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The Christmas story once again peals out upon a happy little stereophonic, filter-tip world of parking tickets, bluebooks and dexedrine.

The booming carols in glittering, teeming department stores remind us of the joyous message — that we can shelve our books for bottles and speed over turnpikes to share a few precious days with our families, old friends, and perhaps lavishing what remains of ourselves and our wallets on a special someone.

Strange that the humble birth of a baby in an obscure village of the Near East a couple of thousand years ago should so disrupt the pattern of The Good Life that even the New York Stock Exchange pauses for the day.

Odd that church bells in Brussels, Boston, Buenos Aires and Biloxi ring out to commemorate the coming of a child who would never know the intricacies of economic warfare and foreign policy, much less the diplomacy of cocktail party etiquette.

Funny that angels and shepherds should share top billing with Maverick, missiles, and sensational murders.

More unusual still are the moments amid tinsel and egg-nog when we realize that this celebrated infant of a far-off time and place was a living symbol of all the love and humanity that man can ever hope to know.