

TOO LATE FOR CHRISTMAS?

'Twas the night before finals and all through the dorm
Every student was cramming, their computers warm.

Old tests were pulled out of files with care
In hopes that this Friday would soon be here.

The engineers were glued to chairs, not their beds
While visions of integrals danced in their heads.

My roommate and I with our Macs set brighter
Had just settled down for a long all-nighter.

When out from the speakers there arose such a clatter
I jumped in my seat and thought what was the matter.

I clicked to a new window like a flash
Afraid lest my hard drive and files go crash.

But bright on the screen I saw a great fuss
Strange images seen from central campus.

And what should appear over the row of hedges
But a little cubicle pulled by eight pledges.

With a nerd driver going through the portals
I knew that moment it must be St. Finals.

Quicker than megahertz his coursers they came
And he keyed in his code and entered their names.

Out from the cloud they came:
"Now English! now Dif Eq! now Organic Chem
and Com Sci! On Statics! on Finance! On Physics, and Psych!"

"To the top of ADP, into the mainframe,
Now click away, click away, click away all!"

As plummet freshmen grades a plenty
After that first test in Physics 220,

So over the trees and through campus they flew
With a desk full of i-pads and St. Finals too.

And then in a microsec what should be seen?
A new icon appearing right on my screen!

As I shook my head and was looking around
Down the modem St. Finals came with a bound.

He was dressed in old jeans and an ISU top
His clothes soiled with pizza sauce and corn chips and pop.

A bundle of flash drives he flung on his back,
And he looked like an expert ready to hack.

His face was covered with glasses many sizes too wide
His eyes and glance so intent as he loaded my c-drive.

Into the system went the answers to my exam,
Formulas, equations, and terms, all I tried to cram.

He was lanky and geeky, an earnest old elf,
And I gasped when I saw him in spite of myself.

A wink of his eye and a twist of his head
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.

He spoke not a word, but went back to work
Filled the computer, then turned with a jerk.

And pointing the mouse to the right icon
With a chick into the modem he went on.

He sprang to his cubicle, to his team pressed, "Enter."
And away they flew like electrons through a meter.

But I heard him exclaim as he drove out of sight.
"Happy finals to all and to all a short night!"

St. Finals is as much make believe as Santa. But we do remember in the original poem that the poet didn't miss seeing Santa Claus. He didn't miss Christmas.

But we can wonder if we will miss it. Usually there is good week between the end of finals and Christmas Eve. This year you get done with finals, get home, rush through a

weekend, and, “Bang! It’s Christmas!” By the time you settle down with family for Christmas Dinner you may just be ready to start celebrating Christmas while the rest of the people have had their fill of Christmas parties, put up the Christmas tree and decorations a month ago, and have done their shopping. You might wonder, “Did I miss Christmas this year?”

Do you remember those Christmas specials on TV like “Rudolph the Rednose Reindeer,” or “Frosty,” or Dickens’s “Christmas Story” with Ebenezer Scrooge, or “How the Grinch Stole Christmas”? The theme of those specials always seems to be about how misfortune or wrong attitudes will cause people to miss Christmas. Every year we hear comments about getting into the right Christmas spirit. How do you do that when you are up to here with finals? How do you do that when your relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend has soured, when you aren’t sure what to do with the rest of your life, when your folks are splitting up, when your grandma dies, when you’re not sure whether there will be a job waiting for you out of college? Are we going to miss Christmas?

By ancient tradition the opening song for Christmas Eve begins, “When all was still, and it was midnight, your almighty Word, O Lord, descended from the royal throne.” We always think of Jesus being born in the dead of a winter night. We don’t know at what time or date He was born. We do know that the angels appeared to the shepherds at night, but that could have happened hours after the delivery. But in truth it was midnight and still when Jesus came to this world. It wasn’t posted on Facebook or Twitter. There was no coverage of the event on CNN, CBS, or even C-Span. There was no set time or invitation like we have to Christmas parties. When no one was looking, when no one sensed it would happen, when no one seemed to care, God sent His Son, Jesus into our dark world of sin, the world of Covid-19, child molestations, cancer, starvation, suicide, and death. Christmas happened whether anyone noticed it or not!

The point is that Christmas is not something we make. It doesn’t depend on whether or not we have everything set by the time it’s December 24 or whether or not we have the right “Christmas cheer.” Christmas is “God’s” doing.

There was an editorial in the ISU Daily entitled, “Who owns Christmas, Santa or Jesus?” September 11 has made many look beyond the commercialism of Christmas, but all too often in our world of pine trees, sugar cookies, shopping sprees, and holiday specials it looks as though Santa has won.

But Jesus didn’t come for December 25. He didn’t come to give us a holiday to cheer us up in the bleakness of the shortest days of the year. He came to bring Himself into our lives, 365 days a year.

The traditional greeting on Christmas is “Merry Christmas.” We take that to mean, “Have a merry, happy time for Christmas.” It is easy to associate that with tinsel, football games, new toys, and gift certificates. But in English when the words, “Merry Christmas,” were first used, “merry” did not mean so much “happy” or “jolly,” but “delighted,” or

“blessed.” It is not something we get into the mood for or make by our attitude. It is something given to us.

So today as we celebrate Christmas together, this December 24th as you gather in your home churches to watch the candles, this December 25th as you enjoy time with your families, as you open presents, but also as you pull an all-nighter to finish a project, as you bend over to fight the winter wind across central campus, as you suffer from a flu, as you go into more debt because of tuition hikes, as you go out each and every day, God comes to you in Christ to tell you, “Merry Christmas.”