



# Simple Gifts

Words to Inspire the Spirit

IMMANUEL CHURCH-ON-THE-HILL

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## The Work of Christmas Begins

By The Rev. Susan D. Parsons

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and the princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among people,  
To make music in the heart.

“The Work of Christmas,” by Howard Thurman, from *The Mood of Christmas and Other Celebrations*

While driving home from a Christmas morning service some years ago, with a heart full of the joy, peace, and hope of Christmas celebrations, I was dismayed to see a Christmas tree, still sparkling with tinsel, tossed to the curb, ready to be picked up by the refuse company. I almost stopped to rescue it, to take it home where it would be allowed to celebrate all of Christmas, not just the first day.

We are in the days the secular world calls “after Christmas.” There are sales, the kids are tiring of their new presents, and now, even the New Year’s Eve parties are over. The holiday feast leftovers have lost their luster.

But we Christians still have another day of rejoicing in Christmas before we celebrate Epiphany and the coming of the Magi. We are not partying or opening presents, although we can resolve to hold onto the wonder and promise of the Christmas story. That’s not an easy task in a culture that turns to New Year’s parties and resolutions on December 26, tossing Christmas to the curb.

Others may have moved on, but we Christians can take this time to consider what we want to do to make Christmas a part of our soul – not the overeating, shopping, and blowup nativity scenes on the front lawn part – we want the mystery, the sweetness, the joy we have found to stay with us, to flow through us all year. We want to be able to feel continually how we feel in our heart when we sing Christmas carols together in the glow of candlelight.

It takes some effort to do this, and we will need to give birth to a new way of being in the world. Incorporating Christmas as a part of our soul means taking this glorious story of compassion, and love, and kindness, and generosity, and humility, and allowing ourselves to soak in it. Never forgetting that evil is real – poverty, violence, pride, fear, and hatred. We need to remember that God is love and the “work of Christmas begins” that calls us to serve others and bring peace through the darkness with love and grace.

It is what our heart and soul long for in this season and throughout the countless days ahead.

Hear Howard Thurman’s poem set to [choral music](#) as you ponder this message.