

## Mrs. MaGee's Christmas Tree



By Michael J. Peck

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Centerville Square is a nice little town. It has a pretty river that runs through downtown. On hot summer days, boys and girls love to hop, splash and play in it. One old bridge spans the shallow river, and lots of pretty houses are found on both sides.

Everyone likes Officer Ralph, the town's one and only policeman. Folks remember the only time he had to turn on the red flashing lights of his police car. That was when Mr. Henry turned in front of Mrs. Livingston and dented the fender of her car. No one knows why he turned his red lights on because no one was driving past. Everyone stopped to see the dent. Was poor Mr. Henry embarrassed! Mrs. Livingston insisted it was all her fault, even though it wasn't.

The town has their own cat named Hector. In the morning Mrs. Morgan feeds him at her front door. Every afternoon Hector jumps up at Mrs. Matteson's front window. That's the sign that he is ready for his supper. Everyone stops to pet Hector the very plump cat, except Mrs. Overstone. She says, "It makes my dog, Benjamin, bark too much."

Every morning the sun rises over the little hills on the Grandpa Worthington Farms. Then, every night, the sun sets over the Grandson Worthington Farms. You also might like to know that Mrs. Dudley has some of the prettiest flowers you've ever seen.

You would like Centerville Square. It's a nice place to live--nice, except for one thing that is. Centerville Square has three tornadoes!

Timmy, Sam, and Pete are brothers who live with their mom and dad in Centerville Square. Most folks in town call them "The Three Tornadoes"! They live on Pleasant Avenue. It is kind of strange because even though they have a happy sounding street, their home is not very pleasant.

Coming up their sidewalk, which is very uneven because the roots from the tree have pushed up some of the pieces of sidewalk, you find a big front porch and a house that really needs some new paint.

Inside Tim, Sam, and Pete complain as they talk with their mom. "But Mom, everyone in town has lights up at Christmas time. Can't we please have lights this year?" they ask.

"I am sure your dad will say no," Mom said with a little bit of sadness in her voice. "You can ask him, but I already know the answer," Mom said as she kept washing the dishes.

“Yeah,” said Timmy. “I can hear him now.” Then he made his voice sound low like Dad’s voice. “We are the Pattersons. We don’t believe in church. We don’t believe in Christmas, and we don’t believe in lights. Costs too much.” Timmy said as he pushed his stomach way out to look like his dad’s.

“Now then, you mind your manners,” Mother said sternly. “Even though that is probably what Dad will say, don’t you go disrespecting your father. That’s no way to talk. You mind your manners, or I’ll give you a good slap, understand me, mister?”

Then Mother continued talking to her boys, “And just why would we want lights up at this time of year? We don’t go to church, and we don’t believe in Christmas. We don’t need that stuff.”

The brothers were sad that another year would go by without any Christmas lights and not even any Christmas presents.

According to their dad, Christmas was just a chance for stores to make money. They were the Pattersons, and they didn’t believe in all that stuff.

A couple of days later, the boys were out on their bicycles. Even though it was snowing, they loved to ride their bikes really, really fast through town in the snow.

Over on East Street, Mr. Whipple’s dog would bark very loudly from the big front window as they stopped in front of his house. “Hey Bark, Bark, Barkowitz. How are ya?” Sam would call as they quickly peddled away.

Racing through town on Willow Winding Way, they loved to scream as they tore up and down the street. Mrs. VonSmooten was very crabby. She didn’t like boys and girls, and every time the Patterson boys rode up and down the street in front of her house, she would yell from her window, “You boys are the three tornadoes. Go home, or I’ll call the police!” And off they would ride and laugh and laugh.

On the way back home, they decided to stop and spend the last of their change on some candy at Karen’s Candy Corner. Miss Karen is a nice lady. She never seemed to mind the way the boys looked. Even though their hair was seldom combed, and even though they were loud and rude, Miss Karen always said something nice to them.

After choosing their candy bars, it was time to pay and be on their way. Miss Karen took their money and said, “So boys, I have some news for you!”

“What news?” Pete asked.

“Did you want to tell us that the school burned down and that we will never have to go back again?” Sam interrupted. The brothers laughed and high-fived each other as they thought of Sam’s silly question.

“Quiet, you two,” Tim said with authority in his voice. “Listen to what Miss Karen has to say. Now, what’s the news, Miss Karen?”

“Well, the house next door to you that has been empty for so long is not going to be empty for very much longer. A couple from my church has bought the old Connally home and very soon will be moving in. In fact, Maggie MaGee is one of my best friends. You will really like them,” Miss Karen said.

“Oh no,” the boys said. “Now we can’t jump off their garage roof anymore.”

“Garage roof?” asked Miss Karen with fear in her voice. “You boys really are the three tornadoes!” she said as she shook her head and smiled. “As for you three, you are really going to like the MaGees,” Miss Karen assured them.

That night as they were eating supper, the three tornadoes were excited to be the ones to tell Mom and Dad about the new neighbors.

That brought up the big question. Pete looked at Sam. Sam looked at Timmy. Timmy looked back and nodded at them but then shook his head ‘no’ as Dad was looking up from his spaghetti.

“What’s going on?” Dad growled. “What have you three tornadoes done now? Have you been back at Whipple’s house again tormenting his poor dog?” He sounded angry.

Timmy spoke up. “We only rode by and said ‘hi’ to Spot.”

Peter hollered across the table, “Yeah, but Sam screamed and called him Bark, Bark, Barkowski. Oops. Probably shouldn’t have told you that,” he concluded.

“I did not call him Bark, Bark, Barkowski. I called him Bark, Bark, Barkowitz,” Sam said as he folded his arms and stuck out his lip.

But Dad, there is, ummmm, well,” Tim stuttered, “there is something that we kind of, sort of...”

“Well, speak up!” Dad shouted.

Timmy almost tipped his water over as he tried to speak. “Dad, we were all just kind of, sort of, well, we were thinking maybe this year we ought to get some lights. Just this year. Just a little bit, Dad?” Tim managed to speak.

“Now, listen you three. We go through this every year. We are the Pattersons, and we don’t believe in all this Christmas stuff. The answer is no. It’s just silly how these stores are trying to take my money away. The answer is no!” Dad shouted and slapped his hand on the table.

The rest of supper was very quiet. Later in their room, the three boys whispered about the Christmas lights at the homes of other people. They whispered about being afraid of their dad and wondered why he was so mean.

Downstairs Mom and Dad were arguing again. They talked meanly to each other almost every night.

“You didn’t have to yell,” Mom said. “What’s the matter with you? Even though we don’t go to church and don’t believe in Christmas, you don’t have to be mean!” Mom screamed as she started to cry.

“Nonsense. All this is nonsense!” Dad shouted back. “And I’ll hear no more about it,” he said as he picked up the paper and pretended to be reading it. “It’s my house, and I say no Christmas lights.”

Back upstairs as the boys continued to whisper, Timmy said to the other boys, “But what if Christmas is true? A lot of people seem to believe it.”

“But what does Christmas even mean?” Pete asked.

“We’ve never believed in Christmas. Why would we start believing in it now?” Sam piped in.

“I don’t know,” Timmy said, “but I want to know about Christmas. I want to know what it means even if I don’t believe in it,” he said, pointing his finger at his brothers.



Three days later it was snowing and the winds were blowing as the rental truck pulled up next door. Many men and women came and helped take

things from the truck to the house. The three tornadoes couldn't stand it any longer.

Flying down the stairs, they tore out of the house and ran down the sidewalk. Never had the boys seen so many people carrying so many things into a house. This was more fun than watching the Memorial Day parade when the two fire trucks, Officer Ralph in his police car, and the town marching band would parade through Centerville Square. Watching the folks unload the truck would be more fun than the time in the parade when Officer Ralph turned on the siren of his police car and frightened Mrs. Hodgins, causing her to spill her orange juice on Mr. Hodgins' lap!

"Hello there!" called Timmy.

"We're the three tornadoes, and we live next door to you!" said Sam.

"Well, I am very happy to meet you," said Maggie MaGee. "Miss Karen told me about you, and I have been looking forward to meeting you. I am delighted to be your new next door neighbor. After I get things settled in my home, I would love to have you come over and have some cookies and see our Christmas tree." Mrs. MaGee patted the boys on the head. "It is almost Christmas. I love Christmas. How about you boys?"

"Christmas tree?" Timmy said. "You actually have a real Christmas tree? You believe in Christmas? You really, really have a Christmas tree?" Timmy asked in disbelief.

There was going to be somebody who lived right next door who really believed in Christmas! The boys were determined to find out if Christmas was real or not.

Several days went by as the three tornadoes watched Mr. and Mrs. MaGee coming and going from their new house. The boys would kneel by their windows, pulling back the curtains just a teeny tiny bit. Late one morning they were peeking at Mrs. MaGee who was unloading her car. Thinking they could not be seen, they watched her from their window. Were they ever surprised when she looked up and with a big smile on her face waved at them! They flew down on the floor to hide.

Sam squealed, "We're busted! She saw us. We've got to be more careful in the future," the boys decided. With that, they loudly flew into the kitchen, asking Mom when lunch would be ready.

Later that day the doorbell rang. The boys panicked when they saw Mrs. MaGee standing at the front door. They were sure that she was going to tell their mom they had been spying on her. They were very afraid. The three tornadoes thought they were in trouble again!

Mom opened the door and Mrs. MaGee said, "Hello Mrs. Patterson. I am Maggie MaGee. It is my pleasure to live next door to you, and I want you to know that you have three fine gentlemen in your house. Timmy, Sammy, and Pete have gone out of their way to make me feel very welcome in the neighborhood," she said.

"Come right in, Maggie. My name is Sue, and I must tell you I am not sure I have ever heard my boys called three fine gentlemen. Most folks in town call them the three tornadoes. Please, please come in," Mom said as she motioned toward the couch.

"I will be delighted to come in another time, but I can't today. However I am wondering if it would be possible for me to hire your three fine gentlemen, or as some folks I guess call them, the three tornadoes, for a few hours. I have a little more unpacking to do, and I surely could use some help decorating my Christmas tree. I would like to hire your boys, if you would not mind," Maggie MaGee said.

"Well, I guess, um, I'm not sure that's a good idea," Mom stuttered and tried to find the right words. "I don't want them breaking something."

"We'll be careful, Mom!" Pete said, almost pleading with his mother.

Sammy interrupted everybody and said, "Yeah Mom, I promise to be careful."

Timmy made his mother laugh when he said, "Come on, Mom. You can trust us. We never do anything wrong! Well, I guess probably I shouldn't have said that, but please, Mom, we really want to help Mrs. MaGee, please!"

Mom thought for a second or two and then said, "I guess, well, I guess that will be all right. But I do want you to know, Maggie, that we don't believe in Christmas. But if you still want them, they can help you."

She turned to the boys, "You boys be careful. Mind your manners. Don't break anything. Come home when the neighbor tells ya. Don't..."

With that Mrs. MaGee said, "Mrs. Patterson, your boys will be fine. They'll be home in a couple of hours," she assured the boys' mother.

With that, they were off to the MaGee home on a visit that would change the direction of their lives!

When the three tornadoes walked in, they stood silently for a moment. Christmas music was quietly playing throughout the house. A song they

had never heard before was playing. Singers were beautifully saying, “O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.”

Wonderful smells of freshly baked Christmas cookies, a beautifully decorated house, and a very nice Mrs. MaGee welcomed the boys to the house next door.

“Hang your coats up right here, boys,” said Mrs. MaGee. “Come on in and let’s get to work. We’ll take a break in a little bit and have some cookies and hot chocolate. But first, follow me.” Mrs. MaGee motioned to the boys.

Through the dining room into the family room the three tornadoes followed Mrs. MaGee. There it stood! The Christmas tree. A real Christmas tree. The boys were standing before Mr. and Mrs. MaGee’s real Christmas tree. One of them gently touched it. The other two sniffed in the beautiful smell of a real living Christmas tree. Never had they stood before a real Christmas tree inside a person’s house. Never!

“I really need some help decorating our Christmas tree,” Mrs. MaGee told them. “I am so happy your mom allowed you to help me today,” she said.

“We don’t have a Christmas tree,” Sam quietly said. He sounded very sad about that.

“Yeah. We don’t even have any lights,” Tim said with the same tone in his voice.

“Well,” said Mrs. MaGee, “let me ask, what do you boys want for Christmas?”

The boys were silent. Finally Peter spoke very quietly, “We never have presents. Dad tells us that the stores just want his money. We don’t go to church, and we don’t believe in Christmas.”

“You don’t believe in Christmas?” Mrs. MaGee said in disbelief.

“What does all this stuff even mean?” Peter asked.

As Mrs. MaGee pulled the box of decorations for the tree just a little bit closer, she said, “Well, let me tell you about Christmas. This is the time of year that we remember how God’s Son left His home in Heaven to come to this earth to be born in a manger in a town called Bethlehem. Would you like me to read it to you from the Bible?” she asked.

Almost immediately all three of the boys told her they really did want to hear about it. They explained that every time they asked about Christmas,



Dad got mad. They didn't know if they believed in Christmas or not, but they really wanted to hear about it from the Bible.

Mrs. MaGee picked her Bible up from the coffee stand and turned to Luke 2 and started reading at verse seven. She read, "And she brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo the angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

The three tornadoes were silent. They had never heard the message of Christmas from the Bible. Mrs. MaGee was the first person to ever read anything from the Bible to Tim, Sam, and Peter.

Pete was the first to say anything. He said, "I don't understand it, but I believe it!"

Sam said, "How can you believe something you don't even understand?"

Tim asked the question, "What does 'Savior' mean?"

Mrs. MaGee called the boys to sit down near to her so she could explain to them what the Bible means about the Lord Jesus being our Savior. She explained that everyone is a sinner. The three tornadoes already believed that they were sinners!

Tim said, "I know my brothers are sinners. They are really bad, Mrs. MaGee."

"What do you mean?" shouted Sam. "You're as bad as we are. Remember what you did to Mr. Cleveland's shed?"

With that Mrs. MaGee interrupted and said, "Boys, enough, enough. We ALL have sinned. You have sinned. I have sinned." And before she could say another word, Peter's mouth flew open and said, "Mrs. MaGee. You have sinned? WOW! Imagine that, guys. Mrs. MaGee has sinned."

She went on to tell them about God. She explained how God is very holy. She told the boys that God could never allow sin to come into His presence.

She explained how the Lord Jesus left His home in Heaven to be born so that He could take our place. She explained that God has to punish sin

and that the Lord Jesus died on the cross and shed His blood, taking our punishment upon Himself.

The boys were amazed to think that the Son of God took their punishment. Tim reminded them of the time he got punished for what Sam did. "I didn't like that at all," he said as he gave Sam a little shove.

"Boys, listen now, and don't miss the wonderful part," Mrs. MaGee said very quietly.

She told the boys the wonderful news that three days after Jesus died on the cross, He rose from the dead! Anyone who is sorry for their sins and asks Him to be their Savior can be forgiven, Mrs. MaGee fully explained to them.

She thought the boys seemed to be amazed. They just sat and looked at each other and then looked at her in astonishment. So that's what Christmas means! God's Son came to the earth as a little baby to take their punishment.

All three tornadoes believed it. The Bible said it, Mrs. MaGee read it, and they believed it.

As they started to work on decorating the tree, Pete was the one to notice the other decorations in the house. At least he was the one who asked what all those different decorations meant.

Mrs. MaGee replied, "Well, these lights remind me that the Lord Jesus is the Light of the world, according to John 8:12. The gifts that we give each other remind me of God's greatest Gift given through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, which is found in John 3:16."

Before she could say anything more, Sam pointed to the Christmas wreath and said, "What's that for?"

"I'm so glad you saw that, Sammy. That reminds me of two things," Mrs. MaGee said with a smile on her face. "Oh boys," she said very quietly. "First, it reminds me of the crown of thorns that very mean people put on Jesus' head. Second, it means that the Lord Jesus can make something beautiful out of my life, even though I have sinned."

"Hey Mrs. MaGee!" said Peter. "How come you have so many candles over by your fireplace?"

Mrs. MaGee hugged him and with her other hand patted the heads of Sammy and Timmy. "Boys, those candles remind me of how warm I feel and how good it is to know that I belong to the Lord Jesus and that He

loves me and is patient with me. Did you know that the book of Jeremiah in the Bible, chapter 31 and verse 3 tells us that God loves us with a love that lasts forever?"

The three tornadoes looked at each other but did not speak a word.

"What's wrong, boys? Did I say something that made you sad?" Mrs. MaGee asked very earnestly.

After a moment of looking at each other, Peter said, "Mrs. MaGee, no one has ever told us that anyone loves us. Maybe Ma told us she loved us; I can't remember. But I know no one ever told us that God loves us. No one loves us, Mrs. MaGee," Peter said as he looked down.

"Yeah, I can't even remember Mom or Dad ever telling us that. Does God really, really love us? Does He really love us even though we call Mr. Whipple's dog Bark Bark Barkowitz and make Mr. Whipple mad?" Sam asked.

Mrs. MaGee tried not to smile. She said, "Yes, Peter, Sam and Timmy. God does not like it when you sin, but He really does love you even when you call Mr. Whipple's dog Bark, Bark, Barkowitz and make him mad. He wants you to ask Jesus to be your Savior," Mrs. MaGee assured them.

"What about the Christmas tree?" asked Sammy. "We never had a Christmas tree. Why do you have one?"

Mrs. MaGee placed another decoration on the tree as she said, "Boys, the Christmas tree is what we call an evergreen. This reminds me of the eternal life that the Lord Jesus gives those who ask Him to be their own Savior.

Remember I told you about John 3:16 in the Bible? Well boys, that wonderful verse teaches us that God loves us so much that He gave His only Son-- in fact the Bible says 'His only begotten Son'-- that whosoever believes in Him won't perish. That word 'perish' means to be lost, to be punished forever away from the presence of the Lord. But think of it, boys, for those who ask Jesus to be their Savior, God will forgive them and give to them everlasting life."

"Wow!" Sam said. "We had no idea that all these things remind us about Jesus coming to this earth to be our Savior. I don't know about my brothers, but I know I'm a sinner and I need Jesus to be my Savior. I want to be forgiven," Sam continued.

The other two tornadoes agreed. Mrs. MaGee was very careful to go over what it meant to ask Jesus to be their Savior. She even wanted to let them

have a little more time to think about it. It was not until Timmy started crying and said, “Oh Mrs. MaGee, don’t make us wait! I don’t want to publish, no that’s not it. I don’t want to, what’s the word, oh yeah, that’s right, I don’t want to perish!”

Later that day the three tornadoes asked Jesus to be their Savior. What a wonderful day for Peter, Sam, and Timmy! What a wonderful day for Mrs. MaGee!

Mrs. MaGee explained to them that a little while after Jesus was born some wise men came to worship the Lord Jesus. While we don’t know how many wise men there were, Mrs. MaGee told them, “Wise men still follow and love the Lord Jesus.

Maybe instead of the three tornadoes you ought to be called the three wise men now,” she said as she burst out laughing. “Peter, Sam, and Timmy are now the wise men of Pleasant Avenue here in Centerville Square.”

Even though they were still little rascals at times, the three tornadoes changed after asking the Lord Jesus to be their Savior. Everyone could see the difference. Mom and Dad couldn’t believe the change that came over their boys.

The day soon came when Mr. Patterson saw Henry MaGee outside. He said to him, “Neighbor, my boys have changed a lot ever since they asked the Lord to be their Savior. Guess it’s about time that I ask you more about this. If it could bring such a change in their lives, I’d say it’s something that I need, too.”

Henry MaGee was happy to lead him to the Lord and to invite him and his whole family to begin attending their church with them.

It would not be long before Mom would make the same decision. The three boys enjoyed calling themselves the three wise men of Centerville Square. The whole family rejoiced that Mr. and Mrs. MaGee had moved next door. Miss Karen at the candy shop was right. The whole family came to love the MaGees.

Even though this is a pretend story, the message about salvation, the Christmas decorations, and the Scripture about Christmas are absolutely true. Do you know the Lord Jesus as your Savior? Are you a wise girl or a wise boy?