



# AHA!

**A PASTORAL COMMENT**  
*FROM TOM BANDY*

## How Would You CELEBRATE?

I have only known one church that seriously considered canceling children's stories during family worship. It happened like this. It was Advent and the pastor decided that she would ask the children a simple question: How would Jesus have celebrated his own birthday? The Holy Spirit was working the room that day, and the children were unusually pensive. The pastor was prepared with all kinds of cute and festive ideas to prompt childish imaginations. Would Jesus have a birthday cake? Would he sing happy songs? Would he expect to receive presents? The strategic plan for the children's story was that this would set up great refreshments after worship, the choir's anthem, and a surprise visit from Santa Clause during Sunday School.

Unfortunately, the children had other ideas.

"Jesus wouldn't want any cake, says one six year old. Jesus would want vegetables so that he could give them to poor children, so they wouldn't get sick anymore."

"Yeah!" says the eight year old. "And Jesus wouldn't sing happy songs, but he'd cry because all his friends at school couldn't come to the party."

One little girl waved her hand wildly to get the attention of the pastor. "Jesus wouldn't need any presents," she exclaimed, "because he already has everything."

The children all began making helpful suggestions about how Jesus would celebrate his birthday by making other people happy. Translating their lan-

guage into "adult speak," it soon appeared that Jesus would open his home to the homeless; hug everybody who was sick; make any sacrifice for world peace; and, oh by the way, renovate the sanctuary into a food court and video arcade.

By this time the pastor's strategic plan was a shambles, but she thought she could recover by refocusing the conversation away from Jesus and onto their self interest. "Is that how you would celebrate your birthday?" The question was received with instant shakes of the head. "Oh no," said a little boy. "Mom and Dad don't want me to be like Jesus." There was an eternal silence in the room that lasted at least thirty seconds, until another little girl said brightly, "We'd have a regular party, and eat cake, and sing happy songs, and I'd get lots and lots of presents."

After the children's story, the choir did sing their anthem, but the applause was unexpectedly stilted. The refreshments were opulent and delicious, but there was a run on vegetables and dip. Church members didn't take the leftover pastry home, but it seemed very odd to give all the unhealthy sweets to the hospice. Santa Clause did come and was received with wild enthusiasm by the children and mixed emotions by the adults.

In January there was a motion in the annual meeting to cancel children's stories. It was defeated by a slim majority who had begun to wonder if the pastor and board were confused about exactly who was immature in the church. 