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Vol 14 • Issue 12



RING THE BELLS

It's Christmas!

The Christmas Star

Gift from the heart

A Very Personal Dilemma

Life choices



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION BIRTHDAY BOY CELEBRATION

My entire life so far has been spent in the Northern Hemisphere, and as a result, my body clock is programmed to recognize dropping temperatures and shortening days as sure signs that Christmas is approaching.

I love everything about the Christmas season—the colors, the twinkling lights, the presents, the Christmas trees, the aromas, the smiles strangers exchange, the quality time with loved ones. Most Christmas music is beautiful, but I'll admit to even enjoying the slightly tacky songs that seem to play on a loop in malls or on the car radio.

Even though I've known Jesus all my life, lately I've found myself getting more caught up in the buzz and activity surrounding the holiday and less on the reason for it. I've had less time than in previous years to consider how Jesus might want me to celebrate His birthday. The Bible doesn't give any specific instruction on this; however, there's a verse that might provide some clues. In this passage, Nehemiah is giving advice on how to throw a party: "Go and celebrate with a feast of rich foods and sweet drinks," he says, "and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared."¹

I think that Jesus—who when He was on earth turned water into wine at a wedding feast²—would want us to have fun and enjoy ourselves. And just as He set aside His own weariness to reach out,³ I think He'd also be concerned for those who are lonely, elderly, sick, or struggling today, and He'd want us to share His compassion with those we can. If we do our best with both aspects of this advice, I think the result will be pretty close to what the Birthday Boy is hoping for.

A very happy Christmas to you and yours!

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. Nehemiah 8:10 NLT
2. See John 2:1–11.
3. See Matthew 14:13–14.

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The Christmas Star

BY SUSAN DAVIS

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED RED AND GREEN POINSETTIA PLANTS and assumed that it was their vibrant colors that had earned them a place in Christmas decorations. But there is more to the story ...

Mexican legend has it that in the 16th century, a young peasant child named Maria was distraught one Christmas Eve, as she had no gift to lay before the altar of the baby Jesus in her local village church. As she walked to the chapel, saddened that her poverty prevented her from making even the smallest offering, her young cousin encouraged her that whatever she gave from her heart, no matter how humble, would be received by Jesus if it was offered in love.

Encouraged by this thought, Maria raced around the chapel, collecting weeds and lacing them together in a small bouquet. It wasn't much, she knew, but she prayed that her gift would convey all that she carried in her heart, humble though it may be. As she walked to the altar to present her offering, she was scolded by some people who questioned the appropriateness of presenting a gift of weeds to the Holy Child.

Determined nonetheless to offer her little bouquet, Maria walked boldly to the front of the

church, knelt, and laid her bouquet by the nativity scene. According to the legend, the bouquet of weeds burst into bright red flowers, and all the parishioners in attendance proclaimed that they had seen a Christmas miracle. Because of this, and the fact that it blooms around Christmas, the poinsettia became known in Mexico as “flor de Noche Buena,” or “Christmas Eve flower.”

Franciscan friars in Mexico began incorporating poinsettias into their Christmas celebrations during the 17th century. The shape of the flowers and leaves is a reminder of the Star of Bethlehem, which led the three magi to the place where Christ had been born. The red leaves symbolize the blood of Christ, and the green leaves the promise of everlasting life.

It's refreshing to discover that there is more to this red and green plant than meets the eye—and a reminder to look a bit deeper for the meaning in other traditions surrounding Christmas. Let us always remember that God can transform even our humblest efforts into flaming flowers that proclaim His love for all humanity.

SUSAN DAVIS WORKS WITH NONPROFITS AND IS A FREELANCE WRITER. ■

Ring the Bells



LET THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS TOUCH YOUR SOUL, whether in the peal of bells, the chorus of songs, or the quiet of your heart. There's plenty to celebrate: Jesus is born!

The world is filled with the sounds of Christmas. If you listen with your outer ears, you will hear carols, bells, and laughter, and now and then a sob of loneliness. If you listen with the inner ear, you will hear the sound of angels' wings, the hush of inner expectation, and the sacred sound of the deepest silence, the vibrant whisper of the eternal Word.

The world is filled with the sights of Christmas. If you look with your outer eyes, you will see brightly decorated trees, tinsel

1. This carol by Minna Hohman was adapted from the "Carol of the Bells," by Peter J. Wilhousky (1936), which was adapted from the Ukrainian New Year's Song "Shchedryk," written by Mykola Leontovych (1916).

stars, flaming candles, and a crèche. If you look with the inner eye, you will see the star of Bethlehem in your own heart.—*Adapted from Anna May Nielson*

Ring Christmas bells, merrily ring,
Tell all the world, Jesus is King,
Loudly proclaim with one accord,
The happy tale, welcome the Lord!

Ring Christmas bells, sound far and near,
The birthday of Jesus is here.
Herald the news to old and young,
Tell it to all in every tongue.

Ring Christmas bells, toll loud and long,
Your message sweet, peal and prolong.
Come, all ye people, join in the singing,
Repeat the story told by the ringing.
—*Minna Louise Hohman*¹

Late on a sleepy, star-spangled night,
angels peeled back the sky just like

you would tear open a sparkling Christmas present. Then, with light and joy pouring out of Heaven like water through a broken dam, they began to shout and sing the message that baby Jesus had been born. The world had a Savior! The angels called it "Good News," and it was.—*Larry Libby*

Let us have music for Christmas...
Sound the trumpet of joy and rebirth;
Let each of us try, with a song in our hearts,
To bring peace to men on earth.
—*Mildred L. Jarrell*

'Tis not enough that Christ was born
Beneath the star that shone,
And earth was set that holy morn
Within a golden zone.
He must be born within the heart
Before He finds a throne,
And brings the day of love and good,
The reign of Christlike brotherhood.
—*Mary T. Lathrop* ■

christmas charades

BY CHRIS HUNT

IN CHARADES, the player acts silently while the audience guesses “who” he or she is meant to be. The players in the first Christmas might have appeared like this:

Mary: “The angel said to [Mary], ‘Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!’

But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying” (Luke 1:28–29).

[Astonished and somewhat worried]

[Afraid]

The Angel Gabriel: “Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus’” (Luke 1:30–31).

[Calm and reassuring]

[Excited]

The unborn **John the Baptist**, while in his mother Elizabeth’s womb: “When Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb” (Luke 1:41).

[Jumping up and down for joy]

[Curious]

Elizabeth: “Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!’” (Luke 1:41–42)

[Pleased]

[Generous]

Joseph: “Joseph also went up from ... Nazareth ... unto ...Bethlehem; to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child” (Luke 2:4–5).

[Determined]

Mary: “She brought forth her firstborn Son” (Luke 2:7).

[Relieved and happy]

The shepherds: “Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them: and they were greatly afraid” (Luke 2:8–9).

The angels: “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).

The shepherds, after hearing the angels’ message: “So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.’ And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger” (Luke 2:15–16).

God: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

CHRIS HUNT LIVES IN GREAT BRITAIN AND HAS BEEN READING *ACTIVATED* SINCE IT WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1999. ■



A CHRISTMAS CAROL

BY NATALIE ANNE VOLPE

WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK OF CHRISTMAS?

Perhaps gifts, evergreen trees, lights, holly, good food, the birth of the Christ Child, the coming new year, the end of the old, and probably for many, *A Christmas Carol*.

The well-known tale of the bad-tempered, miserly Scrooge has been often retold through the many years since its first publication by Charles Dickens in 1843.¹ To many, the story has become a symbol of Christmas; yet while most of us are familiar with the hardheartedness, stinginess, and greed of the main character, Ebenezer Scrooge, how often do we apply the story's lessons to our own lives?

The plot takes a wretched miser and brings him through a dramatic

change for the better. Before his transformation, he was the opposite of all the good qualities that Christmas stands for—love, charity, goodwill, unselfishness, feeling, care for those around us. While Scrooge may be a rather extreme representation of miserly features, he's perhaps also a metaphor for the miserliness that resides in each of us.

There's a little selfishness in all of us, isn't there? Goals gone a little awry, high ideals long forgotten? Do we pass by others without a word or kind glance when they cross our path, too caught up with ourselves to notice?

We don't have to wait until we become as extreme in our selfishness as Scrooge before we decide to make a change. Wouldn't it be wonderful if at every Christmas we could take an honest look at our lives, at the things of the past, at what we're doing in the present, and our goals for the future,

and see what really has become most important to us?

In the ultimate act of love and unselfishness, God gave Jesus to us on earth, so that He could teach us His love, and then die for us to purchase our eternal salvation. At Christmas, we celebrate the giving of this marvelous gift. We can never hope to pay Him back, but Jesus says that "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."² Every kind word and deed done out of love—not because it's logical or in our best interests, but because it will help someone else—will ultimately help us, most often in ways we were least expecting.

By taking Jesus as our role model, we can hope to reflect some of those qualities that will keep us happy and make us a blessing to those around us and a better person in general.

1. See <http://charlesdickenspage.com/carol.html>.

2. Matthew 25:40 NIV



Let's make it a goal—and not only at Christmas—to step back a bit and reassess our life and values and discern what has been the driving force in all our actions. Let us savor every moment while we have it, and make the most of every opportunity to help another human being, because in the end, that's all that's going to matter anyway.

NATALIE (1991–2011) SPENT MUCH OF HER SHORT LIFE IN AFRICA, WHERE HER PARENTS RUN VARIOUS HUMANITARIAN PROJECTS, AND SHE WAS INVOLVED IN HELPING OTHERS FROM AN EARLY AGE. THIS ARTICLE, WRITTEN IN 2006, WAS SENT TO US BY HER PARENTS, GINO AND CLOTILDE, WHO CONTINUE THEIR WORK IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO. FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THEIR WORK AT WWW.FAMILYCARE.ORG/NETWORK/ESPOIR-CONGO. ■



I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round, as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.
—*Scrooge's nephew, Fred, in A Christmas Carol, by Charles Dickens*

SOME SPECIAL GIFTS

A firm handshake to a shaky soul,
A kind word to a lonely person,
A warm smile to the disheartened,
A sincere concern for someone troubled,
A feeling of compassion for the neglected,
A comforting thought for the bereaved,
A respect for the dignity of others,
A defense of the rights of individuals,
A word of witness to help a seeking soul,
A Merry Christmas to all.
—*Author unknown*

A CHRISTMAS LIST

Fear less, hope more;
Eat less, chew more;
Whine less, breathe more;
Talk less, say more;
Hate less, love more;
And all good things will be yours.
—*Swedish proverb*

Let me not wrap, stack, box, bag, tie, tag, bundle, seal, keep Christmas.
Christmas kept is liable to mold.

Let me give Christmas away, unwrapped, by exuberant armfuls. Let me share, dance, live Christmas unpretentiously, merrily, responsibly with overflowing hands, tireless steps, and sparkling eyes.
Christmas given away will stay fresh—even until it comes again.
—*Linda Felver*

BY PETER AMSTERDAM, ADAPTED

A VERY PERSONAL DILEMMA

THE WORLD IN WHICH JOSEPH AND MARY, Jesus' earthly parents, grew up was substantially different from our world today, and they were probably still very young when they were betrothed. In ancient Israel, a couple became betrothed when the man gave the woman either a letter or a piece of money, no matter how small, directly or through a messenger. It was also required that he expressly state, before witnesses, that he intended to make the woman his wife. At the time of the betrothal, the marriage contract was written and agreed upon. Once the woman was betrothed, she was legally considered the man's wife.

It was within Mary's betrothal period, after the contract had been made with Joseph, that she was visited by the angel Gabriel, who told her she had found favor with God and would conceive a son who

would be the Son of the Most High. She asked how she could conceive, since she was a virgin. Gabriel told her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and the power of the Most High would overshadow her. Gabriel was revealing to her that her pregnancy would be from God and would have nothing to do with a man.¹

Mary clearly had a decision to make. She was going to be pregnant during her betrothal period, before she was living with her husband. If she consented to what the angel was saying, she was, at the very least, going to devastate her husband, seriously damage her reputation, bring shame to her parents and family, and harm her relationship with her village community. Mary chose to accept the consequences when she said, "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."² This was a huge leap of faith on her part.

And it did have repercussions. Joseph was devastated when he found out she was pregnant. Scripture says that "he *considered* these things,"³ he thought on them, he mulled them over. The Greek word used for "*considered*" means "passion, angry, anger boiling up." He had no reason to think anything other than that she had been unfaithful to him. In his mind, she had clearly broken her marriage vows and had committed adultery. Joseph was a normal guy, so of course he'd be angry and hurt.

But the Bible says he was a just man. He didn't want to make a public example of her or disgrace her, so he made the decision to divorce her quietly.

1. See Luke 1:35.

2. Luke 1:38 ESV

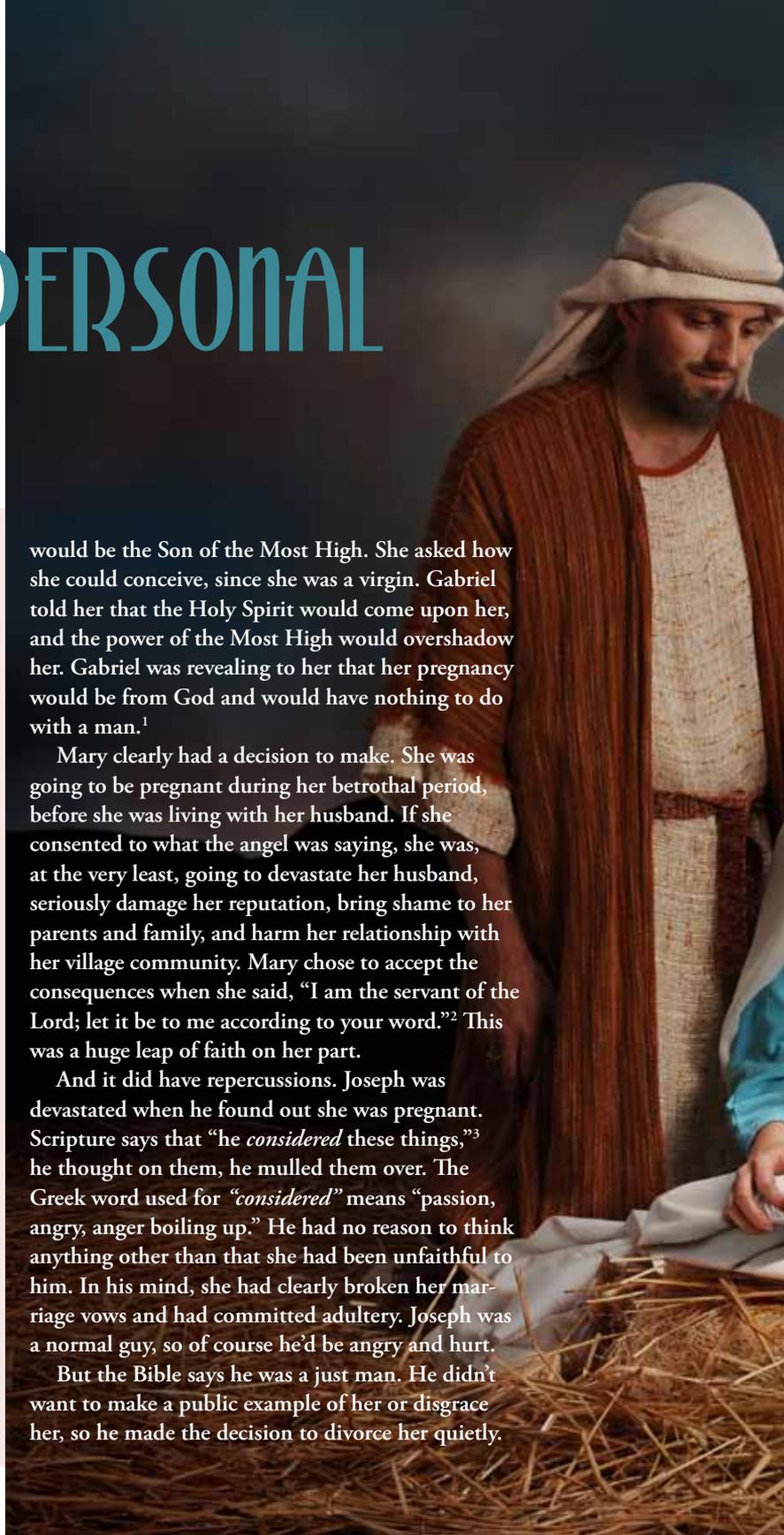
3. Matthew 1:20 ESV

4. Luke 9:35 ESV

5. See Matthew 1:1.

6. See Mark 1:1.

7. See Titus 2:13–14.





It was after he made the decision to divorce but not to expose Mary that he had the dream in which an angel told him that the child was from the Holy Spirit and that he shouldn't fear to take Mary as his wife. Joseph had to make a decision at that point: should he believe the dream? Like Mary, he had to take a step of faith. God showed him what to do and he had to make a choice to believe and trust God or not. Thankfully he had the faith and courage to believe and act upon what God had showed him.

Joseph and Mary were each faced with a huge personal dilemma. Both of them showed great faith and courage. Both chose to follow God in spite of the risks, and by doing so, they made it possible for God to use them to fulfill His promise to bless the world.

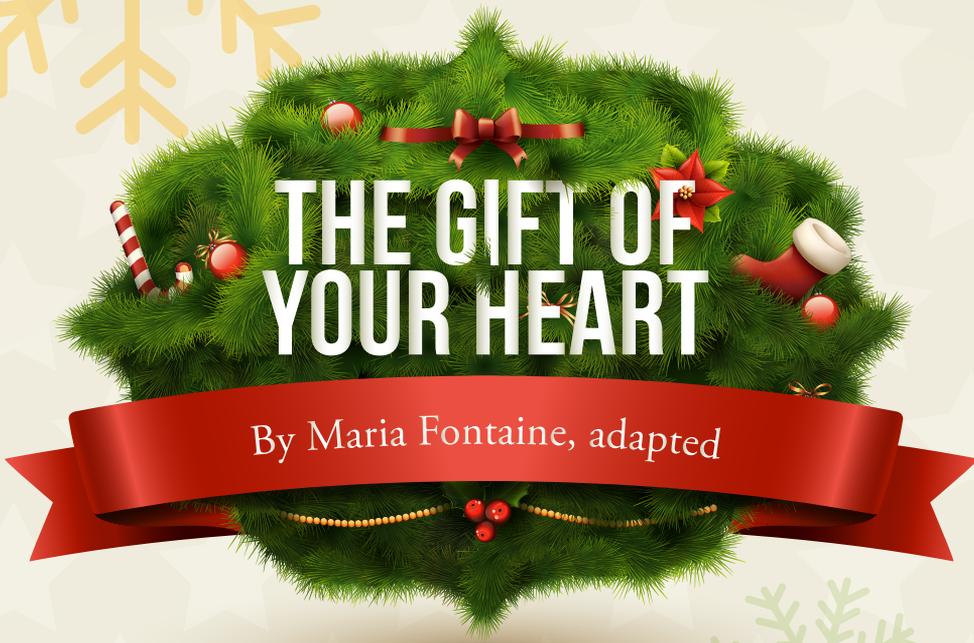
Of course, no one knows exactly how Mary conceived the baby Jesus, any more than anyone knows exactly how God created the universe. What we do know is that God created a human being with two natures, divine and human, who was fully God and fully man. It had never happened before nor has it since. Luke simply says that the Holy Spirit, the power of

God, came upon Mary and overshadowed her. He used the same word when writing about the transfiguration of Christ when he said that a cloud overshadowed them and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My chosen One; listen to Him."⁴ The Spirit of God overshadowed Mary and brought forth the chosen one, the God-man, Jesus Christ.

It was through Joseph's willingness to follow what God showed him that Mary's child was born *the son of David*.⁵ It was through Mary's willingness to yield to what God asked of her that she bore *the Son of God*.⁶ And Jesus, the Son of God, yielded to what His Father asked of Him, and made it possible for humanity to be redeemed.⁷

You might sometimes struggle to act on a nudge from God. When that happens, remember Mary and Joseph. God sometimes calls us to step out by faith and to follow how His Spirit is leading. You never know what the outcome might be.

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



THE GIFT OF YOUR HEART

By Maria Fontaine, adapted

ALL THE WORKS THAT JESUS DID ON EARTH HAD TO BE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT FOR THE SON OF GOD TO COME DOWN IN ORDER TO DO THEM. But when you examine those extremely important things, you see that not all of them were what most people would call “spectacular” in the physical. Many of the things He did—the spiritual transformations—had very little, if any, fanfare. Many of them, like His witness to Nicodemus,¹ or forgiving the immoral woman’s sins,² or His encounter with the woman at the well,³ weren’t outstanding in physical ways.

The more visible opportunities where He taught and healed large crowds had their time and

place, such as when He fed the five thousand.⁴ But He also invested His time and attention on those focused moments when He connected heart to heart and spirit to spirit with one person or a small group of people.

The Bible records several life-changing miracles that Jesus performed in people’s spirits that didn’t require a huge investment of time or materials or effort. He was just where He needed to be when the opportunity arose, and He was faithful to give the truth, love, mercy, and forgiveness that lifted a broken heart or a confused mind or a lost spirit. His gift was His unconditional love that could impart hope, light, and truth.

If we can follow His example by giving to those who need His care and support in whatever way He shows us, this Christmas season can be everything He wants it to be. The more we follow His example, the more our own lives will be spiritually enriched. As we do what we can to demonstrate His

love to others, He will help us to better understand His plan in our own lives.

Letting Him use you to share His love is the gift He wants the most for His birthday. It’s a gift that you can give no matter what else you’re doing, and it’s one that *only you* can give Him, because it’s the gift of your own willing heart.

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

MY CHRISTMAS PRAYER

This Christmas, I want to give You the gift of my heart, Jesus. Please come into my life and fill me with Your unconditional love that stands the test of time.

1. See John 3:1–21.
2. See Luke 7:37–38, 48.
3. See John 4:1–29.
4. See Matthew 14:21.



Christmas Memories

BY IRIS RICHARD

I WAS BORN IN 1955, only ten years after World War II, when wartime hardships were still fresh in people's minds. Grandfather used to tell us children of the extreme hunger and exhaustion of those days, and the struggle of staying alive during the long freezing winter months.

Our town was in the heart of Germany's industrial center, and everything was covered with a seemingly permanent layer of gray-brown dust from the steel mills. In springtime, the grass and green shoots quickly turned brown, and so did the fresh snow in winter, making its white coat look worn after only a day.

On the first Sunday in December, our family always gathered around the table in our apartment's tiny kitchen. My mother, my sister Petra, and I lit the first candle of our Advent wreath and sang Christmas songs, as

our thoughts journeyed far, far away from the dusty city to the three wise men traveling on camelback. Each week a new candle was lit, and peace and joy filled our hearts as the story of the manger which awaited the birth of our Savior came alive.

Then came the long-awaited event of Christmas baking—special indeed, since butter, nuts, and eggs were sparse, and chocolate was a rare treat. With the delicious smell of freshly baked cookies still filling the air, we carefully stored each batch in large tin cans.

On Christmas morning, we went to see the tree, prepared the night before by our parents. We all crept into the living room while Papa lit the candles one by one with a long match.

What joy it was to find stockings filled with homemade cookies, nuts,

chocolate, oranges, and apples, and new knitted dresses for our dolls. There also were crayons and coloring books, hats, gloves, and scarves.

These were days of simple joys and handmade toys. The memories serve as a reminder to me to search for true value, for the human touch, for things that last—especially in the fast-moving times we live in today, filled with technological gadgets and screen-based activities. They are also a reminder to keep my eyes open to the needs of others, to love, and to share. That's what makes this season a truly unforgettable one, leaving its beautiful mark on the memories of our children and those we meet.

IRIS RICHARD IS A COUNSELOR IN KENYA, WHERE SHE HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEER WORK SINCE 1995. ■



Why Christmas?

RETOLD BY KEITH PHILLIPS

THERE WAS ONCE A MAN WHO DIDN'T BELIEVE IN GOD, and he didn't hesitate to let others know how he felt about religion and religious holidays, like Christmas. His wife, however, did believe, and she raised their children to also have faith in God and Jesus, despite her husband's disparaging comments.

One snowy Christmas Eve, his wife was taking their children to a Christmas Eve church service in the farm community in which they lived. She asked him to come, but he refused.

"That story is nonsense!" he said. "Why would God lower Himself to come to earth as a man? That's ridiculous!"

So his wife and children left, and he stayed home.

A while later, the winds grew stronger and the snow turned into a blizzard. As the man looked out the window, all he saw was a blinding snowstorm. He sat down to relax in front of the blaze in the fireplace.

A short while later, he heard a loud thump. Something had hit the window. Then another thump. He looked out but couldn't see more than a few feet. When the storm let up a little, he ventured outside to see what could have been beating on his window. In the field near his house, he saw a flock of wild geese. Apparently, they had been flying south for the winter when they got caught in the snowstorm and couldn't go on. They were lost and stranded on

his farm, with no food or shelter. They just flapped their wings and flew around the field in low circles, blindly and aimlessly. A couple of them had flown into his window, it seemed.

The man felt sorry for the geese and wanted to help them. *The barn would be a great place for them to stay,* he thought. *It's warm and safe. They could spend the night there and wait out the storm.* So he walked over to the barn and opened the doors wide, then watched and waited, hoping they would notice the open barn and go inside. But the geese just fluttered around aimlessly and didn't seem to notice the barn or realize what it could mean for them. The man tried to get their attention, but that just scared them farther away.



God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love —not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.—1 John 4:9–10 NLT

I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death.
—Hosea 13:14

He went into the house and came out with some bread, broke it up, and made a breadcrumb trail leading to the barn. They still didn't catch on.

Now he was getting frustrated. He got behind them and tried to shoo them toward the barn, but they only got more scared and scattered in every direction except toward the barn. Nothing he did could get them to go into the barn where they would be warm and safe.

"Why don't they follow me?!" he exclaimed. "Can't they see this is the only place where they can survive the storm?"

He thought for a moment and realized that they just wouldn't follow a human. "If only I were a goose, then I could save them," he said out loud.

Then he had an idea. He went into the barn, got one of his own geese, and carried it in his arms as he circled around behind the flock of wild geese. When he released it, his goose flew through the flock and straight into the barn. One by one, the wild geese followed it to safety.

The man stood still and silent as the words he had spoken a few minutes earlier replayed in his mind: *If only I were a goose, then I could save them!* Then he thought about what he had said to his wife earlier. "Why would God want to be like us? That's ridiculous!" Suddenly it all made sense. That is what God had done. We were like the wild geese—blind, lost, confused, dying. So God had His Son become like us, so He

could show us the way and save us. *That* was the meaning of Christmas, he realized.

As the winds and blinding snow died down, his soul became quiet and pondered this wonderful thought. Suddenly he understood what Christmas was all about, why Christ had come. Years of doubt and disbelief vanished like the passing storm. He fell to his knees in the snow and prayed his first prayer: "Thank You, God, for coming in human form to get me out of the storm!"

KEITH PHILLIPS WAS *ACTIVATED'S* EDITOR-IN-CHIEF FOR 14 YEARS FROM 1999 TO 2013. HE AND HIS WIFE CARYN NOW WORK WITH THE HOMELESS IN THE U.S. ■



☆☆☆☆

BE AN ANGEL

●●●●●●●●●●

There is no greater joy nor greater reward than to make a fundamental difference in someone's life.—*Sister Mary Rose McGeady (1928–2012)*

We should make the Yuletide season an occasion not merely for the giving of material things but an occasion for the giving of that which counts infinitely more ... the giving of self.—*J. C. Penney (1875–1971)*

Of course, this is the season to be jolly, but it is also a good time to be thinking about those who aren't.—*Helen Valentine*

The Christmas spirit—love—changes hearts and lives.—*Pat Boone (b. 1934)*

Nothing that I can do will change the structure of the universe. But maybe, by raising my voice I can help the greatest of all causes—goodwill among men and peace on earth.—*Albert Einstein (1879–1955)*

There is no ideal Christmas; only the Christmas you decide to make as a reflection of your values, desires, affections, traditions.—*Bill McKibben (b. 1960)*

Be an angel to someone else whenever you can, as a way of thanking God for the help that another angel has given you.—*Eileen Elias Freeman*

Christmas is not in tinsel and lights and outward show.
The secret lies in an inner glow.
It's lighting a fire inside the heart.
Good will and joy a vital part.
It's higher thought and a greater plan.
It's glorious dream in the soul of man.—*Wilfred A. Peterson (1900–1995)*

It is Christmas every time you let God love others through you ... yes, it is Christmas every time you smile at your brother and offer him your hand.—*Mother Teresa (1910–1997)*

One can pay back the loan of gold, but one lies forever in debt to those who are kind.—*Malayan proverb*

It is Christmas in the heart that puts Christmas in the air.—*W. T. Ellis (1845–1925)*

Ask your children two questions this Christmas. First: "What do you want to give to others for Christmas?" Second: "What do you want for Christmas?" The first fosters generosity of heart and an outward focus. The second can breed selfishness if not tempered by the first.—*Unknown*

To give and then not feel that you have given is the very best of all ways of giving.—*Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)*

Christmas is most truly Christmas when you celebrate it by giving the light of love to those who need it most.—*Ruth Carter Stapleton (1929–1983)* ■



CANDLELIGHT

QUIET MOMENTS

BY ABI MAY

REMEMBRANCE, like a candle, burns brightest at Christmastime.
—*Charles Dickens (1812–1870)*

I LIGHT THIS ADVENT CANDLE IN ANTICIPATION...

The fact that we don't know the exact date of Jesus' birth doesn't matter; what counts is that He was born. Amidst all our busy activities, let us pause to think about the Savior who lived, died, and rose again for our sake.¹

Take time, slow down, be still, be awake to the Divine Mystery that looks so common and so ordinary yet is wondrously present.—*Edward Hays (b. 1932)*, *A Pilgrim's Almanac*

I LIGHT THIS CANDLE IN THANKS...

The joys and sorrows, successes and failures, achievements and disappointments of the past year are behind us now. Let us give thanks for them all, acknowledging that "God meant it for good."²

Develop an attitude of gratitude, and give thanks for everything that happens to you, knowing that every step forward is a step toward achieving something bigger and better than your current situation.—*Brian Tracy (b. 1944)*

I LIGHT THIS CANDLE IN MEMORY...

It is customary to hold memorial services during Advent. Whether alone or in company, let us remember those who have gone before us.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them.
—*Laurence Binyon (1869–1943)*

I LIGHT THIS CANDLE IN SOLIDARITY...

Not everyone has the blessing of a happy family, a roof overhead, or

even enough to eat. Let us pray for those who are sick, lonely, bereft, or impoverished, and let us show our solidarity by reaching out to offer our assistance and companionship, as much as we are able.

The Christmas heart is a giving heart, a wide-open heart that thinks of others first.—*George Matthew Adams (1878–1962)*

I LIGHT THIS CANDLE IN PRAYER...

A new year is about to be born. Let us bring our hopes and expectations to God, and trust Him to walk with us on the path ahead.³

Walk with me, oh my Lord,
Through the darkest night and
brightest day.
Be at my side, O Lord,
Hold my hand and guide me on my way.
—*Estelle White (1925–2011)*

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1. See Romans 14:9. 3. See Psalm 16:11.
2. See Genesis 50:20.

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

WHAT I GAVE AT CHRISTMAS



What did I give the world at Christmas? My life for the forgiveness of your sins. That from Me and through Me and in Me you could have life.¹

It all began when I designed the amazing and beautiful world that you live in and gave you life. Then I gave you My life, thus offering you access to eternal life. I give you hope through the knowledge that I am eternal, unchangeable, and never going away.

I promise you good things now and in the afterlife. I know that in this life you will face

troubles and problems, but I promise to stand with you through them.² Be assured that with My strength, you can overcome difficulties rather than be overcome.³ I promise you that you will never be alone. “I will never leave you nor forsake you. I will not leave you comfortless.”⁴

I gave you the promise of eternal life long ago, when I came to earth. I was born, lived, and died because I loved you, and I will always love you. I am your Christmas gift.

1. See Romans 11:36.

2. See John 16:33.

3. See 1 John 4:4.

4. Hebrews 13:5, John 14:18 KJV