



The Christmas Tree of Hope

By Rebecca Laird

One year Advent snuck up on me like an unwelcome guest.
I dutifully put a wreath on the door and unpacked my favorite wooden nativity set with
rough-carved figures. The tiny baby Jesus figure was put aside
to add on Christmas morning.

I couldn't muster the enthusiasm to put up a tree.
A few days before Christmas, a friend stopped by offering a free tree some local group had
given to their volunteers. Her love was insistent. I thanked her and accepted the tree.
Still, I didn't put it up.

Over dinner my husband and I discussed the tree. He was on the board of a
new shelter for unhoused families, the first of its kind in our city.
We would find out if they had a tree.
The shelter welcomed our donation. We drove over two nights before Christmas with the
tree and a box of ornaments. Inside the shelter, shiny garland was taped across the entrance,
and a well-used garden Santa stood sentry. Parents huddled on mats
behind moveable partitions seeking privacy.
The children jumped up and down at the prospect of decorating the tree.

We set the tree up and left the staff and children debating where to place each ornament.
I felt the first stirring of Christmas joy.

On Christmas, after our gifts were opened, and the baby Jesus figure was put in the crèche,
we stopped by the shelter with our church's last-minute donations. The manager met us
with amazing news. One of the mom's had given birth on Christmas Eve and brought the
baby back to the shelter. They made a make-shift crib from a shopping cart filled with blan-
kets. The whole place was enthralled with their Christmas baby parked by the colorful tree.

That good news story released my resistance. Joy, hope, peace, love found me. Every year
when I put the tiny Jesus figure in the manger of my wooden nativity set,
I remember that donated Christmas tree and a baby asleep in a shopping cart.
It reminds me that hope always finds a way.

*Prayer: God of new life, surprise us this season.
Help us to trust that hope always finds a way.*

