

Grace Notes

"God's grace for everyday living

Transposing Christmas from the inside to the outside

By: Debora M. Coty

A veterinarian friend, Dr. Katie Thompson, tells the story about the December when a very sick black lab was brought in to her clinic. The dog exhibited symptoms of some kind of intestinal blockage but the distraught owner had no idea what she could have ingested.

"She's such a good dog—she *never* eats anything she shouldn't!"

Famous last words.

Dr. Katie hung the poor ailing pooch's x-rays up to study the contents of her innards. Something looked a little peculiar. Dr. Katie called her assistant over.

"Does that look like a camel to you?" she asked incredulously.

"As a matter of fact, it does," replied the astute assistant. "And there's an angel, a shepherd, and Baby Jesus over there in the colon."

At that moment, the phone rang. It was the dog's owner.

"I just got home and as I walked in the front door, I noticed my manger scene on the coffee table—only the stable and pine cone tree are there; it's totally empty!"

As I ruminated about this literal technique for internalizing the true meaning

of Christmas, it occurred to me that sometimes I have the opposite problem. With all the bustling of the season, my inner joy in celebration of the birth of my savior never really makes it to the outside.

Oh, I have plenty of glittery, festive evidences of the holiday in decorations, baking galore, and gifts under my tree. But those things are for show. They're merely the pretty wrappings, not the gift itself. After all, myriads of non-Christians celebrate Christmas with the same trappings I do. Why, even Harry Potter celebrates Christmas at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry with colorful baubles, presents, and a tree.

So what's the difference between Harry and me?

Can people really see the core-deep joy that radiates within me when I think of the true gift God sent the world in his son, Jesus? Is my immeasurable gratitude for eternal life evident to my friends and co-workers as I dash through the hectic season, scurrying to get everything done and reserve enough energy to hold my head up at the end of the day?

I'm afraid all too often, the answer is no.

I'm far too busy to allow my outside to reflect my inside



sufficiently for a nonbeliever to recognize that I may view the celebration of Christmas differently than they do because of the hope that is within me as a believer. My joy is obscured by the mounds of clutter and gratefulness is sucked out of my soul by the vacuum called urgency.

"But let the godly rejoice. Let them be glad in God's presence. Let them be filled with joy," (Psalm 68:3, NLT).

This verse is my prayer for this Christmas season—that I would *make* the time to give priority to rejoicing, being glad in God's presence, and letting my inner joy show for those who may be silently desperate to know the giver of true joy and author of my faith.

How about you?

"Debbie's articles have appeared in dozens of magazines including Discipleship Journal, MomSense, and Today's Christian Woman and she has just completed her first book. Contact her at GraceNotes1@earthlink.net for comments, commiserations, or speaking engagement requests." She is a member of the Christian Writer's Guild.