

Reclaiming Christmas

Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?

The day after Christmas many of us vow that “next Christmas is going to be different!” We think that we will slow things down, not get trapped into racing from store to store, not wear ourselves out physically, emotionally, financially and spiritually trying to be in so many places, do so many things, and be in the “holiday spirit”. (This can be true for individuals with their families, or for church staffs planning the church’s calendar.) How do we savor the expectant “waiting” of Advent? How do we live out Christmas as Jesus’ birthday, instead of as a commercial holiday?

Well, Christmas is coming again. Why not make plans to refocus on the true meaning of the season? Discern what it means to you to live out the Advent and Christmas season with integrity in your home or in your church. You don’t have to do everything listed below, but try at least the first step.

First, go to God in prayer. Give thanks to God for the gift of Jesus. Acknowledge to God how difficult it can be to keep the focus on the “reason for the season.” Ask for God’s guidance. Reflect in God’s presence on what is important to you about the season. Pray for those for whom this may be a difficult time of year. And then give this year’s season into God’s hands.

Second, get together with your family (or a friend, or if you work in a church have a staff meeting) and talk over what is good about your holiday traditions and what is not as good. Decide what really honors God’s great gift of Jesus Christ to us, and what does not. Don’t be surprised if you have different ideas about what belongs in each of these categories. Where there is common agreement that something needs to be changed or eliminated, make plans on how this is going to be accomplished. For example: Too many nights out? Agree to some criteria for making decisions on whether to go or not to go. Consider the following to get your focus:

- How does what we are doing square with our values and the fact that it is Jesus’ Birthday we would like to be celebrating?
- Evaluate past practices in light of these values.
- Make specific plans to redirect your practices to reflect these values.

And what about gifts? Here are guidelines that you might find helpful:

1. **GIVE TO THOSE JESUS CAME TO SERVE:** Jesus was quite clear that he had a special concern for those who lived on the edges of society and acceptability. So one way we might honor his gift to us is by diverting some of our Christmas dollars to help those in need. There is no lack of possibilities here. The Presbytery has some suggestions about supporting mission in Guatemala, Malawi, and within Western NC. You will also have ideas about gifts for those in your own community and neighborhood who are in need.

2. **GIVE YOURSELF:** This might be the most precious and difficult gift to give to someone you love. Giving your presence instead of presents. Giving time instead of trinkets. What could this look like? Spending additional time with God in prayer or worship this season as your gift to Christ. Volunteering with a mission in your church or community serving those in need. Really thinking through what your loved one might want, and it might mean that instead of going to a store or shopping online, you give them a coupon for cooking a meal, giving a back rub, providing free babysitting, or writing a poem or letter that tells them what you most appreciate about them. The possibilities are endless!
3. **BUY WITH CONSCIENCE:** Unfortunately we live in a world which can now produce goods that are inexpensive to purchase but which are, in fact, very expensive in terms of human life and environmental health. Many of the clothes we wear and the electronics that we use are made by people in other countries who are paid subsistence wages and work in inhuman conditions (seven days a week in factories where they are locked in, for instance). There are some wonderful gifts that you can buy, knowing that those who produced them are being treated with dignity. Two resources are listed below:
 - Visit shops operated by Ten Thousand Villages, a Christian ministry that works with cooperatives around the world. There are four in our area: Montreat (Montreat Conference Center); Asheville (10 College Street); Hickory (Unique World Gifts, 2751 North Center Street); Charlotte (Cotswold Village Shops, 300 S. Sharon Amity & Randolph).
 - Buy fair trade products, such as coffee, food, clothing, or other gifts via “Enough for Everyone” programs www.pcusa.org/enough, or via one of the twenty global partners which are identified at www.pcusa.org/globalmarketplace (look under “Global Marketplace” and click on “Shop the Global Marketplace” to see the list).

Alternative gift cards for some of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina’s missions are available through the presbytery office. Contact Lisa Pressley at 828-438-4217 ext. 12, or lpresley@presbyterywnc.org.

Other helpful websites:

www.newdream.org/resources/publications Resources

www.pcusa.org/justliving Ideas for reclaiming seasons

www.pcusa.org/enough “Enough for Everyone” resources
(Presbyterian Coffee Project, Sweat-Free T-Shirts, Oikocredit, Global Marketplace, Electric Stewardship, Eco-palms)

www.pcusa.org/globalmarketplace and under “Global Marketplace” click on “Shop the Global Marketplace” to view the list.

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Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway? Order form for 2016

A while back someone came up with three helpful gift-giving guidelines:

- 1. GIVE TO THOSE JESUS CAME TO SERVE:** Although Jesus came for us all, his life and teachings reflect a special concern for those on the margins of society.
- 2. GIVE YOURSELF:** This might be the most precious and difficult gift to give to someone you love. Your presence instead of presents. Your time instead of trinkets.
- 3. BUY WITH CONSCIENCE:** There are some wonderful fair trade gifts that you can buy, knowing that those who produced them are being treated with dignity.



Each year the Presbytery highlights a few missions around the world where gifts would offer hope and help to those in need. The following pages describe these gifts for 2016. (Note the option with a coloring card for children to purchase.) For a sample packet of gift cards that support some of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina's missions, contact Lisa Pressley (828/438-4217 ext.12; lpresley@presbyterywnc.org).

Churches can order a sample set and multiple order cards to display. If a church is having an Alternative Gift Fair or an emphasis on "giving gifts that give twice," we can provide cards for display. We do ask that, as much as possible, you order the number of cards you think your church will need; we will send more if you run out. Or you can take orders and we'll fill the order. Order forms can be used by individuals as well as congregations. (If you have a color printer, you can also download the cards and inserts yourself from the presbytery website www.presbyterywnc.org and click on Reclaiming Christmas.)

The sample order form below is for reproduction.

Please complete my order for the following Christmas cards

For Malawi, Africa:

- Building HOPE-Ebenezer School (\$10)
 Nkhoma Hospital-Rural health & medicine (\$10)

For Guatemala:

- Microloan Project (\$10)
 Healthy Communities(water filters/stoves) (\$10)

For Presbytery of WNC:

- Building HOPE - for Camp Grier (\$10)

Children's Gift Options: (\$2 each)

- Children's Cards (# of cards should equal # of stickers)
 Guatemalan Children's Nutrition sticker (\$2 each)
 Malawian Children's Nutrition sticker (\$2 each)
 Mosquito Net sticker (\$2 each)
 Guatemala Education Scholarship sticker (\$2 each)

Please send my completed order to:

Name : _____

Address : _____

Address : _____

In the event of a question regarding your order, please provide a **Contact Number:** _____

E-mail Address: _____

Special Instructions: _____

Remit order form to:

Lisa Pressley
PWNC
114 Silver Creek Rd
Morganton, NC 28655
lpresley@presbyterywnc.org



RECLAIMING CHRISTMAS GIFT OPTIONS

Every Christmas the Presbytery of Western North Carolina offers “gifts that give twice” that both honor your family members and friends and help those with specific needs.

By supporting the mission programs of our Presbytery, you are, in fact, honoring the birth of Jesus, who came that all may have life, and have it abundantly. The following cards and card inserts supporting the stated ministry are available for 2016.

Guatemala Microloan Project



The Guatemala Microloan Project is a joint project of Presbyterian Women from the Presbytery of Western North Carolina and Suchitepequez and Sur Occidente Presbyteries.

The goal of the project is to give women opportunities to grow in self-esteem, hope and freedom, and to develop sources of economic income for themselves and their families. Women, who receive training, are given small loans to embark on or expand business ventures.

In a short time, women who had never cashed a check or saved are learning financial and business skills. Women who never saved before are learning they can do this!

Healthy Communities - Guatemala

Health Ministry remains an important part of our Presbytery Partnership with Sur Occidente and Suchitepequez Presbyteries in Guatemala.

Family-sized water filters can be used for years by Guatemalans to provide pure water for drinking, thus avoiding diarrheal illnesses and nutritional problems that affect growth and school attendance in children.

Fuel-efficient stoves decrease the incidence of asthma and burns caused by cooking on indoor, unvented stoves. At the same time, families save money on fuel, and deforestation is lessened.



Ebenezer School ~ Malawi, Africa

In Malawi, it is customary for a primary school classroom to have over 100 students, but no desks, no books, and no supplies. The Ebenezer School was founded to offer quality education to children in the Nkhoma community, and the children of the Nkhoma Hospital staff. Ebenezer began with pre-K and has been adding grades yearly. Your gift will provide a reliable revenue stream for annual school operations and improvements.



Nkhoma Hospital

Nkhoma Hospital is a large regional hospital of the Presbyterian Church in Malawi, Africa. Some say Malawi is the poorest country in the world. The hospital provides services in pediatrics, maternity, general medicine, and surgery. The hospital also provides needed care through 9 rural health clinics and a mobile health unit. This gift will help the hospital continue its much needed ministry both in the hospital itself and out in the rural areas of Malawi.



Camp Grier

At Camp Grier we believe challenge, adventure, and service to others are incredible tools that can help us to understand our faith in Christ, our world, and ourselves. We embrace challenge and adventure as an opportunity to grow closer to God and to our neighbors. Sure, we have a lot of fun along the way too; ask any of our summer campers! Our ultimate goal is to help young people develop those values described in Romans: endurance, character, and hope. Your gift will help a young person experience a life-changing week at Camp Grier.



CHRISTMAS GIFT OPTIONS FOR CHILDREN TO GIVE

Helping children celebrate Christmas as Jesus' birthday is not an easy task since our culture encourages them to "need or want" many things. But reclaiming the Christmas season can be meaningful and enjoyable for children, parents, family and friends alike.

The children's story, "Whose Birthday is it Anyway?" approaches the topic in a whimsical but easily understood way. (An illustrated version of this story follows this form).

Giving children options about how they can "give birthday presents to Jesus" is one way to help them gain experience in making choices that run counter to popular culture. We have designed a Christmas card that they can customize by coloring and choosing from among four gift possibilities. (See below.) Order as many cards and labels as you think you might use in your congregation.

FRONT:

It's Jesus' Birthday!



BACK:

**So I bought Him
a present for you.**

(Insert purchased label here.)

Merry Christmas!

(Signature)

LABEL OPTIONS

**SUGGESTED
PRICE**



I helped buy healthy food for children in Guatemala.

\$2.00



I bought a Mosquito net to protect the children of Malawi, Africa from malaria.

\$2.00



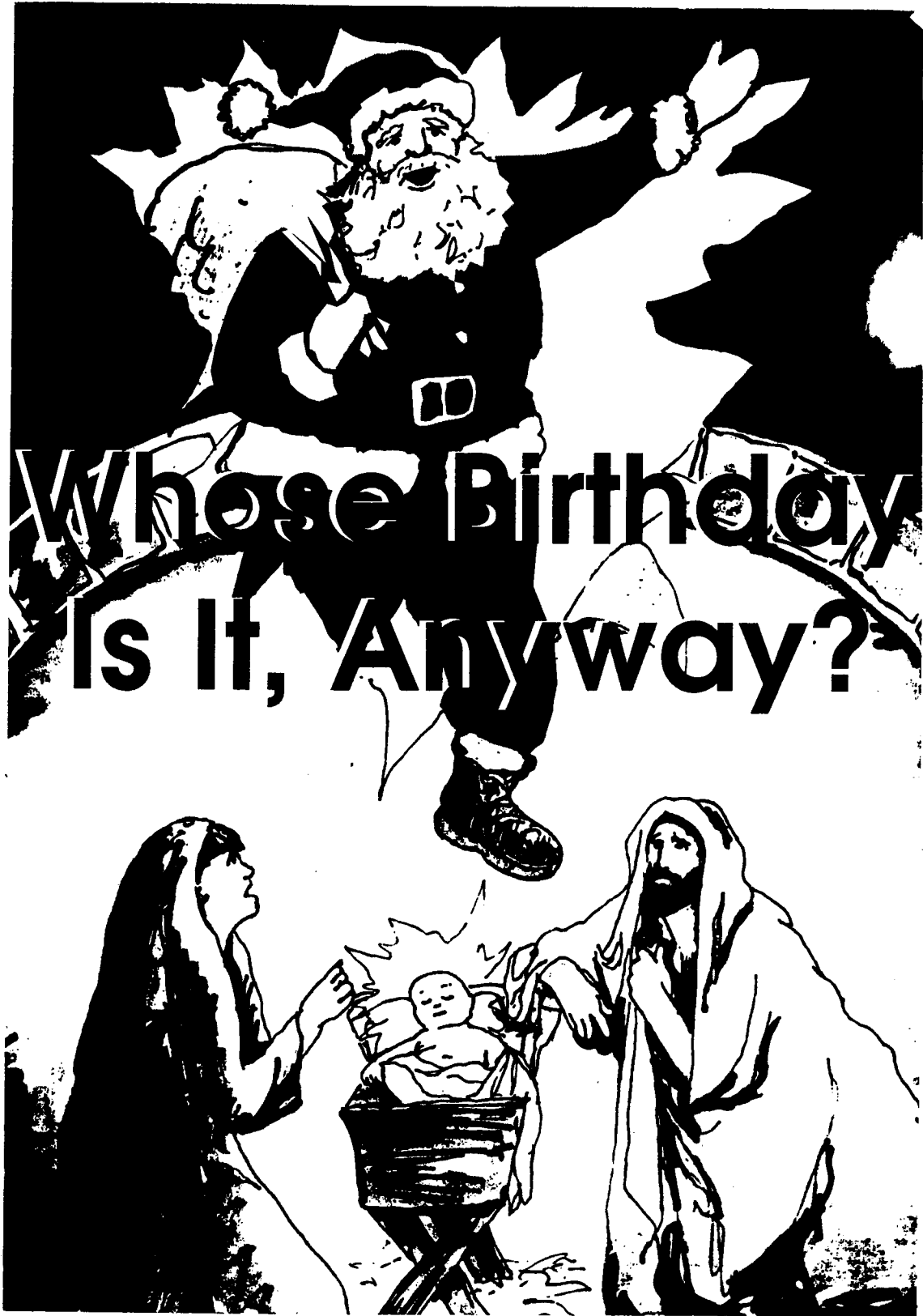
I bought plumpy nuts (a highly nutritious food) for children in Malawi, Africa.

\$2.00



I bought school supplies for children in Guatemala.

\$2.00



A Christmas Tale
for Adults and Children



Oh, In the land of
Puzzling Tales there lived an eight year
old boy named Jason. Now in this land and in the
neighborhood where Jason lived, the unexpected always
happened.

Instead of football they played knee ball; instead of the children "going to
school" the teachers were busy "going to homes" and it was not uncommon to
see water freeze in the summer and leaves grow in the winter.

... It was a funny strange place.



When it was time for Jason's 9th birthday, as usual the unusual happened. Jason's grand parents came from their home across the state to help celebrate, but of course when they got to Jason's neighborhood they went immediately to the Brown's next door and visited and stayed there. When Jason's mother baked the birthday cake she gave it to the letter carrier to eat.



And when all the neighborhood kids heard it was Jason's birthday they exchanged gifts with one another and, of course, Jason got none...

There was a blizzard of birthday cards. The Post Office had to hire extra workers and work longer hours to handle the deluge of cards.

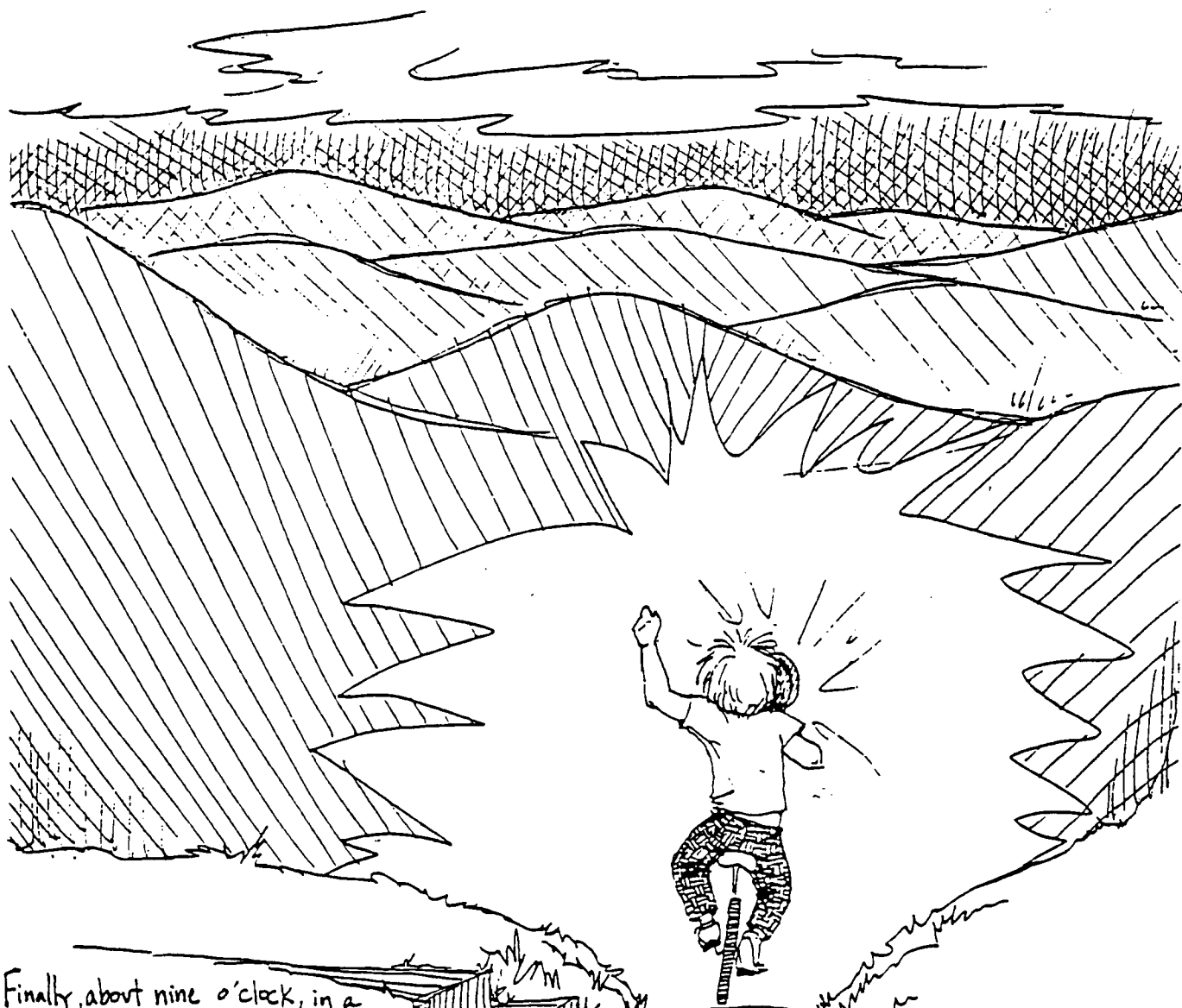
Of course, in the land of Puzzling Tales, the unexpected was the expected and all

the kids, the moms and dads, grandparents, even a couple of dogs

and a paraKeet got cards,

While Jason got none.....



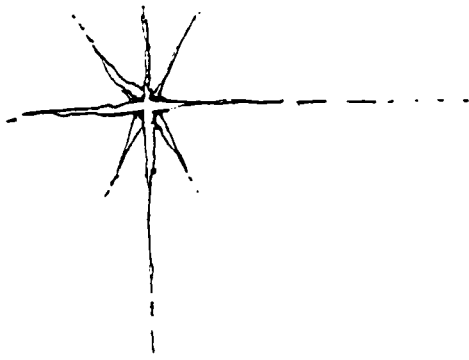


Finally, about nine o'clock, in a fit of frustration and anger, Jason went out of his house, borrowed the school cheer leaders' megaphone, rode up and down the street on his unicycle and shouted at the top of his lungs, "WHOSE BIRTHDAY IS IT ANYWAY !?"

And the night was silent... so silent that all night long echoes bounced off the mountain sides: "WHOSE BIRTHDAY IS IT, ANYWAY?..."

"WHOSE BIRTHDAY IS IT ANYWAY?....."

Ward 92
Ward



Once again this year during Christmas, Americans will spend around twenty billion dollars buying gifts to swap.

But it is Jesus' birthday!

Jesus ought to receive the gifts.

Jesus said, "Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of my brethren you have done it to me."

We give to Jesus when we give to the poor, the weak, the hungry, the homeless, the refugees, the prisoners.



It will be a great birthday celebration when God's people begin in earnest to give once again... to Jesus.

For after all, it is his birthday, isn't it²⁴?

* from a sermon by Rev. Arley Fadness, Shalom Lutheran Church [Harrisburg S.D.]
illustrated by Marion Walton, Warren Wilson College for Hunger Awareness Group [Asheville, N.C.]