

**The giving trees**  
**Advent 3 (B)**  
**December 14, 2014**

She was a single mother with four young children, working a minimum-wage job. Money was tight, but she managed to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table and clothes on their backs. She was happy that her children did not realize they were poor — they just thought Mom was cheap.

At Christmas time, they would celebrate with church and family, special dinners and treats, and decorating their small home. But the big excitement was the fun of Christmas shopping at the mall. The kids talked and planned for weeks, asking each other and their mom what they wanted for Christmas. Mom dreaded it. She had managed to save \$120 for presents for all five.

When the big day arrived, they drove to the mall. Mom gave each of the four a \$20-bill and reminded them to look for gifts of about four dollars each. They had two hours to shop; they would then meet back at the Santa's workshop display.

Back in the car on the way home, everyone was in high Christmas spirits, laughing and teasing each other with hints as to what they had bought. But eight-year-old Ginger was unusually quiet. Ginger

had only one small flat bag. Mom could see through the plastic bag that she had bought candy-bars — five fifty-cent candy bars. What did she do with the twenty dollars? Mom was livid, but she said nothing until they got home.

Mom called Ginger into her bedroom and closed the door and asked her what she had done with the money. Ginger explained:

“I was looking around, thinking about what to buy, and I stopped and read the little cards on one of the Salvation Army’s ‘giving trees.’ One of the cards was for a little girl four years old, and all she wanted for Christmas was a doll with clothes and a hairbrush. So I took the card off the tree and bought the doll and hairbrush for her and took them to the Salvation Army booth.

“I only had enough money left to buy candy bars for us, but we have so much and she doesn’t have anything.”

Hugging her daughter, Mom never felt as rich as she did that Christmas.

[Kathleen Dixon, from **Hearts ‘n Souls.**]

**Light is the central image of today’s Gospel: John proclaims the coming of the Messiah as the light who will shatter the darkness that envelopes**

**our world, the light who illuminates our vision with compassion and justice. The light John proclaims already shines within Ginger, enabling her to realize her own blessings and to see beyond her wants and to make another child's wishes come true. May the light of God's Christ burn within us, melting the winter cold of despair and self-absorption; may his light open our eyes to see God's goodness in our midst, enabling us to make crooked roads straight and bring joy to barren places.**