

EDITOR'S ETC.

BY DEAN MERRILL



Of Toy Trucks And Toasters

The long Saturday of Christmas shopping was almost over, and my 6-year-old legs were worn out. But my mind still raced, for here in Dallas's largest department store I had just spied THE MOST WONDERFUL TOY IN THE WORLD—a five-inch green and yellow milk truck, with rubber wheels and real doors that slid back and forth.

"Mom, can I please have this truck for Christmas? It's so neat!" (I don't remember the price, but back in 1949 it was probably less than a dollar.)

"Well, I'm just about done for the day," she wearily replied. "Go find Dad and stay with him; I'll meet you at the car."

I trudged off in the direction of my father . . . away from the marvelous truck. But had she really said no? Maybe something was afoot here. I circled around the end of some shelves to peek back toward the original aisle—and there she was, standing in line to buy one more thing!

Her eyes caught mine, and she was not happy. I darted for my father.

In the car heading home that day, it was quiet. A cold rain fell from the December clouds. Presently, my mother turned toward the back seat.

"O.K., Son," she said quietly, "I told you to go with Dad to the car, and you didn't obey. So the surprise has now been spoiled. You might as well have your truck."

"No, Mom, no!" I begged, pushing her hand away. "Please take it home and wrap it up for Christmas!"

She was firm. "No, you already know I bought it, so there's no point pretending. You keep it."

I pled some more but got nowhere. Soon the hum of the tires on wet asphalt was the only sound to be heard. I sat holding the little van, looking out across the Texas cotton fields, raindrops coursing down the car window, and rain falling down my cheeks to match. I didn't want the truck *now*. I wanted it on Christmas morning, amid colored lights and warm feelings and family joy. In this cold Saturday twilight, it was just . . . a truck.

Her point that day has never left me: *Christmas is more than merchandise*. More than items on a list. Christmas is suspense, anticipation, atmosphere, wonderment . . . the intangibles.

Christmas is a Baby in a manger. But Christmas is also God reaching out to a hostile world. Yes, the Christ Child was tangible; his par-

ents held him, cuddled him, fed him real food. His Father in fact had sent him to be tangible, "the image of the invisible God," says Colossians 1:15. That was quite an achievement. How do you make a picture of something *invisible*? Yet Jesus did it; he embodied the unseen. Like a Polaroid picture just out of the camera, God's color and texture and image took shape before our very eyes.

And what was the intangible part of his coming? He lifted our sights; he drew us to come love him, to confess our sins and be adopted into his family. He was, at the start, just a baby; but he was also a bridge to everlasting life.

Today, he's no longer here in visible form. But he is still real.

This year, our task is to get beyond the merchandise of Christmas to the greater meaning, to "fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). Toy trucks and ties and toasters are but the ground level of Christmastime. The real joy and fulfillment and peace lies in the upper significance.

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