



Christ Church of Atlanta  
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## Newsletter – December 2011 – Alfred Sawyer

### Christmas Memories

What is your most memorable Christmas? Christmas evokes childhood memories for most of us. My most memorable Christmas was in 1954. I was six. We had gotten our first television set the previous year, and I spent most Saturday mornings glued to the TV watching cowboy movies from the 1930s and 40s. There was Hopalong Cassidy, Tex Ritter, Gene Autrey and my all-time favorite, the Lone Ranger.

The themes of these shows were similar. The good guys wore white hats and rode white horses. They always shot the bad guys in the shoulder, just enough to incapacitate them, but never enough to kill them. The good guys always won.

I already had acquired a white hat for my birthday the previous August. I also had two cap guns that looked real enough. All I needed was a horse. My mother had revealed to me the previous year the shocking fact that Santa Claus wasn't real. This news had taken me somewhat aback, but I quickly recovered when I figured out it would be a lot easier to tell my mother what I wanted than to put in a request to a mysterious fat man who lived at the North Pole.

Christmas that year dawned warm and sunny in Columbus. I was up before the crack of dawn and was somewhat disappointed that there was no horse in the living room. Around mid-morning my parents told me to come outside. In front of my house was the most beautiful site I had ever seen, a brown and white Welsh pony named Danny.

My first ride on Danny ended up with me being thrown head-first off his back when he lowered his head to eat an apple I had dropped. That was the first of hundreds of falls I took from that ornery animal. Danny would try to rub me off on trees, roll over when we crossed streams, and buck wildly whenever the mood struck him. I didn't care. He was a horse (albeit a small one), and I figured if the Lone Ranger could ride Silver, I could ride Danny.

Danny and I reached a modus vivendi about six months later when I discovered the remarkable efficacy of a riding crop, a.k.a stick, applied with sufficient force to Danny's anatomy when he misbehaved. Danny got where he was a pleasure to ride. I no longer had to use the stick. He and I would spend countless hours riding in the countryside that surrounded our house. I rode Danny for years, until I got too big to ride him and long after I ceased to be enamored with cowboy shows.

Now, over a half-century later, I can still recall my delight at seeing that beautiful animal standing in front of my house on Christmas morning. Danny was a dream come true. He exceeded my wildest expectations.

Christmas is about exceeding our wildest expectations, not in the sense of giving us our material desires,



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but in the deeper sense of satiating the real desire of our hearts.

The great Augustine of Hippo put it this way, “God you have made us for yourself. And our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.”

Christmas celebrates God’s gift of Himself to us by becoming one of us in the Person of His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. God came to us at Christmas to redeem us from from an eternity of separation from Him, by the life, death and resurrection of His Son.

God’s gift of His Son, Jesus, is the only gift we will ever receive that can really satisfy the deepest desires of our hearts. It is the only gift that cannot be taken away. It is only gift that will last forever.

This Christmas let us celebrate with joy God’s free gift of eternal life that He has made available to all who call upon the Name of Jesus. And remember to tell those who have never unwrapped God’s gift to them, that He stands ready to make this their most memorable Christmas ever.

*How silently, how silently,  
The wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human  
    hearts  
The blessings of his heaven.  
No ear may hear his coming,  
But in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will  
receive him, still  
The dear Christ enters in.*

*(Phillips Brooks, 1867)*

*- Alfred Sawyer, Rector*