

# DOWN HOME: A little praise for long road trips

December 19, 2009

If you're part of a family that shovels the kids into the ol' vehicle and takes out on a long car trip at Christmas, I've got one word to say to you: Lucky.

No, really. You're blessed. What a tremendous opportunity.

You're thinking: "This guy's just plain nuts. He says we're fortunate to pile the kids into the car and hit the road for hours and hours, maybe days. They must be spikin' the eggnog over at the Baptist Standard office. Does he know what it's like to spend eons confined in a sheet-metal echo chamber with a spouse and a herd of progeny?"

Well, yes, I do.

And I'm sorta jealous.

To be candid, I'm not the least bit interested in grabbing the wheel of your family sedan, sitting beside your spouse, with your children in the backseat and rolling the wheels around for 873 miles one-way to visit your family.

But I do miss the days when Joanna and I mailed Christmas presents on ahead, strapped Lindsay and Molly in our Honda Civic and traveled over the rivers, through the woods and across the plains to grandmothers' and grandfathers' houses. I miss it more than Santa misses his longjohns. More than Dasher and Dancer miss Rudolph on a foggy Christmas Eve.

(By the way, did you ever stop to think that if GPS systems had been invented decades earlier, Rudolph never would have needed to guide Santa's sleigh?)

Back when our girls were little, we lived in Tennessee and then Kentucky, and Christmas break meant a trip back to Texas and Oklahoma to visit family.

We didn't have a minivan, so we made do with a compact car. More significantly, portable video players weren't available, so we made do with singalongs and word games. We didn't have a cell phone, so we made do with telling grandparents when we were leaving our home and then showing up when we got to theirs. We were on a tight budget, so we made do with fast food restaurants and tiny motel rooms.

The miles were long, and they seemed to multiply every time a little voice from the backseat asked, "How much longer?"

And yet those were some of the best times of my life.

A world made hectic by work and school and extra-curricular events and even church seemed to slow down and focus when we spent two days distracted by nothing—just the four of us in the same car. We laughed and sang and told stories. We all learned more about each other. Even though we complained about the distance, those were precious times.

Come to think of it, Mary and Joseph took a long road trip, too.

Their trip—and ours—were blessed journeys, marked by grace.