

By A/Professor Goh Lee Gan, Past Editor (1983-1998)

# Christmas Message 2006

## WHAT IS CHRISTMAS?

What is Christmas? It depends on who tries to answer the question. The Christians will say: *“Hark the Herald Angels sing: A new king is born today. And men will live for ever more, because of Christmas day.”*

And there is a song that was sung in one of the Christmas gatherings that I thought was really touching. I must thank my brother-in-law for supplying me with the lyrics. The first two stanzas go like this:

*“Christmas isn’t Christmas  
Til it happens in your heart.  
Somewhere deep inside you  
Is where Christmas really starts.  
So give your heart to Jesus  
You’ll discover when you do  
That it’s Christmas,  
Really Christmas for you.”*

To the more down-to-earth, Christmas is associated with carols, transformation of places into fairyland, gifts, shopping, parties, and good cheer.

Perhaps the most meaningful of all are the Christmas stories told to us or experienced by us that we still remember even as the years go by. Let me share a few with you.

## WHAT A GRATITUDE

First is a personal story which happened in the recent past. The time was morning

on Boxing Day, 2004. As I turned on the television, I saw the news of a tsunami that had swept across many lands. My thoughts that morning went immediately to the safety of my brother in Sri Lanka and the couple who ran a hotel in Phuket where we stayed just a few months earlier. It was futile to think of anything except to commit their safety to the hands of Divine Providence. And I am pleased to report that they are all well, safe and sound. What a gratitude I felt in my heart.

## CHRISTMAS AT THE SOUTH POLE

Next is a story of Captain Scott and his team of four who made the assault to the South Pole but were overcome by fatigue on the way back. A search party found their bodies in their sleeping bags in their tent buried in the snow.

I read, as a schoolboy, of Scott and his team celebrating their mid-winter Christmas dinner made of pony meat, cocoa and biscuits. What a dinner, I thought to myself.

The British South Pole expedition was in competition with a Norwegian team led by Roald Amundsen in the Christmas season of 1911 to 1912. When the British reached the Pole, they discovered that the Norwegians had been there before them; in fact, a full four weeks earlier.

The English team had chosen ponies to pull their sledges and the Norwegians had dogs. The dogs lasted the journey “hale and hearty”.



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The ponies died. The moral of the story is that the right choice can make a difference between success and failure, life and death.

I learnt on checking for details of the Scott expedition that actually a team of four marines are making their way to the South Pole this Christmas over the same route taken by Scott and his team.

### **THE LITTLE MATCH GIRL**

This is a story by Hans Christian Andersen of a little girl who sold matches but dared not go home one night, for fear of a beating because she had not sold a single box. Cold and bareheaded in the snow in contrast to the houses adorned with Christmas lightings, she decided to strike a few matches to keep herself warm.

On the fourth match, she saw her grandmother. And she struck all the matches in an effort not to lose the vision. In the end, her grandmother took her up with her, away from the suffering of her earthly existence. I will leave you to reflect on what the story means to you.

### **THE GIFT OF THE MAGI**

This story by O Henry is perhaps the most meaningful of all. It is a story of a young couple who each tried to buy a Christmas gift to complement what the spouse had, only to discover that each had sold away

that very item that the spouse was trying to complement.

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The husband sold his watch to buy a tortoise shell comb for the wife. The wife sold her hair to buy a chain for his watch. Each had a useless gift to give away but it was nevertheless a gift of the Magi because they had made a sacrifice to make the other happy.

So, Christmas was Christmas, because the couple had given something deep in their hearts for each other.

### **HAVE A MERRY CHRISTMAS**

You will no doubt have your pet Christmas stories to tell and to reflect upon. Then it will be Christmas because something has happened in your heart as you think about them. Have a Merry Christmas, wherever you are. ■