

# Getting back to the real world

Pastor John Hicks

First United Methodist Church

A number of years ago, when Lou Holtz was at the University of Arkansas, he was taking his team to play a bowl game in Tempe, Arizona. The game was to be played on Christmas day. He was asked how he felt about playing a game on Christmas, rather than being with his family. The coach answered candidly: "I would rather be in Tempe. After all, once you have been to church, had Christmas dinner, and opened the presents, Christmas is the most boring day of the year."

Is that all there is to Christmas? There always seems to be a letdown the week after Christmas. Christmas demands so much of us. Now it's back to the real world, plus a few extra bills to pay and a few extra pounds to work off. But, is Christmas only a day out of the year when the floor becomes a virtual mountain of torn wrappings, boxes, and bows and we spend 20 minutes eating a meal that took hours to prepare? What happens the morning after? Do we pack up the spirit of Christmas when we pack up the ornaments and decorations? Over the years, I have learned all kinds of tricks to try to prolong the life of my live Christmas tree. We put aspirin in the water, sugar, store preservatives, and more, but regardless of the solutions the tree would always wither. Why? Because it had been cut off from its roots.

Maybe that is our problem today. Maybe we have trouble making Christmas last because we have become cut off from our roots. We celebrate, we shop, we eat, we gift, and then we go back. We talk about the reason for the season, but our focus only has seasonal growth, and then fades away.

So, how can we deeply root our celebration of Christmas so it won't just wither away? How do we preserve the spirit of Christmas when the morning after arrives and we are back in the real world?

One way is to follow the example of Joseph and Mary. They had to return to the real world just as we do following Christmas. After the shepherds left and the angels stopped singing, after the celebration of the birth of Jesus, they faced some of life's many challenges, including a flight to Egypt to escape persecution.

There were good times and bad times. Mostly there were just ordinary times. In the end it really didn't matter what life sent their way. No event was serious enough to destroy their love for one another or their faith in God. What did this Mary and Joseph do? They did what you and I do. They went on with their lives. They did the best they could and they trusted God. Life's not easy for most people. It was not easy for Joseph and Mary, but they knew God was with them, just as God is with us. That's what got them through. It's what will get us through.

The eternal message of Christmas that we can keep with us as we get back to the real world is this: God is with us and for us. It's good to know. It's one truth of Christmas that can take root in our hearts and lives and never wither.