

# Christmas

December 2008



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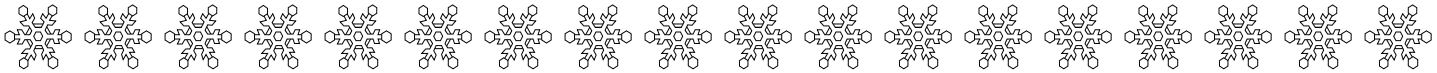
### CHRISTMAS 2008

These are heroic times and most of the heroes are unsung. It is our privilege to hear from many of them in the process of selling wreaths, olive oil, fruit books. In this accidental marketplace I have been enriched by the stories of people who have made contact annually for 30 years as well as young people coming for the first time. From this experience I have some observations.

The only people who will be frustrated this season are those who want a “normal Christmas” – a merry-making interlude in changing times. Yes, most of us are experiencing hard times. But these are also exciting times. Remember those thousands celebrating at Grant Park the night Obama was elected? I am beginning to hear about those who didn’t vote for him but participated fully in that euphoric moment. Our president-elect encouraged a movement from the grass roots and it is now having a life of its own. The hope is, and I don’t think it is unrealistic, that the world will change. I am not talking about specifics President Obama may have in mind, but the general excitement in the air.

This year we perceive the religious stories in scripture and song from the viewpoint of our own lives and times. When we light a candle on the menorah we remember Jewish rebels who said “no” to oppression and desecration. When we hear Luke’s Gospel story we understand with a fresh awareness what it means to be homeless, and give birth in a barn. To have no support, to have your security ripped away, your plans and dreams evaporate. Yet this has come to be the holiest night of the year for centuries of struggling people.

The light of that holy night shines anew in the lives of ordinary people – in all of us. I think of you often these days. Christmas at Starcross still means the 14-foot tree that the young



people insist upon. A tree is a totem of a family, including you, our extended family. I sit and look at this giant visitor and read the story of our lives. I sense the presence of all of us and also the evolution of human history. On this tree is an ornament from my first Christmas tree, 77 years ago. Like the people in the scriptural stories I have waited a long time for our direction to change to more concern for the common good. There are many pitfalls and difficulties but I think, with God's help, we are on the way in this Holy Season.



When he was failing fast from AIDS, my friend Randy Shilts sent out a Holiday card with the message "Imagine a Cure." That is what is in the hearts of many of us right now. A new spirit is abroad. For me it is a sacred spirit. Whatever our personal and social problems – Imagine a Cure!



May this be a blessed and nourishing time for you and all those you love.



Your brother,



*Toby*

