



THE HEART OF A CHRISTIAN PLAYWRIGHT

Written by us, inspired by Jesus

What Christmas Means To Me

An Original Stage play

By

Cleveland O. McLeish

www.christianplaywright.org

Copyright © 2016 Cleveland O. McLeish. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Tele: 1 (876) 352-2650

THE CHARACTERS

MICHAEL
JANET
MICHELLE
JULIUS
GRANDMA
PASTOR

SETTING

The stage is bare, with only a stool positioned at Center Stage (CS). Each character may have additional props they need to take with them on stage.

The Characters should enter from different parts of the stage.

THE SCRIPT

SCENE I

LIGHTS UP

(Michael, mid 30's, enters and sits on the stool. He looks out over the audience, sad eyes).

(He pulls out a newspaper from his back pocket, and reads through the headlines).

MICHAEL: Another shot by police. Under investigation.

(skips the page)

Another athlete has taken his own life --- another military personal. Every day, more bad news. A storm is brewing in the Pacific Ocean --- gearing up to make landfall in a few days. Why won't they ever report anything good!

(folds the newspaper)

Christmas, just around the corner. What does Christmas mean to me? It's difficult to answer that. Three years ago, I got married on Christmas Day. Today, I am single. How do you move from married to single in three years, you may ask? Fortunately, my story is not the worse. My wife just got tired of me, really quick. I never expected it --- never asked for it --- never wanted it. I used to go to church too, but something like this can really damage your faith. It's not that I don't believe in God, I am just not convinced that He even sees me. I would be shocked if there is anybody even listening to me right now.

(Gets up and paces a bit)

If I should be honest though, I think with all the time that has passed since the first Christmas, it has kind of lost its value. It's overrated, if you asked me. I know some of you feel that way. Most of you were probably forced to come here today, to watch this play. I guess it is something to do as a family, but what about those who don't have a family. What do they do when this time of the year rolls in? Where is the church for them? Where is their Christmas?

What does Christmas mean to me? It's a time to reflect. A time to look back and re-analyze all the mistakes I made in my life. I don't really think about the birth of Jesus Christ. I did love the presents as a kid, loved making my parents believed

www.christianplaywright.org

Copyright © 2016 Cleveland O. McLeish. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Tele: 1 (876) 352-2650

that I was convinced Santa Claus came. Every kid knows it was their parents who leave presents under the tree. You can't fool kids these days. They are smarter than we are.

(Sits on the stool)

What does Christmas mean to me? Nothing, I suppose. It's just another day. I do like the snow though. I like the time off it gives me from work, but I hate the work to clear the driveway. I can't even afford to pay someone else to do it.

(a beat)

You know, I remember Christmas as a kid. It was a very exciting time. The family came together, prayed together, ate together. It was nice. I never forgot that, and I was never able to recreate that in my own family. I think our parents had a better handle on this thing than we can ever do. I wish I was like them. I really miss having them around. All the memories.

I think if Christmas is to ever have the value it once did, we will have to practically recreate it. I believe that was what our parents did. They create the Christmas we once enjoyed. I am just realizing how much effort that must have taken. You know, I think Christmas would have a greater meaning to me if I had kids. But for now, what can I really say ---

(pause)

(Michael exits).

(Janet, mid 50's, enters and sits on the stool).

(She looks out over the audience, happy eyes. She sniffs the air).

JANET: Do you smell that?

(A beat)

That's what Christmas means to me. It has a smell no other time of the year does. It's a mixture of cake batter, cleaning chemicals, artificial pine trees, snow and ornaments. I can smell it, before I see it.

As a child growing up, this was the foundation my parents set. Christmas was a time our family would gather together, cook together, reminiscing old times together. We loved it. On Christmas Sunday, we would all go to church and it would be a happy celebration when all the families in the different communities came together to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Amidst the contradictory doctrinal views, we all agreed on one thing --- Jesus Christ was born. It really didn't matter the day we celebrate it.

(Points at someone in the audience)

Has anybody ever forgot your birthday? Do you remember how that felt? What if you had no idea when you were born, what would you do? Of course you would just choose a random day and celebrate it then, right? So, what's all the arguing for?

(A beat)

I have heard it said that the celebration of Christmas was a pagan ritual, that they did all kinds of ungodly stuff on that day, even child sacrifices. They say we as the church have adopted all the pagan practices, even to this day. I have no idea if that is true or not, I just know that Christmas smells like heaven, and I love it. I often imagine this big celebration taking place in heaven. Jesus would be given a cake made with pure light. He would blow out the candles, to celebrate yet another 33rd birthday. I wanted to do that, but my family insisted that I embrace the idea of growing older. I don't mind getting older, I just prefer if my age remained static.

(A beat)

Heaven must have a smell, don't you think? I imagine if there is anything remotely close to that smell, it would be just around Christmas. With all that celebration taking place up there, the atmosphere must be charged with

www.christianplaywright.org

Copyright © 2016 Cleveland O. McLeish. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Tele: 1 (876) 352-2650

frangrances being released from angels, and those who have gone before. My parents would love that.

(A moment of sadness)

I think my appreciation of Christmas should be credited to my parents. I believe because of them. I see a different generation of parents these days --- some who have lost sight of what is important. They have no idea how that is going to affect their children in the future.

(getting happy again)

Anyway, I hope that answers your question. I need to go check on my cakes.

(takes a big sniff of the air)

Sure smells good.

JANET EXITS

(MICHELLE, 15, enters and sits on the stool).

(She looks out over the audience, excited. She shakes from the chill going up her spine. She is dressed to keep warm).

MICHELLE: What Christmas Means to Me?

(She considers)

I guess I like how it feels. Every teenager likes snow, right? Well, I do. I like how it feels against my skin, well, my bare hands and face that is. Sometimes the cold is unbearable, but I usually manage to bear it enough to feel it against my skin. I guess, I like how Christmas feels.

(A beat)

I remember as a child asking my mother where the snow came from, and why does it only come this time of the year. She usually uses that as an opportunity to tell me about Jesus. I never could understand why our Messiah would be born during the coldest time of the year. Even more confusing is that people left from different parts of the world, just to go to Bethlehem to see this child.

(Takes out her cell phone, and punches on the keyboard)

So, I did some research.

(looks incredulously at an audience member)

What? This is the 21st century --- this is what Generation X does. We go nowhere without our cell phone --- it's our eyes and ears into the world. If you think we are bad, wait until our children get to our age.

Anyway, I wanted to find out if it snowed in Bethlehem. This is what is says *(Reads from phone)* If you are lucky you may experience a white Christmas in Bethlehem, although rare some years there is a light snow fall. It is winter in Bethlehem at Christmas time and although snow does fall in Bethlehem it is not that common, the weather gets cold and there is frost in the early morning but snow, if at all is light.

(pause to think)

If you are lucky, it says. Meaning, it is a rare occasion. I bet it snowed that year when Jesus was born. That's what Christmas means to me. It feels different, way different from any other time in the year. It's really hard to express it, but no one

www.christianplaywright.org

Copyright © 2016 Cleveland O. McLeish. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Tele: 1 (876) 352-2650

here can deny it, there is just something different about this season. Do you realize that if you removed the gifts, the stories of Santa Claus and elves, and remove the socks hanging over the fireplace, the Christmas trees and decorations, and even the cake, though I would not personally remove the cake, but if you took it all away, the feeling would still remain? There is this air of celebration that seems to go beyond this world, and the best part is, we all can experience this blissful feeling during this time of the year --- well, everyone, except the Scrooges.

(Pause – Gets up to leave – Stops and look up with a smile, and a child-like grace)

Happy birthday, Jesus.

(Michelle exits)

(Julius, mid 50's, enters and sits on the stool. He looks out over the audience, and smiles).

JULIUS: What Christmas means to me? Where do I begin!

(considers for a moment)

I am a retired Pastor. Do you know why I retired? I was tired. I find that word really strange because the prefix 're' means to do it again, right? So, how exactly do you retire, unless you were already tired? Anyway, I was tired --- some people would say burnt out. I found that the world was changing far too rapidly than I could keep up. With the advancement in technology, and just the way we do things, I found that I was quickly becoming irrelevant. What can I say, I am old fashioned! I like the old way of doing things, and I struggled with the new stuff so I just let it go.

(a beat)

So, I have pretty much seen two different kinds of Christmas. It was once about family getting together, both the natural family, and the church family. We would have indoor bar-be-ques, snow fights, caroling, candle lighting, watching old classics like The Christmas Carol, I am talking the old movie, not the refurbished stuff. We would have church Sunday morning, and family dinner in the evening with all the relatives who flew over to meet in one place, preferably at grandmas and grandpas. Anybody remember that? We would put up Christmas decorations, and lights on the porch and on the lawn. Some people had complete manger scenes, or reindeers with Santa Claus.

(pause to consider)

But then things changed. Christmas became commercialized, competing with gifts, disunity among family, extended work week. Christmas started to feel like just another day. Church on a Christmas morning was never the same. People were anxious to get out about their own business, and you could hardly get the kids away from these new gadgets and out of their rooms anymore. They also figured out that Santa Claus is not a real person, but this also extended to Jesus Christ. Can you imagine that we would see a generation that would put Jesus in the same class as Santa Claus, that both were fictitious characters concocted by bored people to stimulate people's imagination concerning a time of year where everything just feels different.

For me to answer the question, What Christmas means to me, I would have to say which version of Christmas I prefer. I am guessing you already know the answer to that.

I miss what Christmas really meant to us as a family. I would say our priorities have changed somewhat, and I am not casting blame on anyone, but we must accept responsibility. I have lived to see a child's Christmas shatter in their own minds because they did not get the perfect gift. I have seen family's struggle through Christmas because it is also the anniversary of a very tragic time in their own families. It would seem that the phrase "God is good" is no longer a mantra we use despite our deficiencies, and the circumstances we are facing. If God is only good, when all is good, then in reality He is not good. But that's just my own personal opinion.

Christmas for me is a milestone every single year, that provokes deep gratitude that transcends what I am going through, what I lack, or what I think my life should be at this point. Christmas was never about us anyway, it was always about Jesus Christ. It should never have been a time to receive, but a time to give. Do you demand gifts, and attention when you are celebrating someone else's birthday? So why do it at Christmas.

That is my definition of Christmas; "God is good."

(Smiles – gets off the stool and exit.)

(Grandma, mid 60's, enters with the aid of a walking stick and stands staring at the stool. She looks out over the audience).

GRANDMA: They don't expect me to climb up on this thing at my age, do they?

(Someone brings a chair. Grandma sits in the chair, leans on her walking stick).

GRANDMA: What Christmas means to me? I have seen several generation shifts, so it's hard to give a general answer because I can identify preferences. I like some of what I had as a kid, some of the stuff I had as an adult, and some I have as an elder. The truth is, what meaning I draw from this time of the year is probably a combination of all. So let's start there.

Do you know how I celebrate my birthday every year? I call all my family together, and we prepare a meal, cut a cake and drink some non-alcoholic wine. I do that as an outward manifestation of my inward gratitude that I have lived to see another year. When you get to my age, you learn to be grateful for every moment, every day, every week, and every year of life that you are blessed with. You learn never to take anything for granted.

If I celebrate my birthday like that, how do you think we should celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ?

(pause to consider)

There is no fixed template for what you do on Christmas Day, or the days leading up to it. I believe every family will create their own traditions, but the point is to have a tradition, have a way, have something. The only people I expect not to celebrate Jesus' birth are those who don't believe He was born. No one like that is here anyway.

(Pause, sad face)

Christmas was a special time for me and my husband. He is not here anymore, but I get to relive our best moments during this season. He usually sings Stevie Wonder's song to me: *"Candles burning low, lots of mistletoe. Lots of snow and ice, everywhere we go. Choirs singing carols right outside my door. I see your smiling face, like I never seen before. Even though I love ya madly, it seems I love you more. All little cards you give me, will touch my heart for sure. All these things are more, darling, that's what Christmas means to me my love. I feel like running wild, as anxious as a little child. Greet you neath the mistletoe, kiss you once and*

www.christianplaywright.org

then some more and wish you a Merry Christmas baby, and such happiness in the coming year. Let's deck the halls with holly, Sing sweet silent night. Fill the tree with angel hair and pretty, pretty lights. Go to sleep and wake up, just before daylight."

(Pause – wipes a tear)

I am not angry that he is not here. I ask Jesus to give him a gift from me, every single year. I see him celebrating at Jesus' birthday party every year, and I know one day I will join him. But that's Christmas for me --- it's a time of love, a time to remember, and a time to create new memories; snapshots of moments in time when the family is together, and almost everyone has a smile on their face. There is this feeling I get, like electric current running swiftly through my body causing me to twitch for just a moment. I love it.

(smiles)

If you have lost the essence of what Christmas really means, go home and create it. You have the power to make Christmas what you want it to be, but don't do what the world does and leave Christ out of it. He is at the center, and where Christ is, there is abundant love, and eternal bliss. That's all I have to say about that.

(gets up)

You people have me all mushy and crying up in here.

(Grandma shakes her head, and exits)

(Pastor, mid 30's, enters and sits on the stool. He looks out over the audience).

(He pulls out his iPad and swipes to find an article).

PASTOR: Can I read you something?

(audience responds)

I would read it, even if you had said no.

(smiles)

(Reads)

Roman pagans first introduced the holiday of Saturnalia, a week long period of lawlessness celebrated between December 17-25. During this period, Roman courts were closed, and Roman law dictated that no one could be punished for damaging property or injuring people during the weeklong celebration. The festival began when Roman authorities chose "an enemy of the Roman people" to represent the "Lord of Misrule." Each Roman community selected a victim whom they forced to indulge in food and other physical pleasures throughout the week. At the festival's conclusion, December 25th, Roman authorities believed they were destroying the forces of darkness by brutally murdering this innocent man or woman. The ancient Greek writer poet and historian Lucian (in his dialogue entitled *Saturnalia*) describes the festival's observance in his time. In addition to human sacrifice, he mentions these customs: widespread intoxication; going from house to house while singing naked; rape and other sexual license; and consuming human-shaped biscuits (still produced in some English and most German bakeries during the Christmas season). In the 4th century CE, Christianity imported the Saturnalia festival hoping to take the pagan masses in with it. Christian leaders succeeded in converting to Christianity large numbers of pagans by promising them that they could continue to celebrate the Saturnalia as Christians.

(to audience)

I hear the dividing thoughts as it relates to Christmas, so I had to do the research myself. Apparently, some form of celebration had a pagan origin. We are not disputing that. The question I was asked is, What does Christmas mean to me? Before I can answer, I want to ask you a question, Can God still speak to His people through a donkey?

www.christianplaywright.org

(Pause to think)

Both questions, I believe, are equally relevant. If God wanted to institute a celebration on earth as it is in heaven for the initial birth of His Son, and those who should be obeying His voice refuse to do so, then what do you think is going to happen? I believe the Lord will allow the enemy to do some things, and then charge us to redeem it for good. It doesn't really matter if Christmas started as a pagan worship, in the same way we can redeem time, we have redeemed this day, sanctified it and call it holy.

(A beat)

That's what Christmas means to me. It is a time to celebrate the birth of Christ; a time when families come together unified in a way that may not be possible throughout the year to commemorate a monumental event in human history. That's what I preach, and that is what I believe. The quality of our lives will always be rooted in what we choose to believe. If you believe we should not celebrate Christmas for whatever reason, I don't think it will be held against you. I celebrate Christmas with my family every year, and I would not trade that for anything.

(A beat)

(Grandma appears at the edge of the stage)

GRANDMA: Come along, John. Dinner is ready.

PASTOR: Coming Grandma.

(Grandma exits)

PASTOR: Before you leave this place, I would want you all, individually, to ask and answer this same question for yourself.

(pause)

What does Christmas really mean to you?

(Pastor exits)

BLACKOUT