

DECEMBER 2023

inspiration

M A G A Z I N E



Your GREATEST GIFT

God in
All Things

The Woman Who
Gave Jesus a Gift

His Authority
Is Yours

Your Greatest Gift



PAGE 10



Just like Jesus, you and I have a purpose—to bear fruit for the Lord and His Kingdom. Read David's article on **page 5**, and see how your true destiny is fulfilled when you win souls for the Lord.



PAGE 14



PAGE 16



EDITOR'S CORNER



Roone Acree

What a wonderful season to celebrate our Lord! Just as the magi traveled a long way to worship the newborn King, so today God is calling us to send out the Good News about Jesus...to long distances away...at great expense...so people all over the world can be saved and worship Him.

When we draw near and exalt the Lord, He inevitably commissions us to share His Good News with others (Isaiah 6:1-10; Matthew 28:17-20). I am so grateful for your partnership in this great calling to impact the destiny of people and nations for Christ through media. Together, we are giving the greatest gift of all—Jesus!

10 God in All Things

By Karen Ehman and Ruth Schwenk

At those times when we don't know what to expect from life, the one great expectation we can possess is that God is full of tender mercy.

14 The Woman Who Gave Jesus a Gift

By Ben Cerullo

What kind of gift are YOU giving Jesus this Christmas? Join Ben as he unpacks a well-known Bible story full of important truths for those who follow Jesus today.

16 You Are Part of the Healing

See how your partnership with Inspiration Ministries is bringing the hope of Jesus to real lives.

19 Your December Devotions

A daily guide to living in the covenant promises of God.

52 His Authority Is Yours

In Pursuit of God's Promises

When you submit to Jesus and act in His name, all the power and resources of Heaven are at your disposal.





Change Your **VIEW!**



Your
**GREATEST
GIFT**



December 11-22

If God is good, how can He allow suffering to exist? In this 15-part teaching series, Pastor David Chadwick points out that originally there was harmony, but when

sin entered the world, that harmony was broken. Sin on the earth began when Adam and Eve believed the lies of Lucifer and disobeyed God. This sin brought with it the consequence of suffering.

**December 25-
January 5**

Are you ready to see the Scriptures in a way you've never thought about before?



Join Kim Crabill for her new series *Take the Next Right* where she takes

the Scriptures to the streets and the streets to the Scriptures to see how God can strengthen your faith, using everyday road signs to guide your spiritual walk.

Are you signed up for our daily *Strengthen Your Walk™* videos?

StrengthenYourWalk.org



STRENGTHEN
your walk
with David Cerullo

Christmas is such a wonderful time of year to lift up the name of Jesus and tell of His saving grace. While the world focuses on the gifts and festivities of the season, we have the joy of reflecting on what Jesus did for us...how He wrapped Himself in flesh and blood and gave His life as a ransom for humankind.

Jesus came to earth for a *purpose*. He came to die, so we might live. He came to set us free from the power of sin, sickness, and death.

Jesus also came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). His birth was an all-out assault on the enemy's dominion that freed us from the bondage of his work and influence. Jesus came to reclaim that dominion and give it back to man.

Jesus said in John 4:34, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" (NASB). Food represents nourishment and strength, and Jesus was saying the source of His strength was doing His Father's will.



You and I have a purpose...to bear fruit for the Lord and His Kingdom.

WHAT ABOUT OUR PURPOSE?

One day Jesus told His disciples, “*You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain*” (John 15:16 NASB).

You and I have a purpose—a destiny in this life—and that purpose is to bear fruit for the Lord and His Kingdom. Everything else is wood, hay, and straw, and it’s all going to burn up one day (1 Corinthians 3:11–15). We will only take two things into eternity: ourselves and what we have done for the Lord.

There’s an old song that says, “Only one life...will soon be past...only what’s done for Christ will last...only one chance to do His will...so give to Jesus all your days...give to Jesus all your ways...for you have but one life.”

I know it’s difficult to comprehend eternity...life without end. The Bible speaks about the normal length of a person’s life on this earth as just 70 years (Psalm 90:10), so our life in eternity will be much more significant.

What will people say when we come to the end of *our* earthly race? Will they say we were the real deal? Will they say we were people of integrity who walked the walk, not just talked the talk? Will they recognize that we were humble and people after God’s heart? Will they testify that we lived to see souls saved?

LESSONS FROM THE MAGI

Two thousand years ago, the magi traveled long and far as they followed the star in the east to the place where Jesus was born. With them, they brought precious and costly gifts for the Christ child.

When I think about their example, I ask myself what I can possibly give the Lord. What

gift can I bring Him? The answer is always the same two things: myself and souls.

If you’ve been an Inspiration partner for very long, you know how much I love the old songs of the church. One of them says, “All He wants is you...nothing else will do...not just a part...He wants all of your heart...all He wants is all of you...all He wants is you!”

This Christmas, let’s remember the greatest gift of all, given freely to us...our Lord Jesus Christ. And let’s remember to bring Him two gifts this Christmas: ourselves...and souls!

One day, our appointed time on earth will pass. Then the only thing that will matter is what we did for Him on this earth and who we were able to bring to Heaven as a result of our prayers, actions, and offerings. Proverbs 11:30 reminds us, “*He who wins souls is wise.*”

WE’RE THANKFUL FOR YOUR PARTNERSHIP

I am so grateful for your partnership in this ministry that is bringing the joy and peace of Jesus Christ to people all over the world—not just at Christmas, but throughout the year.

Together, we are sending the message of hope in Jesus Christ to a potential worldwide audience of over **1.2 billion people a day!** People in more than **200 nations** can receive the light of the Gospel through our Christian TV broadcasts and our digital outreaches.

We want you to know we’re praying for you...not just today...but *every* day. We pray for all our Inspiration partners—your family, your finances, your physical body, and your spiritual life. We pray for God to step into your circumstances and show Himself strong on your behalf.

This Christmas, let’s remember the greatest gift of all, given freely to us... our Lord Jesus Christ.

YOUR CHRISTMAS GIFT

This Christmas, give yourself to the Lord more completely than ever before. And give Him the gift He came to give His life for...**souls**.

Every *second*, two people pass into eternity—most without a saving knowledge of Christ. The world now contains almost **eight billion** people, and more than **three billion** of them have never heard the name of Jesus even once in their lifetime.

Who will lift up Jesus' name and tell these precious people that Jesus died for them? Through your partnership with Inspiration Ministries, you are impacting people for Christ worldwide through media. Thank you!

My friend and partner, even though you may face difficult circumstances, there is so much to celebrate this Christmas. He has *redeemed* you, and He is *with you* no matter how hard things may seem at times.

In the midst of these anxious days, why not follow the example of the magi and bring your Savior a generous gift? Why not respond to His amazing promise in Malachi 3:10: *“Put Me to the test now in this,” says the LORD of armies, “if I do not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows”* (NASB).

This holiday season may the Lord give you a fresh revelation of His love for YOU—love that took Him from the glories of Heaven to a dusty stable in Bethlehem...to a cross on a Jerusalem hillside...to the right hand of God's throne in Heaven...so that you might spend eternity with Him!

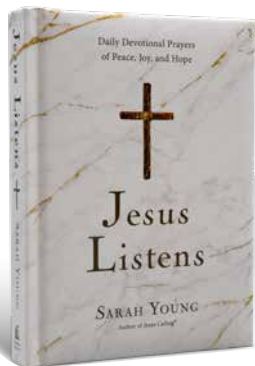
I am praying your heart will be full of praise and adoration as you celebrate Jesus, our living Savior. Have a blessed Christmas, filled with the peace, presence, and provision of the Lord!

God Bless You!

Your partner to reach the lost,



P.S. Visit [inspiration.org/souls](https://www.inspiration.org/souls) today to sow a Christmas seed for souls. Your year-end, tax-deductible gift received and processed by December 29 will help us continue to impact souls for God's Kingdom!



See page 28 for details about this month's **THANK YOU GIFT**.



God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16 NIV

More than **5.1 MILLION** Souls in 2023

Thank you for helping us reach the world for Jesus!

Jesus came to earth *“to seek and to save the lost”* (Luke 19:10 ESV), and our partners are continuing that mission!

We just reached our goal of **5.1 MILLION** souls who have responded to the salvation message in the past year! That means an average of one soul every six seconds has come to Christ through our evangelistic website **iprayedtheprayer.com!**

Hearts are hungry and open for God, but we cannot rest on what the Lord has already done! Our Heavenly Father doesn't want any to miss out on the eternal life Jesus offers—and neither do we.

Will you help us bring even more new believers into the family of God by sowing a seed for souls?

Contact us today and sow a seed for His great harvest!

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[inspiration.org/souls](https://www.inspiration.org/souls)

“I am thanking God for being a partner in this ministry, which is reaching many souls in the world. God is really moving through your ministry, and I thank Him for the wonderful and divine work He is using you to do.”

—HENRY, Austria

GOD in All Things

Experience infinite love in a world full of chaos.

In almost every season of life, there are situations lurking on the horizon about which we aren't exactly sure just what we can expect. When I was a teenager, I often thought about what life would be like after high school. I knew I wanted to go to college, but I wasn't sure if my single mom would be able to financially swing it. I also pondered what my future would bring as far as a career; my interests were all over the map. I toggled between wanting to be a pharmacist, a television news reporter, or a high school history teacher.

Once I was in college, my thoughts turned to life after graduation. Would I stay in the Midwest? Move to another area of the country? Would I be traversing life solo, or would a man come along who would someday be my husband? And then, once I was married, I wondered about things like children and moves, aging parents and forging lifetime friendships. There have also been concerning times of financial stress and medical test results.

Throughout all of it—although in my heart and mind I knew God was in control—something within me wanted to know exactly what I could expect next. Ever the planner and color-coded schedule maker, I yearned to know the steps that lay ahead long before I ever needed to take them.

Looking back now at over four decades of life, I can see that sometimes things turned out much as I expected. Other times, the exact opposite occurred. Things I'd vowed would never happen—like being a June bride and having three kids (I wanted to avoid the dreaded stereotypical oldest, middle, youngest child syndrome)—were exactly what *did* transpire. But here is the one thing that I can say was consistent: God always planned good for me,

even though there were instances in which I didn't realize it at the time. Later on—peering in hindsight—these situations made sense.

Psalm 145:9 asserts, "*The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.*" I just love the definition of the Hebrew word *racham*, translated in this verse as *tender mercies*. *Racham* means foremost having a deep and intense compassion and showing infinite and absolute love. And when we read that "*the LORD is good to all,*" guess what the word *all* is in the Hebrew? *Kol*, and it means all. All means all! And that includes you.

At those times when we don't know what to expect from life, the one great expectation we can surely possess is that God is full of tender mercy. His compassion is deep, His kindness, intense. In His wisdom He allows our life situations to materialize only after being run through a grid of His infinite and absolute love for us.

What can you and I expect in the future? Neither of us knows. But we *can* know with certainty that the Lord is good. He is good to us. His mercies won't ever come to an end (Lamentations 3:22). ❖

Excerpt from *Trusting God in All the Things* by Karen Ehman and Ruth Schwenk, provided by Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group. Copyright 2022. Used by permission.



SAVANNAH McREYNOLDS CAMERON DEANE STEWART

BY GOD'S GRACE

A CHRISTMAS CAROL
STORY OF FAMILY, GRACE AND
THE POWER OF LOVE.

When tragedy strikes, Chris turns his back on all his parents taught him. But God is faithful. Is an unlikely Christmas Eve visitor just the gift he needs?

Saturday, Dec. 9 at 9:00 p.m. ET
Sunday, Dec. 10 at 5:30 p.m. ET
Wednesday, Dec. 13 at 9:00 p.m. ET

Program times subject to change.
Check inspiration.org/tv for details.

AS YOU CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS, REMEMBER...

God Is Faithful!



Sundays at 7:30 a.m. ET

The Alternative with Dr. Tony Evans

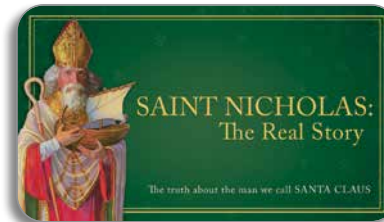
This Christmas, celebrate the love and hope Jesus offers with Dr. Tony Evans on *The Alternative*.



Saturday, December 23 at 9:00 p.m. ET
Sunday, December 24 at 5:30 p.m. ET

A Christmas Snow

A woman abandoned by her father on Christmas Eve learns to forgive when a blizzard brings her two unexpected guests.



Saturday, December 23 at 2:30 p.m. ET

St. Nicholas: The Real Story

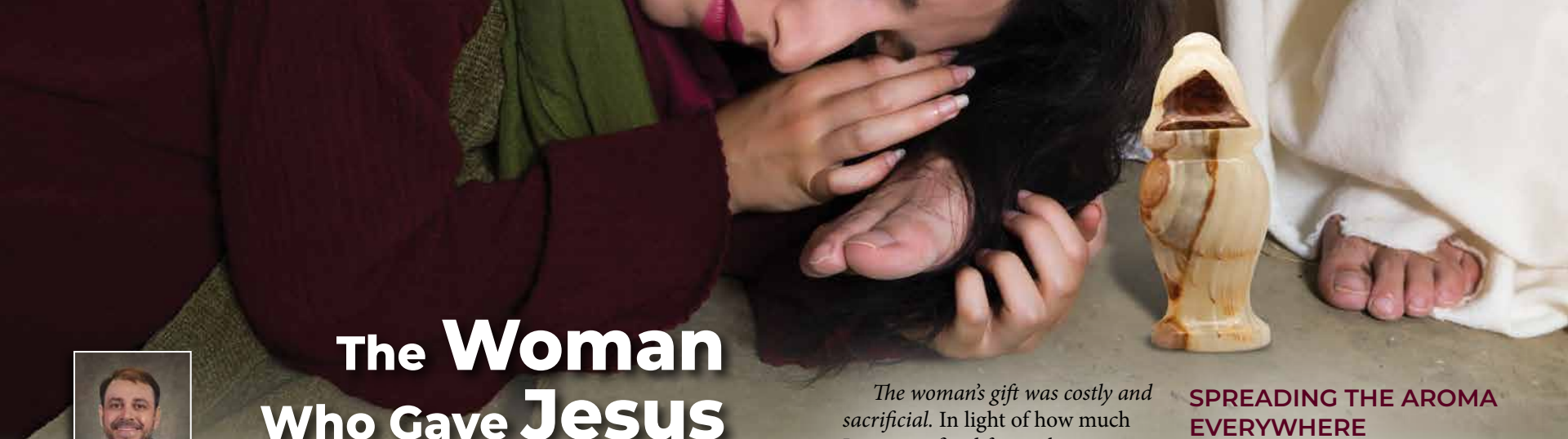
Uncover the real inspiration behind Santa Claus—the brave and compassionate Saint Nicholas of Myra.



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The Woman Who Gave Jesus a Gift



by Ben Cerullo

When we celebrate a person's birthday, we typically do something to honor them, perhaps giving them a gift or a card. But how does this apply to celebrating the birth of Jesus?

At first, it may seem futile to consider giving Jesus any kind of special gift at Christmas. After all, He's now sitting at the Father's right hand, reigning in majesty. Surely there's nothing He needs from us.

However, I want to share a powerful story we can learn from—the story about a woman who gave an extravagant gift to the Savior.

Not many stories about the life of Jesus are found in *all four* Gospel accounts—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But Jesus said this one story was so important

that it would be shared *“wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world”* (Mark 14:3–9).

Jesus was referring to the account of the woman who broke an alabaster flask of *“very costly oil of spikenard”* (v. 3) and poured it on His head in a beautiful act of love and worship.

Why was Jesus so blessed by this woman's sacrificial act? And why was this story considered so important that it should accompany the preaching of the Gospel throughout history and throughout the world?

LESSONS FOR US

This simple story is packed full of important applications for those who follow Jesus today:

The woman's gift was costly and sacrificial. In light of how much Jesus sacrificed for us, how can we not give our best to Him?

She was taunted by critics who said she was wasting her fragrant oil. In the same way, we are likely to face criticism if we radically abandon our lives for Jesus. Perhaps you've already dealt with this when people scoff at your commitment to sow generous financial seeds to win lost people to Christ. “Why this waste?” they ask. Although it's hard to ignore people's ridicule or anger, this woman refused to be deterred from her act of blessing to her Lord.


Jesus said the woman's act revealed a key to the proclamation of the Gospel. This might seem puzzling at first. The woman's attention was fully focused on Jesus Himself, not on reaching the lost. But don't miss the message here: Those who proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ must be energized by this same kind of passion for Him—willing to pay whatever cost is necessary to spread His message throughout the earth.

SPREADING THE AROMA EVERYWHERE

In a parallel passage, we read, *“The house was filled with the fragrance of the oil”* (John 12:3). You see, when we passionately give our all to Jesus, the fragrance will inevitably spread to others. The Good News spreads as God *“reveals the fragrance of the knowledge of Him in every place”* (2 Corinthians 2:14 NASB).

Through your partnership with Inspiration Ministries each month, you are displaying the same kind of love for Jesus this woman showed. Your passion to worship Him and win souls is helping *“the earth [to] be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”* (Habakkuk 2:14).

What kind of gift are YOU giving Jesus this Christmas? I pray you are leaving the same kind of legacy as the woman in this story—a legacy that sends the Gospel throughout the whole world. ❖



See how your partnership
with Inspiration Ministries
is bringing hope to actual lives.

YOU Are Part of the HEALING!

Your partnership with Inspiration Ministries brings light to many through our various evangelistic outreaches. Recently, the International Prayer Center and our Social Media Team joined hands to walk alongside a frightened, hurting soul in Jamaica. We invite you to travel a bit of the road with us.

Praying others through a crisis is long, hard work. It is walking through the dark valleys of life with another...speaking words of life and light from the Word. Hear the cries of one child of God as she stumbled in the darkness. Feel the heart of the loving Father in the responses from the prayer center ministers. Know you are a part of bringing this precious healing!

Marlene wrote on Facebook:

“I am going through anxious moments; I have to do a breast biopsy as they see suspicious areas. I also need strength to get out of an unhealthy and sinful relationship. I know it’s wrong, but I don’t know what to do. I do know better. I feel so ashamed and filthy.”

Inspiration prayer minister’s reply:

“God loves and cares for you. His Word says He will never leave or forsake you. We are agreeing with you in prayer for God’s peace and healing in your body. We are praying for God’s help, wisdom, and strength in getting out of the unhealthy relationship, in Jesus’ name, amen.”

“My biopsy turned out to be breast cancer. I am sad and terrified.

Please pray. I trust and believe God will never leave nor forsake me.

“Your fear is normal. Heavenly Father, we lift up Marlene to you in prayer. We ask You in the name that is above every name, Christ Jesus, that You will exchange sickness for wholeness in her life according to Your Word in Romans 8:11. God loves you, Marlene. We will be praying for your total healing, we will not believe the enemy’s lies.”

“I really need God’s peace and for Him to calm me, so I don’t have to feel so frightened. My daughter and mother are so sad. I have to act strong for them, but I cry a lot. I know it will be well, but for now I am scared.”

“God is with you; just keep declaring your healing. Do not allow the enemy to trouble your heart. We will keep praying 2 Corinthians 12:9. God loves you!”

Weeks passed with more tests and more struggles. Marlene checked in regularly, and the prayer ministers encouraged her to sign up for daily devotions to build

her faith. She continued to battle and...slowly, the tide turned. Her victory came into view!

“Please continue praying for me as I am having bouts of depression. Some days are good and some not so, struggling. Holding on to God though. Thanks. Bless.”

“Greetings, just letting you know the bone scan result is good, and I have been letting go of my unhealthy relationship. Just want you to know that I am so grateful for your continued prayers. Bless you all.”

“Greetings in Jesus’ name, craving your continued prayers as I am scheduled for a double mastectomy with reconstruction. Just know that I have been doing so much better. Thank you for your prayers. Blessings, amen.”

Isn’t God amazing! Because of your partnership with Inspiration Ministries, thousands like Marlene have found hope in the loving power of Jesus. Thank you for your generous seeds for souls. You are making a difference! ❖

**Reach out to our International Prayer Center
today, and let them come alongside you
with prayer and encouragement!**

**US / CAN / CAR:
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inspiration.org/prayer

Let God Prove His FAITHFULNESS

This Christmas,
join us in sharing the Good News!

By becoming an **Inspiration Ministries Monthly Partner**, you enable us to share the Good News with people in over 200 countries around the world who desperately need the hope that Christ offers them. You also prepare yourself for the breakthrough that God has for you. Here's what one partner shared:

“Before becoming an Inspiration Ministries Monthly Partner, I was skeptical. But when I sowed a seed of \$58, I went from making \$150 a week to a new job making \$1,100 a week. Now I know firsthand that expectantly sowing financial seeds really works. Now I encourage others to let God prove His faithfulness by trusting Him with their finances and sowing seeds to impact lives for Christ.”—GALEN, Pennsylvania

If you have a vision to bless others as God is blessing you, call us toll free to automatically put a monthly seed for souls on your bank card or credit card:

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Timeless Gifts

BIBLE READING: ROMANS 6

Every year the gift-giving process at Christmas presents special challenges. What to give? What are the hot gifts? What gifts will be desired by those on our lists? Can we find gifts that will be appreciated? What seems sure is that what is hot today soon will be forgotten.

The Bible reminds us that God has a completely different perspective. His gifts are not linked to fads and trends; they never go out of style. The Bible tells us that He offers each of us something amazing: *eternal life*. This is a gift we can enjoy today but also tomorrow and throughout our lives.

Paul knew how easy it is to take this gift for granted or fail to realize the depth of all God offers. God showed His great love by sending Christ to die for us, and He did this “*while we were still sinners*” (Romans 5:7–8).

This Christmas season, remember all of God's amazing gifts for you and everyone on your list. He offers each of us the *forgiveness* of our sins and *eternal life*. He makes it possible for us to have a personal relationship with Himself. We can be clean in His sight, have hope and peace, joy, and victory, and be confident about our eternal destiny.

God already has given you the greatest gift! *Accept* this gift. Then, as He leads, share your faith, and tell others.

Reflect on the best gift you've ever received.

FRIDAY
December
1

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for the gift of eternal life. Open doors, so I can share this amazing gift with others. In Jesus' name, amen.

I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them mere rubbish, so that I may gain Christ.

Philippians 3:8 NASB

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, I commit my life to You. I declare that You are my Lord. In Your name, amen.

Blessed Savior

BIBLE READING: PHILIPPIANS 3

Born in 1818, George Duffield came from a family dedicated to serving God. Ordained like his father and grandfather, he pastored churches in New York, New Jersey, Michigan, and Illinois. But today we learn most about his faith through his interest in music.

The father of hymnologist Samuel Duffield, George wrote many hymns himself. One of his hymns summarized what Jesus meant to him. Called “Blessed Savior, Thee I Love,” he described how he loved Jesus more than any other joy or pleasure in his life. All his hopes were in Him. He only wanted to bring glory to Jesus: “Ever let my glory be, only, only, only Thee.”

Reflecting on the comments of the apostle Paul, Duffield declared, “Beside the cross, all my gain I count but loss.” When compared with knowing Jesus, all “earthly pleasures faded away.” All that mattered was seeing Jesus “crucified for me.”

He committed his life to Jesus: “Thine am I, Thine to live, and Thine to die.” And no power on earth could keep him from His presence. His only glory was in knowing Jesus.

Duffield’s commitment reminds us of the announcement of the angel who told a group of shepherds that a Savior had been born, who was Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11).

Throughout the Christmas season, use this Good News as an opportunity to praise Jesus. Be sure that He is the Lord of your life.

With whom can you share the Good News of Christmas this week?

Christ’s Comings

BIBLE READING: REVELATION 22

For many people, Christmas has become a commercial and social event. Some even have sought to detach this day from the birth of Jesus, leaving it merely a celebration of fun and festivities, shopping, and exchanging gifts.

How ironic that, in past centuries, the celebration of Jesus’ birth was a time for *reflection*, *fasting*, *prayer*, and being serious about seeking God.

Because of this focus, the season before Christmas was known as Advent (meaning coming). Believers were encouraged to think about His coming as a baby and His *Second Coming*, remembering that He will come again.

Believers are encouraged not to be obsessed with pleasures and possessions but to think about *spiritual* things, consider their lives, and ponder what Jesus means to them. They are to do whatever is necessary to get their hearts right with Him.

In our modern culture, how easily we can be swept along with trends and customs and preoccupied with pleasures. We must stay focused on Jesus. While we think about His birth, let us never forget His life, death, resurrection, and the fact that He will come again.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. What an appropriate day to refocus on Jesus. Remember that He will come again. Dedicate your life to serving Him! Seek to bring the message of salvation to those who are lost. Make sure you are ready for His return.

What are you doing to prepare for Christ’s Second Coming?

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires, take the water of life [...] “I am coming quickly.” Amen. Come.

Revelation 22:17, 20 NASB

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, thank You for coming into this world. I look forward to Your coming again. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. In Your name, amen.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.

Genesis 3:15

Traditions

BIBLE READING: GENESIS 3

Festivities around the Christmas season can seem like permanent parts of life. Unchanging traditions seem to be everywhere, yet many traditions are comparatively recent introductions.

Setting December 25 as the day to celebrate Jesus' birth was established in 336 AD. (Because of pagan activities associated with this day, some Christians refuse this celebration date.) The first decorated, indoor Christmas tree was recorded in 1605, according to one researcher, but they were rejected by some as pagan symbols. Santa Claus became part of Christmas celebrations in America only in the early 1800s.

While we celebrate Jesus' birth on December 25, some scholars conclude that Jesus probably wasn't born in December. Some have identified His birth with Passover (in the spring) or the Feast of Tabernacles (in the fall).

Believers may differ on some theological issues, but they can agree that Jesus *was* born and that His birth is central to human history.

The Bible first mentions the coming of a Savior in connection with the sin of Adam and Eve. God promised that He would send a Savior to heal, forgive, and restore. The Bible is filled with prophecies about this, and Jesus fulfilled every one.

Traditions may differ from generation to generation and culture to culture. But Jesus is *"the same yesterday, today, and forever"* (Hebrews 13:8). Worship Him this season and throughout the year. He is the Lord and our reigning King.

How do your holiday celebrations honor Jesus?

The Spirit

BIBLE READING: LUKE 1

Who, that first Christmas, really understood the Holy Spirit? Certainly not Zacharias or his wife, Elizabeth, even though both were told they would be filled with the Spirit. And certainly not Mary. When Gabriel told her she would conceive and bear a son, she wondered how this was even possible. She didn't know the power of the Spirit.

Gabriel said that the Spirit would *"come upon"* her. The Greek word here describes how the Spirit would enter her life as if from another dimension. Gabriel also said that the power of the Most High would *"overshadow"* her. The Greek word indicates throwing a shadow.

These words help us understand how the Spirit works in our lives as well. He can do anything, at any time, in any place. He can overshadow us like we are in the midst of a cloud, caught up in His presence. He can overtake us and operate within and through us in ways so overwhelming that we can do extraordinary things. He can even transform us and change our very nature.

As you celebrate Christmas this year, remember to be sensitive to the presence of the Holy Spirit. He changed Mary's life and the lives of Zacharias and Elizabeth. He can change *your* life. He is the same today as He was that first Christmas. Let Him change you and use you to impact lives. Remember, with the Spirit, *nothing* is impossible!

Compose a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to direct your celebrations.

The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; for that reason also the holy Child will be called the Son of God."

Luke 1:35 NASB

PRAYER:

Holy Spirit, speak to me. Teach me Your truths. Guide me. Use me to impact lives. I surrender my life to Your control. In Jesus' name, amen.

The angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

Luke 1:26–27 KJV

PRAYER:

Father, I am Your servant. I submit my life to You, ready to fulfill Your calling for me. In Jesus' name, amen.

What is God asking you to do for Him in this season?

Christmas Message

BIBLE READING: LUKE 1

As a boy, Sabine Baring-Gould spent a winter in the Basque country in northeast Spain. While there, he became aware of the carols the people sang to tell the story of Jesus' birth. One carol stirred his heart. It was called "Gabriel's Message." Baring-Gould determined to translate this carol and introduce it to the English-speaking world.

The words of this carol, originally written in Latin, told how Mary received the message that she would become the mother of Jesus Christ the Son of God. The carol has a vivid description of Gabriel, whom God used to deliver this message. It was clear that he came from Heaven with "wings as drifted snow" and "eyes as flame."

Gabriel's message emphasized that God knew Mary's character and that she was just a "lowly maiden," but this was a key reason she had been chosen. She would be honored throughout "all generations," and her son would be "Emmanuel, by seers foretold."

The original writers of this carol made clear Mary's commitment to do *whatever* God called. Each stanza of the hymn closes with the words spoken by Gabriel, "Most highly favored lady, gloria!" This message is told and retold throughout the ages, reminding us why she had been chosen for this important assignment.

Today, remember to cultivate this spirit in your life. Always be ready to obey God and do *whatever* He calls you to do.

Nothing Is Impossible

BIBLE READING: LUKE 1

When the angel Gabriel told Mary she would give birth to the Son of God, she did not understand how this could be possible. After all, she was a virgin.

But Gabriel wanted her to understand God's *limitless* power. He defined this power with a double negative. He did not say that everything was possible. Instead, he challenged Mary to name something that was *impossible!* Clearly, boldly, he stated, "For with God *nothing will be impossible.*"

Today, God gives us this same challenge. Do we face problems that don't seem to have a solution? Do we have needs that seem overwhelming? Do we feel outnumbered? Do we face goals that seem impossible to meet? Do we see before us a hurdle that seems too high to overcome? Do we face a physical ailment that seems impossible to defeat?

The Bible reminds us that with God *nothing* is impossible. In other words, there is nothing we can imagine or think of that is impossible. All we need is faith, even the size of a tiny mustard seed (Matthew 17:20).

The Bible urges us to free ourselves from limits and stop being bound by our finite understanding. Instead, realize God is the Creator. Everything is subject to Him. Draw closer to Him. Read His Word and declare His promises to be true. Think His thoughts. Believe Him to release His power in your life. Remember, "*with God nothing is impossible.*"

What seemingly impossible situation are you entrusting to God right now?

Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" [...] And the angel answered and said to her... "For with God nothing will be impossible."

Luke 1:34–37 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these needs to You: _____ . I believe nothing is impossible for You. I have faith in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

My spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me.

Luke 1:47-49 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, I rejoice in Your goodness to me. I trust You. I believe that with You, nothing is impossible. I praise You! In Jesus' name, amen.

Write a praise to God for His ability to do more than what you can imagine.

Praising, At Peace

BIBLE READING: LUKE 1

Mary was skeptical. The angel declared she would give birth to a son, but this seemed unlikely. She asked a logical question: *“How can this happen? I am a virgin”* (v. 34).

Having been reassured that *nothing* was impossible with God, she declared her willingness to stop doubting and *believe*. She told the angel, *“I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true”* (v. 38).

A brief time later, we see Mary visiting her cousin, Elizabeth, who described how the child within her *“jumped for joy”* when Mary approached. With a supernatural understanding, Elizabeth declared, *“God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed.”* Then, summarizing what had been revealed to her, Elizabeth said: *“You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said”* (vs. 42-45).

All doubts had disappeared. Totally submitted to God, Mary was ready to do *whatever* He asked. Knowing she was just a servant, she marveled that God called her for this special assignment. Her heart was filled with *praise*. She did not complain or question but rejoiced!

When we think of the situations we face, it can be natural to be skeptical. These are moments to remember Mary’s response. Our lives are *transformed* when we *trust* God! Don’t resist but *believe*. Remember that with Him, *nothing* is impossible. Instead of dwelling on questions, respond with faith and praise!

Humility

BIBLE READING: LUKE 1

Pregnant with baby Jesus, Mary realized many amazing things. In her prayer (her “Magnificat” vs. 46-55), she admitted the honor of being chosen to be the mother of the Son of God. She saw clearly how God was holy and merciful.

In particular, she spoke about the importance of *humility*. She realized she simply was God’s bonds slave, and she was amazed at how He had regard for her lowly state. He exalts those who are humble. He brings down rulers and scatters those who are proud.

These revelations point to a key secret of Christmas. The Bible tells us, *“The LORD will tear down the house of the proud”* (Proverbs 15:25). All who are proud are an *“abomination to the LORD”* (Proverbs 16:5). If we humble ourselves in His presence, He will exalt us (James 4:10).

We see these truths displayed that first Christmas. We see them in Mary’s declaration and Jesus’ humble birth in a stable. We see the importance of humility as the angels announced His birth to lowly shepherds while the mighty Herod the Great knew nothing when the Magi approached him.

This Christmas, think about the importance of humility. If you want God’s blessings, *humble* yourself before Him. Take up your cross daily and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23). Let Him be the Lord of your life. Surrender everything to Him. Let Him use you to impact lives for God’s Kingdom.

Are you displaying attributes of humility or pride?

He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble.

Luke 1:51-52 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I humble myself before You. I dedicate my time, talents, and treasures to You. Use me to impact others for Your Kingdom. In Jesus’ name, amen.



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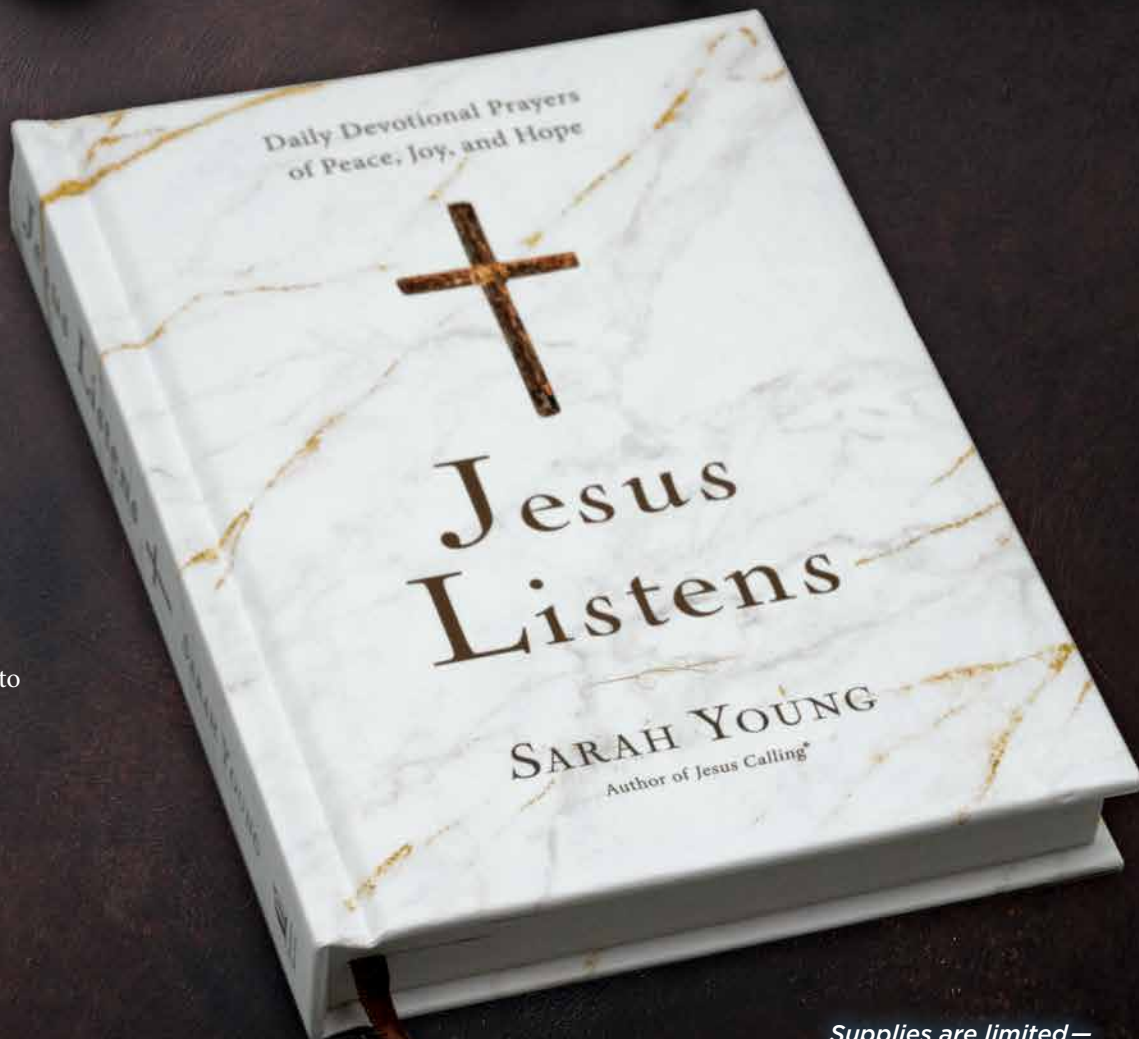
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She gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Luke 2:7 NASB

Away in a Manger

BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

The world can seem so complicated. There seem to be countless reasons to feel worried and stressed. To troubled hearts, the Christmas message can seem unrealistic, too good to be true. But the miracle is that it is true! And it is so simple that even a child can grasp it.

Nowhere is this simplicity clearer than in “Away in a Manger,” a Christmas song often sung just by children. But adults also need its message to wash away modern sophistication and replace skepticism with childlike faith.

This song reminds us of Jesus’ purity. With no crib for a bed, “the little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.” With stars looking down, He was “asleep on the hay.” Every day and night, we can rest in Him: “I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky and stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.”

Like children, we can know He is with us. We can ask Him to stay close by us forever and love us. We can entrust our friends and family to Him: “Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care and fit us for heaven to live with Thee there.”

Today, remember the simplicity of the Christmas message and how profoundly His birth can change our lives. Trust in Jesus. Let Him take away your burdens. Love Him. Stay close to Him, and allow Him to give you His peace.

How has the message of Jesus’ birth changed your life?

Songs of Shepherds

BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

Joseph Canteloube was inspired by the people and landscape of his native land in France. Even as a child, he began collecting folk songs. Everyone seemed to sing. In particular, he noted the shepherds who sang in the pastures. Their songs became the foundation for many of his own compositions.

Canteloube was able to observe what people throughout time commonly knew—that shepherds spending long hours isolated in their fields often passed the time of day by singing. Many of their songs were passed down from generation to generation. We can imagine how the shepherds outside Bethlehem shared this lifestyle.

They must have been startled by the visiting angels. The messages brought to them by Gabriel and the angelic choir penetrated the dark night with a melody and message that were of a different dimension.

The shepherds listened and were changed. This was not music just to pass the time but music of an eternal dimension. The words sung were an amazing message of deep revelation that came from God. The music was rich with overwhelming praise. This music demanded a response and would be remembered for countless generations.

The world is full of music—some intense, some serene, some fast, some slow. As those shepherds near Bethlehem learned, God can use music to convey His messages. May we be listening carefully, asking Him for the sensitivity to listen well.

What is your favorite Christmas carol and why?

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Luke 2:8

PRAYER:

Father, help me to be sensitive to hear music that You have inspired. Touch my heart and mind. Speak to me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

An angel of the Lord suddenly stood near them [...] When the angels had departed... the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem, then, and see this thing... which the Lord has made known to us."

Luke 2:9–15 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these issues to You: _____ . I will follow You wherever You lead. Thank You for loving me. I trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Where is God calling you to go this week?

Worried Shepherds

BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

Who were these men to whom the angels announced the birth of Jesus? Not powerful politicians, scholars, or landowners. They were simple shepherds and *outdoorsmen*.

We can imagine how at the moment they encountered the angels, some might have been worried. Their world was unstable, and the future seemed uncertain. How easily they could have felt discouraged with every reason to doubt. Even the faith inherited from their fathers might have failed them. They might have felt alone, forgotten by God.

But an angel had suddenly appeared in the night with a message for them. Then they heard a massive choir of angels. At that moment, the atmosphere changed. They experienced a jolt of resolve and a determination to believe the message and seek the child.

The message might have seemed too good to be true. They may have paused to consider who would believe their story. Leave their duty of keeping flocks to see a baby? What might others say? What would they say if they stumbled into soldiers, could not find the baby, or their masters learned they had left their post?

We can imagine how some might have wanted to stay behind. But only in going did their lives change.

How will *you* respond to the angels' message? How will you respond to the call of God for you? Will you give in to skepticism and doubt? Or risk everything to follow Him?

Realms of Glory

BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

Born to missionary parents, James Montgomery remained behind to attend school when they went into the field. But both parents died while overseas, causing him untold trauma. He responded by turning away from Christianity.

He became a writer and editor, championing social issues such as the fight against slavery. He was so outspoken that his opinions offended many in authority. Twice he was jailed in an effort to silence him.

Challenged by these life experiences, Montgomery began to study the Bible with greater intensity, motivated in part by a desire to understand the faith of his parents. As a result of this quest, he dedicated his life to Christ.

On Christmas Eve 1816, he published a poem that expressed his understanding. This became the hymn we know as "Angels from the Realms of Glory."

Describing the way the Good News was announced, he called angels to "wing your flight o'er all the earth" as they proclaimed the Messiah's birth. He wrote how everyone needed to come to Jesus. Sages needed to leave all behind to seek the baby Jesus, the "desire of nations."

Motivated by his concern for social justice, Montgomery warned of the need to break the chains of sin, concluding with this refrain: "Come and worship Christ, the newborn King."

This Christmas, turn your heart toward Jesus. Experience the fullness of His forgiveness, power, and freedom. Worship Him, for He is the King.

How can you tell those around you about the Good News of Jesus' birth?

Lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

Luke 2:9 KJV

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for sending Jesus to save me from my sins. I praise You for the gift of eternal life. In Jesus' name, amen.

I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

Luke 2:10 KJV

A Family Celebration

BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

Martin Luther believed Christmas should be a family event. He composed the hymn “From Heaven Above to Earth I Come” to be part of his family’s Christmas pageant and to help teach his children about Christmas.

Each year, family members would dress up in appropriate costumes and sing and recite this pageant. We can imagine Luther’s children experiencing the story in a personal way, even asking their parents about the meaning of events while the entire family joined in the hymn’s closing doxology, “Glory to God in the highest heaven!”

Luther’s hymn reminded them that the angel Gabriel had come to bring the Good News. Jesus’ birth brought joy to the earth. This baby was the Christ, come to be our Savior and set us free.

It was a miracle that our Savior would so humble Himself and lay His head “where lowly cattle lately fed.” The whole event was designed to help everyone understand the “simple truth” that “worldly honor, wealth, and might are weak and worthless in your sight.”

Luther wanted his children to know that this was an event of personal importance. Jesus prepared a place for each child. His birth was for us to celebrate, singing for joy.

Luther’s dedication reminds us that Jesus’ birth should be celebrated in the home and be a family event—reading and telling the Bible stories, times of family prayers, discussion, and sharing the Good News.

How does your family celebrate Jesus’ birth?

The Angels’ Song

BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

A precocious child, Frances Havergal started reading when she was four. Inspired by the example of her father, a noted hymn writer, she began writing poems when she was just seven. Born in England in 1836, she became committed to reaching others with the Gospel.

In her hymn “Now Let Us Sing the Angels’ Song,” she celebrated the message angels brought to the shepherds about Jesus’ birth. She focused on their *response* and the importance of being an active participant.

She reminds us that this was about Jesus, “our Savior King.” Each of us is invited to join in the praise and declare “Glory to God, and peace on earth.”

As with so many of her hymns, Frances wanted this hymn to point people back to the Savior, so they could know that “He came to tell the Father’s love, His goodness, truth, and grace.” In a dark world, He came to “show the brightness of His smile, the glory of His face, with His own light.”

We can rejoice because Jesus came to bring “true peace and perfect rest” to the weary. He came “to take away the guilt and sin” that all who believed might experience freedom and eternal life. He came “because He loved us.”

As you ponder Jesus’ birth, remember to celebrate. Join with the angels, believers throughout the world, and the heavenly throng around the throne. Praise Him. Spread the Word!

How can you spread Jesus’ love to others this Christmas season?

Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

Luke 2:13–14

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for sending Jesus that I might be freed from sin. Use me to impact others with the Gospel. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

Luke 2:14

Glory in the Highest

BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

Applying his training in ancient languages, John Brownlie developed a passion for translating ancient Greek and Latin hymns into English. Born in Glasgow, Scotland, he pastored churches in his native country but was best known for composing and translating hymns. He received an honorary doctorate from Glasgow University for his work in hymnology.

In 1913 he translated what can be considered his most often-sung Christmas hymn, “Glory in the Highest.” This hymn was inspired by studying the message sung by the angels on the hills outside Bethlehem. He found the spirit and tone they displayed to be otherworldly—such amazing music with a message and sound that opened a window into Heaven itself.

Thinking about the role played by the shepherds, the lyrics proclaim, “Glory in the highest!” His overwhelming realization was that Jesus was born and that His advent was a long-awaited event. Overwhelmed, these herdsmen watched the scene unfold, with “their eyes amazed.”

The author could not forget the role played by the magi who brought treasures “to crown the monarch born at Bethlehem.” How overwhelming to think that these sages brought what was best for an offering. Even though He was a king, they found Him just in a manger.

Today, the message rings true for people of all backgrounds, every nation, and every age. Each of us can proclaim with the shepherds and magi, glory to God!

PRAYER:

Father, this Christmas season I pause to give You glory. Thank You for bringing peace and goodwill. May we bring You praise. In Jesus’ name, amen.

What will you do today to bring glory to God?

Christ the Lord

BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

William A. Ogden had a unique perspective on the Christmas story, shaped in part by his experiences in the American Civil War. He served in that war, organizing a choir and writing music. He taught at many schools after the war but became better known as a composer.

In his compositions, we can feel the impact the Civil War must have had on his mind and heart. One of his most impactful compositions was called “Birth of Christ the Lord.” What was particularly significant to him was that Jesus was a king but was born “not in a palace but in a manger...where the beasts of the stall are fed.”

Ogden particularly was overwhelmed with the message sung by the angels. He could imagine the hills around Bethlehem ringing with music, “tidings of joy to men they bring.”

As the worshipers approached baby Jesus, they could witness how He was fulfilling prophecy. He was the Christ, “wrapped in the swaddling garments.” Ogden reminds us that He was “born to redeem” and save.

The angels focused on giving glory to God. They also signaled His desire that all people could experience peace and goodwill and a time when wars no longer would be necessary. Jesus had come to fulfill prophecy as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

This Christmas, remember to focus on God. Praise Him. Thank Him. Remember that Jesus came to bring peace on earth.

How can you share the peace of Christ during this busy season?

For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:11

PRAYER:

Father, I bring You honor and glory. I pray that You would bring peace on earth. I seek Your peace in my heart. In Jesus’ name, amen.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.

Micah 5:2

PRAYER:

Father, as I sing carols this year, help me focus on the true meaning of the Christmas story. In Jesus' name, amen.

What is your favorite Christmas carol that tells of Jesus' birth?

Sing We Now

BIBLE READING: MICAH 5

It is no surprise that the story of Jesus' birth often is told with song. This story has been told and sung in many languages, reflecting the way Christmas has been celebrated in many cultures.

Among the French, one of the most impactful carols is "Sing We Now of Christmas," a fifteenth-century carol. This has become one of the most popular carols of many from the French tradition available in the English-speaking world.

Written by an unknown author, this carol attempts to tell the key highlights of the entire Christmas story. In five short stanzas, participants sing words that tell the whole story.

We sing about the contribution of shepherds who were called by angels to journey to Bethlehem where they found the "holy child" along with Mary and Joseph seated by a manger. We sing the account of wise men who came from afar, "bearing gifts to Bethlehem, guided by a star." These men had brought gold and myrrh, "gifts of greatest price."

But the focus remains on Jesus: "Hear our grateful praises, to the babe so dear." We are encouraged to celebrate *because* "the King is born."

Throughout this Christmas season, reflect on the many ways the story can be told—the many songs, anthems, choruses, hymns, and carols. They have memorable melodies but also meaningful messages. Listen for the story of Jesus' birth, repeated for generations and still celebrated today.

Why Me?

BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

That night, many shepherds were on duty in the hills near Bethlehem. Yet it was to a specific group of shepherds on specific hills that an angel appeared. And it was in that specific place where an angelic choir sang.

About that same time in far-off Persia, many magi studied the heavens, looking for signs and insights. But it was one specific group of magi who grasped the significance of one special star. These men were willing to investigate further, risking all to follow that star across many miles, persevering through dangers and unknowns.

Were these shepherds and magi aware they were participating in unique events of cosmic importance? We can imagine them asking questions, wondering why, of all people, they had these unique experiences and witnessed such special things. Regardless of any uncertainties or doubts, their lives changed when they *responded*, embraced the opportunities God had given them, and followed.

In our own way, each of us has a similar story. Out of all the people in the world, each of us has a special calling from God. He has given us *unique* experiences and brought us to unique places. He speaks to us and calls us to recognize the unique tasks He has prepared for us and our unique preparation.

Are you sensitive to the ways God may be calling you? Are you sensitive to His leadership? Listening? Ready to respond?

Why do you think God chose shepherds to hear about Jesus' birth first?

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

Luke 2:15 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for Your plan for my life and all You have done for me. Speak to me. Use me. In Jesus' name, amen.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem.

Matthew 2:1 NASB

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, thank You for coming to this earth for me. I dedicate my time, talents, and treasures to You. I worship You. In Your name, amen.

What gift will you offer Jesus this Christmas?

A Special Assignment

BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 2

An important class of people in ancient Persia, the magi were *expected* to have a special understanding, grasping the meaning of events in the heavens and correctly interpreting the signs of the times. Persians took their role seriously. As a result, these men were respected and often held important positions in their religion and government.

History has many examples of their interpretations. One example occurred when the temple of Artemis at Ephesus burned down in 356 BC. It burned the night when Alexander the Great was born. Magi interpreted this as an omen of calamities that soon would befall their empire.

The magi who came to worship Jesus surely were highly regarded in their homeland. As men serious about their mission, they did not cross hundreds of miles in dangerous conditions based on mere feelings. They must have been *confident* their interpretation was correct.

These men followed signs from the stars packed with a distinctive message. From their trained observations, they discovered that *all creation* pointed to the birth of a unique King, a King so special they were willing to embark on a dangerous journey just to worship Him, honor Him, and present Him with gifts.

Today, the signs still point to this one Savior. He truly is Christ the Lord. Bring Him *your* gifts. Seek Him with your *whole* heart. Worship Him. Celebrate His birth. Let everyone know He is your Lord.

Journey of the Magi

BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 2

The Bible provides few details about the Magi. We know their origin, their destination, and the purpose of their journey from Persia to Judea. But what about the journey itself? We gain perspective from a painting by nineteenth-century French artist James Tissot called *Journey of the Magi*.

Tissot spent years honing his craft. Many of his paintings in his later years portrayed Bible stories, reflecting the influence of his mother, a devout believer. Studying his paintings, observers called them masterpieces, and his illustrations became recognized as definitive.

In his painting about the magi, Tissot imagined the part of their journey that took them through the “vast, arid landscape of the volcanic hills on the shores of the Dead Sea,” as described by one commentator. Photographs obviously don’t exist of these scenes, but Tissot’s painting makes it seem like we’re right there. We see the caravan led by the magi, their camels loaded down for a journey that already had taken them over hundreds of perilous miles.

Tissot’s painting helps bring insight into the journey of these men—the risks and dangers they faced, how lonely the journey must have seemed, and how determined they must have been to embark on this journey.

It reminds us of the determination and planning it took to follow that star and how God calls us to follow Him wherever He leads, regardless of the risks on our journey.

Reflect on the hardest journey God’s asked you to take.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem...Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

Matthew 2:1–2 NIV

PRAYER:

Father, I commit my life to following You. Guide me. I am willing to go where You want me to go. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His Star in the East and have come to worship Him.

Matthew 2:2

My King

BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 2

Born in England, James Rowe served in the Government Survey Office in Dublin, Ireland before moving to America. There, he was successful in the corporate world, but his real passion emerged in the more than 9,000 hymns, poems, and other works he published.

Perhaps his faith is best expressed in his hymn “He’s My King,” a celebration of all Jesus meant to him. He described singing about Jesus “all day long.” He was enraptured by that relationship and by how He brought joy to his heart. The love he felt from Jesus was everything to him.

He wanted everyone to know that Jesus was his Savior and King. Rowe sang His praises all day long. This was a real love relationship—“streams of love around my soul are flowing.” Jesus’ love had changed his life, and he was eager to tell others about his faith in Him. That love inspired him to sing “an endless song.”

He knew that he would spend eternity with Jesus. He would go home to glory with the souls who trust His saving grace and join all believers in singing and telling His story, “In the blessed sunshine of His face.”

This Christmas season, think about your personal relationship with Jesus. Don’t hold back, but celebrate. Sing the many ways He has changed your life. Make sure He is your King, your Savior, and the Lord of your life.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord Jesus, You are my King. I dedicate my time, talents, and treasures to You. I worship You. In Your name, amen.

Describe your relationship with Jesus.

A Personal Bethlehem

BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

What an awkward time to travel! The 100-mile journey from Galilee to Bethlehem was filled with unknowns and risks. Yet, preparing for the birth of their first child, Joseph and Mary felt compelled to take this journey.

They knew the angel Gabriel had told Mary that she would conceive and bring forth a special child, who would be the Son of God (Luke 1:31–35). But we can be sure that the journey presented complications and physical strains. Why, they must have wondered, at this delicate time, must they leave their home for this risky journey?

They must have had doubts. How could this perilous journey be part of God’s plan? They may have wondered and asked questions, but they obeyed and were faithful.

When they arrived in Bethlehem, there were no cheering crowds. There, in a humble stable, the Savior was born. Through their faithfulness, they changed the world.

Here, we find the model for the journey we must take. God has called each of us to go to special places and do specific tasks. We may have questions and doubts, but following the example set by Mary and Joseph, the key is to follow and obey, trusting God’s sovereign design.

What are the special places to which God has called you? To what special tasks has He called you? We find joy and fulfillment in serving Him wherever He calls us. Trust Him in each step of your journey.

What has God called you to do during this special season?

Joseph also went up from Galilee...into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.

Luke 2:4–5

PRAYER:

Father, I submit my life to You. Help me stay faithful to Your plan for me. I trust You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was.

Matthew 2:9

Celestial Guidance

BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 2

How can birds know *precisely* where to go on their migratory journeys? Intrigued by this question, scientists recently discovered that migrating birds use Earth's magnetic field lines and other unique biological patterns to help guide them to precise destinations.

Some birds are known to fly on a nonstop flight lasting as long as seven days and nights across the Pacific Ocean. Others have shorter journeys but are no less miraculous. These birds have no maps and no one to train them. Yet for thousands of years, thousands of birds have safely navigated these incredibly complex journeys, unique to each species.

How do they find their way? How do they know what to do? These birds have built-in skills. They have plugged into God's incredibly precise and complicated navigational process.

God has created the world in such a way that we can tap into His guidance system. The wise men who brought their gifts to the baby Jesus had skills that had been honed by generations. They simply followed the stars that guided them so precisely that they were led to a solitary stable in the tiny town of Bethlehem, thousands of miles from their home.

In many miraculous and specific ways, God can guide each of us to make the right decisions and know where to go. He can lead us on the right path. Remember, God has a plan for your life. Trust your life to Him.

PRAYER:

Father, I believe You have a plan for my life. Help me recognize the signposts You provide. I trust You to guide me. In Jesus' name, amen.

How are you following God's plan for your life?

Long-Expected Jesus

BIBLE READING: ISAIAH 11

People waited through the rule of countless kings and times when foreign armies fought over their land. They waited as their temple was destroyed and then rebuilt. They waited during years of exile and return. Over time, some stopped believing. Others gave up hope. But some held on to prophecies and the promise that the Messiah would come.

Then He came into the world! But Jesus was born at a time and in a way that surprised many. He brought hope for *everyone* (Isaiah 42:1-4). Overwhelmed by how God's promises were fulfilled, Charles Wesley wrote "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus," a hymn celebrating the prophetic aspects of His birth.

Wesley described how Jesus was born to deliver His people. Although born in humble circumstances, He still was a King, born to reign. Wesley prayed that by the Holy Spirit, He would "rule in all our hearts alone."

Wesley wrote that Jesus was born to set His people free. These words may have been inspired by the years Wesley spent in America where he was troubled by slavery. He knew Jesus could bring *complete* freedom and *everyone* could find rest in Him.

People may look for political or economic solutions to world problems. But Wesley knew that Jesus is the "hope of all the earth." He is the "desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart."

Now, *you* can celebrate! The long-expected Messiah has come! You can hope in Him.

Reflect on what Christmas means to you today.

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch from his roots will bear fruit.

Isaiah 11:1 NASB

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, thank You for giving me hope. I trust my life to You. Use me to impact others for the Gospel. In Your name, amen.

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”

Matthew 5:17

God’s Plan

BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 5

For 53-year-old Anton Bruckner, it was a critical moment. He stood before the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra to conduct the premiere of his *Third Symphony*. After years of rejection, this was his opportunity to hear his music played by a world-class orchestra.

But soon after the opening notes, the audience began streaming for the exits. When the symphony ended, only a few people remained. Instead of being a triumph, this was a crushing defeat. Overwhelmed, Bruckner stood on the podium, tears streaming down his cheeks.

Following this, many colleagues urged him to stop writing symphonies. After all, no one understood them. But Bruckner, a devout Christian, felt this would be a *compromise*. He knew someday God would call him and ask, “Where is the talent that I have given you?”

He felt he had to obey God. Eventually, Bruckner would be acclaimed as a master. But this would have been impossible without his commitment.

Every day, you make many decisions. What should you do with your time? Your resources? Study the example left by Jesus—an example of obedience and faithfulness. He was always sensitive to the leading of the Father (John 8:29) and always faithful.

Think about the decisions you will make today. Make sure you follow God’s leading and avoid the path of compromise. Surrender your life anew to Him. Seek to be faithful to fulfill the goals He gives you.

How well are you stewarding the resources and talents God’s given you?

Faithful

BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 2

Eugène-Alexis Girardet came from a family of Huguenots, including many noteworthy artists. Girardet, born in Paris, achieved fame as an artist at an early age. Then, following in the footsteps of family members, he traveled to northern Africa several times. There, he received intimate insight that resulted in paintings with the kind of authenticity that can only be gained from personal experience.

We sense this insight when studying his paintings on biblical subjects. Consider *The Flight into Egypt*. In this painting, Girardet sought to capture the journey of Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus into Egypt where they had gone to escape Herod’s relentless pursuit. This painting helps us realize the risk, danger, and loneliness of this journey.

Mary rides on a donkey, holding baby Jesus while Joseph leans against his walking stick. In the background are faint images of pyramids. All around is sand—desolation. In his flesh, Joseph must have wondered how they would survive. Had he heard God’s voice? Would they see their homeland again?

As Joseph learned, it takes faith to believe God. As we obey, we can face unknowns and uncertainties and perhaps feel alone. But in every situation, we must continue to believe that God is faithful. If He has spoken, He will fulfill His promises.

Make sure you are faithful to follow God’s call no matter where this leads and no matter what He calls you to do. He is faithful.

Where is God leading you that’s unfamiliar territory?

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream...“Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt...stay there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to kill Him.”

Matthew 2:14 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for Your plan for my life. I commit all I have to You. Use me for Your Kingdom. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Matthew 6:34

Tomorrow

BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 6

Through years of ministry, Charles Wesley learned the limits of his understanding and how *little* he knew about the future. In each moment, it was important to be faithful to do the work to which God had called him.

He expressed these insights in a hymn called “The Past No Longer in My Power.” This short hymn consists of just 42 words, but that was all it took to make a strong point.

The only thing he had been given for sure was the present. He could not predict what would take place in the future. The past was gone, and he could not go back and change anything. The focus should be on the present; this was the gift of God.

He prayed that in each moment God would help him know what to do and how to be faithful with each assignment, to serve and please Him.

The Bible reminds us about how little we know. In fact, we don’t know what will happen tomorrow. Our life is just “*a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away*” (James 4:14).

As Wesley discovered, it can be easy to dwell on the past and stew over words we have spoken, things we have done, and mistakes we have made. We need to let go of the past and focus on the present, every day seeking to be faithful to the tasks God gives us.

PRAYER:

Father, show me clearly the tasks You have called me to accomplish. Help me focus on fulfilling Your call. In Jesus’ name, amen.

How do you let go of past mistakes?

Predicting the Future

BIBLE READING: ISAIAH 47

During the time of Isaiah, the Babylonians had every reason to feel confident and secure. A powerful army protected their vast empire. Babylon itself was the largest and most magnificent city in the ancient world. And it all was supported by their concept of religion.

Scholar Joan Oates describes how Babylonians believed that man was created to serve the gods. “Each Babylonian had his own personal god or goddess to whom he offered prayers and sacrifices.” Priests regularly recited incantations and performed rituals to ward off evil powers, understand the future, and change the course of events.

Men who practiced divination could become powerful. Babylonians believed that their gods “shaped the destinies of mankind.” Through divination, they could “ascertain the will of the gods.” They looked for omens everywhere, from the actions of animals to celestial events as simple as rain and thunder.

Many people today are like these ancient Babylonians, looking for comfort and direction through false religions, the occult, astrology, and other practices. They think they can have their personal gods and predict the future. But as Isaiah warned the Babylonians, there is only one God. We must serve Him and Him alone.

Make sure you place your hope in God. Do not look to the gods of this world or be distracted by idols and false religions. God knows the future. Trust completely in Him. Stand on His Word.

Compose a prayer entrusting your future to God.

Let now the astrologers, those who prophesy by the stars, those who predict by the new moons, stand up and save you... They have become like stubble, fire burns them; they cannot save themselves from the power of the flame.

Isaiah 47:13–14 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, open my eyes to understand more of Your Word. Thank You that You know the future. I trust my life to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

PRAYER:

Father, I commit the coming year to You. I trust You and believe You will work everything together for my good. In Jesus' name, amen.

Reflect on this past year.

God Knows the Future

BIBLE READING: ECCLESIASTES 3

Looking back at the end of a year, there is much to ponder about our personal lives and the world. Some things may have surprised us. At times, we may have been encouraged or discouraged.

Now we face the beginning of another year and another set of questions. Certainly, we all would like to know what will happen. This is a time to remember important *truths* the Bible teaches about *time*.

The Bible reminds us of God's *sovereignty* and *design*, for "*He has made everything beautiful in its time*" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Our paths may bring us through many different experiences. But the Bible promises that God will work everything together for good (Romans 8:28).

The Bible also reminds us that God has an *eternal purpose* for our lives. In fact, "*He has put eternity in their hearts.*" But He has made it impossible for us to know *exactly* what will happen in the future: "*No one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end*" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

None of us knows what will happen in the coming year. But the Bible also assures us that God knows and that we can trust Him.

Are you ready for the future? No matter what you face, you can trust God. He has made *everything* beautiful *in its time*. He promises to take care of you and work *everything* together for good.

God's Word

BIBLE READING: 2 TIMOTHY 2

For hundreds of years, only one version of the Bible was available to English-speaking people: the Vulgate. But it was written in Latin, a language most people could not understand. In addition, only clergy were allowed to read the Bible. But a student named John Wycliffe became committed to knowing more about the Bible for himself.

In 1348, the black plague spread throughout Europe. Stirred by this tragedy, Wycliffe wanted God's perspective. Pouring himself into the Bible, he became convinced that *everyone* needed to be able to read the Bible themselves in their own language.

So he began an English translation, completing this in 1382. It was the first new European translation in nearly 1,000 years. Then he sent men, called Lollards, to bring the Word to the people and to help teach and encourage Bible reading.

Concerned about these unauthorized actions, the church banned Bible translation and expelled Wycliffe from his teaching position. Even though he and his followers experienced persecution, they had begun a revolution that changed the world.

As we end a year, how appropriate to think about the *importance* of God's Word and the commitment of men like John Wycliffe, who died on this date in 1384. He gave his life so we could read the Bible. As you approach a new year, commit to filling your heart and mind with the Bible. Renew your commitment to serve God and obey His Word.

What is your Bible reading plan for the coming year?

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15 NIV

PRAYER:

Father, give me a greater hunger to know Your Word. Help me understand it more clearly. Thank You. In Jesus' name, amen.

His Authority Is Yours!



Few of us really grasp the awesome authority we have in Christ.

We may not look very impressive or strong on the outside, but we've been given a mighty badge of delegated authority. Remember, behind every policeman is the entire police force, the FBI, the National Guard, and the entire Armed Forces of the United States. The badge of delegated authority is far more important than an officer's personal strength or power.

Jesus has given us His badge of delegated authority. When we submit to Jesus and act in His name, all the power and resources of Heaven are at our disposal. No enemy,

including stress, anxiety, fear, or doubt, can stand against us when we're truly submitted to Him!

In John 17:18, Jesus prayed to the Father, "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." God sent His Son to earth for a clear objective: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). The "works of the devil" are the consequences of sin that entered the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve: sin, sickness, relationship conflicts, and death.

Jesus was given all authority to accomplish His mission, and this

same authority has now been given to us! Because Jesus sent us in the same way that His Father sent Him, we have been delegated all the authority that was delegated to Christ!

Frankly, this can be hard for most of us to believe. Why? Not because it isn't clearly taught in Scripture! No, we struggle in grasping our full authority in Christ because it seems so contrary to our experience! In essence, we are saying, "I'll believe it when I see it" while God is saying, "When you start believing it, you'll start seeing it!"

The devil has intimidated many Christians into believing they are powerless against him. It's like the scene from *The Wizard of Oz* movie when "the great and powerful Oz" is trying to terrify Dorothy and her friends. His fear tactics seem to be succeeding until Dorothy's dog, Toto, pulls back the curtain. It turns out that the mighty Oz is just a feeble, old man.

Don't let Satan scare you from boldly venturing into your promised land! God is bigger than any giant that seems to block your way! Because you've been given the authority of Christ, there's no enemy that can stand against you when you pursue your destiny in His name!

Meditate on these verses about your authority, and tell us how they embolden your faith! ❖

Week One

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Matthew 28:18-19 ESV

Week Two

And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases.

Luke 9:1

Week Three

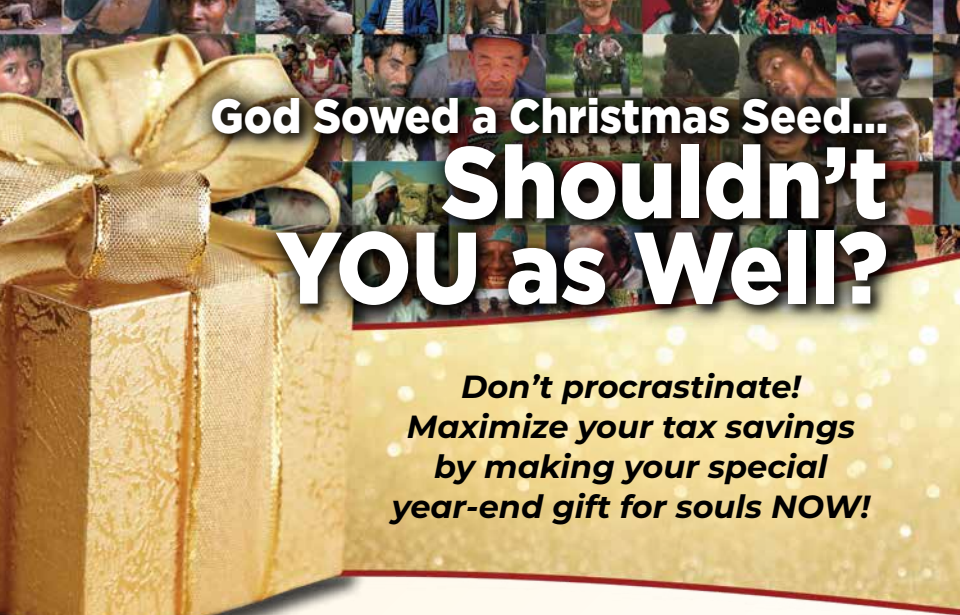
And raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:6 ESV

Week Four

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

1 John 4:4 ESV



God Sowed a Christmas Seed... Shouldn't YOU as Well?

**Don't procrastinate!
Maximize your tax savings
by making your special
year-end gift for souls NOW!**

God has given YOU His Son...
and sowing your financial seeds into God's Kingdom
through the Good Ground of Inspiration Ministries
will give HIM a harvest of souls for eternity!

Because of your partnership with Inspiration Ministries...

**Every second of every day, our evangelistic outreaches
present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to someone,
somewhere in the world!**

Imagine what it will be like to be approached in Heaven by
countless people you've never even met, thanking you for
caring enough to send them the Gospel!

Remember, your gift given by **CHECK** counts toward your
2023 taxes only if it's **postmarked by December 31**. Gifts
given by **CREDIT/DEBIT CARD** must be **PROCESSED
by December 29**. To ensure it is processed on time, we
recommend giving online or by phone.

ONLINE: inspiration.org/souls
US/CAN/CAR: +1 (803) 578-1899
UK /Intl: +44 (0) 84 5683 0580



A Merry Heart...

does good, like medicine. – Proverbs 17:22

Why is it getting harder to
buy Advent calendars?

Their days are numbered.

What do you call a bunch
of chess masters bragging
about their games in a hotel
lobby over the holidays?

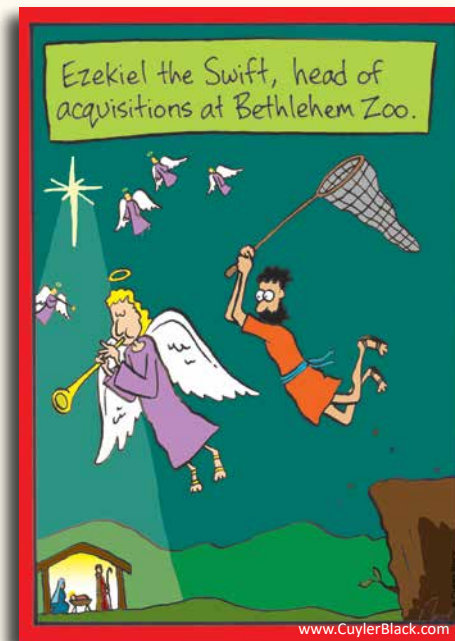
Chess nuts boasting in an
open foyer.

What did the gingerbread
man put on his bed?

A cookie sheet!

What did the stamp say to
the Christmas card?

Stick with me, and
we'll go places!



Got some clean, Christian
humor you'd like to share?

Email it to:
MerryHeart@inspiration.org

What did the bald man
say when he got a comb
for Christmas?

"I'll never part with it!"

What type of key do
you need in order to
put on a Nativity play?

A don-key

What is the best possible
holiday present?

A broken drum—
you just can't beat it!

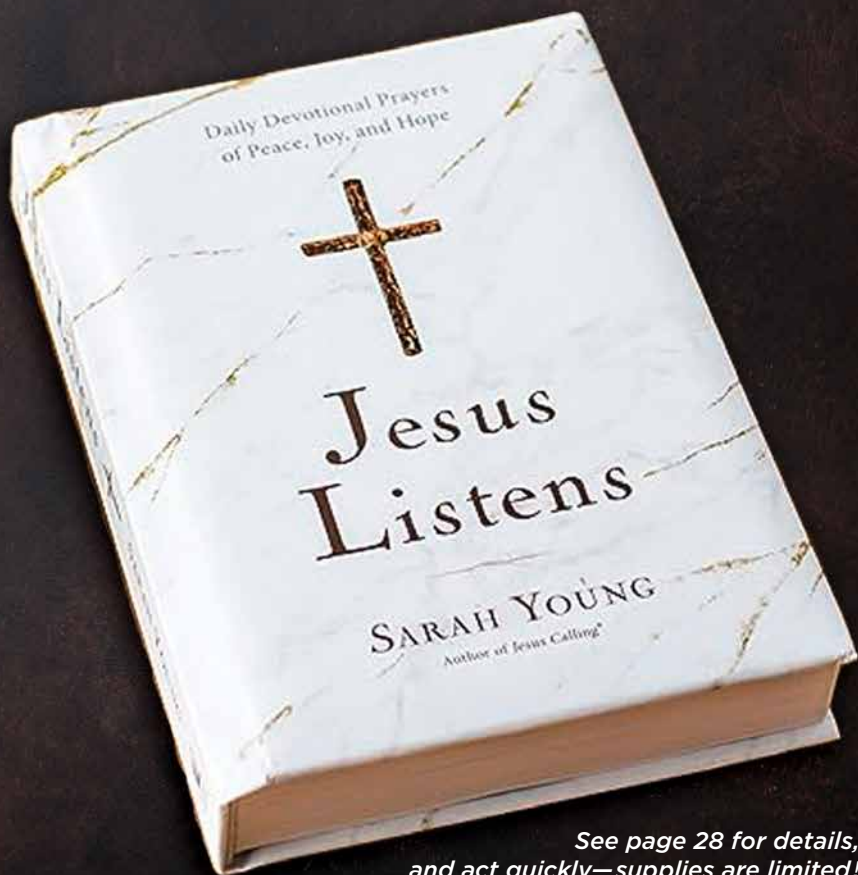




Empower Your Prayers

Many of us want to pray more, but we feel unsure of what to say. In this inspiring, 365-day, devotional prayer book, *Jesus Listens*, Sarah Young, author of the New York Times best-seller *Jesus Calling*, helps you turn to God in all circumstances through a year of daily prayers based on the words of Scripture.

Let Sarah Young's words and her constant return to the Word of God enrich your prayer life like never before.



See page 28 for details,
and act quickly—supplies are limited!