



Faith Country
Shared Ministry

Faith Country Chronicle

January 2017

THE VOICE OF CHRISTMAS

The music of children's laughter and excited voices broke the silence in the room. Jacob and his sister, Emily, had just finished wrapping some presents for their family. Scattered around the floor lay a vision of brightly colored paper, tissue, miles of metallic ribbon, and bags of brilliant bows. All the two could think about and talk about were the presents under the tree...



Jacob picked up a gift and a tiny silver bell tinkled as he said, "Ha, ha, another one for me!"

Emily crawled through the bows and reached far under the tree, exclaiming with joy, "And here's another one for me! And on Christmas morning, there will be..." "...lots more gifts from Santa Claus for you and me," chimed Jacob, grinning from ear to ear.

"Now wait a minute, you two," a gentle voice remarked softly.

Emily and Jacob looked around the room, then gazed at each other, bewildered. Who had spoken to them because there was no one else in the room? Emily edged closer to her brother by the Christmas tree.



The same voice whispered behind them, "It's me." The tree's branches moved slightly.



A talking tree? Impossible! No, that only happened in stories. Jacob and Emily giggled nervously.

"But I am speaking to you, Jacob and Emily," the soft voice commented quietly. "Christmas is so much more than presents and Santa Claus."

The two siblings turned around and huddled together as they glanced up at the beautiful fir tree decorated in silver, gold, and blue bells, white angels, red hearts, and strands of sparkling star lights.

The voice continued, "Christmas is about the joy of giving to others, bringing smiles to the faces of loved ones and friends, and warmth to the heart. Santa is God's spirit of generosity and good will during the season when giving is so much better than receiving. And there is so much more."

Before the children's eyes, a vision appeared; the three Wise Men from the Nativity scene on the mantle graced the living room. Jacob and Emily could merely stare in awe and wonder.

"Long ago, it was written that we came to honor the birth of a humble babe in Bethlehem by bringing him special gifts; this is more than just a story. God sent His Son, a King, to bring us love and salvation. Would you like to see him?"



Emily and Jacob, speechless, merely nodded their heads and took the hands offered. In a flash, they stood before the holy family, gazing in wide-eyed wonder at the tiny baby in the manger. Something special touched their hearts at that moment.

Emily noticed that she had brought a golden bow with her so she laid it gently next to the babe, while Jacob placed the tiny silver bell he held in his palm beside the bow. Brother and sister glanced at each other and smiled, and before they could blink their eyes, they were back in their living room.

“So tell me, my children, what did you see?” the tree asked.

Jacob responded, “First, a bright star.”

“Like the one you placed on my tree top?” Both children nodded. “This star reminds us of God’s promise so long ago to send a Savior to His children. A promise fulfilled in the birth of Jesus.”



Then Emily spoke, Christmas Angel “We saw the baby Jesus in his manger, and Mary smiled at us.”

“What did you feel at that moment?”

Both young voices said in unison, “Very special.”

“And you are special as all God’s children are special,” the voice remarked lovingly.

“I think I saw an angel, too,” Emily whispered.

Jacob and his sister moved closer to the tree, and Emily touched one of the boughs. “Why are you still green when other trees have lost their leaves and why do your needles reach upwards?”

“So many questions,” laughed the tree’s voice, “but that is good, little one. I’m an evergreen that is green all year round and my needles do reach towards heaven. The Christmas green symbolizes God’s everlasting hope. With God in your life, there is always hope for a better tomorrow.”

Caught up in the magic of the moment, Jacob commented, “You are so smart. What else do you know?” Then he grinned because he knew instinctively that there was more to come.

“I can tell you about the other Christmas colors. Look at the other decorations on me. Blue is for the sky that sent the angel to tell of the Savior’s birth, and white represents the angel, the purity of the Virgin birth and the Lamb of God.”

Jacob and Emily stared at the tree, confusion covering their small faces.

“You will understand it all when you’re older but white means that Jesus was born very special and would never be bad in any way. He could not commit sin like people do today.” Heads nodded in understanding. Brother and sister knew that they weren’t always ‘good’.

“What about gold and silver? I like the way they sparkle on you,” giggled Emily.

“Oh, they’re important, too. They symbolize all the richness of God’s blessings and the things that He can do for each one of us, if we let Him into our lives,” the soft voice responded. “And do you see the red of the hearts and the red berries in the holly leaves decorating your house? Red stands for the blood of Christ when He died for our sins.”

“That’s sad,” said Emily, tears glistening on her eyelashes.



The **Faith Country Chronicle** is published monthly from September through May by the partners in the Faith Country Shared Ministry:

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“Dear one, there’s also happiness because Jesus still lives today and waits for us in heaven. One day you can live forever with Him but you must follow His path.”

A silent moment caressed the room. Peace filled their hearts.

Finally, the soft voice spoke again. “Look around your house and tell me what else might be important about your Christmas. Things you have every year.”

“Daddy likes to kiss mommy under the mistletoe, and we give mommy a poinsettia. Oh, its flowers look like a star, too, and its usually red! Wow!” cried Emily with passion and new comprehension.

“Yes, poinsettia’s could be a natural reminder of the Star of Bethlehem and some people believe that the mistletoe symbolizes the healing power of Christ, but I don’t know if kissing under it is supposed to be special or make that person special.”

“Yuk,” said Jacob. “Not me. Don’t like kissing, but I like candles ~ lots of candles. We burn the Advent candles before Christmas and say prayers for people. It feels good. Mom says that our candles are important because they tell everyone that Christ is the light of our world.”

“Good for you, Jacob. Does your mom also hang a wreath on your front door?” the voice asked. Two heads nodded. “The pine wreath shows us the real nature of love because the love of God never stops but is continuous like the circle the wreath forms. Hanging it on your door tells people that your house is blessed with love.”



“What about this?” asked Emily as she held up her favorite treat. Jacob took one, too.

“That’s yummy candy,” commented the tree.

“We know, but does it mean anything for Christmas?” two voices echoed and giggled.

The tree-voice asked quietly, “What do you think? What does it look like to you?”

Jacob held it up and said, “It looks like the thing shepherds have for their sheep.”

“Or ‘J’ for Jesus,” whispered Emily as she turned it upside down.

“It could be the shepherd’s crook or staff and just like the shepherd took care of his sheep, we can take care of each other, and it could also be a symbol for Jesus. Both are good.”

“Mr. Tree,” murmured Emily, “why do we call it Christmas? Some people just call it a holiday and it doesn’t seem to mean much to them. That’s real sad.”

“You’re right, Emily. It is more than sad that all God’s children don’t believe in Him or His son,” the voice commented quietly. “The word ‘Christmas’ is made up of Christ, which means ‘Messiah’ or Savior and Mass, which is a religious celebration. So Christmas should really be a spiritual time celebrating our Savior. Christmas is a time of fellowship and sharing with family and friends. However, Jesus is the best part of all because He brings God’s love and eternal life for us.”

Silence filled the living room once more as the two children sat mesmerized, gazing in wonder at their beautiful tree and thinking about all the things they had heard. They would share it all with their friends and family. It was so quiet in the room that their mother decided to check up on them.

“I heard a strange voice. Who were you two talking to?”



Suddenly, Emily smiled at her brother knowingly and whispered, "Jesus."

The twinkling star on the top of the Christmas tree shimmered bright and lit up the room with a warmth and abounding love like the Star of Bethlehem on that glorious night so long ago.



New Service Times

Beginning January 8 Service start times will change:

Hope, Forestburg - 9:15 AM

St. John's, Sedgewick - 11:15 AM



FAITH COUNTRY SHARED MINISTRY

~ January 2017 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 No Trinity Service	2	3	4	5	6	7
8 Worship Start Times reverse for Hope & St. John's 9:15 Hope Worship Service 11:15 St. John's Eucharist Service	9	10	11 7:00 Big Knife Villa Service 7:00 Hope Council	12 7:30 FCSM Council - St John's	13	14
15 10:30 Trinity Song Service	16	17	18	19 7:30 Animate Study Series - Jesus @ Hope	20	21
22 Richard Conrad to lead morning prayer at St. John's - Special Message: "Second Time Around" 9:15 Hope Worship Service 11:15 St. John's Morning Prayer	23	24	25	26 10:00 Galahad Care Center Service 4:00 Confirmation Class	27	28
29 No Services Today	30	31 10:00 KHC Communion	Notes:			



FAITH COUNTRY SHARED MINISTRY

~ February 2017 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
5 10:30 Trinity Communion Service	6	7	8	9 7:30 Animate Study Series - Salvation @ St. John's, Sedgewick	10	11
12 9:15 Hope Worship Service 11:15 St. John's Eucharist Service	13	14	15 7:00 Big Knife Villa Service	16	17	18
19 Transfiguration Sunday (Trinity) 10:30 Trinity Song Service	20	21 10:30 Galahad Pastoral Care	22	23	24	25
26 9:15 St John's Morning Prayer - Note time change for this service only. 11:15 Hope Worship Service & AGM - Note time change for this service only.	27	28	Notes:			