things without thinking them through, this morning was one of those times.

She sat up, rolled back the covers, quickly pulled on her coat and started for the downstairs. The floor was freezing. What is that banging for? Where did she put her slippers? Through the

grogginess of just waking up she remembered she kept her slipper in bed with her to keep them warm. She thought “Way to not plan Adaline, you have warm slippers and cold feet, you have to wake up.” What is that racket?

As she got to the bottom of the stairs and entered the Parlor she saw what the racket was. It was Brother Tom banging two pots together. When he saw her he stopped, but the racket just got softer, it was coming from outside, too. “Why were you making all that racket, and why are there others outside banging pans at the crack of dawn?”

Brother Tom explained that on Christmas morning all the church bells would begin ringing as the sun rose on Christmas morning. He told her it was to spread the news that the Christ Child had been born. He said the church bells in England would ring for nearly ½ hour every Christmas morning till the sun was completely up, and that British Saints had decided to bang pans and cow bells and anything else that would make noise, since there were no church bells in Nauvoo.

“Why didn’t you tell me? I had no idea, I thought something was really wrong.” Brother Tom smiled and said “What and spoil the surprise?” as he started to bang the pans again. “I want to tell the whole world that Christ has been born to take away our sins”

“Could you not do it so loudly, the first thing in the morning?” but it was as if he didn’t even hear her. Just then she noticed that there were a lot of folks out in the street, making all the noise they could. They were all Brit’s and for being as up tight and proper as they were, they were out in the street doing something crazy. What were they thinking?

As she watched from the window, she could see folks shaking hands and saying Merry Christmas, or yelling Christ is Born, and then they would start up banging things again. It was freezing out there, the sun had barely even cracked the horizon, and the crazy Brits were in the street celebrating. She

knew they were nuts, there had to be something better to do at the crack of dawn.

Then her mind, as it started be more awake shouted to her, “There is nothing more important than the birth of Jesus in all of the history of the world, and for one day we should shout that from the rooftops!” “I must get my shoes on and find something to make noise with!”

It snowed the entire time she was outside banging pans together, but with the street full of neighbors making noise and exchanging greetings. It was fun, so much fun that she barely noticed the cold. Once the sun was all the way up the noise died down and folks started to return to the warmth of the fire inside.

Bessie was standing at the door as she entered.

“You Twit, what do you think you were doing outside first thing in the morning other than trying to catch the death of cold?” Did you forget Father Christmas?” Bessie went on, “Father said we all had to wait till we were all here before we could see if we have a gift.” as Adaline’s eyes became accustomed to the dark, she saw five sets of children’s eyes looking at her with complete distress, and three adults with their faces covered with grins. It would seem they had been enjoying the children’s wait immensely. Adaline could tell the adults were the only ones in the room that were not completely annoyed with her at the time.

“Okay” said Brother Tom and you would have thought he had started a horse race. All of the children descended on the fireplace mantle to retrieve their secret Christmas gift from Father Christmas. Bessie returned with both hers and Adaline’s. To her surprise it was actually heavy, could it be full of coal? As she looked in the top there was a large ribbon of material that enclosed a bunch of chalk, white chalk. That was a little puzzling but she looked further. Next was a Bright red apple, which just happened to be one of her favorite things, and according to the Father Christmas rules this was all for just her.

Then deep in the toe of the sock was a kind of a strange orange ball. She looked to Bessie and said “Father Christmas left

us a ball?" "No, you Twit, that's an orange, don't you know an Orange when you see it?"

Truth be told Adaline had never seen an orange, ever. Bessie must have seen the bewildered look on her face, "You eat it, they are wonderful." "Here smell the end right here." Well, my my, Bessie was right it did smell wonderful. So, she held it like one would hold an apple, and just took a big bite right out of the side of the orange.

All of a sudden, her mouth felt like it was on fire, her eyes stung, and she didn't know if she could breath, but inside her mouth was an unbelievable sweet juice that tasted even better than it smelled.

"No, not like that, you need to peel it BEFORE you eat it, orange peel just tastes nasty."



Now you tell me she thought, as she moved to wipe her tears, "No Addie, don't touch your face, the

acid in the peel will hurt your eyes." Her mother could watch no longer and chucked as she came to her aid. Mother showed her how to separate the peel from the remaining orange, which turned out to be a rather sticky job. Next, she learned the orange had bite size sections, and if you held them up to the light you could tell if the section had any pits in it. She believed mother when she said eating the pits would be unpleasant to the taste also. No peel, no pits, eat just the meat of the orange.

Sweet and juicy, sticky and messy, but Bessie was right they were wonderful. She determined not to wait another 11 years before she had another orange. Getting the sticky off almost took a complete bath but it was worth it, and even after she

washed she smelled like an orange, but today that was really okay.

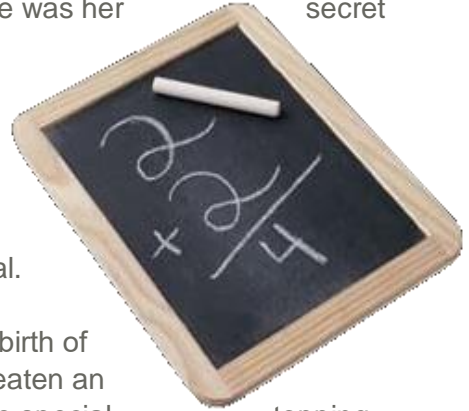
She went back to the stocking, there were some walnut and pecans, but the chalk in her stocking was a bit of a mystery till she looked on the mantle above where her stocking had hung. There on the mantle, was a student size chalk board. and written on was "This was too big to fit in the Stocking---Father Christmas." How did Father Christmas know, it was her secret, and he knew? To think she was sure Father Christmas would never find them in America, but here was her secret wish, a chalk board all her own.

Everyone gathered round the table had had steaming bowls of warm cracked wheat cereal, there was more Plum pudding topping, made with raisins, but it really did make the breakfast special.

Well now, the Sun is up, the "church bells" have announced the birth of the savior. I have for the first time eaten an orange, breakfast was great with the special topping, the dishes are all done and I still smell like oranges. What's next? I know, it's time to draw on my chalk board....

Just as Adaline reached to retrieve the chalk board from the mantle, Brother Tom announced "Children get your coats on, it is time to exchange gift's."

She had been outside once today what was going on? And what gift's?



It was then she noticed the women were busy in the kitchen attaching notes to the banded batches of cookies. The same cookies that Adaline and Bessie had worked for three days to help bake. The cookies that were only made in her home if there was a special quest that would visit. There were enough cookies to last for weeks, and now these nutty Brit's think we are

just going to give them away! They better be planning to save some for her.

Once dressed for the needed deliveries, Adaline and Bessie would take four or five “cookie packages” depending on how big the packages were. Each had a note that told the girls where to deliver the baked goods. They were told to simply deliver the package and tell the intended that this was a Christmas gift from the Knight’s and Leftguard’s, then bid them a Merry Christmas and leave as fast as you can.

Even with three separate delivery teams, the Christmas gifts would take most of the day to deliver. With the completion of each delivery Adaline became more worried that it was their mother’s intentions to give away all the baked treasures they had worked so hard to make.

It was starting to get dark as the sun was low in the western sky. There was a beautiful brilliant sunset that reflected off the snow and made it look like there was yellow and red glitter falling from the sky. They were finally done running to every corner of the town. They were sure they had delivered package to everyone they knew.

As the girls finished their deliveries there was Brother Tom waiting to tell them another Christmas Story. The first words he said caused the girls hearts to drop. He simply said “**Children you have given away all the crackers we have baked.**”

“The reason we do that on Christmas is to remind us that the savior came into the world to give us the gift. All that he and his father have was given to us. Adaline just could not contain her next remark. “But Brother Tom, *we have nothing* to celebrate our Christmas with. **It’s not fair!**”

Brother Tom paused for just a short time, and said “Your right, having to give all that you have for someone else is not fair, but it is the gift the Savior gave to you. In return you need to love him with all your heart for his gift to us”

There was a pause, while each spent the moment reflecting on what they had been told. Brother Tom went on, “If we love the Savior with all our hearts, we give the Savior our best gift. He wants more than anything a gift, of a humble heart and a child’s love. If we do that, we all will have the greatest Christmas we could ever hope for.”

Well, Adaline felt terrible, and wished she could take her words back, but it appears she had said what all the children were thinking, so, there was a long silent pause as everyone thought about Brother Tom’s words.

Just as the silence was getting uncomfortable,

Sister Betty, said “Can I cheer anyone up with a Goober?” Bessie and her brothers leaped and yelled “Yes, may we?” Adaline thought it sounded like something she might not want. To her, she made a “goober” when she misspelled a word or did a math problem wrong, but she had also learned when it came to British things it was best to have a wait and see attitude most of the time.

A Goober was a cracker or as we call it, a cookie, that was made by crushing up green goober pea’s and mixing them into a cookie and baking them. Each cookie had 4 lines on the top, that had been made with the fork used to crush the goober’s. Twenty year’s later, George Washington Carver, would become famous for roasting the goober’s before they were mashed. His discovery is known by its American name, peanut butter.

They were new to Adaline, but that was okay because they were great. Next came a plate of Bedfordshire Clanger’s, it was a kind of tubular sweet short bread rolled around a secret filling. Her secret filling was dark chocolate.

After that the women ask if anyone would like Flies Graveyard? Now that sounded terrible but everyone else was all for it, so bring on the Flies Graveyard. This was a cookie made from oatmeal and raisins, Adaline knew what an oatmeal cookie was and these were excellent. Why couldn’t the Brits get better names for this stuff?

As the evening progressed there were Jimmie Dodger's, a kind of shortbread cookie with a raspberry filling. There was Lardy John's Cake, each got a ½ a slice, it looked like bread on the outside but the inside was filled with nuts and cinnamon and nutmeg with bits of sweet rhubarb.

There were Bakewell Tarts, filled with cherries and currants. Mince Pie which was a kind of pastry Adaline knew as a pop-over, Ginger Snaps, Shortbreads, and Smilies, a sugar cookie with a face and eyes out of raisins. Then there was Black Bun Cake, a variation of Christmas fruit cake.



The children would learn that while they were out delivering Christmas gifts all over town, those same neighbors had been stopping by their home with their “gifts”.

As they were feasting on a ten-course cookie and sweet bread meal, Brother Tom reminded them that giving things away to others as gifts from Jesus, would always be rewarded in the end. Remember, it is impossible to give others more than the Savior gave to you.

That evening, Adaline went to bed with visions of cookies and sugar plums dancing in her head.

It is not known if that Christmas, was celebrated on December 21, the shortest day of the year or if it was celebrated on December 25th as we do today. Regardless of the day, it lifted the spirits of all living in Nauvoo during a time when life could be very hard and cruel.

For the next three years, Adaline and Bessie got regular visits from the Lewis' family. Two and a half years after this first Christmas, Brother Joseph and his brother Hyrum were killed by a mob.

In 1846, Adaline and a handsome Gilbert Belnap, would be married on January 26th. Three weeks later she and her new husband would leave Nauvoo, never to return, although the Knight home is still standing and being lived in today.

In 1850, Harriet Becher Stowe would publish a book titled, The First New England Christmas. In 1876, the first Christian Church of St Louis, advertised an invitation to their Annual Christmas Nativity Celebration in the local paper, it invited everyone to come and celebrate "the Baby in the Manger", it is thought the Lewis family attended that congregation.

In the summer of 1852, Adaline and her husband arrived in Great Salt Lake City, and would move about 25 miles north to the Ogden area. That December Adaline would celebrate her first Family Christmas in Utah, because of their abject poverty it was not as extravagant as her first Christmas, but for the next 63 years her family knew Christmas was at mother's or grandmother's place. The only thing that would change that, is if there was a baby to be born, Adaline would work for nearly 40 years as a midwife, delivering hundreds of babies. Adaline and Gilbert are both buried in the Ogden City Cemetery.

I am the 2nd great grandchild of Gilbert Belnap. Isn't it wonderful to how celebrating the life of the Savior can have ripple effects through time. I have children and grandchildren of my own, and the first Christmas stocking I can remember, had an orange and an apple in it.

