

It was Christmas 2013. Earlier that year, I had lost my grandfather, a man who I looked up to and loved beyond compare. His loss, although it was foreseen by everyone, his health had been failing for some time, it was still a hard blow on everyone. So, my brothers, my cousins, and I, we all got ornaments with the last couple lines of a poem, titled “Merry Christmas from Heaven.” The poem reads:

*I still hear the songs, I still see the lights,
I still feel your love on the cold winter nights.
I still share your hopes and all of your cares.
I'll even remind you to please say your prayers.
I just want to tell you, you still make me proud.
You stand head and shoulders above all the crowd.
Keep trying each moment to stay in His grace.
I came here before you to help set your place.
You don't have to be perfect all of the time.
He forgives you the slip if you continue the climb.
To my family and friends, please be thankful today.
I'm still close beside you in a new special way.
I love you all dearly. Now don't shed a tear
'Cause I'm spending my Christmas with Jesus this year.*

I have seen this ornament every year since, and it still brings a tear to my eye. People say it gets easier with time, but that's not always true. This time of year can send some people back into those dark valleys, searching desperately for light, but not the light you hang on a tree. They look for that comforting message, but not one found in carols or Mariah Carey singing “All I Want for Christmas is You.” For many, even when surrounded by friends and family, they feel alone for whatever reason. During this season, many walk through that personal valley of the shadow of death. For those who face this season with a heavy heart, like I do, we eagerly await that land of green pastures, those overflowing cups, the sign of God's presence here with us.

The question becomes “where and when will we find those things?” The answer is in Jesus the Christ. Jesus came to Earth, was born of a virgin as a human baby, to share with us not only teachings, parables, and reassurances of hope for the coming Kingdom of a God whose love knows no bounds. Jesus came to share in our experiences as humans, to invite us to walk alongside him in our lives, that we might share his love, his messages, and his life with others. Jesus came to share, and in sharing, we find that we aren't as alone as we sometimes think. We find others who feel the same pain we feel. We lessen our load by admitting our need for help to bear our burdens, and we find that helping hand, that shoulder to cry on, in our brothers and sisters in faith. We find Christ in all of those who show forth the love of God, and find renewed hope that, though we may walk through our valleys from time to time, there is hope to be had and joy to be shared. As followers of Christ, we are called to share as he shared, and therefore I will close by charging you all to share your feelings this season with someone that you might no longer walk this valley alone, but have someone else bear that weight with you.