



Gary Wadding

As I grew up in a very small town, my favorite time of the whole year was Christmas. I wasn't raised in a Christian home, but I did know that Christmas was supposed to be about the **Baby Jesus**. Nevertheless, to a greedy little boy like me, Jesus wasn't nearly as exciting as **Santa Claus**, the "Main Man" of Christmas to me. So, although this holiday was Jesus's birthday, I didn't associate it with God very much. I mainly thought about a fat old man with a big white beard. This dotting old grandfather type lived far, far away and had a bunch of little creatures who did his work for him. We wrote him letters in which we told him what we wanted from him, but he didn't matter much except once a year. As December drew near, he began reminding kids that he was "making a list, and checking it twice. Gonna find out who's naughty and nice." That sounded really scary if you weren't an especially good boy. Happily he never seemed to get his lists straight and I got toys anyway. He blustered around, but in the end he always gave us nice toys and new underwear. I liked the toys. He made unreasonable demands and made terrible threats. He demanded that I be a good boy. (Impossible) He also made threats to cut off my toy supply if I didn't. (Horror) But old Santa either lacked the nerve or the ability to follow through on his scary plans. He was a blowhard and a pushover to my mind.

When I met Jesus Christ later in my life, my whole idea of Christmas changed. My focus now shifted from the North Pole to Bethlehem. I began to appreciate the fantastic wonder of God sending His only Son to earth, to be born as a little baby in a poor family, in a small barn, in a militarily occupied country. I saw the overwhelming love of God in providing a Savior who would go through Hell to save me from my sins. I still enjoyed the part of the holiday that involved presents and turkey dinners, but it was no longer the main part. I had now actually met the One who was not a fantasy, but a real person, **Jesus Christ**. Christmas was now truly His day for me.

Sadly, however, I saw that other people didn't see God the same way. They saw Him as being an old grandfather who lived in Heaven far away, and had a bunch of little angels who do His work for Him. Even though they send Him lists of things they want, they think He doesn't interfere in the activities of mankind except once in a long while. He says that He keeps a list of our deeds and will one day judge each

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of us. For the good ones, He will take them to Heaven. For the bad ones, He will send them to Hell. But most people don't think He will do it. They just go ahead and live like He doesn't exist. They figure that if He is real, He's so good that He would never follow through on His announced plans. They assume that He's not much different than the Tooth Fairy, the Easter Bunny or Santa Claus. But they're wrong. He isn't a fairy tale.

I know the reality of all this because I've experienced the changes Jesus said He would bring to anyone who confesses their sins and asks Him to change them to become like Him. I've been born again. It's not a religious term. It's reality. I was able to start all over again. It's not just me either. Millions and millions of people have found Jesus' promises to be true; people from absolutely opposite backgrounds or nationalities. Christ is not a white Jesus, a black Jesus or any other kind of exclusive Jesus. He's both the present and the Giver of the present. I might not be at the point of perfection, as most of you could easily see. But I'm sure not the person I used to be. **The Real Christmas**, and the Real Jesus made a wonderful difference in my life. Is He Real in yours? If He isn't, maybe it's time for you to grow up and make Jesus the center of your holiday. Merry **CHRISTmas**.

