

Anticipation of

Glittered garlands  
Swirls of ribbon  
Evergreen scents

Of leafless silhouettes

Cinnamon, nutmeg, clove infusions  
Giggles and guffaws  
Warm snuggles under layers of blankets

Of icy ground

Returning Northern Shovelers swirling in their dervish dance  
And the piping fife of the white throat  
And the wide eyed enthusiasm of the titmouse

Of the brisk invigoration of a crisp chill sprint

Satisfied, bellies  
Overflowing hearts  
Joy to the World  
Settling into Silent Nights  
Reflection

Of days past

Informing hopes  
and dreams

Of days to come

We pause  
We Celebrate  
The Grace and the Gifts received  
This day and the next  
Brought to us  
Year after Year after Year,  
Arising from tatters and ashes

Of an ancient and beloved story

Of a magical, mystical birth

In love, pure and simple  
Yet profound.

From Susan Ceely Philips

## What If Jesus Had Been a Girl?

What if Jesus had been born a girl?  
Would her name have been Isa?

How would Mary have responded to Gabriel's news?  
Would there have been a song?  
I think there would have.  
I think it would have been lovely.  
But I also think Mary would have been even more unsettled  
From the deliverance of this news.  
A girl.  
How would she shine God's light from the kitchen?  
Who would listen to her?

When Mary and Elizabeth joined hands and hearts,  
Would John still leap within his mother?  
I think he would - in surprise - in joy - in love.

Could Isa have toughed it out in a manger?  
Swaddled and cooing in the night?  
I think she would have smiled at  
A donkey and the camel.  
But the sheep's bleat might have startled her.

And how would Joseph have taken the news?  
Would dreams have sufficed to convince him to be stalwart?  
I think he would long for a son.  
But, I also think he'd find delight in his girl.  
Perhaps Joseph would have been more in the story.  
Perhaps he would have encouraged her to build, shape, create  
Like my dad did.  
Perhaps those creations would be tangible signs  
To remind disciples how to be more consistent in their commitments.  
And she and Mary of Magdalene would have been best friends, no question.

I think God would say, "this is my daughter with whom I am well pleased.

From Susan Ceely Philips

### **When I Think of Christmas...**

When I think of Christmas,  
I think of plastic lawn ornaments of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus,  
or a blow up Santa, 6 feet high, bobbing in a front yard.

Well, not really.

When I think of Christmas,  
I think of an 80 foot sacrificial Blue Spruce bedecked with neon LEDs  
or 'the Great Christmas Light Fight' on ABC TV .

Maybe, but only briefly and for only a couple of episodes.

When I think of Christmas,  
I think of Mariah blaring throughout the mall  
Wailing about her one desire for the holiday  
or Bruce's warning about Santa's impending arrival  
or Steve and Eydie and the weather outside that's "frightful"  
and a fire that's "so delightful".

This is hard to avoid thinking about if you leave your house.

When I think about Christmas,  
I think of a donkey braying gently,  
A plaintively bleating lamb,  
A freshly reaped bed of straw  
And angels hovering above  
Crooning their Hallelujah chorus,  
Competing for attention  
from The Family and a crew of motley shepherds.

This thought does bring a smile to my lips.

But, when I really think about Christmas,  
I see a mother recovering from childbirth  
And a father worn with emotion  
and lack of sleep  
And a baby - whimpering for mother's milk -  
The first sustenance of this life -  
The silky warmth flowing into the infant's being  
Giving strength and comfort.  
Hold onto that sustenance, little one,  
And seek it whenever you can  
Through family, friends, and faith  
In the One we can't see.  
You're going to need it.

This I know.

From Susan Ceely Philips

## “Wonderful Counselor”

Isaiah’s words.  
Which Isaiah? 1 or 2?  
Does it matter?  
Anyway...  
A prophesy for then,  
But we need it now.  
A child is born,  
delivered  
To counsel, to gude, to demonstrate,  
Not just as a friend.  
Not just for analysis  
Of loss or gain.  
But for counsel  
To know what lies before you  
All around you.  
To guide,  
To demonstrate,  
To know that “path of righteousness”  
Laid before you from morning to night.  
Wise counsel.  
Wonder full counsel.

From Susan Ceely Philips