



CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS

A devotional resource from
the Christian Writer's Workshop

Christian Writers Workshop

Presents

Christmas Reflections

We pray these meditations will
focus your heart and mind on the Savior,
Jesus Christ
who is the reason we celebrate
Christmas.

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Advent, the season of anticipating and celebrating Jesus' birth, provides many opportunities to prepare heart and home to welcome the Christ Child. Scripture tells us that his arrival was not an accident, but an event destined to convey reconciliation by a loving God for his creation. In Galatians 4:4, Paul writes that, "when the time had fully come, God sent his Son..." a fulfillment of prophecy and expectation that had been anticipated for centuries. You are invited to walk through the preparations described in the Scriptures below as once again we welcome Immanuel, God with us.

Week 1:

Dec. 1 Is. 40:9–11
Dec. 2 Is. 52:7–9
Dec. 3 Gen. 3:8–15
Dec. 4 Is. 40:1–5
Dec. 5 Gen. 15:1–6
Dec. 6 Deut. 18:15–19
Dec. 7 Ps. 89:1–4

Week 2:

Dec. 8 Is. 11:1–10
Dec. 9 Micah 5:2–3
Dec. 10 Zech. 6:12–13
Dec. 11 Mal. 3:1–6
Dec. 12 Jn. 1:1–8
Dec. 13 Jn. 1:9–18
Dec. 14 Mark 1:1–3

Week 3:

Dec. 15 Lk. 1:5–13
Dec. 16 Lk. 1:14–17
Dec. 17 Lk. 1:18–25
Dec. 18 Lk. 1:39–45
Dec. 19 Lk. 1:46–56
Dec. 20 Lk. 1:57–66
Dec. 21 Lk. 1:67–80

Week 4:

Dec. 22 Is. 7:10–14
Dec. 23 Lk. 1:26–35
Dec. 24 Is. 9:2–7
Dec. 25 Mt. 1:18–25
Dec. 26 Lk. 2:1–20
Dec. 27 Mt. 2:1–2
Dec. 28 Lk. 2:21–35

December 1

GOD'S PURPOSES AND HIS PERFECT TIMING

Charles Dixon

Have you ever wondered WHY you were born...or the reason you were born when, where, and how you were born? You may not know the answers to all of these probing questions, but God has always known. Ecclesiastes 3:1 states, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born..." (ASV).

During this special season of the year, may we be ever mindful that the timing, birthplace, circumstances, and purposes of Christ's birth and ours were not by accident. Isaiah 7:14 declares, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." The prophet Isaiah did not know each detail of Christ's birth seven centuries in advance, but he knew that the One who is in charge of the divine appointment calendar knew precisely. God the Father not only KNEW in advance, but he would DO in advance whatever was necessary for the Son of God to be born at just the right time, in just the right place, for just the right purposes.

The same can be said of you and me. The Apostle Paul wrote, "But when THE TIME HAD FULLY COME, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Galatians 4:4-5).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son to be born in Bethlehem at just the right time so that I and countless others could be redeemed and thus born again. Thank you for your love and matchless gifts of life, abundant life, and life everlasting. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen

December 2

A LIFETIME GIFT
Barbara Russell Chesser, PhD

“Every good and perfect gift is from above.”

James 1:17

More than seventy years ago I received a remarkable gift that captured the essence of Advent and the miracle of Christmas. I was in the fifth grade when right before Christmas break, the teacher announced that our class play would be “Cinderella.” Students could select the role they wanted, she explained, and a class vote would determine the outcome.

I was a tomboy and certainly not the Cinderella type, but I was ready to make a change—I wanted to be Cinderella! When the votes were counted, I had more votes than anyone else for that role.

Jubilant, I reveled in my new fame! However, I soon would be an overnight failure. When class began the next day, the teacher motioned me to her desk. “After thinking about it,” she said, “I believe you are better suited for another role.”

The clock struck midnight in my heart. I had been banished to sweeping ash and soot. I trudged home for the Christmas break. My granddad was emphatic. “Life is not always fair. Sometimes adults break rules—even those they set. If you let that defeat you, you’re the loser.” He advised, “Commit yourself to be great in the role the teacher chose for you—the wicked stepmother!”

Taking the well-meaning advice to heart during the Christmas holidays, I memorized my lines and perfected them with emotion-packed drama. Time for the performance finally arrived, and I gave the performance of my fifth-grade life.

Just as Advent gets us ready for Christmas, my not getting to play Cinderella was a Christmas miracle that helped me learn to make the best of difficult situations—a gift I have used for a lifetime.

December 3

A CHRISTMAS BLESSING TO REMEMBER

Dr. John C. Parker

My wife and I had a long-standing tradition started early in our marriage. We had a desire to share the joy of Christmas with a family in need: a custom which brought us untold blessings year after year. I often received a monetary gift at Christmas from the churches I served. This gift, although not sizable, was appreciated.

We became aware of an unemployed young man whose wife passed away six weeks before Christmas. Brokenhearted and grieving, with three little girls, he knew he could not provide a Christmas for them. Destitute financially from months of caring for his dying wife, he was about as downcast as one can get. There would be no Christmas for the children that year.

His desperate situation tugged at our hearts. This was the family we should assist for Christmas. Their family had moved away to a small city and were living in a government-subsidized housing unit.

Not dissuaded, we put our plans into action. We located where the family was living, purchased a small Christmas tree, a few decorations, and toys for the little girls. For the young father, we purchased several gift cards.

The family didn't know we were coming or bringing their Christmas. Our hearts were racing joyfully with the anticipation and excitement of sharing our Christmas with this family. The joy of Jesus' birth flooded our hearts as we saw these precious little girls greeting us with their glee of excitement and a twinkling sparkle in their eyes. It brought happy tears to our eyes.

God gave his Son at Christmas. Our churches gave love to us with their Christmas gifts, and we gave our love as we fulfilled our passion. Thank God for a Christmas to remember!

December 4

A SEASON OF MYSTERY

Rob Hartland

I proved Santa was real the winter I was six. As my family and I walked through Richland Mall on Christmas Eve, we passed a kiosk where my mom admired one of the dolls on display. “Do you want that, Momma?” I asked.

She smiled. “No, thank you for thinking of me though!” I was troubled. Santa gave us kids presents. Why shouldn’t Mom get one from Santa too?

Upon returning home, I wrote Santa, apologizing for the late notice and imploring him to get this doll for Mom. The letter, sealed in an envelope, was ready to mail but the mailbox was across our big, dark yard. I employed my father to help.

“What is the letter for?” he asked. I whispered the situation in his ear and with his approval, crossed the yard, and shipped the letter to Santa.

The next morning, I snuck from my room to the tree, flung aside the other presents, and found tucked behind the tree a box addressed “To Mom, From Santa.” I was overjoyed. Santa had come through.

Years later, my dad’s revelation of the mystery of Santa was devastating, though today, I am touched by my parents’ efforts.

Of the many lessons and laughs in the full story, let me share one: the mystery of Santa disappoints, but the mystery of Immanuel inspires. We’re not able to know everything about God, but we’re blessed to know all we need to know of him in Jesus, and thus, we can live life anew. Christmas is the unwrapping of God’s mystery, a revelatory moment that ushers in eternity for those who believe. The King is here to suffer, triumph, cry, laugh, and live life eternal with us. He is the mystery of godliness (1 Timothy 3:16), and this mystery will never disappoint!

December 5

CHRISTMAS BEFORE DECEMBER 25

David Price

My grandfather owned an electric company in St. Paul, Minnesota. Price Electric did well, so I'm told, and Grandpa was well-known and loved by the community until his death in the 1960's.

One summer, to earn money for college, I worked for a company that delivered electrical supplies. One day, a man asked if I was related to Charles Price of Price Electric. On hearing I was his grandson, he related this story.

On one of the coldest days before Christmas, Grandpa and the employees were getting ready to close up for the day. An old Native American man came in and asked if he could stand there out of the cold to warm up a bit. Grandpa invited him to stand by the heater and asked where his coat was. The man admitted he didn't have one, but he was catching a bus home to northern Minnesota and the bus would be warm. At that, Grandpa took his own coat off a hook and gave it to the man. "This will keep you warm," he said.

The coat Grandpa gave the man was an early Christmas present from Grandma, an expensive coat meant to keep him warm when he had to be outside. But rather than being upset when Grandpa explained where his new coat was, Grandma gave him a hug and a kiss, then went shopping and bought him another new coat.

She gave him both the new coat and his old one, telling him to give the old one away if somebody needed it. After that, a coat always hung on the hook at Grandpa's store to be given away whenever necessary.

I understand quite a few coats were given away as people occasionally came into the store to warm themselves.

December 6

DIFFERENT KIND OF CHRISTMAS LIST

Cindy Janecka

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Isaiah 9:6

Although we often find ourselves captivated by the warmth and joy of the Christmas season, we are also surrounded by those who are experiencing pain and sadness through loss, illness, financial difficulties, troubled relationships, separation from loved ones, and so much more.

One of the greatest ways to celebrate the arrival of Jesus and the salvation and hope He brings to our world is to be sensitive to those around us and acknowledge that the celebration-filled holidays can also be a time of brokenness. Jesus’ debut into this world offers us strength and healing in all circumstances. With Jesus’ arrival came the birth of hope beyond what the world had ever known.

As a dramatic fulfillment of prophecies, Jesus came into this world to offer us eternal salvation and a personal relationship with the God of the universe. Although Jesus was born centuries ago, the peace He offers is as steadfast today as the day He made his humble entrance into this world.

Perhaps this is a season of celebration and joy for your family or one of grief and sadness. Wherever God has you, remember the promises of the manger, and let’s all be mindful of what some people in our lives may need that is not already on our gift-giving list: sensitivity, compassion, hope, time, acts of service, grace, kindness, and forgiveness.

This holiday season, may the festive décor, adorned trees and holiday traditions be vivid reminders of the hope that Christmas brings to each of us and that so many people desperately need.

December 7

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

David Byrd

One of my most significant life lessons grew from my observations around the week of Christmas. As a young boy, I was touched by how the spirit of people changed around Christmas time. People seemed to be more loving, and the energy of love seemed to intensify during the week of Christmas. Now, as an adult, I still feel the same spirit of love during Christmas. However, I now have a theory of why.

Christmas is in honor and recognition of the birth of Jesus. He brought a beautiful message of love and demonstrated the energy of that love to the world. He left that energy with us in the gift of the Holy Spirit. I believe the energy of that Spirit intensifies during the week of Christmas. People seem to be more tolerant. Smiles are bigger and more prevalent. There's a special hustle and bustle, too. Some see that as a distraction, but could it be that the energy of love hastens its expression during the season of Christmas?

Love is a powerful emotion! Current science tells us that the emotion of love creates the strongest energy of any other emotion. It seems only logical that the very creator of love would choose a special time to remind us of His love. He could do so by consistently demonstrating the powerful message of love during Christmas. I believe the message of love which touched me as a young boy still shows up every year in the "Spirit of Christmas." None of this may be obvious to the casual observer. So, watch closely this Christmas. I believe you will see and feel it too!

"Father, allow the spirit of love to fill our hearts this Christmas!"

December 8

UNEXPECTED CIRCUMSTANCES

Carrie Burrows

*“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.”
Then the angel left her.
Luke 1:38*

I love dreaming about and planning what life will look like in the future. But often, those plans don’t go as I imagine. For instance, over the years, we’ve had to move more often than desired. Even simple plans for social dinners have been botched by forgetting to add ingredients or having to cancel the dinner altogether. Life can change suddenly and unexpectedly, from the loss of a job, loss of a loved one or financial burdens to a move, a new job, or even an unplanned pregnancy.

The text tells us Mary was receptive to the angel’s message. But where did her thoughts go in the moments, days and weeks after the angel left? Did she have a mix of excitement tinged with anxiety? Did she wonder about those who might chastise her since she was not officially married? Every time she felt Jesus kick, did she touch her belly and ponder how everything would work out? This was not in her plan, not the life Mary imagined.

Yet, somehow, in a life she never imagined, the Lord provided something sweet, amazing, and world-changing. A Savior.

Like Mary, our lives don’t always go as planned. But God is faithful and always provides. He continually provided for Mary, even persuading Joseph not to divorce her. Though your circumstances may not be easy and may lead you in new directions, remember the same God who proved his love and faithfulness to Mary is the same God who loves you and desires to be in a relationship with you. God is always faithful, no matter what—even through unexpected change in our lives.

December 9

DON'T EAT THE GIBLET GRAVY

Joye Thackston

"Love the Lord your God."

Deuteronomy 6:5

My eyes sprang open. I could hear my parents' voices. Instantly, I thought, *They're talking to Santa!* I flipped over to my hands and knees, pushed my quilts into a pile at the foot of my crib, and climbed on them. The door by my bed was slightly ajar, allowing light to seep in. As I looked around, I saw Ted asleep in his bed. *Where's Ned?* On my tiptoes, I reached for the door.

"Leave the door alone," came a familiar whisper from below. Ned lay on his tummy under my bed, peeking through the cracked door.

"Is Santa in there?"

"No! Be quiet!"

Ping! Ping! Ping! Three shots rang through the air. Then ten higher-pitched pings sounded off in the distance.

"Oh, no! Is Dad shooting at Santa?"

"No, silly!" Ned exclaimed. "Dad shot into a box to show Mom that the BB guns he got Ted and me for Christmas are not dangerous. The BBs went through the box and bounced off pans in the kitchen. Some must have gone through the flour bucket.

Mom raised her voice, "OK, Daniel Boone, you're in charge of fishing the BBs out of the flour unless you want BBs in your giblet gravy tomorrow!" Ned slid from under my bed and dashed to safety. "Go to sleep. Mom is mad."

I fell backward and pulled a quilt over my head. The next sound I heard was Mother announcing, "Today is Christmas, our Lord's birthday. It's time to get up and open presents."

"Does Jesus have presents to open?" I asked.

"Yes." She lifted me to the floor. "Jesus unwraps our love."

As we scrambled to the tree, Ned poked Ted and whispered, "Don't eat the giblet gravy."

December 10

A CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

Betty Willis

"...A Savior has been born...Christ Jesus the Lord."

Luke 2:11, TLB

Now in our seventies, my husband and I have given away almost all our Christmas decorations. Last year we decided to hang a wreath on the door, have Sunday lunch for the kids early in December, and go on a cruise. After all, we'd done traditional Christmas at our house for over fifty years.

The ship in Miami was festively decorated with Christmas trees, but it took me several days to notice there were no nativity scenes. I'd taken for granted that the birth of Jesus would always be the focus of Christmas, but I was in for a rude awakening. We heard *I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas*, *Jingle Bells*, *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, and *Here Comes Santa Claus*, but not a single Christmas carol. I realized most of the people on our ship were not Christians.

I looked for a Bible, having failed to put one in my suitcase. But there were none in the nightstands or in the library. On Christmas Eve, I wrote out the Scriptures from Luke 2 as best I could remember. My husband and I sat on our balcony, overlooking God's beautiful ocean, and sang *O Little Town of Bethlehem* and *Silent Night* with tears in our eyes. On Christmas Day, we attended a Christian service that had been scheduled at an odd time. Out of the three thousand on board, only a hundred came.

Coming from the Bible Belt of Texas, I was under the impression most people believed in Jesus. That is not the case. This world has many religions, and Christians are the minority.

I learned one thing. If you go on a Christmas cruise, take Jesus with you.

December 11

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS

Susie Jaynes

Carolers are among my favorite images on Christmas cards. They evoke memories of over 25 holiday seasons when my family and friends from our church set our schedules to ‘carol’ for six special friends.

My husband (with zero musical training) could play by ear every Christmas carol and popular song on his harmonica. The other two husbands were musically gifted—one on the guitar and the other a professional musician on the piano. He also was adept on a recorder. The wives, children, guitarist, and any additional guests provided the vocals. We’d caravan from house to house and end the evening in one of our homes enjoying homemade soup and hot cornbread. There we continued the songfest for our own enjoyment, usually ending with “The Twelve Days of Christmas” with each day assigned to a different group.

One year, three grandfathers were assigned “Two turtle doves” as their portion. The fact that none of the men knew the tune was beside the point. Each repetition grew less harmonious, but not their gusto! Laughter reigned! Each time I hear that song I smile at the memory of Christian friends joyously singing and enjoying life together.

The Christian faith is a singing religion. From the beginning, angel songs blessed the shepherds at Jesus’ birth. Music expanded at our Lord’s resurrection and ascension, and spans the years since in the anticipated victorious return of our Savior. (Martin Luther is credited with adding hymns to our Protestant worship as a means of teaching theology to his illiterate congregation.) We have multiple reasons for singing, especially as we ponder God’s precious gift of Jesus!

Consider gathering some friends and sing your faith and joy to some neighbors. (Our similar adventure blessed us 25 years and the sweet memories linger!)

December 12

HENRIETTA

Tricia Mankin

Henrietta's eyes shone with peace and love as she lay in her bed in the nursing home. Her non-functioning arms were crossed over her chest. Her legs had been amputated years earlier due to diabetes. Totally dependent on caregivers, Henrietta did not allow self-pity to control her. Instead, her love of Jesus and of prayer filled her life with meaning and purpose.

One rainy, foggy Christmas night after my family had packed up gifts and returned to their homes, a friend called to wish me *Merry Christmas*. As we shared stories of our celebrations of Jesus' birth, our conversation turned to friends who were alone and likely not feeling the spirit of Christmas. Henrietta's name and life came to mind. We decided to visit Henrietta right then!

As we had imagined, though alone and lying in bed, her sparkling eyes reflected her inner joy. She laughed when we told her we were "kidnapping" her. The nursing home personnel helped us transfer Henrietta to my friend's car for the short ride.

We carried her into the house and propped her up in a chair in front of the festive Christmas tree. The fire in the fireplace danced, and candles glowed around us. What a happy time we shared singing Christmas carols and talking about our love for Jesus. We had no gifts, no feast of food, but we had so much more. Jesus brought us together to share the most precious gift—our Savior!

The memory of that night reminds me that my dependence on Jesus is just like Henrietta's: I can do nothing without Him.

*"If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit;
apart from me you can do nothing."*

John 15:5

December 13

DESPISED AND REJECTED

Jimmy Dorrell

“He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

Isaiah 53:2–3

Christians often have a need to picture Jesus as a pretty baby, a handsome teenager, and an attractive man. Because of respect for God in the flesh, our temptation is to attribute human physical traits that set him apart from the ordinary Israelite. We resist the Messiah image as despised and rejected. Yet Isaiah clearly stated that when he came, there would be nothing about his physical appearance “that we should desire him.”

In our culture, which spends vulgar amounts of money on cosmetics, clothing, shoes, hair, nails, and overall appearance, the idea that we are called to follow One who did just the opposite is challenging. Jesus was known to his disciples for his love, truth-speaking, healing, miracles, and acceptance of the rejected of his culture. He was despised and rejected by the religious leaders of his day, not acknowledged for contemporary marks of outward religion. He healed on the Sabbath, touched lepers, sat down with an adulterous Samaritan woman, and even turned over the tables of the predators at his Father’s house. For his unwillingness to comply with the culture’s standards, he was arrested, beaten, mocked, and crucified.

Our pseudo-Christian culture claims we can have it both ways—follow Jesus and the culture. Yet the Apostle John’s judgment on the seven churches in Revelation demonstrates how we easily “forsake our first love” (Rev 2:4) and become “dead,” even when having a “reputation for being alive” (Rev 3:1).

December 14

MESSENGERS ON A MISSION

Sharon Patterson Payne

“For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

Psalm 91:11–12

My life was in shambles. Facing an unexpected divorce after 32 years of marriage, I was gripped by fear and uncertainty. What was going to happen to me post-divorce? Would I come out of this crisis strong or would I crumble in the aftermath?

Sitting on my front porch one late summer evening, crying my eyes out in despair, I said a heartfelt prayer to God. It went like this: *“Lord, please reveal to me what my true purpose is in this life according to your divine plan for me and let me live it. Please send your almighty angels to show me the way.”*

Exactly one week later, just as God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary with the message she would be giving birth to the Christ Child, He sent his angels to rescue *me*. He confirmed their presence in digital photos I was taking of sunsets from that very porch. To date, I have countless digital images of His angels to display for audiences as I share my testimony.

The most memorable of all was Christmas Eve, December 24, 2009. As I said, “Happy Birthday, Jesus” and pointed my camera into the night sky, I was able to capture over 400 digital photos of His beautiful angels. Since then, my world of doubt and insecurity turned into an ocean of purpose and passion as I share how the power of God’s love and an answered prayer can change one’s life in an instant.

*What is **your** message and request to God and his angels?*

December 15

PRESENTS OR PRESENCE?

Michelle Ruddell

Matthew rubbed his sleepy brown eyes as he peeked around the corner. The adults sat, cameras ready, waiting for my three-year-old son to see the spread that Santa had delivered. There was the toy kitchen he had asked for since July, a big yellow truck, an overflowing stocking, and a stack of brightly wrapped presents. We wondered which treasure would capture his attention first.

Matthew shuffled hesitantly into the living room in his footed pajamas. “Who came to see you?” I asked.

His eyes grew big, not at the sight of toys and gifts, but at the sight of my brother. “Uncle Craig!” An ear-to-ear grin spread across his face as he bolted across the living room. He jumped into Craig’s lap and threw his arms around his neck. Matthew had anticipated my brother’s coming for Christmas. He had asked again and again, “Is Craig coming?”

Our family has laughed about this story for years. We expected Matthew’s focus to be on his *presents*. Instead, the thing that excited him most was the *presence* of his uncle. It was an unexpected lesson from the heart of a child.

When Jesus was born, a promise was fulfilled. The shepherds hurried to see the child after hearing from the angels. They spread the word that the long-awaited Messiah had come. They rejoiced in the *presence* of the Savior.

As Christmas approaches, may we celebrate the *presence* of Jesus. May we grin from ear-to-ear at the realization that he is here. May we experience the child-like faith that causes us to jump into his lap and throw our arms around his neck.

“Today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David.”

Luke 2:11 HCSB

December 16

STILLE NACHT

Vicky Kendig

One of the most memorable Christmas traditions our family cherishes was the Christmas Eve candlelight service at our tiny church in Germany.

The U.S. Army moved us to Germany in 1983, and we quickly found our way to the narrow, four-story former shoe factory where the English-speaking congregation met. It was a traditional Baptist church with all the requisite meetings.

Summer temperatures in the old building were lovely. Cold months were a different story altogether. The church heater wasn't the best, and in the winter, we often had to huddle together during the services to stay warm. In spite of that and various other difficulties, the one meeting that went forward no matter the weather was the Christmas Eve service.

The last activity of the night would be the singing of "Stille Nacht," the German "Silent Night." One of the church members, a U.S. Air Force sergeant, not only played the guitar but had been born and raised in Germany. He taught us the words to the German carol and accompanied us as we sang.

After the children's Christmas Eve musical program, we would light our candles. Then, with the acoustic guitar as the lone instrument, we would sing in our broken but heartfelt German, the way that congregants sang it for the first time in an Austrian church 170 years before.

As the words floated from the church into the frozen night, we hoped they would be a witness to the neighborhood: Christians far from their homeland had found each other and met to celebrate the birth of our Lord.

The song gave our family a feeling of peace and warmth, but mostly it reminded us of the sweet words of Luke 2:7: "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger"

December 17

THE CHRISTMAS JOURNEY

Reita Rea Hawthorne

The porcelain baby Jesus, brought to us from Rome, lay waiting in the brown wooden trunk. After tucking the children in bed on Christmas Eve, we always placed the tiny figurine in the straw under the tree where expectant, shining eyes could find him on Christmas morning.

The beauties of those Christmas Eves, the joys of those Christmas mornings! Oh how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who keep Christmas all year!

I long to relive Christmas with every day that passes,
Strain to hear shepherd's crooks dotting dusty grasses—
Strain to watch as shepherd's feet make haste across those hills—
Strain to see the shepherd's faces as the heavenly Light distills.
All the way, then Bethlehem! I can see them kneeling there
Marveling that the angels gave them the Gift to share.
Then racing off and rushing to tell those who would hear:
The long-awaited Messiah—the Christ-Child is here!
I listen for the bells to ring—to sound from every steeple—
To hear the great cathedrals peal the news to every people.
The smell of fir, the scent of holly, the carols children sing,
The joy and all the happiness, the memories Christmas brings.

Once upon a time ... as children's books begin
I became a shepherd trying to find him.
Now I've found the Christ-child! It's Christmas every day
Traveling in his footsteps, for he said, "I am the Way!"

December 18

QUIET TRUST

Elizabeth Oates

Imagine if God asked you to do something that defied your church's teaching. What if this grand request disregarded your cultural norms? What if God's request was so scandalous, so bizarre, and so shocking that you knew you could lose your family, your community, and live the rest of your life in shame? Would you trust God? Would you obey?

This is the position Joseph found himself in when he learned that Mary was pregnant (Matthew 1:18–25). Joseph was betrothed to Mary, which means their parents had entered into a legally binding agreement that said their children would marry one another. Mary's parents had paid a dowry and only three things remained to make the marriage official: a wedding celebration, Mary moving into Joseph's house, and the consummation of the marriage. Even though the marriage ceremony had not taken place, this betrothal was just as binding as the marriage itself.

You can see why Joseph found himself in a precarious position. His cultural heritage told him that Mary had committed adultery and he should divorce her. God, however, sent an angel to Joseph to confirm that this was all in his plan (Matthew 1:20–23).

The Bible doesn't tell us much about Joseph, but we know a few things: Joseph was kind (Matt 1:18–19); Joseph was a devout Jew who knew God (Luke 2:41); Joseph trusted God (Matt 1:24); Joseph obeyed God (Matt 2:13–14).

When faced with a seemingly impossible task, Joseph trusted God. He turned away from everything his culture told him to do—things that would be well within his rights—and he obeyed God. Joseph doesn't get as much airtime as Mary and Jesus, but without this man's quiet trust, Christmas morning would have looked very different 2000 years ago.

As you reflect on Joseph's story, consider this: Where is God calling you to trust him this Christmas season?

December 19

THE ADVENT MOMENT

Linda Y. Hammond

"...the gift is acceptable, according to what one has...."

2 Corinthians 12

"Have you had THE moment this Advent season?" asked one of our pastors in his mid-December newsletter article. The question encouraged intentionality in searching for that moment in time "when the busyness, hassle, and stress of the Christmas season give way to the purpose behind it."

Such a moment occurred for me during our church's Angel Tree party. This event connects church members with some 200 children and their extended families. The youngsters receive gifts on behalf of incarcerated parents.

Crowned with a tinsel halo upon arriving, each child becomes part of a living nativity scene with church members portraying the characters. Mary, Joseph, and their live newborn son take center stage in front of a wooden stable frame—amid hay bales and plaster animals. Costumed shepherds, angels, and wise men interact with guests.

"Pretend you are at the first Christmas and this is your gift to present to Baby Jesus," one of the wise men must have whispered to a little girl as he handed her his prop, a wrapped gift. Sheer delight spread across the face of that child as she reverently knelt before the baby and set her gift on the floor. Regardless of what had happened in the life of her family to that point, here was a moment to treasure in which she could offer a gift in honor of the Christ Child. She played her role well. She gave what she had.

What can I give Him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;

If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;

Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.

—Christina Rossetti, "In the Bleak Midwinter"

December 20

A CHRISTMAS MEDITATION

Mike Smith

The scene is more lowly than idyllic. A newborn baby is wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger. We've heard the story so many times that we can forget the stark backwardness of it all. The Son of God should have come in the trappings of greatness, yet he spends the first night of his human existence lying in a feeding trough.

Even stranger than the lowliness of Jesus' birth is the birth itself. Imagine! The One through whom and for whom all things were made has become a part of his creation. The Infinite has taken on finite existence. The One who sustains all things by his powerful word has become completely dependent on the sustenance of another. God the Son has taken on human flesh and become the Son of man.

This is the force of the incarnation. The great has become small. The infinite finite. The uncontainable contained. As the Apostle Paul put it: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). We are used to speaking of the love that led Jesus to the cross. Perhaps we should also speak of the love that led him to his birth!

As we continue our journey through the Christmas season, let us remember the everlasting God who did not shy away from drawing his first breath. Such is the wonder of the God we serve. Such is the splendor of a newborn baby who bears the weight of the world. Such is the beauty of Christmas.

December 21

STAR OF WONDER

Ben Hagins

Former Baylor University golfer and friend, Jimmy Walker, won the 2016 PGA Golf Championship. What you may not know about Jimmy is that he is a star-gazer. He regularly programs his Celestron photographic telescope and peers into deep space to capture remarkable heavenly objects. While our naked eye can only see about 3000 stars, even with binoculars or an inexpensive telescope, one can view multitudes more stars and distant galaxies. In fact, there are over 100 billion galaxies with many trillions of stars, planets, moons, and who knows what else. I am humbled by this incomprehensible size and magnitude of God's creation.

Psalm 19:1 RSV reads, "The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork."

So how does all this relate to Advent? We are told in Matthew 2:1–23 that the Magi, known as Wise Men, studied the heavens and followed a star that brought them to Jesus. When King Herod heard of this event, he conspired to have Jesus killed, but the Magi outwitted Herod, and Jesus was saved. These verses are directly related to the Christmas story as recorded in Luke 2:1–21.

Next time you look up at night and view the stars in our Milky Way galaxy, think of the star that the Magi followed to Jesus, the One who gives salvation, hope, and abundant life. Read reverently the words of a favorite Christmas carol by John H. Hopkins, Jr.

We Three Kings

*We three kings of orient are
Bearing gifts, we traverse afar.
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star*

*O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright.
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect Light.*

December 22

THE GIFT RECEIVED

Susie Jaynes

Many Christians bemoan the commercialization of Christmas each season, as advertisers feed our greed with new and improved products we are told we *need* to experience the *good life*.

As a counter-cultural approach this holiday season, make it a point with friends and family to introduce a discussion of “the favorite gift I have ever **given** at Christmas” rather than letting the conversation focus on the favorite gift received or this year’s “want” list.

For me, this stirs memories of Christmas 1970. The hot tech offering of the season was a tape recorder, which I purchased for my husband.

I convinced our two children they could give their daddy a “verbal Christmas gift” by memorizing the Christmas story as told in Matthew and Luke. My daughter, a precocious reader at seven, set about learning Matthew 2:1–11. Our four year-old son became my constant companion for almost six weeks as he learned Luke 2:8–14 by repetition. Over and over we echoed one another, “AND THERE WERE IN THE SAME COUNTRY”...“and there weeruh in the same kuntwee”...“SHEPHERDS ABIDING IN THE FIELDS”...“shep-hurds abiding in the fields”...

By Christmas Eve they were ready to present their gift, and their dad was ready to make his first tape recording. His eyes sparkled with joyous surprise as his children offered him their gift—of no monetary significance to the outside world, but to a dad’s ears utterly priceless in love and effort.

When my husband died in October 2013, one treasure found in his chest-of-drawers was this tape recording of innocent children’s voices offering gifts of love to their dad. No one knows how many times he played it, delighting each session in the vocal gift of a lifetime!

What is the favorite gift you have given?

December 23

THE GIFT OF ABUNDANT LIFE

Chris Wommack

It's Christmas morning and you rush down the stairs. Grandma's already in the kitchen, apron on, slathering powdered sugar icing over a fresh batch of her legendary cinnamon rolls. Dad's stoking a colossal fire reflected in each ornament on the tree that you and Mom spent days decorating. There to greet you is a beautifully-wrapped box as big as you are. Mom smiles, reflecting on the joy she had applying just the right snips of super transparent Scotch tape to each corner. With Elmer's glue and glitter, she even scripted your first, middle and last name across the top of the snowy white paper.

But the day goes by and the package remains unopened. You cradle it gently in both arms as you proudly show it to Grandpa. You try to make your cousins jealous by pointing out its finery, but it remains sealed in its glossy wrappings. That night, you lay it gently at the foot of your bed, never bothering to rip it open to see what's inside.

Sounds silly, but many Christians do that with the gift of abundant life. They know Jesus is their Savior and that He has gladly welcomed them into the family. But their lives lack the joy, peace and purpose exemplified by New Testament believers. They walk around with a present labeled "Abundant Life," but fail to unwrap it. In John 10:10, Jesus said He came to give us life, richer and better than anything we could ever dream. He expects us to open that gift by receiving it into our hearts and living it out day by day.

This Christmas, by faith, open the gift that has your full name on it, written out in heavenly light—the gift of abundant life.

December 24

NUMBERED AND NAMED

Christine Fabiszewski

*“The LORD...heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.
He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.”*

Psalm 147:2-4

The satin black sky arched over the cool African night, sparkling with the bling of billions of stars. Stars in layers so deep no one could possibly count them. No one but God, our God who created the stars in exactly the right number, each one with a name. Today we seldom see the glory of the night. Our man-made-light-polluted skies boast only a few of the brightest stars. These we *can* count and even name.

The world worships stars of another sort, a few human beings whose gifts seem to set them above the rest. The latest sports heroes or movie stars or business gurus seem to shine with light, yet their man-made light fades. The true light is Jesus, the Creator of the stars. At Christmas time, we remember Jesus, the Light of the world. Jesus, who cared enough to live and suffer with us, so He could better heal the brokenhearted. He even calls *us* the light of the world!

You may not be the brightest star. Perhaps your glory has been hidden by layers of man-made hurts, but the LORD who sees all his stars and calls them by name sees you too. You are not lost or forgotten. He loves you. When our broken lives are over, we will awake, “some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).

LORD, help us to live wisely so one day we may outshine the stars!

December 25

IMMANUEL

Mary L. Hamilton

*“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’
(which means ‘God with us’).”*

Matthew 1:23

Your child asks you to stay with him until he falls asleep. A friend’s spouse undergoes surgery, and you wait with her at the hospital. A neighbor receives devastating news, and you rush to his side.

When my sister experienced a health crisis, I traveled across the country to see her. The timing wasn’t convenient, and my trip was thwarted by weather delays and flight cancellations. I struggled with whether to continue or just wait until another time, but I sensed an urgency to visit with her. I finally made it, and though I held no power to improve her health, she knew by my presence how important she was to me. Simply being with her communicated my love in a way nothing else could.

Having someone alongside us, especially in difficult times, is comforting and gives us confidence. I’m reminded of Job whose friends sat with him for seven days and seven nights after he lost his children, his livestock, and his health.

God shows his love for us in many ways, but especially by sending Jesus to be one of us. He even gave him a name that reminds us of his presence: Immanuel. God with us. Few things communicate love as much as being with someone.

Lord, you’ve promised you will never leave us or forsake us. Thank you for being with us through your Son, Jesus, and through your Holy Spirit. Forgive us when trouble overwhelms us, and we doubt the reality of your presence. Teach us to remember the gift of Christmas—Immanuel, God with us. Amen.

Christian Writers Workshop is a Waco area organization dedicated to instructing and inspiring writers as they spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

We invite you to join us January-April on Wednesday evenings at 6:00 p.m.
First Woodway Baptist Church,
101 N. Ritchie Road, Woodway, TX.

For more information, call: 254-772-9696
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/374145049720167/>

2020 Wednesday Evening Schedule

January

- 15—Welcome and get acquainted
- 22—**Reita Hawthorne** “Leaving a Legacy” (legacy writing assignment)
- 25—**Writers Conference (Saturday 9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.)**
 - Speakers: Rose-Mary Rumbley and Dr. Thomas Kidd**
 - The Venue at 110 South Ritchie Road, Woodway, TX (across from church)
 - \$20 adults \$5 students
- 29—Sharing Your Legacy assignment

February

- 5—**Linda Hammond** “Writing A Devotional” (devotional assignment)
- 12—Sharing Your Devotional
- 19—**David Price** “The Value of Critique Groups” (poetry/music assignment)
- 26—Sharing Your Poetry/Music

March

- 4—**Frank Ball** “The Pros and Cons of Self-Publishing”
- 11—No Meeting (Spring Break)
- 18—**Chris Fabiszewski** “Tricks of the Trade (bring your laptop)” (childhood & school memories assignment)
- 25—Sharing Childhood, Grade School, High School Memories

April

- 1—Wrap up

What are your favorite Christmas reflections/memories?

