



## CHRISTMAS WITHOUT SANTA CLAUS

December 2015

*For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah 9:6

Christmas time is for many of us a time for reflection. We think of how things were when we were children. In fact, many of our traditions stem back from those years long ago. We bake and cook the foods we grew up with. Many of us use decorations that date back to when we were younger. We don't very quickly throw away the Christmas tree ornaments our children made for us at school when they were much younger. I

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don't know if you're relating. I'm speaking as a 69-year-old and you're possibly a lot younger than me.

Many years ago I wrote the following as I reflected on what Christmas was like for me when I was a very young child living in Amsterdam. I called the piece, "Christmas without Santa Claus."

Dancing little flames cast a gentle light across the darkened room. Candles were set on the big dining room table and on the mantel. Tiny ones were perched at the tips of the Christmas tree branches. The wonderful aroma of greenery mixed with the smell of melting wax. We sang *Silent Night* and *Away in a Manger*. We ate mandarin oranges, cakes and cookies decorated with almonds. The biggest treats were the chocolate wreaths that Mom allowed us to gently slip off the tree's branches. We felt the warm glow – the blessed hush of the evening.

When bedtime came Dad picked my sister and me up in his arms and we took turns blowing out the candles.

No Santa Claus. No gifts. Christmas was devoted to remembering the birth of Jesus.

This was how Christmas was for me as a very young girl living in Holland. Although Dutch people have their own version of Santa Claus, St. Nicholas, he comes on December 6<sup>th</sup> bringing his gifts. When Christmas comes on the twenty-fifth, St. Nicholas and his gifts are well out of the way making room for a more spiritual celebration. At least, that's how it was for my family when I was young.

I enjoy looking back on those days, those days when Christmas was a purely Christian celebration. There was no loud, flashy merriment, no commercials shouting from TV's and radios. Nothing muffled the feelings of peace and goodwill. Children's hearts did not have to greedily concern themselves with what they were going to get. Instead they looked forward to the magic of the candlelit room and the spirit which filled it.

Maybe memories of childhood Christmases like this one are what create such a desire in me to have quiet times. There's nothing like sitting by the tree, surrounded by the sound of carols. How precious peace at Christmas time can be!

May you too have precious peaceful times as part of your Christmas this year.

marja