

# Christmas has a body

By Roger Edwards

Christmas has a body. It has eyes, ears, and nose. At Christmas, the Word became flesh with ten fingers, ten toes.

It is no coincidence then that Christmas has historically been celebrated with a vigorous sense of the physical. It is the season of robust recipes, sturdy socks, and hefty hugs. Christmas is physical because Christmas has a body. Ask anyone.

Gather a group, as diverse as you wish, together in your living room. Ask them: "What does your nose remember about Christmas?" Then find yourself a comfortable chair, for once this conversation begins, one memory will bring another. You will probably join in.

A woman, who looks like someone's aunt, will say, "Ah! I think of roasted turkey, simmering in broth and vegetables." A man leaning on the mantel says, "A ham, hot-glazed with brown sugar." A large fellow in the corner mentions the yeasty aroma of homemade rolls, with "butter running down the sides". "Oh yes," the aunt lady says, "Stuffing! Seasoned with sage, just when it comes out the oven." She might even clap her hands. Others in the room join in; "Apple pie," "Stuffing," "Peppermint and cloves."

"There are smells beside food," a woman with sensible shoes reminds everyone. "Do tell," the group says. "Well, for example, a match being struck- to light the advent wreath." "Yes, rather pungent," her

husband adds. "Sulphuric," she corrects. "And don't forget the melting wax," offers a rather rotund rector in the armchair, "it has a specific odor."

A young boy chirps up, "The stains on daddy's hands!" "The stains?" you ask. "Yes, from dragging in the tree," he explains. "Yes, indeed," the rather rotund rector nods, "a very distinctive scent." The list expands; "Chestnuts roasting," "Wool caps," "The hint of snow in the air."

Shift the question to the memories of the ear and the same thing will happen. A woman tilts her head and suggests bells, "All the different kinds". "Yes," a grandfather says, "Like church bells - deep, distant tones, I fancy they're calling one another across town." "Then there are small bells, worn on a shoe or tied with ribbon through a buttonhole." You hear them tinkling round a corner, someone laughs. "What about hand bells with their rolling yodel?" asks an Englishman, who somehow found his way into the group, "I particularly like the snuffed hush when they are set down. Such resolve and closure, don't you think?"

"And carolers!" someone will say. "You hear them laughing and clattering on the street, and then the voices; Hark the Herald. Silent Night. Good King Wenceslas. Goodnight! Merry Christmas!" "Specials on the radio," another supplies. "Handel's Messiah- You know, I keep meaning to join a choir some year." "The rattle of chains from A Christmas Carol and 'Bah

Humbug’,” a woman with pearls nods. And everyone knows the sound of packaging being ripped, the tinkle of M & Ms dropping into a glass bowl, and the slow crinkle of pages as Luke’s story is read.

Christmas has a nose and ears. And well it should, for God took on a nose and ears at Christmas. He smelled straw, the

*“God took on a nose and ears at Christmas. He smelled straw, the sweaty perfume of ox and donkey, the scent of a mother’s milk and arm.”*

sweaty perfume of ox and donkey, the scent of a mother’s milk and arm. He heard cattle lowing, hushed conversation between mother and father, and shepherds exclaim; “Lo! There He lays! Just as the angels

said.” The Son of God, heard sounds and smelled smells, just like a son of man.

Someone in the group is bound to mention lights, and off you go to the sights of Christmas. “We switch off the lamps when we light the tree,” a little girl remembers, “it looks like stars perching on branches.” There is a chorus of other memories; “The flicker of a fire against the opposite wall,” “Trailing lights on balusters,” “Candles in a white bag of sand,” “Luminaries in the window.”

The group will think of other things that have no flame, but glow nonetheless; “Bright berries on a wreath,” “Greenery on the hearth,” “Brown paper with red ribbons.”

*“On the His very first day, He suckled a mother’s milk and on His very last, a vinegar-soaked sponge.”*

“Children on tiptoe, at a parade!” the jolly fellow exclaims. “Stockings, hanging in rows.” “Steam curling from sweet potato casserole.” “Winter coats,

at a party, piled high on a bed.”

Christmas has eyes. He who had seen the far corners of the universe, now blinks in a barn’s dim shadows. Above Him, a dark roof slanted. Who knows, perhaps a crack allowed a certain shining star to catch His opening eye. He would have glanced shifting animals, the tired movements of an earthly father making ready a bed, and the growing dawn.

Christmas is God in a body, complete with eyes, ears, and nose. Christmas is sensual because God offered Himself to our senses. “He dwelt among us,” the apostle John writes, “and we beheld His glory.” He came to our senses, so that perhaps we might come to them too.

And don’t forget His sense of taste. On His very first day, He suckled a mother’s milk and on His very last, a vinegar-soaked sponge. He drank, and eventually drank to the bottom, the whole cup of human experience; both the sweetness of life that God created for man, and the bitterness of death that man created for himself. At Christmas, Christ the Lord steps into the life of man.

Now ask your group; “Does your skin have memories of Christmas?” An odd question at first, but once you broach the subject, the others will join in and this list will be just as long, just as delightful and perhaps richer.

Someone will suggest the warmth of a fire. “First the hands, then the backside,” a man from Vermont claims as the preferred order. “A hot mug cradled in cold fingers,” another voice says. “The weight of thick blankets in a sleigh.” “Shoulders close by, when the prayer is offered.” “A warm kiss under the mistletoe,” an elderly woman blushes. “Hot chocolate, scalding a hasty tongue.” The silent interlacing of bodies-leaving the Christmas Eve service. “The repose of digestive slumber,” reminisces the portly gentlemen. “The coarse warmth

of thick socks.” “And don’t forget,” points out the man with black-rimmed glasses, “the secret confidence of new underwear.”

But of all the ways that Christmas is physical, the most astonishing idea of all, is God taking on the size and shape of man. It is difficult to imagine how this could be. Can the immeasurable be folded into human proportions? Can omniscience be confined to a central nervous system? Perhaps with effort, one could picture deified ears, or divinely penetrating eyes. And if you really concentrated, you might be able to envision a supreme nostril. But how is it possible to wrap infinity in an envelope of skin? Would not the consuming fire burn through?

Yet it is true. Christmas has flesh. Oh above all, Christmas has flesh. The newborn Savior was covered with it. He felt the swaddling cloth, the upward lift of Mary’s caress, and the calloused fingers of Joseph the carpenter. As the crucified Savior, He experienced these over again in reverse order; the rough grip of those that pounded the nails, the nauseating hoist of the cross, and wrapping of burial cloth. The body of Christ receives five senses eventually to bear the five wounds. At Christmas, God came near, near enough for harm, near enough to heal.

And we came near to Him; shepherds empty-handed, Magi bearing gifts, and Herod came swinging his sword. Crowds pressed against Him; to ask for bread, to touch the edge of His clothes, and to cry out, “Crucify Him!” He walked the dusty roads of Palestine and drank dark wine in Galilee. He stroked the heads of children, touched the leper’s sores, and dabbed saliva on a dumb man’s tongue. He tore apart loaves and fish, threw aside tables in the temple, and fingered words in the dirt. Prostitutes kissed his feet; disciples leaned on His breast; and soldiers pierced His side. He wept, thirsted, sweated and bled. Christmas is physical and tangible and particular because Christ was physical and tangible and particular.

*“Christmas is physical and tangible and particular because Christ was physical and tangible and particular.”*

Christmas has a body and in that body beats the heart of God. So we celebrate; with horn and harp, ladle and spoon, color and candle. We rejoice, knowing that when Christ laid down His body, He ransomed for us our soul.



# The Barnabas Center

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## Honor's Path Spouse's Group

If you are in a relationship with a man who has struggled with sexual compulsivity or are in a relationship that is recovering from sexual betrayal this group could be a good place for you. Please call (704-365-4545) or e-mail ([info@thebarnabascenter.org](mailto:info@thebarnabascenter.org)) if you are interested in participating or getting more information.



## Upcoming Events *opportunities and Current Events*

Date	Event	Facilitator
Mid-Jan. Weds. 12:00 - 1:00	<b>Beginnings:</b> A 7 week reoccurring workshop for those considering the counseling process.	<i>John Pierce</i>
Mid-Jan. Thurs. 4:00- 5:15	<b>Honors Path Spouses Group</b> – See Box	<i>John Pierce</i>
Mid-Jan.- Tues. 5:30- 7:15	<b>Honor's Path- A Group for Men-</b> ministry to sexually addicted men who want a better path Please call (704-365-4545) or e-mail ( <a href="mailto:info@thebarnabascenter.org">info@thebarnabascenter.org</a> )	<i>John Pierce</i>
January 22, 2005	<b>Love Your Kids Like God Loves You</b> Parenting Seminar at Bethel Presbyterian in Cornelius Contact The Barnabas Center for Details	<i>Roger Edwards</i>
February 12, 2005 is the Kickoff with 8 weekly meetings to follow	<b>Barnabas Training Level I</b> Extends the fundamentals of Barnabas Training Intro. Level I is a 9 week program that includes a seminar and an 8 week	<i>Barnabas Staff</i>
March 4-6, 2005	<b>Heart to Heart</b> Marriage Weekend in Huntersville Contact The Barnabas Center for Details	<i>Roger Edwards</i> <i>Palmer Trice</i>