

...from the heart

Published Quarterly by the Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

Winter 2013



Celebrate!

Birthdays. Don't you enjoy when someone you love celebrates a birthday? There is usually a party, or if not an official party, friends and family come together to celebrate. We want to honor the person having the birthday. It is a time to remember their special day, celebrate the coming of this person into the world, and express how they have enriched our lives.

During the Advent season, we take time to celebrate the coming of Jesus into our world. Christmas Day is time we set aside to focus on the birth day of Jesus, celebrate the meaning of His birth and the impact it has on us and our world. We are once again amazed at the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, the Christ, Messiah, Savior, Our Lord.

The angels announced and celebrated His birthday with these words...

"I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!"

- Luke 2:10-11 New Living Translation

The Lord - God - became a human being and lived among us. Here is what John wrote...

And the Word (Christ) became flesh (human, incarnate) and tabernacled (fixed His tent of flesh, lived awhile) among us; and we [actually] saw His glory (His honor, His majesty).

- John 1:14 (from the Amplified Bible)

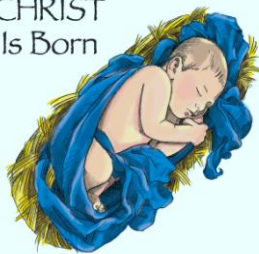
Before the birth of Christ, the Israelites had the Tabernacle and the Temple. The most sacred room in the Temple was an inner room called the "Holy Place" or the "Holy of Holies." Only the High Priest was allowed to go into this room and only once a year. Separating this Holy Place from the rest of the Temple was a sacred veil or curtain. This most sacred place on the other side of the veil represented the visible presence of God in all His power and holiness.

When the actual, visible presence of God came to earth in Jesus, a stable became a most holy place. Angels worshipped Him, shepherds saw His glory, Magi sought Him to honor Him, and Mary wondered in her heart. God came into the very world he created, but many didn't recognize Him, some rejected Him, and many still do. (John 1:10). Yet, all are seeking the life that is found only in God's Son.

Jesus came to die; to give His life for our sin. When Jesus died on the Cross, that veil that separated people from the "Holy Place" was torn, removed (Luke

(continued on back cover)

JESUS
CHRIST
Is Born



Check out our website:

- News and events in our church
- Download sermons with accompanying notes
- Bible Studies from pastor Nick
- And so much more!

www.patchnaz.net



**Patchogue Church of
the Nazarene Group**

23:45). The sacrifice of Christ forgives sin that separates us from God; now, not only can we enter into the Presence and a personal relationship with God, but God, by His Spirit, enters and lives in us. God is in all who believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

God is no longer found in a box, in a room, behind a veil, that represented the presence of God. God no longer lives on earth in a manger, or stable, or some other house, not even in a church, though we might refer to it as the house of God. No: God lives in you.

People have a new way to meet God; they meet you. Have you opened the door of your heart to Jesus? Then God is now in your heart. Therefore, if others are going to meet God, you need to open your heart to them.

Now, I know we're messed up, imperfect; I know we have our problems, but as Paul wrote...

You see, we don't go around preaching about ourselves. We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we ourselves are your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure.

- 2 Corinthians 4:5-7 New Living Translation

This Advent, and all through 2014, open your heart, because people want to, need to, meet Jesus. There's no better way to celebrate His Birthday.

And that's ...

F.T.H.
Pastor Jerry



Pastor's daily "GOOD MORNING!" message includes updates and announcements on church activities, prayer requests, a devotional, of course some jokes, quotes, trivia, news and some other things of interest. To begin receiving "Good Morning" send an email address to: pastor.jerry@verizon.net and he will add you to the daily distribution.

"from the Heart"

is published quarterly by the

Church of the Nazarene

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Sunday Service at 10 a.m.

Senior Pastor: Rev. Jerry Bonfiglio

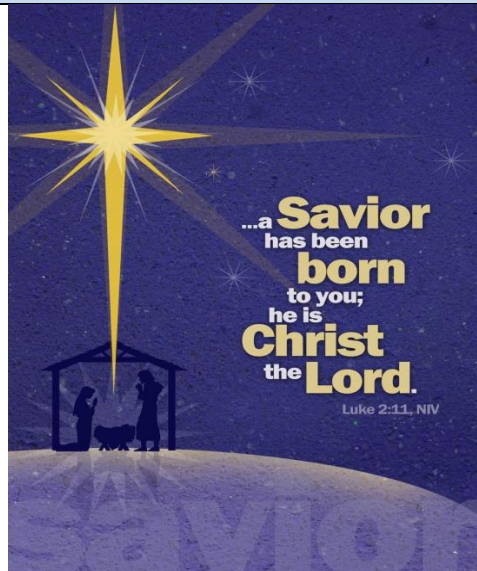
Associate Pastor: Rev. Nick Franco

His Place Youth Center

65 Franklin St., Patchogue, NY

631- 758-9525

Newsletter Design Editor: Suzanne Herrmann



Forever Family Update



Our Sympathy and Prayers:

Marlaine Dennerlein's Aunt, Gloria
Paul McCoy's Brother, Kevin

New Addition:

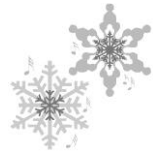
Damon Jamie Boutsikos
Born November 5th



Baby Dedicated to the Lord:

Timothy Jacob Herrmann
September 29th

Winter Weekly Schedule



Sunday	10am Worship Service 10am Children's Programs Teen Bible Study (during Sunday Sermon)
Monday	7pm M.E.N. (Men's Encouragement Network - Every other week)
Tuesday	7pm Ladies In-Touch at MaryAnn Malcolm's home, Bellport (286-2435)
Wednesday	7pm East End Home Fellowship at the Mercurio's home, Center Moriches (478-4852)
Thursday	11am Ministry at McPeak's Assisted Living (1 st & 3 rd Thursday) 7pm Ladies Sewing Circle (3 rd Thursday of the month) 7pm Church Board Meeting (2 nd Thursday of the month)
Friday	7pm Friday Night Lights Teen Night - 9 th thru 12 grade at HPYC (His Place Youth Center - 65 Franklin St.)
Saturday	8am Men's Breakfast (1 st Saturday of month) 12-1pm Food & clothing distribution, at Terry St., Patchogue Village with Lighthouse Mission 7pm Good News Bowlers (1 st Saturday of month)

On Our Calendar

Holy Communion Served the first Sunday of the Month



1 First Sunday of Advent, “Be Ready.” Spaghetti Luncheon hosted by the Teen Ministry after service.

2 7pm CTMB (Christian Training and Ministry Board) meeting

7 8am Men’s Breakfast / 7pm Good News Bowlers

8 Second Sunday of Advent, “Be Fruitful.”

9 7pm M.E.N. (Men’s Encouragement Network)

12 7pm Church Board Meeting



13 7pm Ladies Christmas Craft Night

15 Third Sunday of Advent, “Hanukkah – The Feast of Dedication” with Rev. David Sedaca of Chosen People Ministries.

22 Fourth Sunday of Advent, “Be Blessed.” Cantata, “Bethlehem Morning”
5:30pm Pizza party for the children involved with the Children’s Christmas musical.

6:30pm “Big Great Story” a Children’s Christmas Musical



24 5pm Christmas Eve Service, “Be Amazed.” Encore presentation of “Bethlehem Morning”



25 Christmas Day, “The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today!” Luke 2:11

29 Luis Meza, Nazarene Missionary to Columbia



NOEL HALLELUJAH MERRY CHRISTMAS HAPPY NEW YEAR

The Joy of Fellowship

"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." (Ps. 133:1)

I know this newsletter is from Dec. forward, but I have to mention the Men's Retreat in November each year. On the second weekend of every year, the Men's Retreat takes place at Taconic Conference and Retreat Center - our denomination's own camp. Every year men from every church in the Metro NY District come together to worship The Lord and grow in our walk as men of God. The surroundings are familiar and the format is well planned.

This year, we had to move to a different location. We went to the Spruce Lake Retreat Center in the Pocono Mountains, PA. We stayed and had our sessions in a beautiful new building that was just wonderful. The District did well in securing this facility on short notice.

Every year we can expect certain things to take place like clockwork. This year, things were a little different. We didn't know what to expect or what to plan for. However, God knows all things and has a plan, even when we don't.

The sessions were very relevant and powerful. The men were inspired to discuss the topics in the off times. We even had an intimate time of sharing around the fire place with just our men and a few from other churches. Chris Beir played the guitar to Psalms from the Bible, and Jason Koontz played his mini Conga drum. The men enjoyed a very detailed discussion about hearing The Lord in our personal lives. The bottom line was to pray and seek The Lord, and He will direct us in ways we may not know at the time we ask Him. We are all on a course for God. Sometimes we need to just walk where we are until we hear God calling to us differently through various avenues that He will use to direct us.

We enjoyed our fellowship together, as always, and maybe even more than always, since this new

venue caused us to take a new perspective on all things spiritual. After returning, I am seeing a new fever in the hearts of our men. Maybe we should get together again in a few months to share where we are in the things we heard on that retreat. There were certainly some challenges to us as men of God that we need to put into practice. Accountability is never an easy concept to accept, but it is a way for us to check up on each other; it can help us to stay in step with what God was saying while we were away with Him.

As the Advent season approaches, we all begin to draw closer to God in light of the celebration of Jesus' birth. However, this attitude should be a present reality for all of us. Every day we need to press in to God for our daily strength, direction, guidance, and stability. He is faithful and will see us through, because He loves us that much.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and He was with God in the beginning ... The Word became flesh (Merry Christmas) and dwelt among us. We have seen His Glory, the glory of the One and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1, 14).

It's all about Jesus - The men's retreat bears witness that we are all together because of Jesus and our relationship with Him. Men from every culture, ethnicity, church, and background can come together because of our common relationship with Jesus Christ. We are all one in The Lord.

As we celebrate Christmas this year, may we gain a new appreciation of the common bond of Jesus in our lives that unites us all together by His Spirit.

Merry Christmas,

Pastor Nick



Making Time for Christ

I can't believe it's that time of year again. Is it me or does Thanksgiving and Christmas seem to come upon us much faster than it did when we were younger? Usually we start putting up our tree and decorating our home with wreaths the weekend following Thanksgiving. This year, maybe we will wait until the following weekend. We can just slow it down a bit, and enjoy our Fall harvest decorations before we pack them away for next year. Everywhere I look, people seem to be on full speed. There are a million things to do; 24 hours in a day just isn't enough time. One day meshes into the next, and before you know it, our lives become a blur. I feel energized the busier I am, but energized doesn't necessarily mean spiritually energized. No matter what we set out to do or accomplish, we need to keep ourselves hydrated in God's Word. How often are we grabbing a drink, running out the door, putting something else off until later? I know I do it; we all do. Our children need us, or our jobs are requiring extra hours of our already precious time; too many obligations can get in the way.

When God is calling us to take a few extra minutes of time with Him, do we? Do you?

I have tried to incorporate different devotionals that I receive daily in my emails into my prayer time. I especially enjoy *Tozer on Christian Leadership* and *Prime Time With God*. This has helped focus my attention to more prayer time. I thought since I am receiving so much email daily, I should receive emails that benefit my spiritual soul, and mind. It forces me to sit quiet for a few more minutes.

With Love,
Annette Neff



Here's a delicious cookie recipe from Annette Neff – try them this year with your family ☺

The Sweet & Salty Nestle Tollhouse Cookies.

Yield: 60 cookies.

Ingredients:

2 1/4c all purpose flour
1tsp baking soda
1tsp salt (optional)
1c Butter, softened
3 1/4c granulated sugar
3 1/4c packed brown sugar
1tsp vanilla
2 Large eggs
2c (12oz package) Nestle tollhouse chocolate morsels
2c coarsely broken ripples potato chips
1c small pretzel twists, broken into 1/2in pieces
1/2c unsalted peanuts (optional)

Preheat oven to 375, combine flour, baking soda and salt in small bowl. Beat butter, sugar, brown sugar and vanilla in a large bowl until creamy. Add eggs, one at a time beating well after each egg. Gradually beat in flour mixture. Stir in morsels, potato chips, pretzels and peanuts. Drop by rounded tablespoons onto ungreased baking sheets. Bake for 9-11 minutes or until golden brown. Cool completely & ENJOY!!

Good News Bowlers

Good News Christian Bowling League is now in our 16th season. We have people from several local churches bowling with us, but one thing we have in common is we serve the same Lord! We can come together and have fun & fellowship, but also share our faith with our outward actions.

Over the years we have developed some monthly activities - some for fun, and some with a compassionate purpose. In November we collect canned goods to be donated during the Thanksgiving Outreach to the community. This year we were asked to assist a specific family that had come to the church in need of help. The response from our bowlers was great! We were able to put together a large basket of food items for both Thanksgiving and every day meals, along with a supermarket gift-card to cover the cost of a turkey and then some. The basket was delivered and received with great appreciation and thanks.



Our league meets the first Saturday of the month at Bowl Long Island in Patchogue. If you are interested in bowling with us please send me an email: corinnefchurch@verizon.net

Faith- fun - fellowship!

Corinne Franco

John 14:6

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! May God's blessings be with you all as we start a new year together! As my first year serving as your church secretary comes to a close, I wanted to extend my thanks to all of you. I love being the church secretary; I love being part of the "forever family," a family much larger than any I have ever known. I want to thank you all for the prayers and words of encouragement throughout this past year. I could not have made it through many weeks without the love and support of my forever family.

I would like to personally thank a few people that have made my life a great deal easier this past year at different times. First, Our Pastor, for being so patient with my work schedule, helping me learn as I go, and always having patience with me, and never making me feel embarrassed or inadequate. Frank Donato, for always being "on call" for my computer "issues." Sue Herrmann, for putting together the lovely newsletter, and being understanding when things didn't work out exactly as expected. Last, but not least, the many helpers I have had at different times to help stuff, fold, tape, and get paper-cuts 😊, to get the newsletter out on time: Megan Mahler, Stephanie Holland, Toni Cerruto, Linda Cucinotta, MaryAnn Mavridis, Kathryn Shaw (my mother), and Harris Noor (my beloved Husband).

I could sit here and list everyone that called, sent cards, and/or came by to visit, but that would be a very long list. I just want you all to know: you are appreciated and loved so much. Thank you for making me feel like I am finally home.

All My Love, Evie Noor

Friday Night Lights – Teen Ministry

The Teen Ministry has been in full swing this Fall. The ministry is hosting a Christmas Spaghetti Luncheon December 1st, following service. Our teens have decided to bake desserts as well. I don't know about you, but I am looking forward to tasting these treats. They sound so good!



Friends in Faith

Our Friday Night Lights Teens helped with Operation Christmas Child. If you want to see teens have fun, set them loose in Dollar Tree! I wish I had a video!

They have enjoyed Go Karting, our Coney Island BBQ, The Ducks game, and many Fridays of fellowship and meeting new friends. Some teens went on the Missions Trip in July and some teens went away in August to a Christian camp, and two others spent part of the summer in Europe! So considering all the traveling, our calendar has been quite full.

The Teen Ministry is having a craft fair at the church on Saturday, March 29th (rain date April 5th). Applications for vendor spots are available in the church office, or you can contact me at (631)395-7181 and I will mail one out to you. Each spot is \$35.00. We have quite a few brand vendors interested, but we will need craft vendors, too. If you have any questions, or know anyone who is crafty and may be interested, please contact me.

My email is annette.1029@hotmail.com ; application deadline is February 21st.

I am so excited about 2014 and the possibilities a new year brings.

Merry Christmas, God Bless you all with Joy, Peace, Health and a grateful heart.

Annette Neff

Buildings and Grounds Winter Update

We took one step closer to completing our three projects this month when new cabinetry was installed in the redesigned Usher room. The cabinetry will provide both workable space and storage for our usher ministry, which is greatly improved under the direction of Barbara Brennan. **Special thanks** to Angelo Vitale, Joe Herrmann and Jesse Bonfiglio

Have you noticed how much brighter the church looks? We were able to capitalize on a LIPA energy efficiency rebate offer. All light fixtures have either been replaced with new energy efficient fluorescents or LED bulbs. This upgrade is a tremendous leap forward for three reasons.

1. Replacement of old poorly functioning or broken equipment both on the main level and fellowship hall of the church
2. Significant reduction in energy consumed which in turn reduces our monthly electrical costs
3. Once received, the rebate from LIPA pay for approximately 75% of the total cost

With these and other changes we continue to need volunteer help to assist us to complete work and to care for the facilities God has entrusted us with. We need carpenters, painters, carpet and floor care maintenance etc. If you are willing to step up and serve God in this manor please contact John Mercurio or Pastor Jerry.

Serving Him Together, *John Mercurio*

Women's Ministry

What a beautiful autumn the Lord has blessed us with! It is my favorite season; the changing leaves burst forth in an array of vibrant colors, even as they are dying and falling to the ground. It is such a reminder of our own mortality as the seasons of our lives keep moving forward in change: losses, health issues, financial woes – the list is endless. No matter what season of life we are in, we are precious in the sight of our God. We were recently reminded by a guest speaker at church that if we can breathe, we can serve the Lord. He is our ever-present strength, no matter what is going on in and around us. He is the one Constant in our lives, and by faith, we can head toward the goal set before us – an eternity spent in the presence of our blessed Savior. So let us serve and encourage one another as we share the love of Jesus in our families, church, community, and world.

Our Ladies In-Touch continues to meet each Tuesday evening in my home. We are reading a book entitled Pain, Perplexity and Promotion by Bob Sorge. It is a study on the book of Job and has led to some lively and interesting discussions. We start the evening with intercessory prayer, and have been blessed to see the Lord answering in amazing ways. We always end with a time of fellowship, and are truly blessed as we learn, laugh and cry together.

Once again, we will be sponsoring Operation Christmas Child for the 16th year. Since this article is being written before we actually have our packing party and collection of shoeboxes, I don't have the actual count for 2013. Last year we were able to send 186 boxes to needy children around the world. This year the goal is over 200. What a blessing it has been to be able to share the love of Jesus with children and their families around the world through your generous giving.

On Friday, Dec. 13th, we will have our annual Christmas craft night. It will be at 7:00pm at HPYC. All ladies are welcome, but please let me know if you are coming so we will have enough materials for our latest creations! Coffee, tea and treats will be served along with lots of laughs!

As we join in celebration of the birth of our Lord and King, may we truly focus on what Christmas is really all about. I pray that you will limit the shopping and stress, and spend time seeking more of Jesus in your hearts and lives.



Have a blessed Christmas, and a New Year filled with the joy of the Lord.

In Christ,

Mary Ann

Thank you to everyone who contributes to this newsletter! I wouldn't be able to do it without you ☺. I hope you all enjoy reading about the wonderful things that are happening in the hearts and lives of our Forever Family. As we enter into a new year, may you feel rejuvenated, encouraged, and most of all, blessed.

With Love and Thanksgiving,
Sue Herrmann

Thank you to MaryAnn Malcolm for this simple, yet poignant illustration.

Leaving The City Of Regrets: By Larry Harp

I had not really planned on taking a trip this time of year, and yet I found myself packing rather hurriedly. This trip was going to be unpleasant and I knew in advance that no real good would come of it. I'm talking about my annual "Guilt Trip."

I got tickets to fly there on Wish I Had airlines. It was an extremely short flight. I got my baggage, which I could not check. I chose to carry it myself all the way. It was weighted down with a thousand memories of what might have been. No one greeted me as I entered the terminal to the Regret City International Airport. I say international because people from all over the world come to this dismal town.

As I checked into the Last Resort Hotel, I noticed that they would be hosting the year's most important event, the Annual Pity Party. I wasn't going to miss that great social occasion. Many of the towns leading citizens would be there.

First, there would be the Done family, you know, Should Have, Would Have and Could Have. Then came the I Had family. You probably know ol' Wish and his clan. Of course, the Opportunities would be present, Missed and Lost. The biggest family would be the Yesterday's. There are far too many of them to count, but each one would have a very sad story to share.

Then Shattered Dreams would surely make an appearance. And It's Their Fault would regale us with stories (excuses) about how things had failed in his life, and each story would be loudly applauded by Don't Blame Me and I Couldn't Help It.

Well, to make a long story short, I went to this depressing party knowing that there would be no real benefit in doing so. And, as usual, I became very depressed. But as I thought about all of the stories of failures brought back from the past, it occurred to me that all of this trip and subsequent "pity party" could be canceled by ME! I started to truly realize that I did not have to be there. I didn't have to be depressed. One thing kept going through my mind, I CAN'T CHANGE YESTERDAY, BUT I DO HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE TODAY A WONDERFUL DAY. I can be happy, joyous, fulfilled, encouraged, as well as encouraging. Knowing this, I left the City of Regret immediately and left no forwarding address. Am I sorry for mistakes I've made in the past? YES! But there is no physical way to undo them.

So, if you're planning a trip back to the City of Regret, please cancel all your reservations now. Instead, take a trip to a place called, Starting Again. I liked it so much that I have now taken up permanent residence there. My neighbors, the I Forgive Myselfs and the New Starts are so very helpful. By the way, you don't have to carry around heavy baggage, because the load is lifted from your shoulders upon arrival. God bless you in finding this great town. If you can find it -- it's in your own heart -- please look me up. I live on I Can Do It Street.

A Christmas to Remember

An original Christmas Story

The War in Europe was over. Hitler was dead, and so were the Nazis and their iniquitous plans to enslave the world. The evil that G.I.s like myself witnessed will never be forgotten; it'll live on inside us forever. That is our cross to bear the rest of our lives, but as for Hitler's legacy, he's already yesterday's news; soon, he will be just an ugly footnote in history.

I remember it like it was yesterday, December 18, 1944; we were waiting, sitting in the French opera house, or what was left of it, there in the war torn city of Paris, awaiting final orders to return to the States. With Christmas only eight days away, I was getting antsy. The only thing I truly cared about was getting home in time for Christmas. Sure, I was proud of the role I played in this conflict of good vs. evil, proud of my country for stepping up to do what no one else could, but it was time to bask in our victory. It was time to go home. For me, it was back to Iowa to celebrate Christmas with my kid brother, sister and parents. There were thousands of soldiers there with me, all longing for the same thing: a White Christmas, a tree, a crackling fire and a slice of pumpkin pie. But, *Operation Christmas Present* turned out to be more of a trickle than a surge.

"Fisher!" bellowed the floor officer, towering over me.

"Yes Sir," I jumped up standing at attention, almost knocking my cap off with a clumsy salute. The officer scrunched his face, attempting to hide his laughter. Keeping up his poker face, he continued.

"Is there something wrong with your hearing, Fisher," he queried. "I called your name three times. Your orders are here!"

Embarrassed, I lowered my gaze and bit my lip, "Sorry sir," I croaked, "guess I ... just... umm ...err" as my voice trailed off into nothingness.

"At ease, soldier, most of the men here are in the same funk, dreaming about home and a sweetheart. But this," he says, holding up a folded paper, "will make those dreams come true: your pass home for the holidays." With a grin he extends his hand. "Good luck getting back in time for Christmas; you'll need it. There are ten thousand G.I.s all getting these orders at the same time. I hope you make it in time, son."

I grinned, "Thank you sir, so do I."

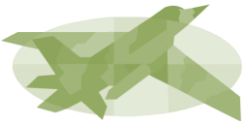
He turned to walk away but then stopped abruptly, as though he had forgotten something. "What's your full name soldier, and where do you hail from, your accent sounds familiar?"

"Fisher sir ... Fred Fisher, I'm from Bettendorf, Iowa."

"I thought so - small world, Fisher, I'm from Rock Island, Illinois, we're neighbors, just opposite sides of the Mississippi. Maybe my running into you isn't a coincidence ... maybe it's time you asked for a little help," he said, raising his eyes and head upward. Then, with a wink and a smile, he was off. I stood there, puzzling over his words. "Did he mean ... I should pray?" I shook my head and smirked at the thought of praying about this, or anything for that matter, and swiftly dismissed that idea.

Four days, ten hours and twenty minutes to be exact, *Operation Christmas Present* seemed dead in the water. Twelve hundred soldiers still waiting for transport were offered a choice - hop aboard one of eight unheated freight planes bound for the states, or wait until after Christmas to get home. "It's a little risky," were the only words of advice offered to us.

"Better huddle together ladies, it's gonna get real cold real fast," barked the crew chief. For the seventy men crammed into that tight cargo bay, getting close wasn't the problem;



finding space to stretch out was. But minutes after getting airborne, we found a way. Our bare skin immediately stuck to the plane's metal casing. We couldn't allow anyone to fall asleep. Only our combined body heat kept us from freezing to death. We sang songs to bolster our courage and stay awake, shivering in that frigid icebox. After what seemed like days to me, a member of the crew stuck his head out of the warmer cockpit to announce, "We're over U.S. airspace and will be landing in Boston in five minutes."

A lusty cheer rose from the frost bitten young soldiers, but what he hadn't told us was why we were landing so abruptly. We were flying blind in a blizzard, working strictly on instrumentation; the plane had to be piloted at a lower altitude in order to keep the temperature above the sub-zero mark. "Hang on boys, this is going to be rough," shouted a voice from the cockpit. The aircraft lunged downward suddenly, suspending us in midair, above the icy cargo bay floor. Everything seemed to move in slow motion – as if time itself had stopped. A deathly stillness enveloped the cabin, as steam from soldiers' breath hung motionless, frozen in space. My life began to pass before me; my eyelids opened and closed ever so slowly. Everything became clear: I wouldn't be getting home in time for Christmas; I wasn't getting home at all! Within seconds it would all be over: I would be dead.

But then my attention was refocused and redirected by an unseen power, and I heard the words of the officer who'd handed me my orders of departure resounding in my head. *Maybe running into you wasn't a coincidence; maybe it's time you ask for help.* At that moment, I knew it hadn't been a coincidence. Radiant warmth covered me, and an amazing peace swept over me. Something within me instinctively cried out to God, praying repentantly, ferociously. "O God," I cried, "if you spare my life, and the lives of these soldiers, my life is yours forever!"

Instantly, time and space came rushing back together as our plane's landing gear hit hard on the snow covered runway, bounding awkwardly up in the air. Wheels touched down a second time, and the plane slid sideways across the frozen air strip, one wing scraping the surface while the other went vertical, but just before the plane flipped, we crashed into a hanger. It felt like a giant hand had reached out and cradled us.

I walked away from that plane wreck on my own power. The aviation specialists, the military officials, and medical staff were at a loss to explain how the plane didn't burst into flames, how the flight crew kept it from flipping over, and why injuries were not more severe. I spent the next few days helping out at the city hospital, visiting crash victims, sharing my experience in the final moments of that ill-fated flight. Though some injuries were life threatening, no one aboard that plane died. I had a new joy and zest for life. Finding a Gideon Bible in my hotel room, I read about the first Christmas morning, about angels, shepherds, the Magi and a Bethlehem manger. Emanuel, God with us, became Jesus, my friend and savior. No longer a story, this Jesus had taken up residence in my heart. No, I didn't make it home in time to celebrate Christmas with my family that year, but I've celebrated the true meaning of Christmas 365 days a year, ever since.

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6 KJ

Merry Christmas

John Mercurio

