

## “It’s Christmas, Carol!”

I’ve always loved sitting in my rocker in a darkened living room lit only by the Christmas tree lights. Many memories, thoughts and feeling come to me during such times. I often remember a dear high school friend, whose name was Carol. In my generation Carol was a common name. In fact, when I chatted with other friends about something I’d done recently with my friend, Carol, I was invariably asked, “Which Carol.... Carol Who?” I decided to ask my friend if it ever bothered her that there were so many other “Carol”s—if she liked her name. (I wasn’t too sure I liked mine, even though NOBODY I had ever met in my entire life was named “Ronni Sue”!)

Carol’s reply surprised me: “I love my name,” she stated warmly and with no hesitation. I asked her to tell me, if she could, why she had such an immediate and positive response. She looked a little embarrassed, but she answered honestly. “It’s because of Christmas.” She went on to explain. “Ever since I was little I’ve always loved hearing my name over and over associated with Christmas. Actually, when I was real little, every time anyone would talk about a Christmas carol, I thought they were saying, ‘It’s Christmas, Carol!’ It’s still like that for me, somehow- as if that special message is being spoken, just for me, every year. ‘It’s Christmas, Carol!’”

I thought this was wonderful, and in some ways I envied my friend- having that special bond with her name and this beautiful season of the year.

I always think of her at Christmas, whenever we sing Christmas carols. But I have come to claim the message she heard as MINE—even though my name isn’t “Carol”. The announcement of the angels to the shepherds is in that message. The song of the angels is in that message. And that song is sung to ALL OF US. This is the message we receive tonight:

UNTO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DAVID A SAVIOR, WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD.

UNTO YOU.....is born.....a Savior.

What does this message mean?

While I was in seminary a professor shared a personal story from a rough time in his life. He had just gone through a divorce. His children were struggling with strong feelings of anger toward him, feeling he had abandoned his family. Friends were trying to remain neutral, but many of them were spending most of their time with his ex-wife and children. He was lonely, feeling isolated and bereft. He tried

to pray, but felt empty inside. God seemed far away—almost as if he wasn't there at all.

He went to be one night exhausted from pacing his small apartment and weeping in despair. As he was drifting off to sleep, he had a dream, or a vision- something we may not know how to name, but that was real and powerful and life-changing for him.

He dreamed that Jesus was right there in the room with him. He came to the side of his bed and knelt down. He reached out and put a hand on the man's forehead. He was sure in his movements; his gaze was steady and open, his touch was gentle yet firm. Then he spoke. "I have something to tell you. You need to know this. If you were the only one in the world who needed me, I would have come. I would have been born in Bethlehem. If you were the only one who needed my sacrifice, I would have gone to the cross, just for you. I would have died, just for you. I love you."

Peace swept over the professor. His tears dried on his cheeks. He awoke to a world with new meaning and to a deep sense of God's love and presence with him. IN a lonely time of despair, he heard the message of the angels again:

UNTO YOU... is born... a Savior.

Yes, unto ALL OF US, this good news is given- given to all the world.

Yet, also, strangely, almost paradoxically, this news is breathed to each of us individually as well---

Listen! Can you hear?

It's Christmas, Carol.

It's Christmas, Jim.

It's Christmas, Sylvia.

It's Christmas, Brian.

It's Christmas, John.

Listen! The news is FOR YOU! Unto you is born this day a Savior—

Receive the good news, and then respond. Go and tell it to others. Speak their names. Tell them the message is meant for each of them.

The God of mystery and might decided to come to us in the flesh. He came to save us, each and every one of us.

Christmas is a time for presents, for gifts—but remember- this is the gift that started it all. Once we have received this gift we will want to give gifts in return.

I'd like to leave you with a question this evening. Remember the manger—the feed box where they laid little Jesus? Remember the story of those who traveled to see him. They brought gifts. We receive HIM as OUR gift. What gift would you offer back—what gift would you lay before the manger?

UNTO YOU is born a SAVIOR.

It's Christmas, Carol! He has come for you, the best gift of all. AMEN.