

Senator REID, the whip, stays around here. He stays around the Chamber. He renders a tremendous service to his country.

I want to take this moment to thank him, to thank TOM DASCHLE, to thank the Republican leader, to thank the Republican whip, to thank the Senators—the ladies and the gentlemen—who preside, all of the members of the staffs in the cloakrooms and in the hallways, in the corridors, and those who provide the security of this Chamber, and the people who work in it. I thank them all.

Somebody appreciates you. You may not realize it, but somebody is watching you. Somebody appreciates what you are doing. The people at the desk up there, somebody appreciates you.

So I just want to express that appreciation.

THE REAL STORY OF CHRISTMAS

Mr. BYRD. Now, Mr. President, we are just a few days from Christmas, a few days from the morning when millions of children tumble out of their warm beds, awaken their parents, rush to the family room, and look, with gleeful delight, at the bows, the boxes, and the bundles under the tree.

This is one of my favorite times of the year—a time of joy, a time of love, a time of family gatherings and warm memories.

I remember the Christmas presents waiting for me when I was a boy back there during the Great Depression in the hard hills of Mercer County in southern West Virginia. There was not an electric light in the house—no electricity, no running water, but there was an orange or a drawing book or a set of pencils or a set of water colors, or a geography book that I had been wanting.

My family did not have great material wealth, but we always had a wealth of love. The two old people who raised me, they are in Heaven tonight. They are in Heaven. We did not have fancy toys in those days. We celebrated the season for its true meaning: the birth of the Christ Child.

Now, I respect every man's or woman's religion. I respect their religion. If it is Moslem, I respect their religion. I can listen to the prayers of any churchman or any layman. I can respect them all because who am I? I am unworthy of God's blessings. I can respect them.

So my wife Erma and I have passed those lessons on to our children, our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren.

In recent years, however, that meaning has been drowned out by a society that is focused more on the perfect gift or the latest gadget or the hottest-selling toy. Our attention is on store sales and Santa Claus rather than on the true meaning of Christmas.

Now, I am a Christian. I believe in Christ. I am not very worthy, but I be-

lieve in Him. I respect anyone who does not. I respect anyone who believes that He was, that He lived, He was a historic figure, He was a prophet. They may not believe He is the Messiah—I do—but it does not lessen my respect for others.

I will listen to them at any time. But I think all of us have to agree that this was a great event that happened that split the centuries in two, and the years that were before Christ are numbered, the years that are after Christ numbered differently. This was some, some happening. No matter what we believe or do not believe, it is still recognized by all that there was a man named Jesus Christ.

And so no matter what our religion, I think we ought to understand this was more than just an ordinary happening, more than just an ordinary man.

At its core, the season has not changed. Christmas will always be, to me, about a family that found no shelter but a manger, and also about a newborn child who would become, in my viewpoint, the Saviour of the world.

As Luke wrote in his Gospel:

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

Good tidings. Great joy. How many people think of those words standing in the long lines of their local shopping malls?

I worry that too many of us, in the hectic pace of the modern world, have forgotten the true spirit of Christmas, have forgotten what this is really all about. They have forgotten the true meaning. The story of the birth of Christ has been overshadowed by the pressures and the strains of a commercialized holiday.

Families will spend hours at shopping malls, waiting in long lines, rather than in the company of loved ones or in a church or in a place of worship celebrating in song or prayer. They will become obsessed with purchases and the gifts they may receive. Children will meticulously craft the perfect list of toys and will worry that grandma will again, this Christmas, buy them another sweater that they will never wear. Sadly, the Christmas season has become the shopping season. A time for joy and spiritual reflection has drowned in the shallow waters of greed.

That does not need to be. We can return to the true meaning of Christmas. During this holiday, I urge all Americans to reflect on their families and their faith—whatever their faith—and to read the story of Jesus' birth in the Gospels. Look up into the night sky and pick the Star of Wonder that led the wise men to Bethlehem to offer gifts to the Christ Child. Join with family and friends to sing a Christmas

carol, share a meal, and reflect on the blessings we have been given. Visit each other, one another's church or synagogue or whatever. Go join and visit and enjoy this season. Perhaps the materialism that has come to dominate the season will fade and we can begin to truly understand the great and glorious story of Christmas.

And so, Mr. President:

'Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer

Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But held it up with a smile:

“What am I bidden, good folks,” he cried,
“Who'll start the bidding for me?”

“A dollar, a dollar”; then, “Two!” “Only two?”

Two dollars, and who'll make it three?
Three dollars, once; three dollars, twice;
Going for three—” But no,

From the room, far back, a gray-haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow;
Then, wiping the dust from the old violin,
And tightening the loose strings,
He played a melody pure and sweet
As a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said, “What am I bid for the old violin?”
And he held it up with the bow.

“A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?
Two thousand! and who'll make it three?”

Three thousand, once, three thousand, twice,
And going, and gone,” said he.

The people cheered, but some of them cried,
“We do not quite understand

What changed its worth.” Swift came the reply:

“The touch of a master's hand.”

And many a man with life out of tune,
And battered and scarred with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd,
Much like the old violin.

A “mess of pottage,” a glass of wine;
A game—and he travels on.

He is “going” once, and “going” twice,
He's “going” and almost “gone.”

But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand

The worth of a soul and the change that's wrought

By the touch of the Master's hand.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Jersey.

COMMENDING SENATOR BYRD

Mr. CORZINE. Mr. President, it is my honor to address you in the chair. Your remarks with regard to Christmas are ones that stir one's heart and feelings. I am the lucky one to be here this evening to hear you speak. I hope everyone across America has the sense of how you love this body, the great Senate, and the people we serve.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. In my capacity as a Senator from the State of West Virginia, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

There being no objection, the quorum call is waived.