

I remember as a child that the days between Thanksgiving and Christmas dragged sooooo slowly! I could hardly wait for Christmas and all the wonder that it brought. I confess that my family, normally regular participants in worship, did not go to church on Christmas Eve. We gathered with grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins for food and presents. It was my favorite night of the year!

Then I grew up and the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas changed – it seemed to speed up! It filled with parties and events, shopping and decorating, addressing cards and wrapping gifts. And as I matured in my faith, I added Advent events at church, including an annual Saturday retreat that I dearly loved. Yet, there never seemed to be enough hours and I found myself looking forward to Christmas Eve for a different reason – because all the rushing would be over!

Have you ever felt like that? Then one year I found this reflection and it helped put things in perspective for me.

A young woman approached Christmas when her life was in turmoil and the holiday frenzy just made it worse. Exhausted from cooking and shopping and decorating, she found that the pressures in her personal life threatened to push her over the edge. She threw up her hands in despair and went to seek comfort from a friend.

“I’ve lost any sense of peace or serenity,” she told her friend, who’d weathered any number of crises over the years.

“The world can’t give you serenity,” the friend told her. “The world can’t give you peace. We can only find serenity and peace in our hearts. That’s the bad news. The good news is, by the same token, the world can’t take it away either.”

What a revelation! Peace and serenity are not found in the gifts or decorations or parties. They come from another place, an interior place.

Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid” (John 14:27). That is the peace that the angels announced to the shepherds at his birth, the peace that we seek and wish for one another in our cards and greetings.

If your holiday this year is full of anxiety, stop and take a deep breath and pray for that peace Jesus promises. You won’t find it for sale in a store or available on a website. It comes from spending time with the Christ child whose birth we celebrate.

And remember that God’s gift to us was his Son and the promise of a new life in him, not pretty packages under the tree. Celebrate the best gift of all this year in the gift of Christ. Come celebrate with us on Christmas Eve and welcome the Christ child into the world.