

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree

December 1, 2011

The President. It's nice having your own band. Please have a seat, everyone. Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!

Thank you, Secretary Salazar, for that introduction and for your hard work to preserve and protect our land and our water and our wildlife. I also want to thank Minister Rogers for the beautiful invocation, as well as Neil Mulholland and everyone at the National Park Foundation and the National Park Service who helped put this outstanding event together. I'd like to thank Carson Daly and Big Time Rush and all of tonight's performers for joining us to kick off the holiday season here at the White House.

For 89 years, Presidents and Americans have come together to light the National Christmas Tree. And this year is a special one. This year, we have a brand new tree. The last one stood here for more than 30 years, until we lost it in a storm earlier this year. But we all know that this tradition is much larger than any single tree. And tonight, once again, we gather here not simply to light some decorations, but to honor a story that lights the world.

More than 2,000 years ago, a child was born to two faithful travelers who could find rest only in a stable, among the cattle and the sheep. But this was not just any child. Christ's birth made the angels rejoice and attracted shepherds and kings from afar. He was a manifestation of God's love for us. And He grew up to become a leader with a servant's heart who taught us a message as simple as it is powerful: that we should love God and love our neighbor as ourselves.

That teaching has come to encircle the globe. It has endured for generations. And today, it lies at the heart of my Christian faith and that of millions of Americans. No matter who we are or where we come from or how we worship, it's a message that can unite all of us on this holiday season.

So long as the gifts and the parties are happening, it's important for us to keep in mind the central message of this season and keep Christ's

words not only in our thoughts, but also in our deeds. In this season of hope, let's help those who need it most: the homeless, the hungry, the sick and shut in. In this season of plenty, let's reach out to those who struggle to find work or provide for their families. In this season of generosity, let's give thanks and honor to our troops and our veterans, and their families who've sacrificed so much for us. And let's welcome all those who are happily coming home.

And this holiday season, let us reaffirm our commitment to each other, as family members, as neighbors, as Americans, regardless of our color or creed or faith. Let us remember that we are one and we are a family.

So on behalf of Malia and Sasha and Michelle and our grandmother in chief, Marian—[laughter]—I wish you all the happiest holiday season, the merriest of Christmases. God bless you all, and may God bless the United States of America.

And with that, I'm going to invite the entire Obama clan up here to light the Christmas tree. I need some help, and there's a lot of technical aspects to this. [Laughter] Come on, guys. All right.

Okay, we're going to start counting down here. We've got the switch right here.

The First Lady. All right, come on.

The President. Everybody ready? And this is the new tree. I know it's not quite as big as the old tree, but it's going to take time to grow. But we're going to fill it up with some spirit and start a new tradition right now.

All right, everybody ready? We're going to start counting down. Five, four, three, two, one—[applause]—whoa! There you go. That's a good-looking tree. Thank you, everyone.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:31 p.m. on the Ellipse at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Perrin Rogers, elder, Triumphant Church, Hyattsville, MD; Neil J. Mulholland, president and chief executive officer, National Park Foundation; and talk show host Carson Daly. He also referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson.