

I once heard a story about a young boy named Joshua who had asked Santa for a Transformers Action Figure for Christmas. A Transformers figure is a toy that you can manipulate with your hands and it changes into something else. It can transform from a vehicle or an animal to a robot action figure and vice versa.

Now Joshua's parents had a rule that he couldn't get out of bed until 7 am on Christmas morning. At that time, the entire family would go down to the living room to open gifts. Well, he had been waiting and anticipating receiving this gift for weeks and weeks. Joshua happened to wake up at 5 am, and he finally reached the point where he couldn't wait any longer. Very quietly, he snuck downstairs to the tree to have a look.

The tree looked so beautiful, all lit up, and surrounded by presents. Some obviously were socks and underwear, but one larger one was marked, *To Joshua From Santa*. Not able to control himself, he peeled back the wrapping paper and saw that he did indeed receive his Transformers figure. He was just thrilled!!! He put the wrapping paper back in place and snuck back upstairs.

Then at 7 am, he woke up his parents and headed back downstairs. Much to their surprise, the presents were gone!!! They found a note from Santa saying that because Joshua had peeked at his present, Santa had taken back all the presents!

Young Joshua cried and cried in total despair, feeling all hope was lost. After a short while, his misery ended, when the presents were returned to the tree. It turned out it was all a prank pulled by his older brother, who saw him peeking at his presents.

That was a Christmas morning I'm sure the family never forgot!! Joshua's brother kept Christmas from coming for a short time! Over the years we have heard stories of other people who tried to keep Christmas from coming. Dickens' A Christmas Carol told the classic tale of Ebenezer Scrooge. More recently Dr. Seuss wrote How the Grinch Stole Christmas. It's not too flattering to be called a Scrooge or a Grinch, is it? They seem to personify evil itself. But in both cases the main character has a change of heart, and is eventually filled with the spirit and love of Christmas.

After the Grinch removed all the Who's presents, Dr. Seuss tells us:

Every *Who* down in *Who*-ville, the tall and the small,
Was singing! Without any presents at all!
He HADN'T stopped Christmas from coming!
IT CAME!

Somehow or other, it came just the same!
And the Grinch, with his grinch-feet ice-cold in the snow,
Stood puzzling and puzzling: “How *could* it be so?
“It came without ribbons! It came without tags!
“It came without packages, boxes or bags!”
And he puzzled three hours, till his puzzler was sore.
Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before!
“Maybe Christmas,” he thought, “*doesn't* come from a store.
“Maybe Christmas...perhaps...means a little bit more!”¹

This year it seems as though Covid-19 is the evil villain trying to keep Christmas from coming. But we Christians know that Christmas does mean “a little bit more”. Christmas will come without holiday parties. Christmas will come without shopping in crowded malls. Christmas will come even without large family gatherings. Without all the extra activities that we are used to, perhaps we may feel that Christmas seems more special this year. Perhaps our hearts will grow larger as we concentrate on the true meaning of this holy-day.

In our story Joshua was punished for peaking at his present early. However, it's ok for us to take a sneak peak at God's Christmas gift to us. In fact, God won't mind if we all open our present early...and bring Jesus into our hearts and feel His comfort and love before December 25th. What a gift...to have Jesus, the Prince of Peace, with us always, and not just at Christmas!

I pray that each and every day we may:

- Feel His peace,
- Know His peace,
- Carry His peace.

Isn't it wonderful that Jesus is a present that God will never, ever, take away from us?
Bernadette

¹Geisel, Theodor S. How the Grinch Stole Christmas by Dr. Seuss. New York: Random House, 1985.