

A Christmas Tea Party

Carol: Today we're having a Christmas tea party with some of our Women of Hope friends. We've got some fruit mince pies, and nuts and sweets: treats that our families have always made at Christmas. And Tammy's wearing a pretty Christmas necklace- she looks great!

Tammy: You should see Carol- she's wearing a circle of tinsel in her hair, and she looks like a rather wise middle-aged angel. It's all part of the joy of Christmas.

Carol: Hello, and welcome to Women of Hope. I'm Carol, and Tammy, Susan, Ros, Jay and Fran are here too. Have you put the kettle on to boil yet? Since this is a tea party, we started talking about our tea and got into a discussion about how to make a perfect cup of tea.

Tammy: And it was lively! Everybody has a different family tradition. Susan, tell us how you make Indian spiced chai.

Susan: I grind a mixture of spices- cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom, ginger, cloves, or whatever I like. I simmer it with tea leaves and sugar in boiling water and milk for about 5 minutes. Then I strain out the tea leaves and serve it in tea glasses. Here, try some!

Tammy: Oh, that's delicious. What about Chinese tea, Jay?

Jay: In China we take tea very seriously. In traditional Chinese tea preparation, they prefer water from running streams or springs rather than from a well. They want water that's mixed with air. The Chinese don't add sugar or milk to tea usually. People who really understand tea often have separate teapots for every variety and flavour of tea that they brew. They feel that the clay of the teapot might absorb some of the flavour characteristics of the tea. Many Chinese people drink tea three times a day. It's a large part of their daily life.

Fran: It was a large part of my mother's life too! Whatever happened, she would make a pot of tea. As soon as she heard someone coming she put on the kettle so she could welcome them the Australian way.

Ros: My mother always said to use *fresh* water, not water that had already been boiled. And she said to always heat the teapot first by half filling it with boiling water.

Tammy: It has to be a *china* teapot in my family- metal makes the tea taste different.

Carol: While the teapot warmed, my mother would leave the kettle boiling for a minute to make sure any germs were killed. Then she would tip out the water from the pot and put in the dried black tea leaves.

Fran: I remember the rule- a teaspoon of tea leaves for each person and one extra for the pot! Or one teabag per person and one for the pot, if you use teabags- though some tea lovers say they don't make *proper* tea! And my mother had another rule- take the teapot to the kettle, so the water is really boiling when it hits the leaves.

Ros: But some people say you should let the water cool slightly first. What do *you* think?

Tammy: I think it's important to give it time to brew. About three or four minutes for black tea, less for green tea, more for herbal teas. That releases the tannins that give the flavour, but if you leave it brewing too long it gets bitter.

Jay: And brewing lets it cool down a little bit so you don't have to slurp the tea.

Fran: But my Dad said slurping was the best bit!

Carol: You see- people can never agree on how to make tea! Now what about pouring it? You need a strainer to catch the tea leaves. I like to use my best china cup, and I warm it first. *I* think plastic cups spoil the taste. When do *you* think you should add the milk, if you take milk? I put it in *after* I pour the tea.

Tammy: No no, you should put it in first! That ways the milk gets warmed gradually and doesn't get burnt by the hot tea! And put the sugar in last, if you take sugar.

Jay: Why would you add sugar? It stops you tasting the natural flavours of the tea.

Susan: Oh no, you must have sugar, it makes the tea delicious!

Ros: Now, I love to make tea by simply picking a small bunch of mint leaves and pouring boiling water over them. I let it stand for a while until the water goes a lovely mint green – and drink it just as it is – no milk, no sugar.

Fran: That sounds very refreshing! Of course the Moroccans would say you must have sugar and lemon juice in your mint tea!

Carol: Now do you see what I mean about how lively our discussion about tea can get. Again- we all have our ideas about tea! But we all agree that drinking tea *together* is the best way to enjoy the tea, and enjoy each other. You have to take a little time to do it properly, and to drink it slowly. That's time to spend together. So I hope you've made a cup of tea and can sit down to enjoy it while we listen to the true story of Christmas.

Tammy: You know, I was making a cup of tea this morning, and I thought how dry and uninteresting tea leaves look. Yet, *after* tea leaves have been brewed in hot water, the flavor and the strength of the tea is released. Then you can taste the different flavours- China tea, green tea, Jasmine tea, herbal teas

Carol: Now, isn't this just like our life? God has made us all different. Each of us has our own strengths and abilities. But often we don't *know* that we have some *inner* strength *until* we are in *hot* water.

Jay: What do you mean, 'hot water'?

Tammy: Hot water means trouble, a crisis or a difficult situation. Like the tea leaves being brewed in hot water, when you face trouble you can expand and give off your true flavor. Instead of giving in to the trouble, you can allow God to bring out the best in you, and he will make you a blessing to those around you.

Fran: Well, that was what happened to a godly woman that we read about in the Bible. She was called Elizabeth. She lived in the land of Israel, at a time when it was ruled by the Roman Empire. Many devout, religious people were praying and looking for the Messiah, the deliverer that God had

promised centuries before. God had also promised to send a messenger before the Messiah, to get the people ready for him. But nothing seemed to be happening. Now let's hear this true story from God's word, the Holy Bible.

Fran: Elizabeth was married to a priest called Zechariah. They both lived good lives in God's sight and obeyed fully all the laws of God. But, Elizabeth was not able to have children and they were both getting old. (Luke 1: 6-7)

So, Elizabeth was old and childless. They called her barren.

Old and useless, do you think? Oh *no*, my friend! Listen!

One day Zechariah was doing his work as a priest in the Temple of God. An angel appeared to Zechariah and told him that his wife, Elizabeth, was going to have a son. They were to call him John. Then the angel described what John's life would be like:

'How glad and happy you will be when he is born. He will be a great man in the Lord's sight... From his birth he will be filled with God's Holy Spirit, and he will bring many back to the Lord their God. He will go ahead of the Lord... he will get the Lord's people ready for him.' (Luke 1:11-17 based on TEV)

Zechariah could hardly believe what he heard. He thought they were too old.

What about Elizabeth? How did she react to this unbelievable event in her life? Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months she stayed at home. She did not dance around the marketplace and boast about the baby and how great he would be. She was not filled with pride. In fact, Elizabeth said humbly: "The *Lord* has done this thing for me. He has shown His favor and taken away my disgrace"! Elizabeth recognized the power of God. And sure enough, she had a son. He was known as John the Baptist, and he was indeed the promised messenger who would prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah.

Tammy: I think Elizabeth's faith was tested in hot water! She had been disappointed for so many years, but she waited patiently and did what she knew was right. What about you? Are you going through a difficult time in your life right now? Do you think that your *life* has become dry and wrinkled, just like tea leaves? Or, are you feeling old and useless because of your age or because of some physical weakness? Perhaps you might think that your life is not fruitful - there is no purpose in living any more. Then, think of Elizabeth. She was old and barren. Yet, she believed God. And, because she believed, God blessed her and made her satisfied in her old age.

Carol: That makes me wonder. Have you prayed to God recently about some struggle in your life? Maybe you asked God, but you felt that you did not have *enough* faith to believe God would answer you. Friend, don't look at the faith that you do *not* have! Use the faith that you *do* have - even if it's very small. And ask God to give you the gift of faith. God is able to bring out the *best* in you. He will make you strong and sweet and use you to bless others.

On Women of Hope We've been hearing the story of Elizabeth, a woman who God used in an important way. An angel told her husband Zechariah that she would have a son, though she was considered infertile. And this happened; she had the joy of holding her baby, and seeing him grow up to be the special messenger of God.

Fran: Something else happened while Elizabeth was pregnant. I'd like to tell you about that, too, from the Holy Bible (Luke 1: 26-38).

Elizabeth had a relative called Mary, a young woman who was engaged to be married to Joseph, a descendant of King David. When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel with a message for Mary. He started by saying, 'Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!'

Mary got such a shock- what could this mean? But the angel went on, 'Don't be afraid Mary: God has been kind to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him *Jesus*. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David... and his kingdom will never end!'

Mary said to the angel, 'But I'm a virgin. How could this be?' She knew that you couldn't have a baby without having a sexual relationship with a man, and she had never done that. But Gabriel had an answer, and it tells us something very important.

The angel said, 'The Holy Spirit of God will come upon you, and God's power will rest upon you. So the baby to be born will be *holy*, and he will be called *the Son of God*. Remember your relative Elizabeth. They said she couldn't have children, but now she is six months pregnant, even though she's very old. For there is nothing that God cannot do.'

Then Mary said, 'I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.

Did you listen carefully to what the angel said? This is why we Christians always say that Mary's son Jesus is the *Son of God*.

Jesus had no earthly father. The angel wasn't his father either. Jesus is not God's Son in the same way as a human father who passes on his genes to his son. God did not get married and have a son. God did not mate with Mary and, together with her, produce a son.

No, it was the power of God's Holy Spirit that caused Mary to conceive her baby, without any physical contact at all. We don't know how God did it- it was simply a miracle that caused this holy baby to form in her womb. As the angel said, there is nothing that God cannot do.

Jesus was different to any other person who ever lived. He was not just a good man, or a prophet like the other prophets. He could be truly called the Son of God, because he was conceived by a miracle of God. But we also call him God's Son because, well, that's the best word we have to describe the intimate relationship between him and his Father God. They always had this loving relationship, from all eternity, before Jesus came to live on this earth. The Son was always dependent on the Father. They were always as one in what they wanted and what they did. The Son was exactly like his Father in his nature, his character and actions. (Phil 2:6) He said, 'I always do the will of my Father.' So what other word could we use? That's why we call him the Son of God.

Carol: It's Christmas, and here on Women of Hope and Fran just told us about the angel Gabriel, who told the virgin Mary that she would have a baby who would be called the Son of God. Now let's go back to the story from God's word. (Luke 1:39-49)

Fran: Soon after this, Mary hurried off to the town in the hills where Elizabeth lived. Mary went into the house and greeted Elizabeth warmly. When she heard Mary's greeting, she felt the baby jump inside her. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke a prophecy, in a loud voice. 'You are the most blessed of all women, and blessed is the child you will bear! Why should this great thing happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should visit me?... The Lord has blessed you because you believed that the Lord's message to you would come true!

Then Mary said:

'My heart praises the Lord; my soul is glad because of God my Saviour, for he has remembered me, his lowly servant! From now on all people will call me blessed because of the great things the Mighty God has done for me. His name is holy!'

And the angel Gabriel's message was true. Mary and Joseph had to travel to the little town of Bethlehem, where Joseph's clan came from, to register for a census. So this special baby was born in a stable, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Matt 1:24, Luke 2: 1-7)

As the angel had said, Mary and Joseph called the baby *Jesus*, a word that means 'God saves', because he would save people from their sins. This was the first Christmas, the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Carol: Do you remember Gabriel's promise?... that Mary's baby would be a king like his ancestor David, the hero king of Israel long ago? Yet what happened to that baby? He was born in an animal shelter. He grew up as a perfect man; he told people about God, he healed sick people, he showed us what God is like. But did they *crown* Jesus? No, they *killed* him.

But he came alive again, and his followers saw him many times. Then Jesus returned to heaven to his father God. But to his followers he was always their king, the ruler of their hearts and lives. And ever since he's been king for those who believe in him. He's the king of my life. Is he king of your life?

Fran: But the story isn't finished yet. One day Jesus will return to this world- with more angels! And in that day everyone will see that he really is king, that he really is God. It says in the Bible that 'every knee will bow down...in heaven, on earth, and under the earth; and every mouth will tell out that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'. (Phil 2:10-11)

Tammy: You know, God loves you so much, he sent Jesus to show you his love, and to die for you. This is the *real* story of Christmas. Have you asked Jesus the Son of God to be your Lord and your king? Have you asked him to save you from your sins? You can do that, simply by praying in your heart. Ask him to accept you, just as you are, and to be king of your life.

If you have questions about Jesus, maybe you can ask someone who follows him, or you could write to us and we'll try to answer your questions. You can contact us at... in care of this station or at TWR Women of Hope.... The address: TWRWomenofhope@twr.org. That's TWRWomenofhope@twr.org.

If you have missed a program or would even like to hear one again you can do that on our website twrwomenofhope.org that's twrwomenofhope.org. or by visiting us on our Facebook page.

Carol: We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings.

Fran: Thank you for spending this time with us. We wish you a very happy Christmas time...

Carol & Tammy: Merry Christmas ...and God bless you.

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