

# ON KEEPING CHRISTMAS WELL: A MEDITATION

*"...And it was always said of him that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless Us Every One!"*  
(Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*)



Amidst the soaring prophecies of Isaiah, the tender Nativity narrative in Luke 2, and the bracing "Stir up" prayers of Advent, some of us take time in December to reread Charles Dickens's masterwork, *A Christmas Carol*, first published in 1843.

This story has woven its way into our cultural imagination, not only as a book to be read but through all its dramatic and cinematic retellings. What an amazing metamorphosis of that miserly curmudgeon Ebenezer Scrooge: *"a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner!"*

Through a series of ghostly encounters with the Spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Future the old coot was transformed—all in one night!—into an endearing soul, of whom it was said: *"he knew how to keep Christmas well."*

## Just what is this "keeping Christmas" business, though?

Nowadays one might conclude that "keeping Christmas" is all about attitudes, policy positions and words of greeting. So we vow to "keep Christ in Christmas" (as if that were really up to us!) We take sides in our culture's "War on Christmas," whether by defending crèches in public squares or by lamenting the dearth of sacred songs in public school concerts or by emphatically countering "Happy Holidays" with "Merry Christmas."

But "keeping Christmas" is about so much more than posturing or preening, words that we say, and righteous (self-righteous?) positions that we defend.

Remember again, how a renewed Ebenezer Scrooge "kept Christmas" on the first day of the rest of his life:

- He began **noticing the "little people"** he'd been ignoring...starting with a neighbor-boy on Christmas morning.
- He **plotted ways to subvert the poverty** of his faithful employee Bob Cratchitt, the whole Cratchitt family, and especially the invalid Tiny Tim.
- He **pledged an eye-popping donation** to the community chest for *"the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time."*
- He **mended fences with those from whom he had been estranged**, starting with his own nephew Fred.

To be sure, the repentant Scrooge did go to church on Christmas morning, and offered greetings to others, with a hearty "Merry Christmas." Words do matter, after all.

But what made all the difference in the world was Scrooge's repentant resolve to keep Christmas by **keeping faith with those for whom Jesus Christ came into this world** (see Matthew 25:31-46).

And, in Dickens's own words: *"May that be truly said of us, and all of us!"*

**LET US PRAY:** *Gracious God, teach us how to "keep Christmas" in all the ways that really matter. Help us notice those whom it would be easy to ignore—persons who don't look like us, refugees who simply want a fresh start, newcomers who desire to become our neighbors. Teach us to plot fresh ways to subvert poverty in our troubled world. Stir us to embrace eye-popping generosity. And give us courage to build bridges, mend fences and relentlessly pursue the reconciliation for which the Christ-Child was born among us. In the strong name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Amen.*



Merry Christmas, my dearly beloved ones. God bless us, every one!

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*God's work. Our hands.*

