

✧ *A Christmas Story* ✧

David Manuel

[Over the years this Christmas story, which began as a parable in a 1964 column by the late Louis Cassels of UPI, has been re-told many ways in many places. David Manuel's version first appeared in *Logos Journal* (forerunner of *Charisma*) in 1973.]

Because Christmas doesn't make any sense!" The words hung in the air. Well, maybe it was better this way. Clean. Final.

He'd tried to explain before, on other Christmas Eves when she'd asked him to come with her. This Jesus whom she loved in her quiet way *had* been a great man. Perhaps the greatest who ever lived. But – the son of God? Or God himself in human form? Pure fantasy!

"I'm sorry," he added now, more gently. "But if you could show me – just once – why God, if there is such a being, would ever want to become a man, I'd come gladly."

She *had* tried once, and he'd demolished her arguments. Now, as he helped her on with her coat and raised the garage door for her, he avoided her eyes.

The house seemed unusually quiet after she left. He wandered from room to room, turned on the TV, turned it off again. In the dining room, seldom used now that the kids were gone, he stared out the window. Under the backyard floodlight, he could see stiffening wind driving ice needles of new snow.

He turned to put a fresh log in the wood stove, when out of the corner of his eye he caught a movement: on the fast-whitening ground, a wind-buffeted sparrow was foraging for stray seed under the bird-feeder.

If there was one thing he loved other than his wife, it was birds. He cursed himself for not having fixed the squirrel guard on the bird-feeder; those wily marauders cleaned it out as fast as he refilled it.

More movement – a flock of sparrows, disoriented in the rising storm, joined the one on the ground. He glanced at the outdoor thermometer. The mercury was still falling; if those birds did not find food soon. . . .

Donning his parka, he slipped out into the dark garage and shivered; he'd forgotten to close

the door. Easing the lid off the large pail of birdseed, he took up a scoopful and being careful to stay in the shadows, moved out into the night.

He worked his way upwind, then cast the seed into the air, so it would fall among the sparrows. Yet they could find only a few kernels, before the new snow obliterated the rest.

Frowning, he hurried back into the garage, returning with the entire pail, from which he flung scoopful after scoopful into the night sky, only to see the seed vanish before they could find it.

Trembling with fatigue, he stopped to catch his breath. "I know!" he gasped. "I'll put seed in the garage and turn its light on!"

Going back into the garage, he scattered the remaining seed all over the cement floor. What a mess! But if it works. . . .

Going into the kitchen, he turned off the backyard floodlight, and turned on the garage light, leaving the door to the garage open a crack, so he could watch them eat.

But they did not understand. There, in plain sight, was food and shelter – yet they stayed out in the darkness.

Slipping out the side door, he came up behind the birds to shoo them towards the garage. . . yet all he succeeded in doing was scaring them into the surrounding trees.

As soon as he went back inside, they returned to the ground under the bird-feeder. They seemed to sense there was help there somewhere. . . .

He went back out and tried again, with the same result. Shaking, he stood by the bird-feeder, tears in his eyes. "Oh, God!" he cried, "Why won't they understand? Everything they need is right there!" he pointed to the lighted garage, "But they won't see it! If only I were a bird myself, I could show them, lead them in there and –"

His eyes widened, as he realized what he'd just said.

