

EXPERIENCE THE MIRACLE OF CHRISTMAS

Since the song of angels welcomed a tiny baby into the world two thousand years ago, Christmas has come to symbolize many things. It's a season for renewing dreams and strengthening bonds of love, for giving and forgiving, for sharing goodwill and good times. It can also be a hectic, stressful time if we get too caught up in the shopping, cooking, and entertaining aspects.

The Wonder of Christmas invites you to pause and savor the joy of the season with this collection of short quotations, poems, anecdotes, meditations, and more. Celebrate the wonder in Christmas; share its joy and meaning with those dear to you, and its miracle will linger all the year through.

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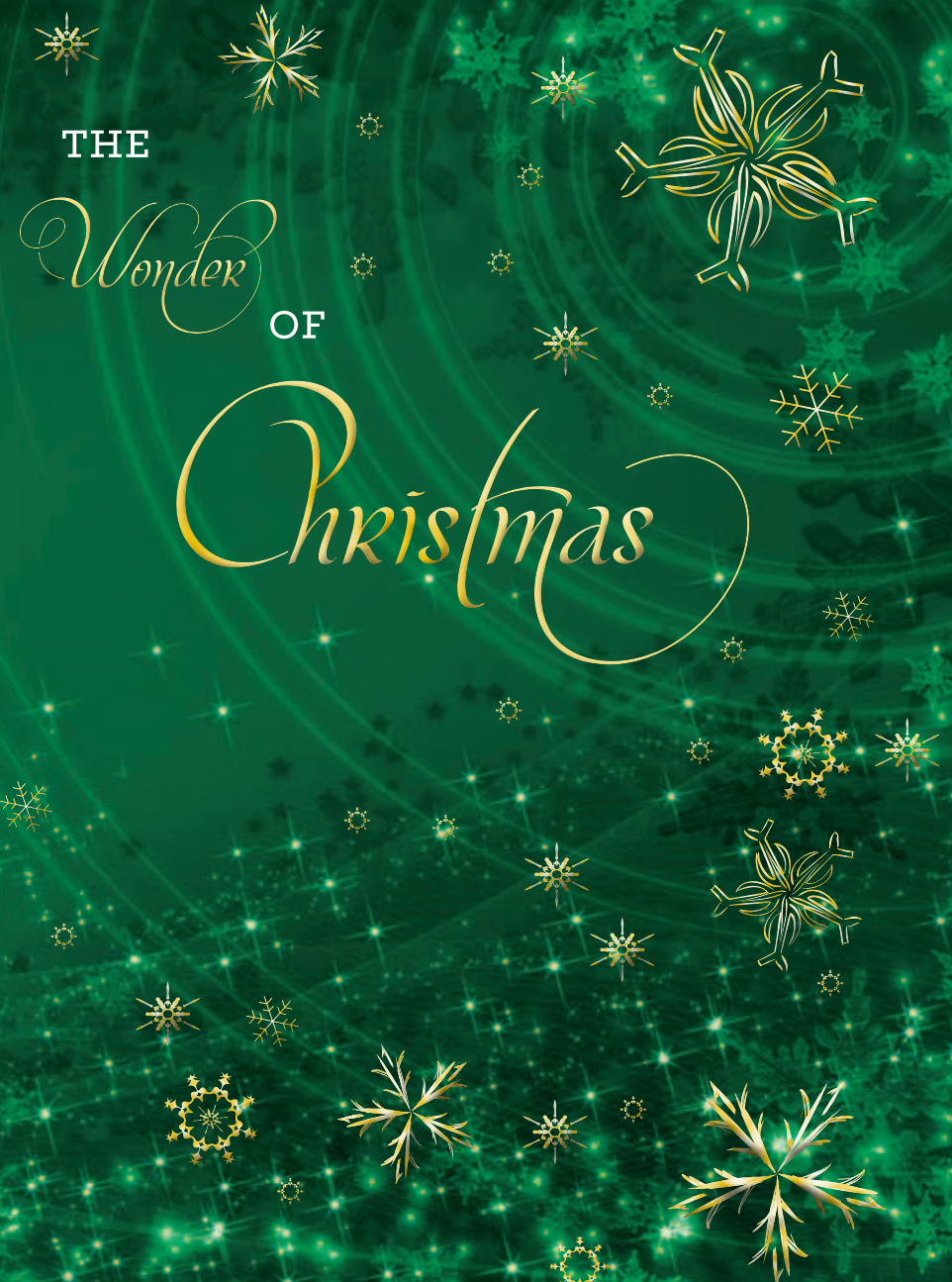


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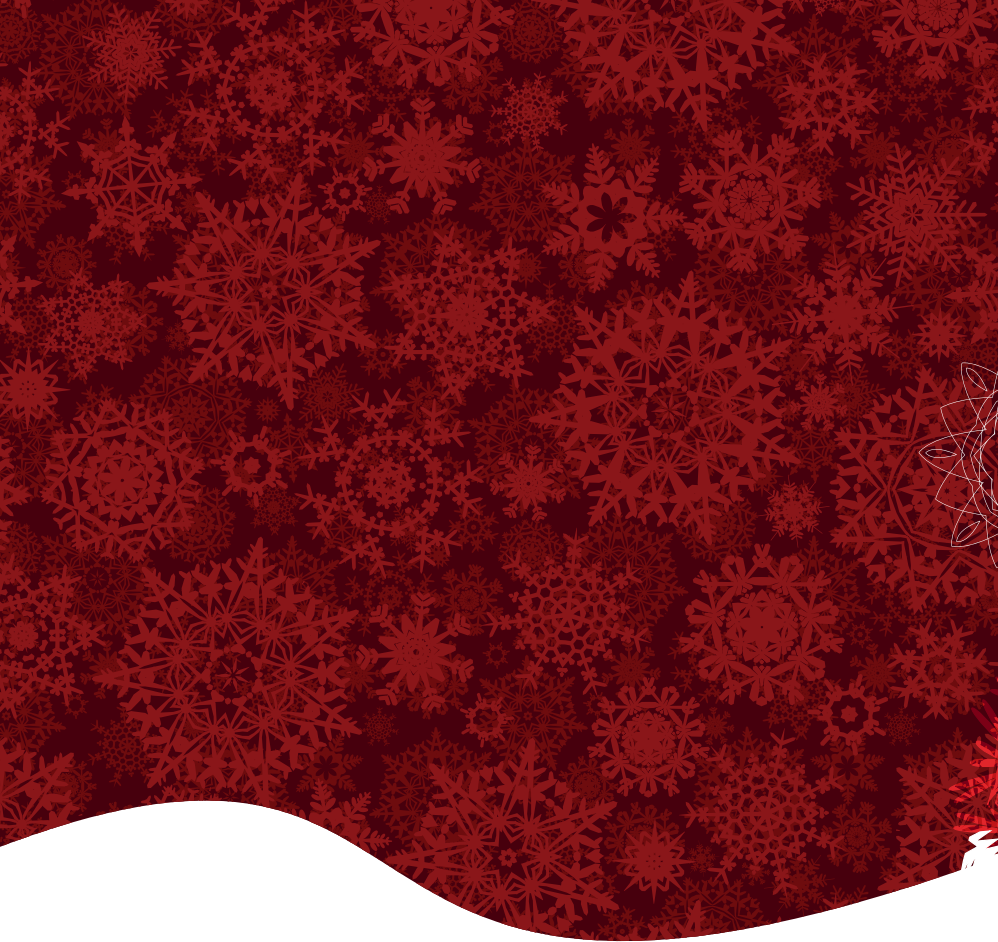




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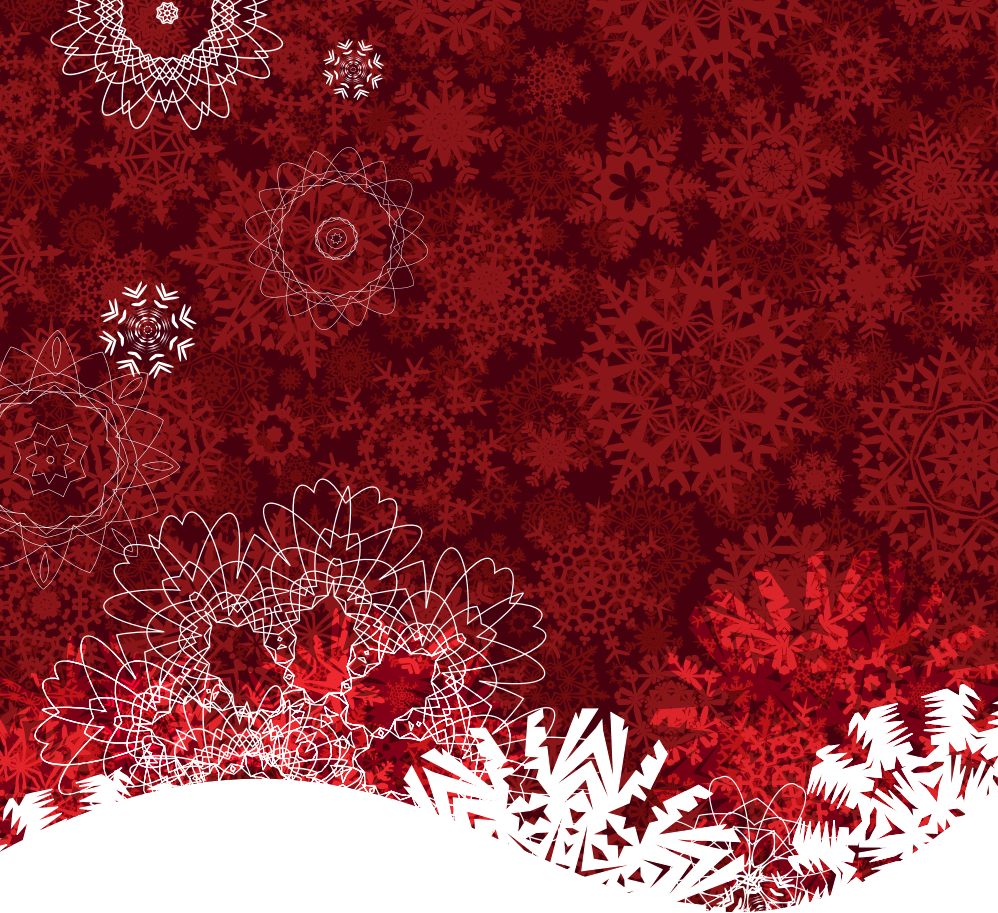
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Other titles in this series:

The Wonder of Love

The Wonder of Mothers

The Wonder of Fathers



The Wonder of Christmas

Acknowledgments

This book is a collection of thoughts and meditations about Christmas. In addition to scripture portions and original contributions, it includes messages from Jesus. Quotes credited to Jesus but not followed by a Bible book-chapter-and-verse reference (John 3:16, for example) were received directly from Jesus in answer to prayer. He speaks today, as He always has to those who stop to listen. His voice is that calm and kind voice in your mind that points you in the right direction and tells you that you are loved by God.

The editors would like to thank all of those who contributed to this book, whose poems and articles were originally published in *Activated*, an inspirational magazine with an international readership. (Visit *Activated* at www.activated.org.)

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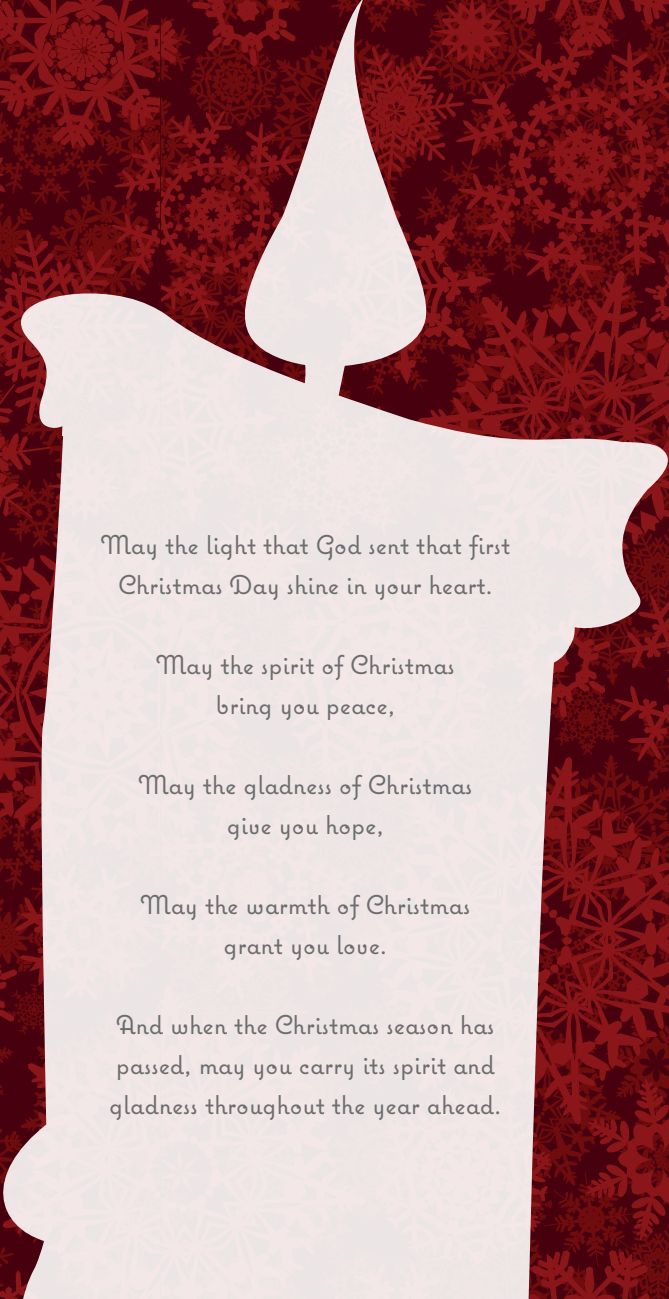
Introduction

The first Christmas was our heavenly Father's gift of love to the world, but it was also His gift to each of us personally. It was a "gift that has kept on giving!"

For those who saw it firsthand—the star, the choir of angels, the baby in the manger—it was all an unexpected and overwhelming spiritual experience. For the blessed few who recognized that baby as their Savior, it was a dream come true. For them and the many millions since who have likewise believed, the door to eternal life was opened.

The same wonder, the same promise, and the same unspeakable joy can all be yours!

May the inspirational readings in this book bring a touch of the true Christmas spirit into your life and home this holiday season.



May the light that God sent that first
Christmas Day shine in your heart.

May the spirit of Christmas
bring you peace,

May the gladness of Christmas
give you hope,

May the warmth of Christmas
grant you love.

And when the Christmas season has
passed, may you carry its spirit and
gladness throughout the year ahead.



Freely

you have received,

freely

give.

—Jesus, Matthew 10:8

CHRISTMAS IS THE TIME to celebrate the day that the Creator of the universe sent His greatest gift to the world in the form of a weak and helpless baby. With that baby came a message of love, hope, and salvation for all people everywhere.

—Michael Roy

Christmas

Christmas is...



Christmas is a season of sharing
moments and memories that will be
cherished for years to come.

—Shannon Richards

Christmas is...

A mother's love for her baby boy,
A sacrifice to bring others joy,
A father's care for one not his own,
A message sent from a royal throne,
A seeming wrong that was turned to right,
An angel's song in the dark of night,
A prophet's vision at last fulfilled,
A miracle because God had willed,
A gift of love from a caring heart,
A bringing together what was apart,
A reaching out to comprehend

How another felt by a sincere friend,
A seeking soul that journeyed far
To find a dream, to follow a star,
A bridegroom claiming a bride as his...
All these things are what Christmas is.

—Ian Bach






Restoration

IN HIS STORY, “Repainting the Angel,” Wilfred Peterson tells of the restoration of a figurine of an angel holding the hand of a little boy. Covered with soot and dust, it had been lost on the back shelf in an antique shop until a man browsing through the shop discovered it and had an inspiration: He would rescue and restore it and give it a place of honor among his Christmas decorations.

In his basement workshop, the man covered the figurine with glistening white paint. Then he painted the wings of the angel and the hair of the little boy sparkling gold. Each brush stroke worked magic. The old, grime-covered statuette vanished and a shining new one appeared.



*Isn't this what
happens to people
at Christmas? the
man thought as he
painted. They come
to the end of the year
covered in grime,
and then Christmas
repaints their nature
with love and joy and
peace.*

—Chloe West



CHRISTMAS IS NOT MADE SPECIAL by presents, decorations, and parties, but by what we give to Jesus and to others from our hearts. Giving from our hearts demonstrates true gratitude and appreciation for all God has given us.

—Alex Peterson



A Christmas Prayer

THE DAY OF JOY RETURNS, Father in Heaven, and crowns another year with peace and goodwill.

Help us rightly to remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wise men.

Close the doors of hate and open the doors of love all over the world.
Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting.

Deliver us from evil, by the blessing that Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clean hearts.

May the Christmas morning make us happy to be Thy children, and the Christmas evening bring us to our bed with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake.

Amen.

—Henry van Dyke (1852-1933)

Joy

The Joy of Christmas



Joyful, all ye nations rise.
Join the triumph of the skies!
With the angelic hosts proclaim
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”

—Charles Wesley (1707–1788)


The Light of the World

LIGHT PLAYS A BIG PART IN CHRISTMAS—the star, the angels’ brilliance, Christmas lights. And most of all, Me. “I am the light of the world.”

—Jesus, John 9:5

I am the light
of the world.





Now light one thousand Christmas lights
On dark earth here tonight;
One thousand, thousand also shine
To make the dark sky bright.

Oh, once when skies were starry bright,
In stable cold and bare
Sweet Mary bore a Son that night,
A Child both kind and fair.

He came to bring us love and light,
To bring us peace on earth,
So let your candles shine tonight
And sing with joy and mirth.

*—Translation of traditional
Swedish carol*



The most meaningful gifts are gifts of
love—time, friendship, company, giving,
forgiveness, and understanding.

—Chloe West

A Christmas Tree

A CHRISTMAS TREE! What a beautiful sight! But what does it mean to me? I wondered as I gazed at the Yuletide display before me.

The evergreen tree—it symbolizes Jesus, who lives in my heart strong and sure. He never dies away in the winter of my difficulties, but is always with me.

The star on the tiptop of the tree is like that unforgettable star that lit the way to the humble childhood home of my Savior over 2,000 years ago. It also reminds me to always look up—that there's always a shining star of hope, even in my darkest nights.

The baubles and pretty decorations are the good, happy things that fill my life with spice and delight.

I don't take the time as often as I should to thank God for all my blessings, or even for the sad things and the hard times that have made me the person that I am today. Life wouldn't be life without the joy and sadness, the good and the bad.

The colorful string of lights? It reminds me of things God does to light my way through life. "His Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). I never need feel alone.

And last but not least, the presents under the Christmas tree symbolize my gifts to Jesus. It is His birthday, after all. I give Him gifts each time I give from my heart to others. This is what makes Christmas.

—Amanda White

A Christmas Prayer of Thankfulness

DEAR JESUS,

Thank You for leaving the halls of heaven to be born on earth, then to live and die amongst us and thereby to change the world—and my life.

Though You came as a little child,
Your warmth, love, and peace soon spread throughout the whole earth.
Your love is ready to enter into every heart that welcomes You.

Thank You for what Christmas means—that whether or not I have family and friends, good times or bad, I will always have You. I will always have Your love—love that has stood the test of time, love that saved me and so many others like me.

Jesus, the stars and angels welcomed Your birth, as I welcome You into my heart with praise and thankfulness.

—Alex Peterson

Love

Love, the Essence of Christmas



Love came down at Christmas;
Love all lovely, love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Stars and angels gave the sign.

—Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830–1894)

Christmas

is ultimately
a celebration
of God's love
for each of us.

—Casey Parker

CHRISTMAS IS A TIME to renew bonds of love. It's a wonderful time when loved ones can show appreciation for each other. It's also a great time to use that love to build bridges of understanding, acceptance, and forgiveness.

—Shelley Landon

O LITTLE BABE of Bethlehem, though
You lie so still, You awaken in us the
joy, love, and peace that You wish to
spread throughout the world.

—Author unknown



...mend a quarrel
dismiss suspicion
seek out an old friend
write a love letter
share some treasure
give a soft answer
encourage someone
listen
apologize if I've been wrong
be patient and understanding
reexamine my demands on others
think first of others
show appreciation
be kind
be gentle
laugh more
express gratitude
welcome a stranger
gladden the heart of a child

—*Author unknown*

“this
Christmas,
I will...”

The Gift of Forgiveness

GIVE ME THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS.

Forgive someone who has wronged you,
whether intentionally or unintentionally.
Whether the wound runs deep in your heart
or is just a scratch, Christmas is a wonderful
time of year to make things right. And
making things right often starts with you
taking the step to forgive someone, even if
you feel that the other person is the one who
should be seeking forgiveness. Has someone
said or done something that has hurt you?
Forgive. Are you harboring bitterness
in your heart toward someone?

Forgive.

—Jesus







Coming Home

A TEENAGER WHO HAD RUN AWAY FROM HOME is returning on Christmas Eve by train. He isn't sure if his parents will receive him. He had written his father beforehand, asking him to tie a red cloth on the big elm at the back of their family property, adjacent to the train tracks, to signal him if he's welcome.

When he is yet a few miles away, the boy shares his anxiety with an older passenger sitting next to him. The man says he knows the teenager will be as welcome as another young man who ran off one time. Then he tells him Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32).

Sure enough, when the train reaches the old homestead, the father's red signal is out—but instead of one signal, there are dozens of red flags waving in the wind, one from every conceivable branch, shouting the news to a runaway boy that all is forgiven at Christmas.

—Retold by Keith Phillips

A Prayer for Love

Help me, Lord, to be like Your love,
not knowing any hour or time.

Help me, Lord, to be like Your love,
that gives and expects nothing in return.

Help me, Lord, to be like Your love,
that just loves to give and give.

Help me, Lord, to be like Your love,
that is meek and kind and sincere.

Help me, Lord, to be like Your love,
for faults are lost in Your love's sea.

Help me, Lord, to be like Your love,
to laugh with those who laugh,
and to weep with those who weep.

Help me, Lord, to be like Your love,
never-ending and never too busy to stop.

Help me, Lord, to be like Your love,
to give my life that others may live.

—Maria Fontaine

Giving

The Gift of Giving



Giving is not merely an act of love;
it is the essence of love.

—Jesus

“Glory to God
in the highest,
and on earth
peace, goodwill
toward men!”

—Luke 2:14


I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play
And mild and sweet the words repeat,
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And in despair I bow'd my head:
“There is no peace on earth,” I said,
“For hate is strong, and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men.”

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)





MAKE THIS YOUR PLEDGE
to Me this Christmas:
to give goodwill, cheer,
and My love to as many
as you can. Then you
will be bringing peace to
earth by giving them My
goodwill, which is love.

—Jesus

The finest Christmas
gift
is not the one that costs
the most
money,
but the one that carries
the most
love.

—Henry van Dyke

IF YOU WANT TO GIVE SOMEONE A SPECIAL GIFT,
try giving them your time and attention.

—Maria Fontaine

TAKING TIME TO PRAY for each of your loved ones
sometime on Christmas Day would be the greatest
gift you could possibly give to both them and Me.

—Jesus





The Gift of Time

A SUCCESSFUL YOUNG ATTORNEY SAID,
“The greatest gift I ever received was a gift I got one Christmas when my dad gave me a small box. Inside was a note saying, ‘Son, this year I will give you 365 hours—an hour every day after dinner. It’s yours. We’ll talk about what you want to talk about, we’ll go where you want to go, play what you want to play. It will be your hour!’”

“My dad not only kept his promise,” the attorney went on, “but every year he renewed it. That was the greatest gift I ever received. I am the result of his time.”

—Cited in *Moody Monthly*



My Prayer for You This Christmas

DEAR ONE,

It is not within my power to give you all the special things you need and deserve, so this Christmas I'll offer a prayer for you, asking God to give you His very best.

First, I pray for your happiness. The Bible calls it joy. My prayer for you is for joy that lasts even when things don't go just right.

Next, I pray for peace in your heart—a sweet knowledge that God is in control and that He won't let anything happen that He and you can't work out together.

And I pray for you to have faith—strong faith based on the most wonderful realities of all: God and His love and His promises to you.

Last but not least, I pray for you to experience love—great love, overflowing love, patient love, wise love, sweet love, fun love, exciting love, purposeful love, abiding love, strong love, encouraging love, God's love in all its wondrous forms.

—Chloe West

Moments

Quiet Moments



What is the best way to celebrate Christmas?
Spend it with Jesus.

—*Maria Fontaine*

WHY DON'T WE STOP AND ENJOY—really enjoy—what Christmas means? Cut down our task lists. Enjoy the beauty. There are so many wonderful things about Christmas and so many beautiful things to see. It would be a shame to miss it all, wrapping this and wrapping that, rushing for this last thing and that, cooking and preparing so much for a feast, cluttering our Christmas with so many unnecessary things.



Let me take a minute with Jesus.

The true presence of Christmas
is found with Him.

—Virginia Brandt Berg (1886–1968)



A Prayer from My Heart to Yours

DEAR JESUS,

You are God and man, King of kings and servant of all. You left Your throne of immortality and encased Yourself in human flesh. You became one of us, so that You could save us. Joy floods my heart when I think of how You quietly and humbly came into our world and changed it forever. Who could have imagined the transformation that would come through a little baby, born to commoners, wrapped in rags, sleeping in a feeding trough?

Whether times are good or bad, even if I don't have anyone else, I will always have You and Your love—love that has stood the test of time, redeeming love, love that saved even me. Thank You for making the choice to experience both the joys and sorrows of our earthly life. Thank You for enduring the tears, pain, frustration, loneliness, exhaustion, and finally death so that You could truly understand us. Never has there been a more perfect love than Yours!

—Casey Parker

Miracles

Eight Miracles of the First Christmas

Ronan Keane



Every baby is a miracle of God. The baby's first cry rings out, and the proud parents and everyone else present rejoices at the wonder they have just witnessed. The birth of Jesus on the first Christmas was all of that, but it also involved at least eight more miracles.



Miracle Number One:

Angelic Pronouncement

UNLIKE OTHERS, Jesus' birth was announced before He was even conceived. "Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel said to her, 'Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!' 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 1:26-28, 30-31).

Miracle Number Two:

Miraculous Conception

IT IS, OF COURSE, one of the best-known and most outstanding miracles that at the time of Jesus' conception His mother, Mary, was a virgin. The Bible is very clear on that:

"Mary asked the angel, 'But how can I have a baby? I am a virgin.' The angel replied, 'The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of God shall overshadow you; so the baby born to you will be utterly holy—the Son of God'" (Luke 1:34-35 TLB).

This event was foretold 700 years earlier by the prophet Isaiah: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel ['God is with us,' in Hebrew]" (Isaiah 7:14). In every sense, Jesus is the Son of God.



3

Miracle Number Three:

Another Miraculous Conception

GABRIEL ALSO TOLD MARY that her cousin Elizabeth, who had been barren and was now past the age for childbearing, would also conceive and give birth to a son who would “turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.” Elizabeth gave birth to a boy who grew up to be John the Baptist. Everything happened exactly as Gabriel had announced (Luke 1:5-25, 57-66).



Miracle Number Four:

Angelic Confirmation

WHAT ABOUT JOSEPH, MARY'S FIANCÉ? What was he to think when he found out that Mary was three months pregnant? As can be expected, his first reactions were mixed. "Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly" (Matthew 1:19).

That's when God sent an angel to Joseph also, as much to reassure and comfort him as to clarify the situation, no doubt. "An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is

of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus ["the Lord is salvation," in Hebrew], for He will save His people from their sins.' Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife" (Matthew 1:20-21, 24).



Miracle Number Five:

Place of Birth

IT WAS ALSO A MIRACULOUS FULFILLMENT of an Old Testament prophecy that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, since His parents lived in Nazareth, some days' journey away. "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).

The Roman emperor Augustus Caesar had decreed that an empire-wide census should be taken, and Jewish tradition required that for any such business each man return to the place that he considered his ancestral home. For Joseph, a direct descendant of King David, that meant returning to Bethlehem with his pregnant wife, and she gave birth to Jesus shortly after they arrived.

Miracle Number Six:

Angelic Announcement

SHEPHERDS KEEPING WATCH over their sheep on the hillsides surrounding Bethlehem were visited by an angel, who told them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.’ And 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 2:10-14).

The shepherds went to Bethlehem, where they found the Messiah exactly as the angel had told them. “Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child” (Luke 2:17).





Miracle Number Seven:

Sign

in the Heavens

WISE MEN FROM THE EAST observed an unusual occurrence in the heavens, which they interpreted to signify the birth of the “King of the Jews,” and they went to worship Him.

Travel in those days was difficult and slow, and it’s believed, based on other Scriptures, that it took the wise men up to two years of preparation and travel before they arrived in Judea and gave their gifts to Jesus. “Behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over the house where the young

Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:9-11).



Miracle Number Eight:

Best By Far

THE SUPREME MIRACLE OF CHRISTMAS, however, is not about angels or wise men or a sign in the sky. It's about God's only begotten Son taking on the form of a weak, helpless baby in order to better love, understand, sympathize with, and eventually die for you and me. Eternal life is God's gift to us, and that life is in Jesus (1 John 5:11).



The Answer

CAN YOU REMEMBER A TIME when you were a child and you wanted something so badly 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 faraway 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 they 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.

—Keith Phillips

Forever

Christmas Forever



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

My birth

was the greatest present

My Father

could give to
you,

the chance to receive

eternal life.

—Jesus

Forever Love

SOME PEOPLE CANNOT UNDERSTAND how God could have come to earth wrapped in human flesh, but He came! It isn't strange to me because I see Him born in hearts every day. He comes and lives in hearts and transforms lives. That's a mighty miracle!

—Virginia Brandt Berg





O holy Child of Bethlehem!
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in,
Be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel!

—Phillips Brooks (1835-1893)

God's Christmas Gift to You

HAVE YOU RECEIVED the Christ Child into your life? All you have to do is open the door of your heart and invite Him in. He says, "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him" (Revelation 3:20). Just pray:

*Jesus, please come into my heart.
Please forgive me for my sins and
fill me with Your love as You have
promised to do. Thank You for
giving me Your new life. Amen.*

Once you have asked Jesus into your life, you'll have Christmas in your heart forever!

—Chloe West


Christmas

Continual Christmas



Somehow not only for Christmas
But all the long year through,
The joy that you give others
Is the joy that comes back to you.

—John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)



I will honor
Christmas
in my heart,
and try to keep it
all the year.

—Charles Dickens

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATES a moment that changed the course of history. But it remains meaningless to you until it has changed the course of your life.

—Jesus

A Prayer for Peace

DEAR JESUS,

I want to know You personally. I want to understand the truth. I want to see the world the way You see it. I want to understand Your will, and I want to do my part to fulfill Your will. I want to stand up for truth and justice. Give me strength to do so. Show me what I can do to change the world around me for the better. Show me how to love my fellow man, how to help and care for others as You would help and care for them if You walked on earth today. You are the Prince of Peace. Show me what I can do to promote peace.

Amen.

—Shannon Richards





