

After

It's the day after Christmas, and the land is somehow different once again. The presents are opened, the dinners are done. The special services for Christmas have come and gone. Traveling times may still be going on, and a little turkey or dressing may be hidden away in the refrigerator for an after Christmas snack, but things are going to back to normal before long.

But things should not get back to normal. If Christmas does what it is supposed to do, then the way forward is higher, better, and more fulfilling.

If at Christmas the arrival at the manger was the main thing, and everything else was secondary, then a change has happened. We have met the King of Kings, Emmanuel, the baby Jesus who would be our savior, and we are now different.

The day after Christmas must never be like the day after anything else. The day after we buy a car we can be full of happiness, or have buyer's remorse. The day after our birthday we can be happy or wish that it was different.

The day after we start a new job, or move to a community can be a time of anxiety and fear. The day after a meeting that did not go the way we thought it should could be a time of anger or regret.

If Christmas was a time when we were reminded that no matter what, God is in charge, our day after will be different. If it was a time when we finally realize that only he can bring peace on earth, Christmas was a divine revelation.

Perhaps we were given a gift, like the proverbial Ebenezer Scrooge, to see the past, present and future, to realize that we are made to spend our lives for others rather than ourselves.

Perhaps we, realized that this picture of the Grinch, before his "conversion," is us, and we need to change!

You're a monster, Mr. Grinch,  
Your heart's an empty hole,  
Your brain is full of spiders, you have garlic in your soul, Mr. Grinch,  
I wouldn't touch you with a thirty-nine-and-a-half foot pole!

You're a foul one, Mr. Grinch,  
You're a nasty wasty skunk,

Your heart is full of unwashed socks, your soul is full of gunk, Mr. Grinch,  
The three words that best describe you are as follows, and I quote,  
"Stink, stank, stunk"! ~Theodor "Dr. Seuss" Geisel

Christmas has truly happened in our hearts after we realize that it is not at all about us, but about how God has blessed the world and wants to bless others through us. And after Christmas is a warm afterglow when we have done all that we can to both find and share the new life that Jesus came to the manger to bring.

The innkeeper, after he turned Mary and Joseph away, probably felt bad afterwards. And he probably wished that the after moment had been one of inclusion and welcome rather than alienation and goodbye.

"In today's world," Neal Maxwell writes, "each of us is an innkeeper who decides if there is room for Jesus." So how are we doing on this in the days after Christmas?

And the wise men, the magi? Well, they are at the manger in the scenes in our homes. But they came years after Jesus was born. After the angels and the shepherds. After the manger. After Jesus and his family had moved to Nazareth, and Bethlehem was an image in the rearview mirror.

What's the saying? Wise men (and women) still seek Him?

I hope that the beauty and divinity of Christmas comes clear to you long before you leave this earth. After we die, and try to get in a heaven we did not think existed before then will be a terrible spot.

I pray that it will be before you don't have time to share that good news of great joy with other people. After the moment when we could have done something eternally significant is a time we can think about how we or someone else missed out.

Before is a much better word. It means, "prior to, in anticipation of, or in preparation for. Sunday worship all year long is a great place to prepare for Christmas before it happens. Advent is thirty days of spiritual preparation before that holy and magnificent day.

My prayer for us all, dear reader, is that we can dance in the before moments, before the Lord, prior to the glorious celebration of Christmas. That we can bow in anticipation of what God will do. And that we will always be in preparation to see and appreciate the next miraculous thing that God is planning.

May the wonder of the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem linger and grow in you long after the presents are unwrapped on Christmas day. May the love that prompted God to send Jesus to earth make you an "after" believer.

May the power of the people who saw Jesus resurrected and we totally inspired after that moment be ours.

And after Christmas, after you have been to the manger, after you have seen and worshipped him, may God make your forever happily ever after!