Freddie’s Christmas
(Fiction)
Written by Bill Williamson

The snow barely covered the driveway, but it was
snow. Christmas was barreling down on us quickly and
the weather had changed with a white Christmas laid
out before us.

Christmas had always been white here in these mountains where snow fell regularly in the
winter months. And snow always seemed to begin in late November. Christmas was two days away
and although late the weather had not disappointed us again this year.

Freddie was still upstairs asleep and he had not seen the snow yet. Freddie was eight years old,
but seemed so much older sometimes. He was my best helper and he sought to please me in every
way he could. I am a single mom and life can be a bit challenging on some days. Freddie’s father,
Wes, had slipped off in the night two years ago, leaving a note behind that read, ‘Sorry, Trish, I’ve
got to go work some things out.’

He called once since then. He was having an apologetic moment and said he was simply
working through some things and wanted to know how Freddie and I were doing.

Our marriage had never been a good one. That is because we were both so selfish, I suppose.
He wanted everything to revolve around him and his sports, hunting and fishing to be specific. Now,
I don’t think there is anything wrong with hunting, or fishing, but it was his very life. A life he
placed above mine, and Freddie’s. He had even missed one Christmas morning with Freddie
because of a late bow hunt.

I had been selfish too. I had thought he shouldn’t hunt at all. I didn’t like guns and wished
they were not in the house. I felt that if he loved me he would willingly give up hunting. Maybe a
little fishing once in a while would be okay, as long as it was with me and Freddie.

Making it on our own had been tough but the days turned into weeks and the weeks into
months. And we are still going step by step.

‘Mom! Mom!’ Came the cry from the stairs as Freddie bounded down them two by two. ‘It
snowed, Mom.’

‘Yes, I know,’ I said as he rushed to my side at the door. He opened the door and stepped onto
the porch with intent to go farther.

‘Not yet, you have to get dressed first.’ I pulled on the back of his pajamas against his
resistance. He had waited all month for this snow to come.

I fed Freddie breakfast, made sure he was appropriately dressed, and he disappeared out the
front door to make a snowman. It wouldn’t be a very large one with that skiff of snowfall, I thought.
Our Christmas tree was small but filled the corner of the living room and gave us both the feel of Christmas. Several presents for Freddie were under the tree. Not much, but that would be Christmas this year. Keeping up with utilities and rent didn’t leave much for extras. In fact, there was no extra. I had shaved a few dollars off the groceries for months to make room for his gifts. Freddie didn’t notice the cut back, and I didn’t mind.

Then there was the small ornamental manger scene on the end table next to the tree. There just had to be a manger scene at Christmas. Freddie’s father never saw the reason for a manger scene. In fact he rebelled against it with a fervor saying, ‘We’re not going have a religious thing in our yard.’ A major part of our differences was centered around the need for Jesus Christ in our lives, and he shunned anything that vaguely represented that idea. When Wes left I couldn’t afford an outside manger scene, but I managed this small indoor scene from a thrift store.

I pushed the cookie sheet into the oven and closed the door. One sheet of cookies would be enough for us. It was mainly the smell of cookies in the air that seemed to make more of a holiday atmosphere. Freddie and I would have some with hot chocolate when he came in from playing in the snow.

Tomorrow would be Christmas Eve and we’d make the drive to Tinkerton to my parents house. Freddie always looked forward to going there. There would be more presents for him there, but the biggest thing he looked forward to was Papa’s display in the front yard. Dad had been putting out his manger scene as long as I can remember. I recall that he made most of the manger pieces himself and had found the figurines somewhere in his travels.

Dad delighted in telling the manger story to Freddie, and Freddie seemed just as delighted to hear them again and again.

I yelled from the door, ‘Ok, Freddie, time to come in and dry off.’

‘Just a minute, Mom, I’m almost done with my snowman,’ he said, looking my way. ‘Come and see.’

I stepped back into the house and pulled a sweater over my shoulders and went to see what he had handcrafted out of such a small amount of snow.

I was surprised. There were trails all around the yard and driveway where he had rolled his little ball of snow and gathered enough to make the body parts of his snowman. They were sizeable balls, although they had grasses and leaves stuck to them. He had three balls, one on top of the other, and pieces of broken sticks to mark the eyes, nose and mouth. He had done a good job with very little.

‘That’s great, Freddie,’ I said. ‘You can be proud of that little snowman.’

He beamed and came to my side and stood with his hands on his hips. I could see that he was pleased with his snowman.

I took him by the hand and turned toward the door. The words that Freddie said next stunned me.

‘That’s Dad,’ he said. ‘I remember. That’s what he looks like.’

I didn’t know what to say, but managed a few words. ‘It does kinda look like him too, Freddie. Come on, let’s get you dried off.’

Freddie added more, ‘Dad is coming home for Christmas.’

‘We’ll see,’ I said, hoping that the subject would change.

We went inside and once Freddie smelled the cookies there was nothing else that could be done, but have that hot chocolate with some cookies.

I couldn’t put his words out of my mind. ‘Dad is coming home for Christmas.’ Where did that
Sleep sometimes came slow for Freddie, but this night he soon dropped into a deep slumber. The next morning he was out of his bed and standing beside mine just as light was starting to peer past my bedroom window blinds.

He was excited as he exclaimed, ‘We’re going to Papa’s house today!’

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘We are going after we eat breakfast and load the car.’

‘Can we eat now?’ Freddie squealed as his eyebrows rose sharply.

‘Go brush your teeth and make your bed, and I’ll fix breakfast,’ I replied.

He ran off in the direction of the bathroom.

Soon the breakfast dishes were cleaned up, and we were loaded into the car. It was an hour’s drive to Dad’s and we were looking forward to seeing him. Mom had died four years ago leaving Dad missing her and a little sad at the loss. But, he had settled quickly and was now well adjusted to living alone. He was retired and spent his days in his wood shop making all sorts of things. He mostly made things on request, and never accepted any payment for them. Sometimes he would make an item he had always wanted to make and then find someone to give it to. He would be glad we were coming.

The manger scene was already in the yard, and had been all month. Dad wanted to remind people what Christmas was really about. He was quick to tell everyone who would listen.

He was standing on the porch at the front door when we pulled into the driveway. Freddie was unbuckled and almost out of the car before it stopped. He and Papa met halfway and Dad pulled him up off the ground and held him close.

Before Dad could put him down Freddie exclaimed loudly, ‘Dad’s coming for Christmas.’

As we started into the house, I explained about Freddie’s idea of his snowman being dad and the part about him coming home.

Dad was direct, ‘That would really be something if he did come.’

I shot my response back at him quickly. ‘I’m not so sure about that Dad,’

Dad tipped his head down in that familiar way indicating he had something very important to say, ‘Honey, it is not God’s will that you are apart. And He is in the reconciliation business. You know that.’

‘Well, God will have to do a miracle for him to show up tomorrow wanting to be a husband and father. I’ll have to see it to believe it.’ And with that I turned to see what Freddie was doing. I hoped that would be the end of that discussion.

In the beginning I had hoped that Freddie’s father would come back. That he would be changed and he would finally become a good husband and a proper father to Freddie. But those thoughts had faded into the distant past as time wore on. I’m not sure what I would do now if he showed up on our doorstep. I don’t think I could take it.

I had come to believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior just before Wes and I had married. I don’t know what took me so long. I had known since a youth that God wanted to save each one of us from eternal punishment, but I just couldn’t make a decision to take part in God’s plan. My life had changed for the better since I turned control over to the Lord. Now I wouldn’t want to live any other way. Somehow I figured that Wes had not ever considered Jesus as a way of life and how could I live with him if he had not.

Freddie tugged at his Papa’s hand saying, ‘Tell me the story, Papa. Tell me the story.’

Dad knew what story Freddie was talking about. It was customary on this visit every year for him to tell Freddie the story of Jesus’ birth in the manger. He took Freddie by the hand and opened
the door. ‘OK, Freddie, let’s go out to the manger.’

Dad knelt in the straw in front of the manger scene and pulled Freddie close to him and began.

‘You see, Freddie, the world was very bad. It was so bad that God knew he had to send someone to help the people do what was right. God knew he had no one to send, so what could he do? That person needed to be a man, but needed to be God too.

God had an idea, “I’ll go myself. I’ll become man and still be God too.”’

‘How can he do that?’ Freddie asked.

Dad had the answer to that question, ‘Well Freddie, with us it is impossible, but with God, all things are possible. God can do whatever he wants to do, and he knew this was a good thing to do.’

Dad continued the story. ‘God became man, and that meant he must come as a baby born to a woman, because that is the way a human comes into the world. God picked a girl named Mary who was going to have a husband named Joseph to be the mother of the baby that he would name Jesus.’

‘Is that Jesus?’ Freddie asked pointing at the baby figurine in the manger.

‘That isn’t the real Jesus, but it shows us how small Jesus was when he came into the world. He was dependent upon Mary, his mother, just like you were dependent upon your mother when you were a baby.’

‘Was I that small, Papa?’

‘Yes you were, Freddie,’ Dad said.

The story went on. ‘Mary had the little baby Jesus in a manger almost like this more than two thousand years ago. He was a good boy and always helped his parents just like you do Freddie. Jesus helped his father, Joseph, build things from wood. His daddy was a carpenter and Jesus learned to do those things too.

Jesus knew something that no one else knew. He knew that he was God who had become man. And he knew that he had a purpose and that purpose was to make a way for wicked man to come to heaven and spend all eternity with God.’

Freddie blurted out, ‘Are we going to heaven, Papa?’

‘Yes we will,’ Dad responded. ‘And do you know why, Freddie?’

‘Why, Papa?’

‘We will be in heaven one day because we have believed that Jesus came to earth to save us, and that we can live forever with him. We told him with our own mouth that we believe, and we try to live our lives without sin so that we can please him. You did that last year, do you remember?’

‘Yes, Papa, I remember when you prayed with me at Christmas.’

‘Your Granny believed too, Freddie. She is with Jesus right now. You see, when we die we go to be with Jesus in heaven.’

‘Let’s get back to the story,’ Dad said. ‘It was a good thing when God became a baby and came to save us, but many did not like that. They were wicked and wanted to kill Jesus. But, Jesus got to tell lots of people how to get saved so they could be with God forever in heaven when they died.

The wicked men finally did hang Jesus on a cross and killed him. Jesus died because God had set a law into motion that required that blood had to be shed as a sacrifice to cover our sins. So, Jesus became that sacrifice for our sins, everyone’s sins. And the only requirement that God made for us, is to believe in Jesus and what he did for us on that cross. And part of that is turning from our sin and trying not to sin any more.’

‘Sometimes I sin, Papa.’ Freddie looked up from the manger and into Dad’s eyes as he made
that declaration.

‘I know you do, Freddie. But that is OK, because you always say you’re sorry and try not to do it again, don’t you?’

‘Yes, Papa.’

Dad continued. ‘Jesus is God, so he couldn’t stay in the grave. He could not stay dead. And he had told some of those that followed him that he would come out of the grave after three days. And he did just that. Because he is God, the grave could not hold him in death.’

‘Is Jesus alive right now, Papa?’

‘Yes, he is, Freddie. He sits at the right hand of God in heaven. And he is coming back to earth one day to take all of us who believe back to heaven with him. That is the “Good News” that we are waiting for.’

Dad wasn’t ready for the next question that came from Freddie, ‘Is daddy going to heaven, Papa?’

Dad paused and said, ‘I don’t know, Freddie. If he has believed in Jesus and turned away from sin, he will.’

‘Daddy’s coming home, Papa.’

‘If he does, Freddie, that will be an answer to my prayers. I have been praying for that a long time.’

Freddie wrinkled his little face and said, ‘God answers prayer doesn’t he?’

‘Yes, he does if we ask things that he wants us to ask,’ Dad answered. ‘God is like a good father, and he wants to give good things to his children. And we are his children when we believe in Jesus.’

Suddenly, story time was over and Freddie bounded for the house. Dad stood up and smiled. He was always thankful to tell Freddie the story about Jesus.

The drive back home went quickly as Freddie talked about the gifts he had gotten from Papa. Soon we were tucking in for the night and Freddie was excited about the next morning. Christmas was about to arrive.

Light poured through my bedroom window and I realized that Freddie had not come into my room yet. He always came in on Christmas morning before I woke up. I slipped out of bed, put on my housecoat and slippers, stepped into the hallway and made the left turn into Freddie’s room.

There he was half under the covers and half out of the covers. He looked like he had been wrestling all night. I pulled the cover over the half of his body that needed it and slipped from his room.

Coffee was soon making its joyful morning noise and gurgling the dark, and rich blend into the pot. I love the smell of the coffee making, but not as much as the taste of that first cup each morning.

I pulled the pot from the coffee maker and hovered over my cup to pour. Just then I noticed a pick-up truck pull into our driveway. ‘Who could that be,’ I whispered to myself?

I couldn’t make out the driver at all. The glare on the windshield kept me from seeing into the cab. I put the pot back in the coffee maker and stepped sideways away from the window so that I wouldn’t be seen watching so easily.

The driver’s door of the truck opened a few inches and then paused. Then more, and a leg dropped to the driveway. It was a man in jeans. That is all I knew for a moment until he stepped from behind the open truck door.

I didn’t believe what I was looking at. It was Wes. What was he doing here? And of all days,
He just stood there like he wasn’t sure why he was there. He wore a nice blue jacket above the jeans that were pulled down over the top of shiny black boots. Wes was a boot man, I would have been surprised if he had something else on. He turned back to the truck like he was going to leave, and then like he changed his mind, he turned again toward the house and swung the truck door closed.

He started across the drive and onto the sidewalk leading to the house.

I pushed my hair back, pulled my robe together tighter, and headed for the front door. I opened the door before the knock came and stared straight into Wes’s eyes.

‘What do you want?’ I spoke to him in a louder voice than I planned.

‘Hi Trish,’ he said. ‘Can I come in?’

‘What do you want?’ I repeated.

‘I just want to talk to you for a few minutes. I’ve been working up to this all night,’ he said.

Just then the pounding of Freddie’s little feet hitting the stair treads could be heard and he came bounding across the living room toward me.

‘Dad,’ he screamed as he saw Wes standing outside the screen door.

Freddie arrived at the door full run and I swung the door open and he flew into Wes’s open arms. The embrace was long, and silent. You couldn’t have slid a tissue paper between their cheeks as they hugged.

‘You better come in out of the cold,’ I said.

Wes stepped in still holding Freddie close.

Before we knew it, we were all sitting on the floor around the Christmas tree and presents were being opened. Freddie was as happy as I had seen him for two years. And Wes seemed somehow different and enjoying his son like never before. But I was eager to know why he had come.

I made Freddie hot chocolate and poured a cup of coffee for myself and Wes. Freddie was playing on the floor near the tree as Wes and I sat down at the kitchen table.

‘OK, Wes! Tell me why you are here.’ I said.

He began.

‘Here it is. Last night I was feeling lonely, and missing being part of a family. Maybe it was the holiday thing. Holidays always seem worse when you are alone. Christmas didn’t seem to mean a thing to me and I just couldn’t stay in the apartment any longer.

I went for a walk just to get out of the apartment. The streets were really empty. I guess everyone was somewhere celebrating Christmas Eve. I walked for a long time not knowing where I was going. I turned the corner onto Collins Avenue and saw that old church you used to like. There in the front of the church was a manger scene all lit up, with hay and all.

I crossed the street for some reason and walked to the church. I stood there looking at the figurines. There was Joseph, Mary, other men, and a bunch of animals. My eyes fell on the plastic baby in the makeshift manger and I spoke, maybe out loud. ‘Why all this fussing about you, little plastic baby?’

At that moment a side door opened at the church and a beam of light flooded out onto the snow. A man stepped out and walked directly to me. ‘You like it?’ he asked.

‘I don’t know if I would say that,’ I responded. ‘I’m not even sure what it is all about.’

The man responded, ‘I’m just about to open the front door. People will start arriving soon for our Christmas Eve service. Won’t you come in? Maybe you’ll begin to see for yourself what it is all about.’
Thinking I really didn’t want to do that, I hesitated before saying, “I don’t know.”

“It won’t last long,” he said. “We want people to have plenty of time to spend with family tonight.”

I wasn’t sure what propelled me, but I said, “What can it hurt?” And I followed him to the side door. There was no one inside but me and him. I went to the very back of the sanctuary and sat down.

More people began to come in and some songs were sung. And then the man, who turned out to be the pastor, stood up and began talking to us. He said, “I want to explain why there is a baby out there in that manger,” and he pointed toward the street.

He started out talking about how God created the heavens and the earth. I wondered at that point what that had to do with that baby. Soon the story drew me in. I was hearing things I had never heard before, things about sin, repentance, and forgiveness. And when he mentioned forgiveness something began to tug at my heart. I was feeling very vulnerable, but also felt close to something. Something was drawing me in and I liked it.

Soon he stopped with the story and just stood there. He looked at me and said, “Some of you have always put yourselves first, and left no room for Jesus. Well, things in your life can improve dramatically if you’ll turn that around and accept what that baby in the manger grew up and accomplished on the cross for you.”

That was all that he had to say. He dismissed everyone and wished us a good holiday.

The people chatted a bit and eventually all had gone. I left the building and stopped again and was just standing looking at that baby in the manger. Then I noticed the pastor standing beside me. He stood there silently for a moment before turning to face me and asked, “Are you ready to accept what he has done for you?”

I fought the tears that began to trickle out of my eyes and I somehow got the words out, “Yes. Yes I am.”

He prayed for me right there in front of that manger scene. He asked me to repeat my commitment to Jesus, and my statement of repentance. Something happened to me for sure. I see something different now.

I’m here because I want us to have another start. I’m sorry for the way I treated you and Freddie.’

He reached over and took my hand. His touch was tender and I knew that this was a new Wes. He had encountered the Jesus that the baby had grown into.

He looked at me and said, ‘Can you forgive me, Trish? Can we start over?’

I had dreamed of this moment many times, and now that it had come I wasn’t sure I wanted it. Was the change real? How could I know for sure? But something inside me was saying, ‘trust me.’

My answer came as though propelled by trust. ‘If we can move slow, Wes.’ And I took his other hand.

I don’t know how little Freddie knew that his daddy was coming home today, but I’m thankful that he did know. I hadn’t thought of anything else since he told me. And now here sat Wes and I holding hands and a whole new start in front of us.

This is turning out to be some Christmas. Thank you, Jesus.