

## CHRISTMAS – YOU JUST HAVE TO LAUGH

So many of our images of Christmas are wrapped in the soft glow of multicoloured lights festooning trees rich with full green needles while fluffy snowflakes gently fall and, softly in the background, cherished Christmas carols are sung in perfect four-part harmony. That image is diametrically opposite to what many people experience during the Christmas season these days.

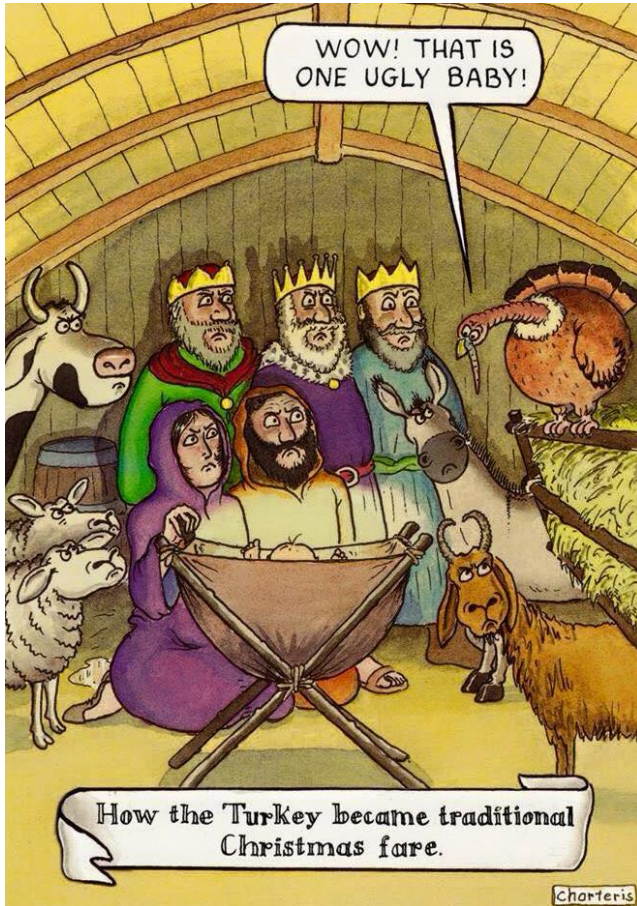
For example, there was a family living at the hectic pace experienced by so many at this time of the year. One day close to Christmas was especially bad. The smallest daughter in the family seemed to be constantly in the way of mother and father. Finally, in exasperation, the wee girl was put to bed.

She knelt to say her prayers and perhaps became confused. She prayed, “Forgive us our Christmases, as we forgive those who Christmas against us.”

You just have to laugh at how we have taken a story about a poor couple finding no room to stay in the husband’s home town – no family and no friends to welcome them in – forced to make due with the warm but “aromatic” surroundings of a stable. The light and the wonder of this birth – despite the hardship and the forlorn circumstances – this promise of someone and something world-transforming yet to grow into fulness, all of that we miss in the frantic and frenetic busyness of our modern Christmas preparations. You just have to laugh how we do this to ourselves even with the very best of intentions.

In many ways we have turned the story around and around while forgetting the power of the original story. In another town, there was a minister who decided the church bulletin board needed something to attract attention during the Advent season of preparation. After some thought and out of the desire to combat how people seemed to forget the baby Jesus’ promise in the Christmas story, he posted a notice that read, “Santa Claus never died for anybody.”





A few hours later, the church phone rang. The minister picked up the line and a voice complained, "It's awful! I think it is inexcusable for the church to mix religion with a legitimate holiday."

Thinking about that swift and misguided response, the minister pondered. Later that day at the grocery store, the song "Jingle Bells" was playing cheerfully over the sound system. The minister continued to think about worries that Christmas was more and more twisted from its original message of vulnerability not to mention of hope, of peace, of joy and of love. On the drive home he wryly composed some new words to the song which reflected his despairing take on the current state of Christmas celebrations.

Dashing through the streets, snarling as you go,  
if someone's in your way, shove the so-and-so;  
Whizzing through the doors, charging down the aisles,  
all the Christmas faces wreathed in tense and nervous smiles.

Oh, buy our stuff! Buy our stuff! Empty out your purse.  
Christmas is a spending time that steadily gets worse.

Oh, have we got lovely gifts for every him or her.  
If we're out of frankincense, then buy our dandy myrrh!

Gleefully satisfied with this "in your face" composition while humming along, the minister walked past the front of the church, stopping to admire the creche display beside the church sign featuring Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus. A couple were walking by and remarked, "Look at that," said one to the other. "Even the churches are trying to horn in on Christmas."

You just have to laugh.

Perhaps any confusion comes from assumptions made that the story is so familiar it needs no explanation. After all, the human mind is wonderfully inventive,

especially when that mind is the mind of a child. When in the company of mumbling adults, children fill in the blanks to delight and sometimes inspire us all.

The term mondegreen means “misheard lyrics.” For example, some children hear a radio favourite as “Olive, the other reindeer ...” which carries on to the big finish of the song; “You’ll go down in Listerine!” Here’s some more. You figure out what the originals were:



We three kinds of porridge and tar ...  
On the first day of Christmas, my tulip gave to me ...  
With the jelly toast proclaim ...  
Noel, Noel, Barney's the king of Israel ...  
He's making a list, chicken and rice ...  
Later on, we'll perspire, as we dream by the fire ...  
Sleep in heavenly peas ...  
You'll tell Carol, "Be a skunk I require ..."  
(You may need help with that one: "Yuletide carols being sung by a choir ...")  
O come foggy faithful or O come froggy faithful ...  
Good tidings we bring, to you and your kid ...  
Oh, what fun it is to ride with one horse, soap and hay ...  
In the meadow we can build a snowman, and pretend that he is sparse and brown ...

You just have to laugh, for the above mangled lyrics only prove that some of the best things – the silliest and funniest things – happen when we learn to enjoy our mistakes. Then, in learning to enjoy our mistakes as we giggle, we can stop taking ourselves quite so seriously and enjoy one another. Even when we are stressed beyond endurance, love bubbles up among us when we make room for laughter.