

# The First Christmas Wreath

A sure sign of the approaching Christmas Season is the appearance of brightly colored wreaths which adorn the front doors of countless dwellings around the world. These gaily decorated reminders get us ready to commemorate again the wondrous birth of Christ our Savior.

Christmas is a time of warmth and celebration. A blazing fireplace, the smell of pine, a brightly lit tree with gifts spilling out in every direction, the sense of families drawing closer, shining smiles of eager youngsters—these and a myriad of other personal touches and traditions make this a most special time of the year.

But ironically, this joyous season becomes also a time of stress and dread for many. Stress and dread caused by endless traffic and irritating crowds, financial tensions, anxiety in the choice and cost of gifts for others, fractured families who shuttle children back and forth and spend more time awkwardly carving up a schedule than they do the turkey, Roloids and ruined toys, traffic deaths and body counts, loneliness, alienation, depression, and fatigue.

Such is the bitter/sweet nature of Christmas. And yet these very feelings of lostness and despair are what Christmas is really all about. Because its celebration flows out of divine consolation. Little Immanuel has come to identify Himself with a fallen humanity. To share our pain and give us hope.

He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. . . . As a teenager He experienced the death of Joseph, His human father. As eldest son He knew backbreaking labor and the weight of the responsibility to provide for His household. His ministry and mission were misunderstood by His loved ones. He faced the humiliating accusation of illegitimacy all of His life. And accepted His betrayal by a friend. He patiently bore the

hostility and the taunts of His enemies, and also the injustice of being wrongly accused. He humbly submitted to arrest, torture, and the cruelest of deaths. He died of a broken heart.

“Sure He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows,” says the Prophet Isaiah. “We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness, but one who has been tested in all ways as we are,” notes the writer of the book of Hebrews. He understands. He lived as we live. He died and rose again that we might *really* live. Christmas, then, is a celebration of life for God’s people, a time of triumphant rejoicing and praise. We can wholeheartedly do so because *our Savior has come*. His suffering has brought freedom and hope to us all.

Why can we celebrate each year with the Christmas wreath? Because He *wore* the **first one—a crown of thorns**.

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