



**Don Rait**  
CPCO President



## Christmas Reflections

*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord is upon you.*

Isaiah 60:1

I would like to invite each of us to step back into our own personal past and reflect on how we, as children, prepared for Christmas. For me December 8 always marked the first real day of Christmas preparation. When I was a child this was a holy day, a religious holiday. The morning started early. I made my way to the church at 6:00 a.m. to serve mass with our pastor Monsignor Kirby. I would arrive back home to a welcomed breakfast and then wait patiently for my grandmother to finish squeezing her oranges for her fresh orange juice. As she sat at the opposite end of the table eating her toast and drinking tea and juice, I nibbled away at the pulp left in the strainer. After the dishes were washed, grandma would put on her warm woolen coat and we would venture outside to catch the College streetcar. Every year, without fail, grandma would bring me to see Santa Claus at Eaton's.

The store windows were magical and the basement of the store was transformed into a winter wonderland of rides, toys and Santa. Everything was bigger than life. I cannot remember when I stopped going on this annual excursion. Maybe it was when we no longer got December 8 off as a religious holiday. Most of those holidays are gone yet we have many opportunities to make each day holy.

At school we learned a new Christmas song, sang the old standard hymns in three-part harmony or prepared a Christmas play. We always performed in the church hall. It had a stage with dressing rooms. I remember how bright the footlights were as we all stood in perfect order caroling away.

My aunt always took us to her company party, held at the CNE coliseum. There would be great entertainment and we all got to sit on Santa's knee. His elves would always give us a present that we knew we would enjoy. The boys most often got six-shooters or rifles and the girls got dolls or baking sets.

As the Sundays of Advent progressed, the decorations in the church became more magnificent. By Christmas Eve, five large evergreen trees were positioned behind the altar, poinsettias stood beside the candles and everything appeared to glisten. It seemed that every Christmas Eve our walk to midnight mass was greeted with a fresh new falling of snow. The choir was always bigger and violins and trumpets supplemented the organ. As the bells rang outside to mark that Christmas Mass had begun inside; not one, not two, but all three priests would process toward the altar dressed in their special golden vestments. I recall that the walk home was always faster, with the anticipation of Christmas morning. It did not matter how dark a Christmas night was, I knew the morning would be bright.

The morning came early and the presents were always there, but I remember the most special moment came when my dad and mom would open the present I got for them. It was always smelly perfume, or a pair of cufflinks but they always made a big deal out of it. A few dollars went a long way in those days.

Times have really changed. Eaton's does not exist, most orange juice comes pre-made or frozen, religious holidays are, for the most part, a thing of the past, the church hall no longer has a stage, play guns and baking gifts are not politically correct, and you would be hard-pressed to find three priests serving any one parish today.

Nevertheless, a great deal remains the same. Children are still singing carols and vying for the chance to be Mary, Joseph or the donkey in the Nativity play. Their eyes still bulge when they see that jolly old man dressed in red and white fur. Their hearts still pound as they wait for mom or dad to open that special present they either bought or made. Our traditions still live on and our schools continue to supply our communities with an anchor to the past and a window to the future. Classrooms are filled with the signs of the Christmas season. This is truly the purpose of our schools - to experience the beauty of the entire world now made visible in the child Jesus. The character of our schools emanates from that beauty. We are blessed for we have the opportunity to see Christ reborn through the wonder-filled eyes of our students.

As we prepare for our hectic rush towards Christmas, the weeks of Advent remind us to reflect quietly on the promise of the baby born in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago. Our Catholic schools continue to relate to the Advent themes of waiting, preparation, light in the darkness, and the coming of the promised Messiah.

Our Catholic schools are reborn each day. The Nativity can inspire each of us to sail on the winds of God's love and soar, everyday, towards the One who made us all. We, as school administrators, are called to be faith leaders. We are commissioned to journey to the mountaintop, stand on the highest peak, stretch out our arms and catch the breathe of God's love, born in His Son this Christmas day.

Let us never forget the joys of our own journeys towards Christmas. It is great to be in schools during this time of year. We have the opportunity to rekindle the joys of childhood each day as we prepare with our students to tell the Christmas story.

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