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ACTIVATED

Vol 22 • Issue 12

GOD'S CHRISTMAS GIFT

The perfect fit for
every heart

The Man Who Found Christmas

A modern-day
Christmas Carol

The Way

How Luke found
his way home





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

CHRISTMAS HOPE

As we said goodbye to 2020, most of us were looking at a holiday season that was darker and lonelier than usual, without many of the comforts and joys we've come to associate with the celebration of the birth of Christ. There was also terrible uncertainty regarding the future.

What a year this has been! At the time of writing this, while it's impossible to predict the course of the Covid-19 pandemic and new variants, there are encouraging signs and we can look forward to the time when the world will have overcome the worst effects of this virus.

At the same time, we can't help but feel pain for the families and friends of all those who perished this year, many of whom were denied the chance to say goodbye to their loved ones or to properly dispose of their remains. The world's inequalities were again laid bare, as the deaths and financial hardships were concentrated in those nations, cities, and neighborhoods that were the least prepared to deal with them, and the economic recovery, while welcome, is proving to be just as unequal.

It has been an exceedingly tough year for so many, and as it draws to a close, perhaps you may be asking the age-old question: If God is all-powerful and truly loves us, as the Bible says, why doesn't He do something to relieve the pain and suffering that so many are experiencing?

He did. He sent Jesus.

God feels our pain. He understands our struggles and sympathizes with our losses. He longs to draw us close, to soothe, to heal, to comfort, to reassure. He wanted so badly to help us that He sent His Son in human form to live among us, to experience our hardships, to reveal His heart, and to put us in direct, personal contact with His love and power. He came to us as a helpless, innocent baby in a manger, not to remove our problems, but to equip us to get through them and become better for them.

And that is why we have reason to hope this Christmas.

For more information on *Activated*, visit our website or write to us.

Website: activated.org

Email: activated@activated.org

Local contacts:

South Africa:

Tel: (082) 491 2583

Email: sales@bigthought.co.za

India:

Email: activatedindia@activated.org

Nigeria:

Cell: +234 (0) 7036963333

Email: activatednigeria@activated.org

Philippines:

Cell: (0922) 8125326

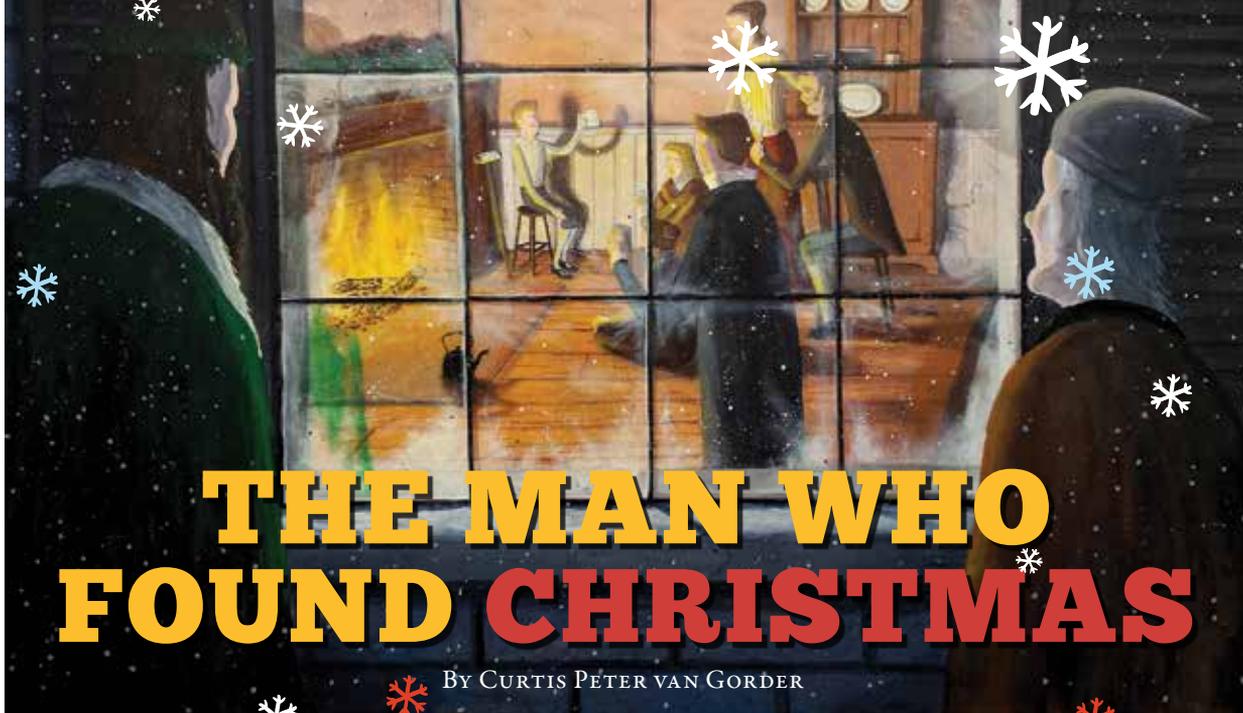
Email: activatedph@gmail.com

EDITOR Ronan Keane

DESIGN Gentian Suçi

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THE MAN WHO FOUND CHRISTMAS

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

MY WIFE AND I ONCE SAW A GERMAN STAGE PRODUCTION OF *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*, by Charles Dickens. You likely know the story of a miserly banker who transforms into a kind and generous man through the mysterious workings of three ghosts who take him on a trip through his past, present, and future. I was struck by the impact the stage production had on me and the audience.

The story was born out of Dickens' desire to make people aware of the terrible conditions of workers in England at that time. Having been brought up in poverty and having worked in a factory 12 hours a day as a child himself, he empathized with their plight and hoped this story would make a difference for the

better in their lives. Dickens wrote the novella in six weeks, and it became an instant and enduring hit.

Ruth Glancy, a professor of English literature, stated that the greatest impact of *A Christmas Carol* was how it inspired individual readers to help the needy. Thanks in part to this story, hosting Christmas dinners for the poor became a tradition. In 1867 one American businessman was so moved by attending a reading that he closed his factory on Christmas Day and sent every employee a turkey. In the early 1900s, the queen of Norway sent gifts to London's crippled children signed "With Tiny Tim's Love." Author G. K. Chesterton wrote, "The beauty and blessing of the story ... lie in the great furnace of real happiness that glows through Scrooge and everything around him. ... Whether the Christmas visions would or would not convert Scrooge, they convert us."

I recently read about a Christmas transformation story that parallels the

one in *A Christmas Carol*. It's about a banker named George Mason, who locked himself by accident in his own bank vault on Christmas Eve. When he finally got out two days later, he realized that no one missed him. Fortunately, he had reflected on his life and decided to make positive changes. Inside his vault is a handwritten card that reads: "To love people, to be indispensable somewhere, that is the purpose of life. That is the secret of happiness."¹

We don't have to be visited by ghosts or get locked inside a bank vault to realize the real meaning of Christmas. God loved the world so much that He sent Jesus, His only begotten Son, on that first Christmas, to redeem us from death and give us eternal life. Let's share the love we have received with others this Christmas season.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST² IN GERMANY. ■

1. Note: Read Curtis Peter van Gorder's dramatization of this story here: <https://bringelixir.wordpress.com/tag/man-who-missed-christmas/>
2. <http://elixirmime.com>



BY PETER AMSTERDAM

CHRISTMAS ECHOES

FOR MANY OF US, an important feature of Christmas is remembering the story of Jesus' birth, whether through reenactments and plays of the first Christmas, readings of the Christmas story from the Bible, or by singing beautiful carols about His birth. As we celebrate the Christmas season, we are reminded of the story from which these all emanated.

When we read about the shepherds, the wise men, the manger, and

the star, it connects us to different aspects of the birth of our Savior. As we look at the context in which the birth of Jesus is placed, we find that there are several events recorded in the Old Testament that echo within the Gospel accounts of the Nativity. Awareness of these connections helps to deepen our understanding and appreciation of God's work in bringing about His plan for our salvation.

One such aspect of the story relates to the announcement given to Mary that she had been chosen to be the mother of the Son of God.¹ Mary was betrothed to Joseph, meaning that she was legally considered married to him, though there had been no wedding ceremony and the marriage had not been consummated. Twice Luke mentions in his Gospel that Mary is a virgin.

The angel Gabriel made this astounding announcement to Mary:

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”²

Six months earlier the same angel had appeared to Zechariah, the husband of Mary's cousin Elizabeth, while he was in the temple in Jerusalem, and announced that Elizabeth would have a child as well. To Zechariah, Gabriel had said:

“You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord ... and he will be filled with the

1. See Luke 1:26–27.
2. Luke 1:31–33 ESV
3. Luke 1:14–17 ESV
4. See Luke 1:12–13.
5. See Genesis 16.
6. See Genesis 17.
7. Luke 1:34–35 ESV

Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God ... to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."³

Both announcements were delivered by an angelic messenger; both explained that sons would be born in situations that would require a work of God, as Mary was a virgin and Elizabeth was old and barren.

Mary was told to name her son *Jesus*; Zechariah was instructed to name his son *John*.⁴ Zechariah was troubled and afraid at the sight of the angel; so was Mary. Both were told not to fear.

The birth announcements of John the Baptist and Jesus follow a pattern similar to the stories recounted in the Old Testament of the births of Ishmael, Isaac, and Samson. Some of the similarities in all these stories include an appearance of a messenger from God (or God Himself); fear, astonishment, or falling down prostrate before the angel or messenger; a divine message; an objection as to how this could happen or a request for a sign; and the giving of a sign.

This pattern can be seen in the story of Hagar, the mother of Ishmael, when she was found by an

angel in the desert. The angel called her by name, saying, "Hagar, where are you going?" Then he said to her, "Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen."⁵

A similar pattern is also seen in the story of Abraham and his wife Sarah, who was barren. God appeared to Abraham, who was ninety-nine years old, and announced that within a year He would give Abraham a son. Abraham was instructed to call his son *Isaac*, and God said that He would establish His covenant with Isaac and his offspring.⁶

Another facet of the story that is noteworthy is the miracle of these women becoming pregnant. Sarah and Elizabeth were both barren and elderly. Neither of these women would have been able to conceive without God's direct intervention. Each couple experienced a miracle birth just as God had said they would.

With Mary it was different. She was a virgin. Although we witness God's miracle-working power in these earlier miraculous births, there was no Old Testament example of a woman who had never been with

a man becoming pregnant. While Sarah and Elizabeth overcame age and barrenness through a miracle of God, Mary's pregnancy was going to require a completely new manifestation of God's creative power.

Mary asked the angel how this was going to come about, and the angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God."⁷

Rather than God overriding some physical impediment such as barrenness or old age, this was going to be a completely new, one-of-a-kind act of creation by God.

A further example of the echoes of the Old Testament in the Nativity story is the reference in the angel's announcement to Mary to a prophecy Nathan gave regarding King David's offspring a thousand years earlier. This prophecy was foundational to Israel's expectation of the messiah. Part of Nathan's prophecy stated: "I will make for you a great name; I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever."⁸

The hope and expectation of the Jewish people at the time of Jesus' birth was that a messiah—a normal



human being—would be anointed by God and would arise in Israel as a king and leader. There was no expectation that the messiah would be the Son of God.

However, the angel Gabriel, using terms similar to Nathan's prophecy, expressed that Mary's son would be *great*, that God would give him the throne of David *forever*, that there would be *no end to his kingdom*, and most important, that he would be called the *Son* of the Most High.⁹

In these few examples of similarities between the story of Jesus' birth and other events related in the Old Testament, we see connections that point to the wonderful miracle of God's love for us and His work

throughout history to bring salvation to humanity. Jesus, the Son of God, entered this world as a gift of love from God Himself.

His life, death, and resurrection made it possible for us to be redeemed from our sin and to connect with God in a more personal and intimate manner than ever before. Through God's gift to humanity, we are able to find the joy and happiness of being one of God's children, to live with Him forever—the greatest and most long-lasting gift of all.

PETER AMSTERDAM AND HIS WIFE, MARIA FONTAINE, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE. ■

THE ANSWER

By Keith Phillips

Can you remember a time when you were a child and you wanted something so much that it seemed that special something would never come?—And then when it finally did come, it wasn't what you had expected at all, but something far better? That's what our heavenly Father did with Christmas.

Since the beginning of time, people had longed for a special something to make their lives truly happy and complete. Who would have ever thought that all of that would come in the form of a tiny baby born in a barn in some far-away land? But that's exactly what happened.

God looked at every human heart He had created and every heart to come, and He knew just what we needed. So He took a part of His own heart and fashioned the perfect answer. Then He sent the answer into the world. And He called the answer Jesus.

8. 2 Samuel 7:9, 13–14, 16 ESV

9. See Luke 1:32–33.

A BETTER TOMORROW

BY RUTH DAVIDSON



ON A RETURN TRIP FROM VISITING SOME OF MY CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN, I was waiting to board my plane at Gate 56. The silence was rudely broken by a voice emanating from the loudspeaker, “Pre-boarding announcement: Everyone with small children, all uniformed military personnel, those handicapped or in wheelchairs, please board.”

I had flown numerous times before, but this particular time, something struck me like never before. One of the servicemen with a cast on his leg and foot was on crutches, another was being pushed in a wheelchair, while another had no visible disabilities. They were no doubt on

their way home to enjoy the holidays with loved ones. Then my thoughts began to wander to soldiers suffering from PTSD. My mother’s heart went out to them in compassion.

It was shortly before Christmas and I was reminded of a few lines from John Lennon’s song written years before. It begins, “And so this is Christmas and what have you done? Another year over and a new one just begun.” The main point he was driving home was one of peace and to stop all the fighting. Then for the New Year: “Let’s hope it’s a good one, without any fear.”¹

The word “war” comes from the Old High German word “werra,” meaning to confuse or to cause confusion. Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians tells us that “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.”² And John writes that “If any man says he loves God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his

brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”³

In approximately BC 760, Isaiah prophesied that in the coming reign of Christ on earth, there will be no more war. “He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”⁴

We look forward in the future to a better day where there will be love and laughter and peace ever after. In that day, we’ll be free from war with real peace brought by God and His kingdom forever.

RUTH DAVIDSON WAS A MISSIONARY TO THE MIDDLE EAST, INDIA, AND SOUTH AMERICA FOR 25 YEARS. SHE IS NOW AN AUTHOR AND CONTRIBUTOR TO THE WEBSITE WWW.THEBIBLEFORYOU.COM. ■

1. “Happy Xmas” (War Is Over), John Lennon, 1971
2. 1 Corinthians 14:33
3. 1 John 4:20
4. Isaiah 2:4



BY LI LIAN

THE WAY

LUKE, a young student living in an industrial metropolis on the coast of West Africa, stared despondently out his cracked window. It had been over two years since he had last seen his elderly parents who lived in a distant city, and he hoped to make it there for Christmas.

But the problem was always the same: money. With the economic slump, part-time work was all he was able to find, and his meager earnings were barely enough to sustain him, let alone pay for the expensive bus fares that rose considerably during the busy holiday season.

He turned away from the window and buried his head in his hands, as he mulled over what he could do.

Later that evening, he asked a good friend if he could possibly help him with the transport fare. Unfortunately, his friend was also in a tight financial situation and had almost nothing to spare. “But,” he said, “if you are convinced that God wants you to visit your parents, He will

make a way. The Bible says that ‘with God nothing will be impossible.’¹ Both of us are short on money now, but God is never short of anything. I know that He can get you there, and you can prove Him by heading out tomorrow.”

“But I don’t have a car,” replied Luke.

“You have your feet,” his friend answered.

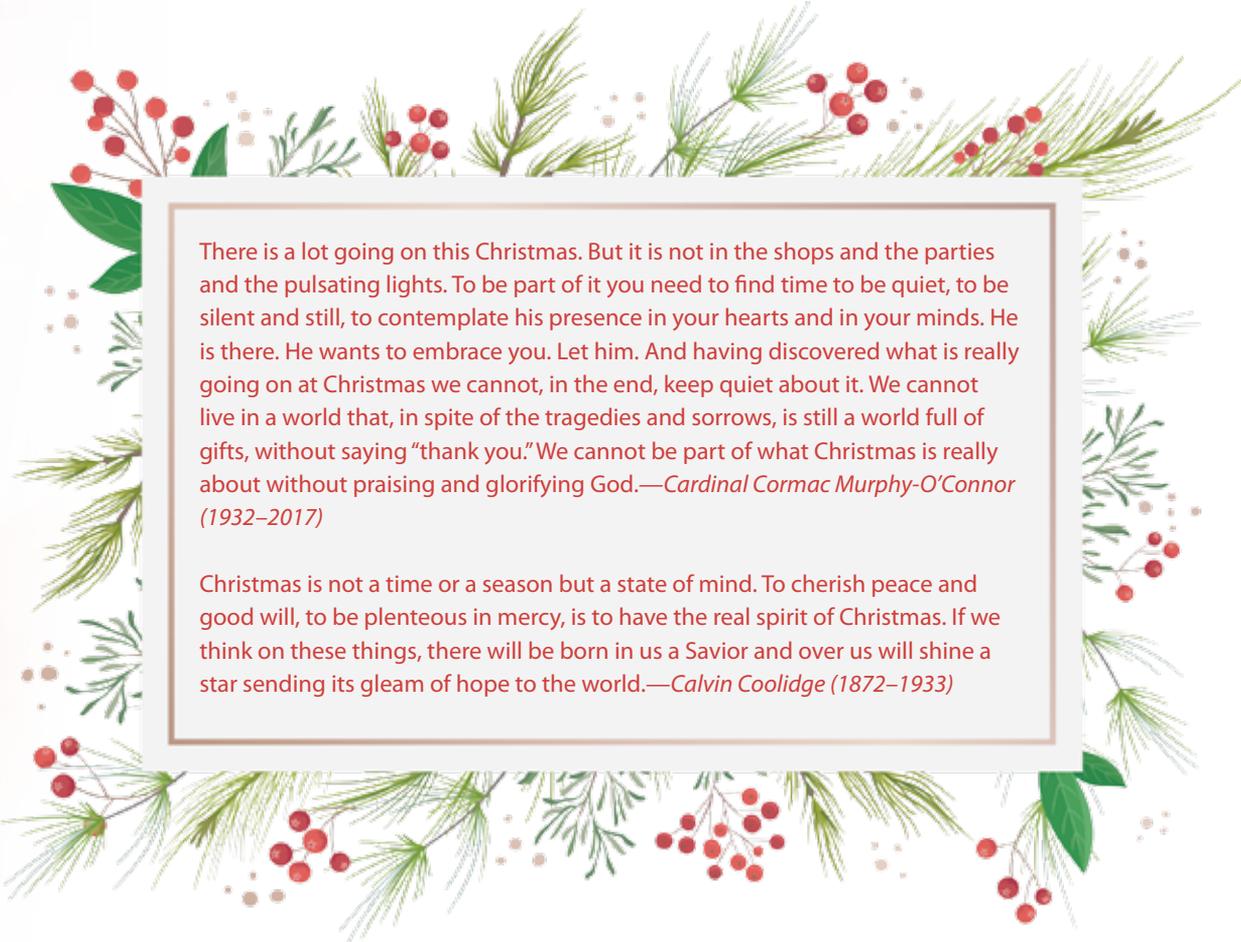
“Walk? I can’t walk that distance!”

“I know, and God knows that too. But at this point you have two choices: you can choose to stay home tomorrow and probably nothing will happen, or you can choose to start your trip and pray that something will happen. If you step out and try, God will make a way for you.”

The next day, Luke set off in the direction of his hometown. In his backpack, he carried a large stack of gospel tracts, and for the next hour, he handed out tracts to whomever he came across—passersby, Christmas shoppers, hawkers, and roadside beggars.

When he reached a crowded bus station, he passed out tracts to the lines of anxious passengers waiting to enter

1. Luke 1:37



There is a lot going on this Christmas. But it is not in the shops and the parties and the pulsating lights. To be part of it you need to find time to be quiet, to be silent and still, to contemplate his presence in your hearts and in your minds. He is there. He wants to embrace you. Let him. And having discovered what is really going on at Christmas we cannot, in the end, keep quiet about it. We cannot live in a world that, in spite of the tragedies and sorrows, is still a world full of gifts, without saying “thank you.” We cannot be part of what Christmas is really about without praising and glorifying God.—*Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor (1932–2017)*

Christmas is not a time or a season but a state of mind. To cherish peace and good will, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas. If we think on these things, there will be born in us a Savior and over us will shine a star sending its gleam of hope to the world.—*Calvin Coolidge (1872–1933)*

the crowded and overstuffed buses. The buses were so packed that he knew that even if he had transport money, he wouldn’t be able to get a seat. The sinking feeling of disappointment that had come over him the day before returned, but he pushed it out of his mind and continued on his way.

He reached a busy intersection, and as he stood on the roadside, waiting to cross, the sound of a car approaching jolted him out of his thoughts. He turned around to see a silver Suburban pull over onto the curb behind him.

“Good morning,” said the driver, looking out of his window. “I saw you earlier across the street at the bus station while I was fueling my car. I knew from the backpack you were carrying that you were traveling, but you didn’t board any bus. When I saw you now, I decided to stop. Where are you heading?”

Luke told him and gingerly added that he didn’t have enough money to pay the bus fare.

“My family lives there as well!” exclaimed the driver. “In fact, I’m going there now to see them for the holidays. You’re welcome to join me.”

And so the overjoyed Luke found his transportation. As he climbed into the passenger seat, he was reminded of the lyrics to a song that he had once heard:

*I know the Lord will make a way for me.
If I trust and never doubt
He will surely work things out.
I know the Lord will make a way for me.*

And when I heard a pastor tell this story about Luke’s miraculous Christmas ride, I knew that the Lord would make a way for me too when I step out by faith along the path of His will.

LI LIAN IS A COMPTIA CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL AND WORKS AS AN OFFICE AND SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATOR FOR A HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION IN AFRICA. ■



SOME YEARS BACK, my husband and I were serving as missionaries in northern Brazil when an opening came up for us to take part in a new venture helping young people in Buenos Aires.

At the time we had three children, and I was pregnant with our fourth. My husband is from Argentina and was hoping we could arrive in time to spend Christmas with his elderly father, so a few days before Christmas we set out on the 7,000 km (4,350 mi) overland journey. The trip went fine until we arrived at the border.

Unable to drive our van into Argentina due to paperwork complications, we decided to leave it in Brazil until we could sort things out. Someone gave us a ride from the border to a truck stop in the city of Concordia, from where we planned to take a bus the rest of the way. The first bus to arrive was full, and when

we inquired about the bus schedule in the truck stop restaurant, we were told that there wouldn't be another bus until the next day.

Our hearts sank. We felt like Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. December is chilly in northern Argentina, but it was warm inside the restaurant. The waiter, who was there alone, said we could stay as long as we needed. We said a fervent prayer.

That prayer was answered only a few minutes later. Several cars pulled up, and a party of about 30 people filled the huge table in the center of the restaurant. They turned out to be the owners of the truck stop and their families, and they invited us to join their festivities, which included a delicious Christmas dinner. It was midnight before we knew it, and we all exchanged hugs and warm Christmas wishes, as carols played over the sound system.

We felt so loved. We had arrived cold and hungry at a lonely, empty truck stop in the middle of nowhere, but God didn't forget us. He sent His Christmas angels—first the waiter, then the owners and their families—to cheer us up and share a wonderful celebration.

At 12:20 a.m., two bus drivers stopped at the restaurant for a cup of coffee. They were returning to Buenos Aires with an empty tourist bus, and offered to take us there free of charge. We slept soundly on the bus and arrived to a beautiful pink sunrise over La Plata River.

It didn't go as we had planned, but it was a Christmas we will never forget.

ROSANE PEREIRA IS AN ENGLISH TEACHER AND WRITER IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■



REACHING AT OUT CHRISTMAS

BY MARIA FONTAINE

WITH THE CHRISTMAS SEASON BEGINNING, we will likely be presented with numerous opportunities to talk to people about how the babe in the manger is a gift that can have great significance for them, right now, today. Because Christmas for many is little more than a secular, commercialized holiday, there is little to celebrate for the millions worldwide who grapple with poverty, injustice, chaos, fear, and suffering. But there is hope; there can be awe-inspiring life transformation, which can bring strength and joy where there was none, and the will to keep going in hard times, when that will is almost gone.

As the world grows darker, the gift appears more valuable, and people who are looking for the Light will not be able to miss it. The Christian message of hope, that God's power can keep us and that His love can overcome anything, becomes more

appealing and relevant by the day, as events strip away people's sense of security, worldly joys, and even daily necessities in many cases.

This Christmas, let the message of hope ring in your heart and radiate from your life. At every opportunity, let it beam from your face. Let's proclaim the message that Jesus is our hope!

Spread the message this Christmas that there is an answer for those seeking truth and meaning. Declare how God loved us so much that He took on a human body so that He could experience the life that we all face, unshielded from its hardships and upheavals. He didn't choose the easy path through life. He wanted to fully experience the human existence: the immense difficulties as well as the joys.

Let's show people the unvarnished story of the Son of God,

who faced incredible challenges and died a cruel death on the cross to save each one of us. Let's give them hope in the midst of their troubles with the knowledge that God in the flesh, Jesus, experienced the full force of man's inhumanity to man. That's why He can be right here, a close friend who truly understands the hardships and fears we face in life. He wants to stay by our side, sustaining and upholding us through everything.

This Christmas, through our example and words, let's show that hope exists and that abundant life is possible, through Jesus.

MARIA FONTAINE AND HER HUSBAND, PETER AMSTERDAM, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE. ■

BY GABRIEL GARCÍA

LAST CHRISTMAS...



CHRISTMAS 2020 LOOKED LIKE IT WAS SHAPING UP INTO A BLEAK AFFAIR. The newspapers were swamped with letters from people mourning for past days when they were able to get together with their families to celebrate. The lockdown in Chile had taken its toll, and the pandemic, like the Grinch, seemed to have not only caused illness and death, but also stolen much of what makes Christmas outstanding. The closeness, the precious moments to enjoy the company of loved ones, would have to wait for better times, if ever. Smiles were scarce, cheerfulness was slim, and no one was immune to that. It seemed not much could be done in a pandemic Christmas. On top of it, we had just moved houses and were very busy settling in.

Due to the government's prohibition on all gatherings of more than five people, we had to cancel our usual activities for children in churches, parks, and community centers. But, as they say, love finds a way and hope lightened a ray. A Christmas market was allowed a few blocks from where we live, so we put our masks on and went out to meet folks doing their holiday shopping and give them

a message of hope and encouragement. Everyone we met received Christmas tracts.

Though many people were distressed at not being able to assemble in big family reunions, it was heartening to see how they made the most of the occasion and celebrated modestly. This helped bring home the simplicity of the Christmas story, causing us to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas and the Christ child born in a solitary stable. At the end of the day, it truly felt like we were collectively telling the Grinch to beat it!

Perhaps you can't engage in your usual Christmas routines because of the lingering pandemic restrictions or your own particular circumstances. But take heart, God wants you to celebrate His Son's birthday. He will make a way and show you how to, in spite of restrictions, distances, or limitations.

GABRIEL GARCÍA V. IS THE EDITOR OF THE SPANISH EDITION OF *ACTIVATED* AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN CHILE. ■

BY JOSIE CLARK

THE BEST PART OF CHRISTMAS

AS I RUSHED AROUND THE STREETS OF MORELIA, Mexico, the stoplights were crowded with beggars. It was Christmas Eve, and I had gone out with my 10-year-old daughter Cathy for some last-minute shopping.

“Look at her!” Cathy drew my attention to an old woman who had stopped begging momentarily and was rubbing her cold, bare feet.

“She’s someone’s grandmother,” I thought aloud, “but instead of being home with her family, she is out here in her bare feet, trying to scrape together a little money for food.” Then an idea struck me. “Cathy, let’s go home and get together some food for her.”

It was already getting dark, so she probably wouldn’t be working that stoplight much longer. We raced home, found a couple of sturdy bags, and began going through our well-stocked pantry and refrigerator. Rice, beans, dried jalapeños, a jar of salsa, corn tortillas, a cooked chicken. It was easy to fill the bags from our abundance. A loaf of bread, jam, bacon. I tied the bags with large bows, and we headed off to find the old woman.

At first we thought we had taken too long and missed her. Then we saw her trudging slowly down the street, her shawl wrapped tightly around her, probably on her way home.

“Hello!” Cathy greeted her and continued in Spanish. “We saw you at the stoplight and brought you some food for Christmas dinner. We hope you and your family will feel God’s love this Christmas.”



The old woman looked at us with wonderment, and tears welled up in her eyes. Then she took Cathy’s hands in hers and kissed them. “Thank you. Thank you. God bless you. You are beautiful. You are a Christmas angel.”

She took the bags and continued down the street.

Our own Christmas Eve was festive, as usual, and the next morning Cathy opened her gifts. When I asked her if she was having a good Christmas, she replied, “You know, Mommy, seeing that old woman so happy last night, and having her kiss my hands—that was the best Christmas present I received. I think giving is the best part of Christmas!”

JOSIE CLARK IS A FREELANCE WRITER IN THE UNITED STATES AND A LONGTIME *ACTIVATED* READER. ■

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

GOD'S CHRISTMAS GIFT



CHRISTMAS CELEBRATES THE MOST IMPORTANT BIRTH IN HUMAN HISTORY, when the Creator of the universe entered our world in bodily form as both God and man in Jesus. An angel appeared to announce Jesus' birth to a few shepherds who were watching their sheep at night. "I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people," the angel proclaimed, "for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."¹

As I was thinking about that, I was reminded of another event that took place a few days later. When Jesus' parents presented Him in the temple, in accordance with

1. Luke 2:10–11
2. See Luke 2:26–32.
3. John 3:16–17
4. John 14:6

the Mosaic Law, they met an old man who had received a personal promise from God. The man's name was Simeon, and God had told him that he would not die before seeing the Messiah. When Simeon saw the baby Jesus, he took Him in his arms, praised God, and said, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel."²

Both proclamations make it clear that Jesus came to bring salvation to "all people"—anyone who would believe in Him, regardless of race, religion, background, or anything else. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God

If you haven't received God's ultimate Christmas gift, you can right now by welcoming Jesus as your Savior. Simply pray a prayer like the following:

Jesus, I want to experience God's love and care, which are promised through You, "the way, the truth, and the life."⁴ I open my heart and invite You in. Please forgive my sins, fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and give me eternal life. Amen.

Oh Christmas star, shine your light and guide us all to the true meaning of Christmas! Direct us to the Savior, the Prince of Peace, that we too may have peace in our hearts and good will toward all men.—*Troi Fountain*

did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."³

"Whoever believes." Salvation is God's Christmas gift to you and me.

PETER AMSTERDAM AND HIS WIFE, MARIA FONTAINE, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ■



ADVENT

IDEAS

BY MARIE ALVERO

I LOVE THE IDEA OF ADVENT, though I admit that I'm not too great at observing it. It comes at the busiest time of the year when I'm rushing to meet year-end goals and deadlines and, of course, prepare for Christmas.

Advent is about reminiscing on the significance of Jesus' first coming, and the anticipation believers feel for His second coming. It requires spiritual preparation and isn't something you can rush through.

Simeon and Anna were present in the temple when Joseph and Mary brought baby Jesus in to be circumcised. Most likely, there were lots of other baby boys being brought into the temple that day. What made Simeon and Anna know Jesus was special?

The Bible doesn't go into details, but one thing it does say is that they were *waiting* for Jesus. Anna never

left the temple, and Simeon had been promised by God that he would see the Messiah before he died. And when Jesus showed up that day as a tiny baby, the Holy Spirit revealed to them that the Messiah had come. No one knew or was told in advance. I believe their preparation in spirit is what made them ready for that revelation.

Here are a few ways you can join me in preparing this Advent season:

- Read the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus. Some of the most beautiful parts of the Old Testament are the parts that prophesy about Jesus. Each time I read these I grasp a tiny bit more of what a big, wonderful, intricate miracle Jesus is! Here are few starters: Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, Genesis 12:3, Micah 5:2, Isaiah 7:14.
- I'm going to rewatch *The Chosen*. I love how the story is told from so many different perspectives, and how it shows the reality of Jewish life at that time.¹
- Do something for your neighbors. Giving to the needy is important,

but it's also important to give to those around you, even if they don't come across as needy. Some things we can do are invite someone over for dinner, bake cookies or brownies to share, host a viewing of a Christmas movie, help with babysitting or some other time service.

- Spend time in prayer. This is the thing that takes the most effort for me. It's not that I don't pray. But making time to only pray takes tremendous effort for me, even though it's a vital part of spiritual preparation.

These may not be the most traditional Advent activities, but for me, the point isn't about observing tradition as much as it is about observing Jesus and preparing for His second coming.

MARIE ALVERO IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO AFRICA AND MEXICO. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES A HAPPY, BUSY LIFE WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN IN CENTRAL TEXAS, USA. ■

1. See Jesus through the eyes of those that met Him in the multi-season TV show *The Chosen*: <https://watch.angelstudios.com/thechosen>



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

CHRISTMAS GIFT EXCHANGE

The first Christmas was My Father's gift of love to the world, but it was also His gift to you personally.

For those who saw it firsthand—the star, the choir of angels, the baby in the manger—it was an unexpected and overwhelming spiritual experience. For the blessed few who recognized that baby as their Messiah, it was a dream come true.

For them and the many millions since who have likewise believed in Me as the Son of God, it has been the door to eternal life. And it's the same today. If you celebrate Christmas in spirit and in truth, the same wonder, the same promise, and the same unspeakable joy can be yours.

But Christmas doesn't end with this gift from My Father's heart to yours. It's also a gift *exchange*. It's a special time for you as you reflect on My love and relive the wonder of the first Christmas, and you take time to worship and thank and praise Me for all I've done for you. So if you're wondering what gift to give Me this Christmas, let's make this Christmas special by sharing the *best* of all gifts—love.