

Christmas Eve
December 24th

As my family walked from our house to the car, I realized the night air felt freezing, joyful, and exciting. It was finally Christmas Eve!

We drove along the dark roads, heading for the Christmas Eve service, which we went to every year. My parents chatted in the front seats, Grant and Ruby sat in the middle, with Ty and I in the back. We wore nice outfits with sweaters, which helped with the cold.

When we arrived, the parking lot was nearly full. Other families shuffled out of their cars, holding their grandparents' hands and carrying toddlers and babies. A couple of the kids were dressed like sheep (more on that later). We all walked through the night towards the church doors.

To me, the church always felt bigger on the inside than it looked on the outside. The ceilings were high, the light was warm, and I can't really describe it, but there was always a feeling of meaning in the air during the Christmas Eve service. Though the pews were totally full, there was a kind of peaceful quietness, I guess.

We sat next to another family in a half-open row. I knew Clare and her dad were somewhere near the front. I leaned against the back of the strong wooden bench and looked up at the choir, red Poinsettia flowers, and twinkling lights.

Within a few minutes, the service began.

There were thick books in each row, and when they announced the first song, you could hear everyone turning to the right page to find the lyrics.

The choir began: "O Holy Night / The stars are brightly shining."

The whole room joined in. I like to sit by my dad on Christmas Eve, so I can hear him sing. He has such a full, deep voice, "A thrill of hope / The weary world rejoices."

After the first one, we all sang two more called "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" and "O Come All Ye Faithful." Then we all sat down for the little play they do each year with the kids.

Some were dressed like shepherds, others like sheep, and my favorite one looked like an angel. They gathered in the front and acted out the story of a quiet night in the Middle East long ago.

There was a very special baby, born in a barn, who would grow up to save the world. One child narrated into a microphone, saying that an angel appeared to the shepherds and three kings, and they all went to see the baby.

I loved watching it; even Grant, Ty, and Ruby always leaned forward on the wooden bench and paid attention. I liked all the kids in their outfits, and I loved the idea that this tiny baby could grow up to be so important.

Something about it always made me smile, and the whole night made my heart feel very glad.

Once the kids shuffled off stage, everyone on the wooden benches got a candle from a big basket. It was white and smooth and fit perfectly in my hand. A little cup was around the bottom to make sure the wax didn't drip on you.

Someone in the row in front of us lit my mom's candle, which she used to light my dad's and mine. Soon, the whole room was glowing with little candle lights, and we sang one more song all together.

I looked around at all the glowing candles and listened to all the different voices. I felt peaceful and then began to think about Grammy. 'Please let her be okay,' I thought.

Then I thought about Clare and inwardly declared, 'I'm so happy she's my best friend.'

I glanced over at Ty and Ruby, who didn't have candles but had both fallen asleep by now and were leaning against my mom. 'I'm thankful I have my family,' I thought.

I imagined all my friends at school, and even Amy, and felt very happy to get to learn.

As all the different loud and quiet voices around me sang the final song, I thought about all the people around the world. I wondered about the other kids my age.

I wondered what they were like and how they were doing. Something in me wished them all well.

I hoped that if I ever had a chance, I could be a good friend to them.

Your Friend,
Joanie