



# The Pilgrim

*“All the trumpets sounded for him on the other side”*

—PILGRIM’S PROGRESS

O. P. Kretzmann

December, 1967

Dear Son:

It was almost midnight last night when I drove home from Chicago... A cold November rain beat against the windshield, and a bitter wind wailed across the prairies... Suddenly, just where the road turns away from the lake, I noticed snowflakes mingled with the rain... Winter had come... It was time to write you another letter about Christmas...

As I drove the rest of the way, the fields turned white with that still whiteness which is the charm of our northern winters... These nights, these long and quiet winter nights, are made for silence, the sweet and mortal memory of other days when the way ahead was much longer than it is now, and the going by of the years was broken into the happy march of days free of care and unburdened by fear... I slowed the car down and tried to think of all the things that I would like to have you know and remember in 1990... the things you will need then as we need them now, when all our hearts are so far away from Christmas...

Perhaps, I thought, we ought to begin with the little things... The things of the earth... I hope you will be in a place where you can watch the seasons come and go, the wonder of spring, the turning leaf, the galleries of the stars, the joy of summer, the frozen grief of winter... You will need the awareness of these things as a constant balance against what men do in the innocent earth and the unheeding years... You will find it, I hope, a strange and comforting contrast... And you will, I fear, need that in 1990 even more than we do in 1967...

I hope, too, that you will have other things... The light from the windows of home on autumn nights, a few books, a fire, music now and then, good friends who can make life vocal as the hours turn toward morning... And always, from the far shore beyond the years, the sound of singing, fainter now than ever in 1967, but perhaps stronger again in 1990...

And that brings me to Christmas... My trip to Chicago was to attend

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a meeting in which we talked about the problems of the Church... The problems were great, and we talked, not too wisely, about education and missions and plans and programs and surveys... I should confess to you that I have been doing that for a long time now and that I am very tired of it... Perhaps by 1990 you will know that there were two things wrong with what we did in 1967: first, we talked much too long, and did not act enough; and secondly, we talked only about abstractions... We were little, bewildered, anxious people, and we thought we could do something about the world's darkness by talking about the light instead of being it, living it, and loving it with every beat of our hurting hearts...

Many years have now come and gone since I wrote my first Christmas letter to you... War was on the earth then —just as it is now; men hated and feared and died — just as they do now; peace came silently to a few on Christmas Eve —just as it does now...

As each year comes to Advent, I like to think that your faith in Christmas has grown deeper and wider... Once the joy of a child over the Child made real by lights and toys and laughter it should now become the thoughtful joy of a man — the ancient peace which you can know but never understand... the vigilant spirit hearing at Christmas the pulse-beat of eternity... Sometime Christmas 1967 will be long ago for you and you will know either the treachery of Time or the sureness of heaven... and only the enlightening or darkening years will tell that story...

A few days ago I saw again the lines written by a friend thirty years ago:

With measured pace unto the lectern place

Passeth the priest and reads:

*“In the beginning was the Word...”*

Strange, mystic words — so heard!

For, lo, is all not over?

The Vine is riven, the Winepress trodden,

The last Drop shedded by the Divine Lover

Sodden with love for sinned and shriven;

And e'en the little acolyte

Holds snuffer ready for the candlelight

(His mind on cake and applesauce

The while responding “Deo gratias”!)

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Softly as some far chiming golden bell  
Inlaid with angel minstrelsy,  
Intoned beside the glassy Sea,  
Heralds this cradling of our years  
And sounds the knell for darksome fears:

*“In the beginning was the Word...”*

Believe not, Mortal, that thy days  
Lose bitter-barren through Time’s portal  
And no good hopes betide: for those immortal,  
Fair words of John herald to men  
A Christmas lovely now as when

*“In the beginning was the Word...” Amen.*

