

Column

Christmas is more than memories, but not less. We all have them. Why not pull some out from the vault as Dec. 25 approaches?

In my case, I remember, as if it were only yesterday, going out into the woods with my father to find a red cedar (the Christmas tree of choice in the deep South in those days). It was always well into December, and the tree had to be 10-foot tall, the height of our ceilings. Often, because cows had damaged the lower branches, only the top was used. Bringing it into the house was always a highpoint. The evergreen odor was the signal that Christmas was near.

This year additional memories came pouring out of the vault as the tree was being decorated. The strings of lights were from my family's collection and are over 70 years old. They are of the type that if one bulb goes out, all go out. It was my job as an older boy to keep all the lights burning. Today the bulbs for these vintage strings are no longer

manufactured, and I have to rely on those I have picked up in antique stores over the years.

Beyond the lights are the ornaments that I have collected over the years . . . I am especially fond of those made during the Second World War (some in my collection still have paper caps because metal was needed for the war effort). Others are family heirlooms one hundred or more years old. I remember these fragile pieces of glass being on the tree when I was boy. Still others were given to me over the years by friends.

In the third category, ornaments from friends include a handmade one given to me by the artist who created the NASA spaceship insignias for Friendship 7 (John Glenn), Aurora 7 (Scott Carpenter), and Sigma 7 (Wally Schirra). Her name was Cece Bibby. Following her carrier in the U.S. Navy, Cece retired to Blue Ridge. She died in 2012.

Also in my collection is a set of handcrafted globes by a lady in Ellijay, likewise deceased. At a sad period in her life, after her young son was taken from her and placed in the custody of his father, she

began taking on many craft projects. In addition to Christmas ornaments, she created a heritage quilt for her family as well as one for Gilmer County. Her name was Carolyn Bunce.

Still other ornaments, though not handmade, represent places I have visited. These include ones from St. Paul's Cathedral in London, the Biltmore House, Vicksburg, and Kanuga (an Episcopal Conference Center in North Carolina).

Memories of other times, people and places are precious. Especially at Christmas, they need to be brought out of our memory vaults. Even so, they must not eclipse the real meaning of the season -- God becoming man in Jesus Christ. Keep Christ at the center, and everything else will come right and your Christmas will be bright with holy light.

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the

quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen. (Advent collect, Book of Common Prayer)

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