

OLD ORNAMENTS AND THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

The doors of our time machine slowly opened. We cautiously entered, soon to find ourselves in a bygone day.

It was Christmas, and a young couple was decorating their first Christmas tree. The last on the lot, the 50-cent price was probably too much.

The five handmade ornaments were hardly fancy... and perhaps oversized for such a small tree. Cut from paper, a gaily-colored Christmas ball hung on a lower limb, balanced by a paper star a bit higher up. Sandwiched between them were other paper creations: a duck and a kitten. A little angel topped the tree. Crafted from a plastic spoon, frayed cloth and more paper, her painted-on face radiated the joy of that first Christmas.

Meager finances didn't allow twinkling lights, so a small table lamp cast its glow on the little tree. The husband was struggling to make things "just so" when the scene abruptly changed. The time machine had moved ahead--to yet another Christmas.

Excited about decorating his first tree, a small boy was digging through dusty boxes. Then strung with the bright lights and glittering ornaments he pulled from them, the stately tree became a wonderland.

Curiously out of place, however, were five timeworn ornaments. "Dad, what are these for?" His parents then tenderly described their first Christmas together. We watched this scene of boy and box replay year by year as the time machine steadily crept on. Suddenly it lurched, transporting us to a Christmas many years future.

Children squealed with delight as their parents and grandparents helped them rifle through the now-familiar dusty boxes. But like their father before them, they had questions. "Grandpa, what are these old paper ornaments?" Grandpa explained, "They tell a very special story about the true spirit of Christmas. They remind us that we can be content with very little, and the greatest treasures in life--love, joy and peace--are free."

Once back in the present, I was grateful for the lack of material possessions our first Christmas together. But the tradition born that year is but a shadow of another birth--on the very first Christmas ever.

For on that day, Jesus left the splendor of heaven to occupy a lowly stable. Though not announced to kings, His birth was heralded by angels to shepherds. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord." And He has promised to freely give the most important treasures in life--love, joy and peace--to all who would ask.

As the "time machine" of our lives continues to slowly inch forward, earthly fortunes may wax and wane. But because of that unique One whose birth defines Christmas, the old paper ornaments still have meaning, speaking across the years of the true spirit of the season. We can be content with very little, and the most important treasures in life--love, joy and peace--are Jesus' free gifts to all who call Him friend.