

*The
Heart
Of
Christmas*

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A little history...

I think of Christmas all year long – because I love Jesus, who was born as the Son of Man on that day. He is my Savior, my Lord and my God, my friend, my comforter, and my brother. I pray that He is yours as well.

A Gift for Jesus is a poem written when my children were toddlers. I printed them in red, rolled them and tied a ribbon around them as gifts for friends and family.

The Scripture Tree is a Christmas project for a church group or the whole family. It was written during my husband's first pastorate. My ladies' Bible study group put it together at church and my sons and I put one together at home.

The Child Who Chose to be Born is a Bible study developed while my husband was ministering at an international church. I have very fond memories of the ladies in that church who were eager to study the Bible.

Butterflies and Roses in December remind me that what is uncommon for me during the Christmas season may be ordinary for others. My friends down under don't experience snow during Christmas time, but butterflies and roses are plentiful. In the northern hemisphere Christmas comes during winter; they celebrate during summer.

My husband and I minister internationally and share a love for Christ with many friends around the globe - though we may experience Christmas in a different season or in a different way.

God's love transcends miles and cultural and language barriers. We are all part of His magnificent world that He came to save.

May God richly bless each of you as you celebrate His birth this year. He is indeed the heart of Christmas!

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Christmas 2020

Christmas time usually marks the ending of a year. The beginning of another year is right around the corner. Traditionally, most children are off from school for a two-week period. When they leave school for the holidays, their papers are dated with the current year's date. When they return, they must remember that the calendar has turned over and they must use a new date. Letter writers and journal keepers must change the year's date as well. If you still write checks to pay your bills, you must also pay attention to the fact that the previous year is behind you. During the Christmas season, families get together and catch up. Conversations often turn to the accomplishments or the disappointments of the past year. Within a week, they are off and running into the New Year.

What about Christmas of 2020? What is there to celebrate? This year, depending on where you live, it is even possible that it will be against the law to have your usual large family gatherings for a Christmas celebration. The children may not have their two-week holiday – they may have instead been homeschooled through the year and by this time are very tired of being at home. With a worldwide pandemic, lost businesses, skyrocketing unemployment and dramatically reduced hours and wages, untold financial crises, unpredictable (even more so than usual) stock markets, dramatic cultural shifts, a surge in lawlessness and the growing uncertainty that it will all end anytime soon, what good news can we reflect on at the end of 2020?

I have never experienced a year like this one and I suspect you haven't either. Now more than ever, we need the reminder that there IS good news. With politicians fighting tooth and nail for every inch of control – even taking advantage of a global pandemic – we need to remember that God IS in control.

Our reason for celebrating Christmas has not changed. Jesus really is the reason we can rejoice. *Then the angel said unto them, "do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you tidings of great joy which will be to all people* (Luke 2:10). He IS the good news. He offers salvation to those who trust in Him. He has not been surprised by anything that has happened this year. God has not changed. God has not moved. God has not forgotten His people. God has been actively involved and He has been watching. He knows and He cares.

This Christmas – the reminder that God in the flesh arrived on site to stand next to those He created and loves – should perhaps be our most meaningful Christmas ever. *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"* (Luke 2:14). How anyone has made it through this year without Christ is beyond my imagination. I have witnessed those who have gone through many struggles this year and true believers are actually very calm and peaceful. They know and so do I – that peace on earth does not mean the absence of conflict and trials, but the presence of God through difficulties. When He promised to be with us, He meant it and that is all we need. *For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5b).

A Gift for Jesus

It was the night before Christmas and all over the earth
Only a few people were aware of Christ's birth.
He was not an ordinary baby, for Jesus is God's Son.
He chose to leave Heaven to provide redemption for everyone.
The wise men came from afar their precious gifts to bring,
Angels in Heaven that day had a new song to sing.
Jesus grew, was crucified, rose, but now He's gone away.
He's again at the right hand of the Father, what can we give Him today?
What can we give to the King of Glory, owner of all creation?
Is there anything that we can give to the source of our salvation?
The gift that He wants is the very thing that costs us a great deal more
Than anything we might purchase in the finest department store.
He wants all of our love, our trust and our loyalty, too.
Loving Jesus with all of our hearts is the only gift that will do.
First Christ said, "Love me with all of your heart, soul and mind
Then I want you to spread My love among all mankind."
We can't give anything to Jesus that's not already His, that's true.
What He asks of us is to give ourselves to others and let His love shine through.
What Jesus asks of us is nothing more than He was willing to give.
Spending His time serving others, He gave His life so that we might live.
So in remembering the significance of this wonderful day
Let us celebrate the birth of our Savior in a Christ like way.
Let us make sure that His will in our lives is the goal that we seek
Looking for ways to help those less fortunate, wounded, weary and weak.
Christmas day takes on new meaning for us all through the year
When the voice of Jesus, not Satan, we have tuned in to hear.
As we live as Christ lived, without resentment, anger or strife,
We can then wish to one another,
"Merry Christmas and a Christ-filled life!"

Scripture Tree

Cut a Christmas tree from green poster board. If you need a pattern, you might want to look online for cardboard Christmas trees. You will need one with four branches. For the ornaments, use white and colored paper. Use white poster board to make the star and the candles. Gifts at the base of the tree can be wrapped or just placed underneath.

Have members of your Bible study group (or family members) decorate the tree and talk about how Jesus really is “the reason for the season.”

White ornaments:

The white Scripture balls are verses that tell *about* Jesus. They form the trunk of the tree (Jesus is the True Vine - John 15:1). The last four fill in the second branch from the top (2 on each side) forming a cross in the middle of the tree. Start at the bottom of the tree and go up with the scriptures as you explain them:

1. *The Savior - yes, the Messiah, the Lord – has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David* (Luke 2:11).
2. *And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins* (Matthew 1:21).
3. *Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and he will be called Immanuel (meaning God is with us)* (Matthew 1:23).
4. *Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!* (John 1:29).
5. *Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth and the life”* (John 14:6a).
6. *Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life”* (John 11:25a).
7. *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”* (John 10:11).
8. *“Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved”* (John 10:9a).
9. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16).
10. *“Take heart, because I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33b).
11. *He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised from the dead to make us right with God* (Romans 4:25).
12. *But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners* (Romans 5:8).

After making the cross in the tree with the twelve white ornaments, place the star on top of the tree, *“I am the light of the world”* (John 8:12).

White candles:

The first Christmas trees were decorated with candles on the ends of the branches. There are nine candles for our Scripture tree, each one “lit” with a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Place “love” at the base of the tree for Jesus said, *“I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. And here is how to measure it – the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends”* (John 15:12-13).

Place the other eight candles on the tips of the branches citing examples of how Jesus demonstrated joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in His lifetime.

The first twelve ornaments, the star and the candles are white to represent the purity of Jesus who knew no sin (1 Peter 2:22).

Colored ornaments:

The colored ornaments are some of Jesus' words to His followers. Although Jesus said "*You are the light of the world*" and "*Let your shine before men*" (Matthew 5:14, 16), we must always remember that we have been stained with sin and are reflective light. We can only shine when we are "plugged in" to the Source of Light. Fill in the rest of the tree with these ornaments, reading each as you put them on, reflecting on Jesus' words to us.

1. "*Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness . . .*" (Matthew 6:33).
2. "*You are the salt of the earth . . .*" (Matthew 5:13).
3. "*You are my friends, if you do what I command you*" (John 15:14).
4. "*You will know them by their fruits . . .*" (Matthew 7:16).
5. "*I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail . . .*" (Luke 22:32).
6. "*You are the light of the world . . .*" (Matthew 5:14).
7. "*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth . . .*" (Matthew 28:18).
8. "*By this all men will know that you My disciples, if you have love for one another*" (John 13:35).
9. "*Let your light shine before men . . .*" (Matthew 5:16).
10. "*Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . .*" (Matthew 6:20).
11. "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God . . .*" (Matthew 5:8).
12. "*My sheep hear My voice . . . and they follow Me*" (John 10:27).

The Scripture references for the colored ornaments are taken from the New American Standard.

At the base of the tree, place the gifts that Jesus gives to those who trust Him:

- ETERNAL LIFE: The greatest gift of all is the gift of eternal life - Romans 6:23: *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*
- THE HOLY SPIRIT: He gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit to comfort, guide and instruct us - John 14:16: *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, who will never leave you."*
- SPIRITUAL GIFTS: To each Christian is given at least one spiritual gift - 1 Corinthians 12:7: *A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church.*
- PEACE: Only through Christ can we know true peace - John 14:27: *I am leaving you with a gift - peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give isn't like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid.*

- WISDOM: We have only to ask for wisdom, in faith believing, and He promises to give it to us. James 1:5: *If you need wisdom – if you want to know what God wants you to do – ask him, and he will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking.*
- FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: We can cope with the trials of life because God gives us the fruit of Jesus' Spirit - Galatians 5:22, 23: *But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*
- GLORY: Jesus shares His glory with His believers. John 17:22: *“I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one as we are.”*
- POWER, LOVE, SOUND MIND: 2 Timothy 1:7: *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (NKJV).*
- THE MIND OF CHRIST: 1 Corinthians 2:16: . . . *But we have the mind of Christ (NKJV).*

The tree may be draped with garlands of red yarn or rick-rack to represent the shed blood of Jesus.

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With the remnants from the green poster board, you can make stars with descriptions of Jesus. On one side you would put the description, on the other the Scripture. Punch hole in the top of the star, place ornament hanger in the hole and hang on your regular Christmas tree. Below you will find just a few of the descriptions of Jesus.

- Only begotten – John 1:14
- First and Last – Revelation 1:17
- Cornerstone – Ephesians 2:20
- Prince of Peace – Isaiah 9:6
- Emmanuel – Isaiah 7:14
- Bread of Life – John 6:48
- Governor – Matthew 2:6
- Judge – Acts 10:42
- Rock – 1 Corinthians 10:4
- Vine – John 15:1
- Unspeakable Gift – 2 Corinthians 9:15
- Teacher – John 3:2
- King – Matthew 21:5
- Shepherd – Hebrews 13:20
- I AM – John 8:58
- Lamb – Revelation 5:6
- High Priest – Hebrews 4:14
- Advocate – 1 John 2:1
- Good Shepherd – John 10:11
- Morning Star – Revelation 22:16

The Immanuel Impact

Something amazing happened when Jesus came. Not only was His birth miraculous, but it had been foretold centuries before. Isaiah said that when the virgin gave birth to a son, He would be called IMMANUEL - which means "God with us". The gospel writer Matthew said that this was to be true of the child that was born of Mary, the virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that God had spoken to our ancestors in the past "at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." With the coming of Jesus, it was possible now for every man and woman to actually be with God face to face and hear Him speak - not from heaven, a mountain, a burning bush, or any of the various ways He spoke in the past - but actually stand beside Him, follow Him and even touch Him. In Jesus, God was more accessible than He had ever been. Jesus is God with us – Immanuel.

IMPACT can refer to:

- a physical force (like a collision, an impact of two physical objects)
- an influence (like a teacher having a great impact on a child) or
- a strong effect (such as a snowstorm having an impact on driving conditions).

THE IMMANUEL IMPACT on humanity was enormous.

His physical presence restored the possibility to do what Adam and Eve were able to do before they sinned - walk and talk with God. In a sense, His physical presence collided with mankind. Those who saw Him in the flesh were forced to make a decision. His physical presence - God with us - was positive for those who believed in Him. Those who did not believe in Him could not avoid His presence, His miracles or His words and the collision of those physical forces - His and theirs - resulted in His death. That was, however, the reason He came and their hatred of His presence resulted in fueling the eternal love and gratitude of His followers - then and now.

What the crucifixion could not do was kill the influence that Jesus had on those around Him. It has, in fact, grown over the centuries. The impact of Jesus on the lives of every person who believes in Him is soul changing and eternal. When you meet Jesus, recognize Him as God in the flesh, accept His gift of grace, and follow Him, you are forever changed.

The impact that Jesus has on people is unavoidable. Just as a snowstorm has an effect on driving conditions, His miraculous birth, sinless life and sacrificial death has an undeniable effect on those who trust Him.

The Gift from the Heart of God

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, give Me a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (John 4:10).

Christmas is celebrated practically worldwide. Many cities decorate their streets, homes are brightly lit and draped with garland for Christmas and merchants have specials. In Europe, people look forward to delightful Christmas markets where food and local wares give a festive atmosphere to the end of winter.

For many years in the United States, the day after Thanksgiving has been the biggest shopping day of the year. Some major retailers were also open on Thanksgiving Day. News commentators believe this will be a new trend. In fact, practically all "news" right now deals with Christmas: where to get the best bargains; how retailers are faring; jobs that have been created because of Christmas; challenges of traveling during the busy holidays; recipes for holiday entertaining and how to cope with the stress of it all.

Christmas is so commercialized that few could tell the real significance of it. Christmas has become a "season," a holiday time to have family gatherings at the end of the year. Each year, much thought and expense goes into the purchase of gifts for family and loved ones. Often people will plan all year long for Christmas, putting money aside to buy gifts or making purchases throughout the year and saving gifts for the big day.

Today's Christmas is nothing like the first Christmas. On that day, because *God so loved the world . . . He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life* (John 3:16). The only other gifts on that occasion were given to the Christ Child: worship by those who had eagerly anticipated His arrival and gold, frankincense and myrrh given to Him by the wise men.

God planned the birth of the Christ Child before time began. *Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began* (2 Timothy 1:9). God, the Father, *sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him* (1 John 4:9). The angel Gabriel told Mary: *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God* (Luke 1:35). Jesus, the Son, chose to be born in order to save us from our sins. *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14). *So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us'* (Matthew 1:23).

This plan of Almighty God was not put in place without pain on His part. Since the creation of man, God had revealed Himself, but the world did not know Him. Many chose to ignore His presence and His claim on their lives. What father deliberately plans for his son to suffer?

Almighty God agreed within Himself because He *so loved the world that* Jesus would take on man's skin, submit Himself to the hardships and temptations of man, demonstrate a victorious sinless life and would die a sacrificial death on man's behalf. Jesus, God in the flesh, *is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation . . . for it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross* (Colossians 1:15, 19-20). The everlasting love of God was demonstrated through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. *Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!* (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Jesus is the Divine Gift from the heart of God. *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God* (Ephesians 2:8). When we accept the gift of salvation Jesus extends to us, we are then called children of God. *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are* (1 John 3:1).

Christmas should be celebrated. Family gatherings, gifts exchanged between loved ones, enjoying good food together are all ways to appropriately commemorate that unique event. God is all about family. He invited us to be part of His. He wants us to express love for one another. However, if Christ is left out of Christmas, it is nothing more than a pagan holiday.

Christmas gives true Christians a wonderful witnessing opportunity. More people attend church during Christmas and Easter than at any other time of year. Although many go simply as a part of the season's festivities, receptivity to the gospel may be greatest during these times.

Christians can and should use this time as an opportunity to remind people that *every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights* (James 1:17). Jesus revealed the nature of God and His love to the world - *No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him* (John 1:18) – and that is indeed cause for celebration.

In Jesus, God stepped down from Heaven to show us His heart of love. At His birth, the shepherds looked up and saw the angels who told of His arrival. The wise men looked up and followed the star to where the Christ Child was. After Jesus' resurrection, *He was lifted up while they were looking on* (Acts 1:9). As Stephen was being stoned, he looked up and saw *Jesus standing at the right hand of God* (Acts 7:55-56). When we look up, we can see Jesus, worship Him, and give Him our heart of love and gratitude. *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind and 'your neighbor as yourself'* (Luke 10:27).

The Coming of the Lamb and the Shepherd

Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth between Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might, come and save us. Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved (Psalm 80:1-3 NIV).

Picture the nativity scene. That's easy for most of us. Displayed in illustrated Bibles and Bible storybooks and set up in homes and churches during December, the characters are always the same. Mary and Joseph with shepherds and wise men and animals in the stall surround a baby in a manger – the Son of God who had just become the Son of Man.

The most striking elements in this picture are its simplicity and its majesty. No one seems to think it strange that rich wise men from the east are facing humble shepherds from the fields - standing or kneeling on a carpet of straw with singing angels above joining sounds of animals below and the sweet coos of the baby who planned it all.

This scene had been foretold by many but understood by few. Unable to grasp the possibility that God's Son would make His entrance with such humility, most were expecting the Savior to come with the only kind of majesty they were accustomed to – to reign and to rule.

Amidst the many prophecies about His coming, the two that capture our attention in the nativity are symbolically sitting at the feet of the child or standing at His side: the lamb and the shepherd.

The baby lying in this manger would someday hang on a cross. Naked, He would die there. His humble beginnings would lead to an even more humiliating climax.

Submitting Himself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter, the Good Shepherd did for His flock what they could not do for themselves. All His sheep having gone astray, the Lord laid on Him the sins of them all. He bore those sins on the cross and left them there.

The one announced as the Lamb of God also revealed Himself as the Resurrection and the Life. Having shed His blood and redeemed His flock, the Good Shepherd walked out of the tomb.

There is no longer any need for a sacrificial lamb. Now, the church, the Bride of Christ, is being made ready for the Bridegroom, the Lamb who sits upon the throne.

The tranquil scene of the nativity makes perfect sense to those who worship the Son of God who came in humility in order that we might reign with Him.

“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb . . . for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Revelation 7:10, 17).

The Christmas Story Told by John

Families gathering around the Christmas tree usually turn to Matthew or Luke to read the Christmas story. Angelic visitations, the birth of Jesus in a manger and the search for the Christ child by shepherds and wise men are pictures that come readily to mind. Descriptions given by Matthew and Luke have resulted in magnificent artwork of the nativity scene.

Joseph's visitation by an angel of the Lord in his dream was to let him know that Mary's child was of the Holy Spirit. Matthew said this event fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy. "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which is translated, "GOD WITH US" (Matthew 1:23).

Where Matthew and Luke record the birth of the baby Jesus as fulfilled prophecy, John takes a different approach to the event. IMMANUEL didn't appear on the day Jesus was born. IMMANUEL has always been. With a bodily form, we could now set our eyes upon Him. Jesus Himself created the prophets and it was His Spirit that gave the prophecies to them.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made (John 1:1-3).

In John's gospel, it was Jesus Himself who gave us details about why He came the way He did. His birth was His plan. When the right time came, He fulfilled His plan.

The Bread of Life

"I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

The birth of the Christ child put flesh on the Son of God so that He could accomplish His redemptive plan.

The Light of the World

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it..."I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 1:4-5; 6:12).

In the Old Testament, a man could not see the light of the eyes of God and live. Righteous men of the past looked forward to that day; we who have been born since His return to Heaven have His word and the word of His witnesses that the Light became flesh; those who walked and talked with Him in person could actually peer into the eyes of the light of the world. His birth made that possible.

The Door

"I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:7-9).

Without the birth of the baby Jesus who grew into the man who became our Savior on the cross, mankind would have been unable to have fellowship with God. There is no other door.

The Good Shepherd

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

The good shepherd existed long before the Christ child was born because God is the good shepherd. David described Him. It was the body of the good shepherd that hung on the cross for us - the body that was conceived by His Spirit and birthed by Mary on Christmas day.

The Resurrection and the Life

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

Jesus came to die for our sins. He did that as a man - a substitute for the sinner. If it had ended there, He would only have proven that He was our loving replacement. It was in resurrection that death - our penalty for sin - was conquered.

The Way, The Truth and The Life

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

Man has tried and continues to try to find a way to God other than through Jesus. It is not possible. As Immanuel, God in the flesh, He explained why.

The True Vine

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Jesus lived on earth as a man. He walked and talked with His followers. He became our Savior and example. By His life and His words He showed us how we could share in His joy and fruit bearing. "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11).

In Jesus' prayer to the Father in John 17, He gives the real reason He came in the flesh: to glorify the Father, to finish His work, and to share His glory with those who believe. This is the purpose of the Christmas story. The child in the cradle became the Savior on the cross, the Redeemer who rose and the Immanuel who shares His glory with those who love Him.

In His Humanity

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made....And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth....

"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star" (John 1:1-3, 14, Revelation 22:16).

At Christmas time, we turn our attention to Jesus as the baby in the manger. With His birth, the world would never be the same, for that event meant the Son of God became the Son of Man - taking on Himself all the limitations of man without losing His divinity - something only God could do.

None of His limitations as a human were a surprise to Jesus. For our sakes, He willingly took those limitations upon Himself. The Son of God who was, is and will always be the Lord of Lords did something He did not have to do. Fully God and fully human, He expressed His love tangibly and sacrificially.

Jesus referred to Himself most often as the Son of Man.

- In His humanity, the Creator of man became like His creation in order to redeem mankind.
- In His humanity, the Creator of time came just at the right moment for the prophecies about Him to be fulfilled.
- In His humanity, the Shepherd who cares for His sheep needed a mother to care for Him through His early years.
- In His humanity, the Source of all wisdom and knowledge grew and learned.
- In His humanity, the Living Water got thirsty.
- In His humanity, the Bread of Life became hungry but resisted the temptation to satisfy that hunger with anything that would dishonor His Father.
- In His humanity, the Judge of all men felt sorrow for fallen man and was determined to take our just punishment upon Himself.
- In His humanity, He needed rest and sleep.
- In His humanity, He enjoyed companionship with His fellow man.
- In His humanity, He prayed to the Father.
- In His humanity, the One who gave the commandments demonstrated how to obey them.
- In His humanity, the King of Kings came to serve, not to be served.
- In His humanity, He accomplished something the rest of humanity could not do - He lived a perfect life.
- In His humanity, the great Lion of Judah became the Lamb of God sacrificing Himself for those He came to save.

He rose from death victorious - forever to be the Son of Man who would intercede for those He understood so well. There was never a time when Jesus was not God, but with His birth, now He would also always be the Son of Man.

Jesus' followers should never doubt that God understands what they are going through. He has been there, done that in regards to human life, yet without sin. Although He performed many miracles, they were for others - not Himself.

I am part of His bride and am well aware that as my Bridegroom, Jesus paid the price that made it possible to be with Him forever.

How grateful I am for Christmas and every blessing His coming represents. My Lord and Savior is also my Brother and Friend.

"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying; "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us" (Matthew 1:21-23).

The Best Free Gift Ever

There is sometimes a little letdown when Christmas is over. Family members go home and the house feels somewhat empty. The decorations need to be put away (not nearly as fun as putting them up). There is a possibility that some of the gifts need to be returned - either because they don't work, you can't use them, you already have one just like it or it doesn't fit.

The opposite might also be true. If you have received a gift card or money for a Christmas present, now is the time to be able to choose something you really want or need for free.

Redeeming the gift card or spending the money after Christmas often stretches your money because there are many after Christmas sales which are deeply discounted.

Everyone likes something free. The gifts you received didn't cost you anything. You may have gotten something you have been wishing for and because it is something you would not have purchased for yourself, it is a true luxury. Some of my favorite belongings remind me of Christmases past and the thoughtfulness of a loved one.

Regardless of what you received this Christmas or past Christmases there will be a point where you will no longer use it. It will either wear out or you will leave it behind when you die.

The best free gift ever offered and received will never wear out or be left behind when you die. It was the most costly gift ever because it required the Son of God to die on the cross for your sin. Our free gift cost Him everything. His sacrifice enables you to spend eternity with Him in Heaven.

Just like the gifts you got for Christmas, the only thing you have to do is receive this gift. As He offers it to you and you receive it by faith, you are able to have fellowship now with Him on earth and forever with Him in Heaven. If you have not received this most precious gift, why don't you do so today?

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

Butterflies and Roses in December

James M. Barrie* began his rectorial address at St. Andrews University on May 3, 1922 with the following statement: "You have had many rectors here in St. Andrews who will continue in bloom long after the lowly ones such as I am are dead and rotten and forgotten. They are the roses in December; you remember someone said that God gave us memory so that we might have roses in December. But I do not envy the great ones. In my experience - and you may find in the end it is yours also - the people I have cared for most and who have seemed most worth caring for - my December roses have been very simple folk." Barrie considered himself simple folk, but left his mark on the world with his stories, most notably *Peter Pan*.

Barrie's reference to roses in December carries the implication that roses would not be available to view in December - thus the need for the memory of them. I will remember this year as the December where I did not have to use my memory to enjoy roses - they have been blooming in some areas of the south during December. Not only have I seen roses this month, but I have enjoyed watching the monarch butterflies in my backyard in recent days. Even in Texas where you can alternately use the air conditioner and heater in off seasons, roses have usually lost their bloom and butterflies are long gone by December.

Barrie related his December roses to people - those people who are worth caring for. In my life, I also have fond memories of these December roses. I have friends and family that I seldom see, but hear from periodically through cards, Facebook, phone calls or email. Every time I do, it brings a smile, similar to the smile that comes across my face when I see roses and butterflies in December. Their contribution to my life continues to bloom.

Family, friends, roses and butterflies are among many things I am grateful for. The greatest blessing I have ever received is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ His Son.

Fellowship with Him makes me aware of the delightful gifts that He gives as well. So, whether I actually see them or I need to exercise my memory to enjoy them, through His grace I can experience roses in December.

I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys (Song of Solomon 2:1).

The True Spirit of Christmas

Many people the world over look forward to Christmas. Time off from work, time spent with family, looking forward to special gifts and an occasion for parties may be the sole reason for the celebration.

Retail stores put out Christmas decorations earlier each year. They suppose - and they may be right - that makes it easier for customers to get in the Christmas spirit and desire to purchase their products.

Of course, merchandisers profit from the Christmas season. Many of us believe that it has, in fact, become way too commercial. On the other hand, generosity is expressed more freely by more people at this time of year than any other.

The signs of Christmas spirit may include

- making Christmas lists and checking off each present as it is purchased, wrapped, mailed or placed under the tree
- preparing eggnog, special candies, cookies and a variety of other traditional family dishes
- making elaborate preparations for parties, trips to see family, gifts for teachers, neighbors and others
- decorating homes in and out
- attending Christmas musicals and plays
- looking for ways to help others through churches and charities

Part of the traditional Christmas celebration includes classic Christmas stories, which are read and reread to children at this time of year.

In Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge, a grumpy old miser who preferred his own company, is visited by three Christmas spirits on Christmas Eve. What the spirits of Christmas past, present and future showed him so affected Scrooge that his life was radically changed. The result of their visits was that he became the exact opposite of what he had been before. "He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man as the good old City knew, or any other good old city or town in the good old world.... it was said of him ever afterwards that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed that knowledge."

A Christmas Carol is one of the movies on my Christmas season watch list, always saved for Christmas Eve. Of course, it is not the original Christmas story, but it does illustrate what happens when the true Spirit of Christmas visits someone. There is a radical change. To truly know how to keep Christmas well, one must be born of the Spirit of the Christ of Christmas.

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5). Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Sunrise on Christmas Day

People around the world look forward to sunrise on Christmas day with eager anticipation, especially young ones. Children who have been told that they cannot look under the Christmas tree until after sunrise can hardly wait for the sun to come up. They hardly sleep the night before and when the slightest hint of light comes out in the morning, they run to their parents and ask, "May I get up now? May I see what Santa brought?"

The traditions of Christmas are about family, food and gifts. Some people spend all year thinking about the next Christmas. They shop a little during the year, hide the gifts away and save up for the special treats that the family loves to eat at Christmas time. More books, songs and movies revolve around Christmas than any other holiday. It is a celebration for people of all nations and cultures, even for those who do not believe in the Christ who made it all possible.

The first Christmas was anticipated for centuries. The prophets spoke about the coming of the Christ child long before that day Mary gave birth to Him and laid Him in a manger. Mary herself must have been excited about the dawn of the day when the promise given to her was born from her own body. That sunrise brought her Son to her and to the world.

As people choose Christmas gifts, they put much thought into it because they want to please the ones they love. Sometimes that entails sacrifice on their part. They may scrimp and save in order to get that special item to wrap and put under the tree.

The gift of the Son to save the world was planned by God before time began. He knew the gift that was needed and He sacrificed much in order to give that gift. God's love for us is so great that He was willing to suffer to give us the gift we needed most.

As the sun rose as expected on that first Christmas morning, the Son of God rose as predicted on Easter morning. Some day His followers will rise to be with Him forever. What God promises He fulfills.

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).

...that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles (Acts 26:23).

...Martha said to Him, "I know that he [Lazarus] will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24).

Joseph, The Man in the Background in the Nativity

When unpacking Christmas decorations, I love pulling out and setting up my collection of nativity scenes - the picture of the real Christmas story: the gift of the Son of God to the world.

Jesus is the central figure in the nativity scene. It would not mean anything without Him. When I am placing the other figures around Him, I usually place Mary behind His right and Joseph behind Him on the left.

The placing of Joseph in the nativity scene is somewhat symbolic of his life. He is the man in the background. Many stories have been written about how Mary was chosen to be the mother of our Savior, but little has been said about the man who was chosen by God to raise His Son.

Matthew tells us more about Joseph than anyone else. Like me, I think Matthew must have been impressed with this humble man who loved God, loved the mother of His Son and loved His Son in a way that no one else could.

After Mary told him she had been chosen to bear the Christ child, Joseph had the first of his dreams that included instructions from God. The angel in the dream told Joseph not to be afraid but to wed Mary as he had planned. Joseph was visited by an angel of the Lord in his dreams at least twice more. After the visit of the wise men, he was instructed in a dream to take his family to Egypt because Herod wanted to kill the child. He was told to stay until he was visited again. After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to go to the land of Israel. Joseph settled in the city called Nazareth, thus fulfilling the prophecy about Jesus that He would be a Nazarene.

Joseph is mentioned again when he and Mary found Jesus conversing with the teachers in the temple. When Mary questioned Jesus as to why He had not come with them when they left the city, Jesus said, "*Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?*" (Luke 2:49). This is the last time Joseph is mentioned, so he must have died between the time Jesus was twelve and the beginning of His ministry.

Although Jesus' brothers resented Him and for a long time did not believe in Him, that was not true of Joseph. He did not resent raising a Son that was not his own. He accepted that assignment from God without question. We see no evidence that he ever argued with God. What God instructed him to do through the word of the angels, Joseph did.

Joseph was an unusual man, humble and obedient. What Jesus learned about carpentry, he learned from Joseph. Joseph must have also taught Jesus much about His Father's word as well, for we know that Jesus learned Scripture as a child.

I am looking forward to meeting Joseph in heaven, the man in the background in the nativity.

Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus. (Matthew 1:24-25).

Preparing for the First Christmas: Greetings from Gabriel

Preparing for Christmas is a delightful experience to me. I love getting out the decorations, playing Christmas music, watching favorite Christmas movies, lighting candles reserved for the season, entertaining, preparing special treats that for some reason are only eaten during Christmas time, strolling through stores and malls with special decorations and driving through neighborhoods that have prepared for this most important day.

Most of all, getting ready for Christmas includes the reading of the Christmas story. As a believer, I continue to be amazed and grateful that God would send His Son to live among men so that we might live with Him forever. As God was preparing the world for the first Christmas, He enlisted angels to bring messages to those who would be directly involved.

Many people are fascinated by angels, including me. Movies, television programs and books support the idea that good people become angels. That theory can make interesting entertainment, but it is not true. According to scripture, angels are unique creations of God and are sent by God to minister to believers.

Other popular pieces of literature about angels concentrate on their involvement in the lives of people - sometimes detailing rescues and comfort in trying situations. Although it is possible to have encounters with angels, these visitations originate with God, not the angels themselves. Good angels are always on assignment from God. He deserves the credit for any rescue or comfort received at the hands of angels.

Joseph, who was engaged to the virgin Mary, came to understand his special role in the life of Jesus through many visitations of angels. After the birth of Christ, humble shepherds in the field were honored to receive a birth announcement - via special delivery through an angel and accompanied by an angelic choir.

Gabriel is one of two angels whose name we know. We first discover him in the Old Testament where he was sent by God to explain visions to Daniel. His most familiar appearances were in the New Testament as God sent him to prepare the world for the coming of the Christ child. He told Zacharias that God sent him to bring him news of the birth of his son, John the Baptist, whose voice in the wilderness would prepare the way of the Lord. When Gabriel is last mentioned in scripture by name, it was to deliver greetings from God to a young virgin who, because she had found favor with God, would be blessed among women and give birth to the promised Messiah.

"I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God... 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...And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you, therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:19, 26, 27, 31, 35).

Heroic Shepherds

Usually, when one thinks of a hero, someone who has been through the battlefields of war or has achieved widespread acclaim because of their accomplishments for mankind comes to mind. It is unlikely that anyone would initially think of shepherds as heroes. Yet shepherds are some of the notable heroes of scripture.

Abel, the First Shepherd

Abel, son of Adam and Eve, was a keeper of sheep. He gave the proper sacrifice to God when he brought the firstborn of his flock. God gave His only begotten Son - the firstborn among many brothers - so that whoever believed in Him would be saved.

Abraham, a Wealthy Shepherd

When Abraham proved to God that he trusted Him above all else, God substituted the lamb (ram) for the sacrifice of Isaac. John the Baptist announced that the living Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The writer of Hebrews tells us that the Good Shepherd offered Himself as the sacrificial lamb, one sacrifice for the sins of all time.

Jacob, a Shepherd in Love

For the love of Rachel, Jacob served Laban fourteen years - seven for Leah and seven for Rachel. Before he died, he gave a blessing to his beloved son Joseph who was Rachel's child. Israel (Jacob) acknowledged that the God of his fathers had been his shepherd all through his life and that his son Joseph was strong because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.

Moses, a Shepherd in Training

Before leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, Moses spent forty years as a shepherd in Midian. This period of obscurity, guiding and protecting defenseless sheep, was preparation for forty years spent in the wilderness with fearful and stubborn people.

David, the Giant Killer

Although a youth, David's experience as a shepherd enabled him to fight the giant Goliath. Even as king, David never forgot lessons learned tending sheep. His Psalm 23 is the most often quoted Psalm of the Bible.

Shepherds in the Field

Humble God-fearing shepherds were honored by a visit from an angel announcing the birth of the Christ child. Finding Him in a manger made them feel quite at home.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd

Shepherds, under-shepherds and sheep are an important part of God's story. He warns against false shepherds. He calls His people His flock.

The Old Testament characters above (and others) pointed to the coming of the Chief Shepherd, the Son of God. Although heroic in their actions of protecting the sheep under their care, the true hero of the Book is the Good Shepherd, the Lamb that was slain.

Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young (Isaiah 40:10-11).

Christmas is Coming

Spending a delightful day in mid-November in London, England, it was obvious that the city was preparing for Christmas. The stores, the streets, the advertisements all reminded one that "Christmas is coming." Particularly enjoyable was a stroll through Covent Garden Market, where the decorations were all in full display. The gigantic Christmas tree was adorned in only lights and balls of all sizes. Overhead were gigantic red balls dangling from the rooftop of the market square. A huge reindeer made of greenery was adorned with white lights.

Throughout the city the decorations were classic - large stars lit with white lights hung between the buildings on the main thoroughfares. Store displays were being dressed in Christmas colors and packages were lying in the windows all around with a gentle reminder that gifts would be needed for father, mother, son, daughter, uncle, aunt and cousin.

As a Christian, I am aware that preparation for Christmas in much of the world is a secular activity. On the web and in the mail, the announcements that Christmas is coming are made in hopes that people will buy their products for Christmas gifts. Many people are simply looking forward to time off from work and the family traditions surrounding the most popular holiday of the year.

Unfortunately, few are experiencing the inner reminder that without the first Christmas, there would be no Easter. Without the coming of the Christ child, His perfect life, His substitutionary death on the cross and His resurrection, there would be no hope for eternal life. Whether or not stores, streets and homes are decorated with the intent to honor Christ, the decorations can speak for themselves, just as the Bible says that the rocks would cry out if people fail to worship God.

All of the decorations in London did, however, remind me of the first Christmas - the coming of Immanuel, God with us. The balls reminded me of a globe - our world and the planets and stars of the universe. The Christ who was born in the nativity is the One who created the universe and our world. The trees and the reindeer caused me to reflect on how He adorned our earth with plants and animals and all that is good. As I gazed at the stars hanging over the streets, I envisioned the star that led the wise men to the Christ child. The lights everywhere - in white - made me think of Jesus, the Light of the world.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...Through him all things were made...In him was life, and that life was the light of men (John 1:1, 3-4).

The Child Who Chose to be Born

Then the angel said to 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 in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10-11).

Occasionally an angry child will tell his parents, "I did not ask to be born!" And in every instance but one, that statement is true. Only one child in all of history chose to be born. His name is Jesus.

How could it be possible for a child to choose to be born? Only God, who declares *the end from the beginning* (Isaiah 46:10) could do such a thing. Only the Creator could choose to manifest Himself in the same form He created. *For he knows how we are formed* (Psalm 103:14a NIV).

The Son of God stated many times that His Father sent Him; however, He chose to be sent. God has revealed Himself to us as a triune God, a Godhead of three totally unified in one Divine Person. He is a relationship within Himself. God refers to Himself both in the singular and the plural.

- *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One!* (Deuteronomy 6:4).
- *Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. . . So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them* (Genesis 1:26, 27).
- *And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased"* (Luke 3:22). See also Matthew 28:19-20.

Jesus did not become the Son of God at His incarnation. In His divinity as the Logos, the Son of God, He chose to be born as the Son of Man. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit decided that *in Him* [would dwell] *all the fullness of the Godhead bodily* (Colossians 2:9). *As the image of the invisible God* (Colossians 1:15), Jesus would reveal the everlasting love of God in an undeniable tangible form – as the Son of Man. God the Father sent the Son, God the Son chose to come, God the Holy Spirit made it happen. That is why Isaiah could describe the entire Godhead as he prophesied the coming of the Christ Child, *For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6). "In the Hebrew text there is no comma between "wonderful and "counselor." This means that there are really four, not five, titles given to the child who is to be born."¹ The name (singular) of the child represents the entire Godhead.

Until the coming of Jesus, God spoke through *various ways . . . to the fathers by the prophets*, but now in these last days He has *spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all*

¹ Guffin, Gilbert L. *The Gospel in Isaiah*, Convention Press, Nashville, TN 1968, Foregleams of Christ, p. 69

things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person (Hebrews 1:1-3).

In both his gospel and his first letter, John says, *No one has seen God at any time (John 1:18a, 1 John 4:12a)*. John finishes the first statement with *the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him (John 1:18b)* and the second is in the context of God loving us and us loving one another because He abides in us. *If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us (1 John 4:12b)*. We see God through Jesus, who demonstrated His love and asked us to do the same (John 15:12-13).

Logos, Son of God, sent into the world

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1-3, 14).

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:1-4).

. . . when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. . . Then I said, 'Behold, I have come – in the volume of the book it is written of Me – to do Your will, O God'" (Hebrews 10:5, 7).

The Humble Jesus Received God's glory

Rich with prophecies about the coming of the Lord Jesus, Isaiah is often quoted by the writers of the New Testament. *These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him (John 12:41)*. Through Isaiah, God said, *I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another (42:8)*. (See Isaiah 44:6-7 and Revelation 1:4-8 for one example of Isaiah's prophesy about Jesus).

Jesus has always been and will always be God. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8)*. As man, He did not seek glory apart from the Godhead. *And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges (John 8:50)*. Satan tried to get Him to do that very thing in His temptation experience.

He did not *seek his own glory* distinct from his Father's, nor had any separate interest of his own. For men to *search their own glory is not glory* indeed (Prov. 25:27), but rather their shame to be so much *out in their aim*. This comes in here as a reason why Christ made so light of their reproaches: *"You do dishonour me,*

but cannot disturb me, shall not disquiet me, for I *seek not my own glory*.” Note, Those who are dead to men’s praise can safely bear their contempt.²

But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men (John 2:24 NIV). Jesus, however, did receive and accept glory as part of the Godhead.

- *For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. . . 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 2:11, 13-14).
- *When Jesus heard that, He said, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it”* (John 11:4).
- *“Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son that Your Son also may glorify You . . . Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world”* (John 17:1, 24).
- *Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord* (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).
- *For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (2 Peter 1:17).
- *“You are My Son, Today I have begotten You” . . . “Let all the angels of God worship Him” . . . But to the Son, He says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” . . .* (Hebrews 1:5, 6, 8). Read the entire chapter for amplification.
- *Saying with a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: “Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!”* (Revelation 5:12-13).

The uniqueness of Christianity is the Person, Jesus Christ, and the distinctiveness of Christ is the fact that He is the God-man. In other words, He is a divine-human Being, something unique in time and eternity. It is also a concept very difficult to understand, for we have no basis for comparison with another God-man in history nor do we get any help from our experience. Yet this is not a dogma imposed on us simply to receive without question; it is a conclusion which grows out of the evidence in the Bible. Many facts point to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is God; many others lead to the conclusion that He is truly human; at the same time we see only one Person moving across the pages of the gospels. This union of undiminished deity and perfect humanity forever in one

²Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody : Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Jn 8:48

Person is called the doctrine of the hypostatic union (that is, the union of two hypostases or natures), and this is the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.³

When His work was completed, He asked His Father to restore His pre-incarnate glory: *“I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was”* (John 17:4-5).

Jesus' Choices

Have you ever thought it strange that when the Son of God became the Son of Man angels appeared to shepherds instead of priests - that a widow instead of a princess was privileged to see the Infant in the temple – that a virtually unknown man recognized the baby as the promised Messiah instead of a government official?

If you were in charge of planning the announcement of the Son of God, who would you have notified? Would you have chosen a woman of royalty to give birth to Him or would you have chosen Mary? Would you have prepared a man of political standing and reputation to go before Him and announce the beginning of His ministry or would you have chosen John the Baptist? Would you have chosen a man of substantial wealth and influence to raise Him as his foster child or would you have chosen Joseph? Would you have prepared a palace for His birth or a manger?

The revelation of His imminent coming was to male and female, young and old, peasants and princes, Jew and Gentile, rich and poor. Of the men, there were wise men, a priest, shepherds, Joseph and Simeon. Of the women, there was a virgin, a widow, a married woman who was barren until God miraculously gave her a child.

God used His creation, a star and angels, as well as dreams and prophecies to announce the coming of new covenant through His Son to people of all stations. *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise* (Galatians 3:28-29).

Jesus chose to tell people He was coming

There are hundreds of Old Testament prophecies surrounding Jesus, many of which had to do with the unusual circumstances of His birth. The New Testament notes their fulfillment. Just a few of them are:

- He would come as the Son of God (Psalm 2:7, Luke 1:32, 35).
- He would come as the seed of woman (Genesis 3:15, Galatians 4:4).
- He would come as the seed of Abraham (Genesis 12:3, 17:7, 22:18, Acts 3:25, Galatians 3:17).

³Ryrie, Charles Caldwell: *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*. Chicago : Moody Press, 1995, c1972

- He would come as the seed of Isaac (Genesis 17:19, Matthew 1:2).
- He would come as the seed of Jacob (Numbers 24:17, Luke 3:34).
- He would descend from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10, Luke 3:33).
- He would come as the seed of David (Isaiah 9:7, Jeremiah 23:5, Matthew 1:6, Romans 1:3).
- He would be called Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:22-23).
- Great persons coming to adore Him (Psalm 72:10, Matthew 2:1-11).

Jesus chose Gabriel to announce His coming

Jesus sent Gabriel to Zacharias. *And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings . . . your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John"* (Luke 1:19, 13). Gabriel told Mary of Elizabeth's pregnancy and when Mary visited her, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and *the babe leaped in [her] womb for joy* (Luke 1:44). At John's circumcision, on the 8th day after John's birth, both Zacharias and Elizabeth surprised others by naming him John.

Jesus sent Gabriel to Mary. *Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin . . . whose name was Mary . . . behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name Jesus* (Luke 1:26-27, 31). *And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb* (Luke 2:21).

This was not the first time Gabriel appeared with an announcement about the coming of the Messiah. Both Zacharias and Mary would recognize Gabriel's name as the messenger sent from God to Daniel to explain a vision he had seen (Daniel 8:16, 9:21). In the explanation, God promised the coming of the promised Messiah (Daniel 9:24-27). On these two occasions, hundreds of years apart, God's special angel messenger carried *glad tidings*.

Jesus chose John the Baptist to be His forerunner

The Old Testament, filled with prophets announcing the coming of the Messiah, ended with Malachi predicting the return of Elijah (Malachi 4:5). The intervening four hundred years placed John the Baptist at the precise point in time in which Jesus planned for him to announce His imminent arrival. Jesus verifies John the Baptist was the prophet who prepared the way for Him (Malachi 3:1 Matthew 11:10) and was the Elijah to come (Malachi 4:5, Matthew 17:10-13). John's miraculous birth and his mission were announced to his parents by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:11-19).

Jesus chose His mother and foster father

Jesus chose His ancestry, linking His birth with His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. His legal right to the throne of David through Joseph's lineage is recorded in Matthew 1:1-17. There are some unexpected entries in that genealogy, Gentiles and women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and one *who had been the wife of Uriah*.

It was no mistake that Mary was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter and humble follower of God. Matthew includes Joseph's perspective on the arrival of the Christ Child. God led him in successive dreams to do His will, protecting Mary and the Child (Matthew 1:20, 2:13, 19, 22). His obedience brought about the fulfillment of many of the prophecies concerning Jesus (Matthew 1:21, 25, 2:14-15, 21-23).

We might assume that His foster father taught the young Lord the craft of carpentry. Together, they worked with timber to construct useful objects. The One who used His human hands to learn carpentry was the same One who created the world and placed the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. The One who made tables with Joseph was the One who knelt around a table with His disciples at the Last Supper. The One who worked with wood as a young Man carried His own wooden cross to Calvary. The One who formed furniture from felled trees knew that He would one day give His own life upon a tree. As he hammered nails into wood as He worked, did He think of the day when huge nails would pierce His hands and rip His flesh as He hung upon the cross?

Jesus chose His mother carefully. Mary's response to the surprising news that she would bear the Christ Child was "*Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word*" (Luke 1:38). As her young mind was filled with the word of the Lord, she quotes Scripture throughout her Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). Luke gives the account from Mary's view and traces Jesus' genealogy back to the beginning of the human race.

Jesus had prepared this girl to care for His needs as a child, nurture Him as a young Man and suffer with Him as He accomplished His purpose. He knew she had what it took to trust her firstborn Child as her Savior. He knew she would call upon God for the strength to bear the trials ahead. *Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul"* (Luke 2:34-35 NLT).

Jesus chose the time of His birth

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4).

Although the four hundred years between the Old and New Testaments are often called the "silent centuries," God was at work during that time to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus.

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures, did not exist until after the conquest of Alexander the great and the spread of the Greek language sometime between 300-200 BC. Many early Christians and New Testament writers depended heavily upon this translation as the Hebrew language was no longer used as widely as it had been.

The development of the Sanhedrin happened during this period.

The Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jewish nation, comprising 71 members is first mentioned' in a letter written in 198 B.C. by Antiochus III of Syria to the chief Jewish representatives. Until the attack made by Antiochus IV on the Jewish nation and religion, the Sanhedrin, under the presidency of the high priest, regulated the internal affairs of the Jews. The authority of the Sanhedrin tended to diminish under the autocratio Hasmoneans; but after the Roman conquest of Palestine it enjoyed considerable freedom in the internal concerns of the Jewish people, not only in Palestine, but even (as the circumstances of Paul's visit to Damascus show) to some extent in other provinces. We gather from John 18:31 that, while the Sanhedrin could sentence an accused person to death, this sentence could not be executed without the consent of the Roman governor. It was for this reason that the Lord Jesus, having been sentenced to death on a charge of blasphemy (because He confessed Himself to be the Messiah), was then brought before Pilate. Pilate, as the Sanhedrin knew, would not be interested in a charge of blasphemy, and so it was on a charge of seditious activity that our Lord was arraigned before the Roman judge.

Politically and religiously alike, the period between the Testaments is far from representing a standstill, but shows a steady moving forward to the accomplishment of God's purpose in the redemption wrought out by His Son.⁴

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Jesus chose the place and circumstance of His birth

Jesus chose Bethlehem as His birthplace and informed the Old Testament prophet Micah (Micah 5:2, Luke 2:4-6).

In 31 B.C. the civil wars which had raged in the Roman world for many years came to an end with the sea-victory won at Actium by Octavian, the adopted son of Julius Caesar, over his rival Antony and Queen Cleopatra, the last ruler of the Ptolemaic dynasty. With this victory Octavian had the whole Roman world at his feet, and he ruled it until A.D. 14 as first Roman Emperor, under the name Augustus (which means something like 'His Majesty').

And so it came to pass that when the fulness of the time came and God sent forth His Son, that Son "was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king" (Matt. 2:1), Joseph and Mary having travelled to that place because

⁴ The Period Between the Testaments, 1949 F.F. Bruce. Reproduced by permission. Prepared for the Web in March 2008 by Robert I. Bradshaw. <http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>

“there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled” (Luke 2:1).⁵

As Jesus came to identify with all men, He chose a feeding trough – a manger – to lay His newborn head. He knew there would be *no room in the inn*. During His years of ministry, He said, “*The foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*” (Matthew 8:20). Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb.

Have you ever had the chance to share the gospel with those who are homeless? In His birth, His lifetime and His death, Jesus chose to identify with them.

Jesus chose to announce His imminent arrival to a chosen few

Although prophecies abounded about the birth of the Christ Child, at the point in time when it actually happened, there was a special revelation to a privileged few. The message and manner in which they were notified were varied but all miraculous. Matthew and Luke tell us that Jesus prepared

- Zacharias and Elizabeth by sending John the Baptist as their miracle child.
- Mary by purifying her heart and sending His special messenger Gabriel to let her know she had been chosen to bear the Christ Child.
- Joseph by sending angels to appear to him in his dreams.
- shepherds by sending an angel and a heavenly host.
- Simeon in the years he waited for the Consolation of Israel with the promise from the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Christ.
- Anna by speaking to her heart through the many years she spent fasting and praying in the temple.
- wise men from the East by sending His star to lead them to come and worship Him. He chose the gifts that they brought: “gold to honor His kingship, frankincense to honor His Divinity, and myrrh to honor His Humanity which was destined for death. Myrrh was used at His burial. The crib and the Cross are related again, for there is myrrh at both.”⁶

Jesus chose His human Name

Names given to our Lord in the Old Testament looked forward to His coming as the Savior of the world. As Gabriel appeared to Mary, he said, “*Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus*” (Luke 1:31). *An angel of the Lord appeared to [Joseph] 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, for He will save His people from their sins* (Matthew 1:20-21).

This is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which was originally Hoshea (Num. 13:8, 16), but changed by Moses into Jehoshua (Num. 13:16; 1 Chr. 7:27),

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Sheen, Fulton, *Life of Christ*, McGraw Hill Book Company, New York, 1958, p. 40.

or Joshua. After the Exile it assumed the form Jeshua, whence the Greek form Jesus. It was given to our Lord to denote the object of his mission, to save (Matt. 1:21). – Easton's Bible Dictionary

Jesus (je'-zus) = Jehovah is salvation; Jehova, my salvation; Savior. Greek form of Jehoshua. – Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible names

Jesus means "Jehovah is salvation," Christ means "Anointed One." Since names were so important in Biblical times, Jesus knew that those who trust Him would understand why He chose the name He did.

Jesus chose the town in which He grew up

And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene" (Matthew 2:23).

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see" (John 1:45-46).

It was not by accident that He spent His youth in Nazareth, a place despised by others. He knew that He would *be despised and rejected of men* (Isaiah 53:3). He could then identify with those who did not measure up in the eyes of men.

In this quiet and obscure village, He learned submission to His mother and foster father all the while knowing His calling was to do the will of His Heavenly Father. *"Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:29-52).*

The years in Nazareth prepared Him for His ministry. Submission to His earthly family prepared Him for the trials ahead. *Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered, and having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:8).*

Jesus Chose to Be Born In Order to Die

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work (1 John 3:8), the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world (Revelation 13:8 NIV).

Jesus took on man's skin because the entrance of sin in the world made it necessary for man to die. In order to offer salvation to mankind, He chose to become our substitutionary sacrifice. Having done what we cannot do – live a perfect and completely obedient life – he chose to die in our place. Those who believe that and trust Him experience eternal life.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death on the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11 NKJV).

In the NKJV above, Paul said that Jesus *made Himself of no reputation* (verse 7). Many other translations render that *emptied Himself*; NCV *but he gave up his place with God and made himself nothing* and NLT *he gave up his divine privileges*. Even though The Message is a paraphrase, not a thought for thought or a word for word translation, it does bring some clarity to our modern ears.

Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of the status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death – and the worst kind of death at that – a crucifixion. Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth – even those long ago dead and buried – will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11 The Message).

In his comments on this passage, Charles Ryrie says the doctrine of Kenosis (Greek for “an emptying”) is derived from verse 7 – *emptied Himself* or *made Himself of no reputation*:

But in what sense does Paul mean that Christ emptied Himself at the incarnation? “Emptied” may be a misleading translation because it connotes Christ’s giving up or losing some of His divine attributes during His earthly life, and that was not the case. Therefore, the kenosis cannot be understood to mean a subtraction of deity but the addition of humanity with its consequent limitations. Indeed, in the passage itself, the verb “emptied” is explained by three participles which follow—(1) taking the form of a servant, (2) becoming in the likeness of men, and (3) being found in fashion as a man. The kenosis is further explained in the text by the parallel clause which follows, “He humbled himself.” The idea is that by taking on humanity with its limitations, there was a humbling which, although real, did not involve the giving up of any divine attributes.

If our Lord did surrender some of His divine attributes when He came to earth, then His essential character would have been changed, and He would not have been fully God while on earth. You cannot subtract any attributes without

changing the character of the person. . . Thus any doctrine of kenosis which says Christ surrendered attributes at the incarnation is in direct conflict with scriptural evidence concerning His person during the incarnation.

What is included in a proper statement of the true doctrine of the kenosis? The concept involves the veiling of Christ's preincarnate glory (Jn 17:5), the condescension of taking on Himself the likeness of sinful flesh (Ro 8:3), and the voluntary nonuse of some of His attributes of deity during the time of His earthly life (Mt 24:36). His humanity was not a glorified humanity and was thus subject to temptation, weakness, pain, and sorrow. Choosing not to use His divine attributes is quite different from saying that He gave them up. Nonuse does not mean subtraction.⁷

Jesus chose to be born the Son of Man. In Heaven, in His perfection, He maintains both natures. He identified with man as a child, as a boy, as a young man who carried out His Father's call during His life. He still identifies with us as He intercedes for us *at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens* (Hebrews 7:25, 8:1).

And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

Jesus chose to be born the Son of Man so that you could be born again as a child of God.

⁷Ryrie, Charles Caldwell: *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*. Chicago : Moody Press, 1995, c1972

The Faith, Hope and Love of Christmas

Do not be afraid, for I bring you good news of great joy, which shall be for all people, for today in the city of David there has been born a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10).

And now abide faith, hope and love, these three, but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

The birth of Jesus Christ brought the good news the world had been waiting for. We needed a Savior. God had promised He would come. With His coming, the world would never be the same. Now reconciliation with God was possible. Through faith in Him, our sins could be forgiven. His coming brought hope of everlasting life with God. And most importantly, His birth, sinless life, sacrificial death and resurrection spoke volumes about the love of God.

The good news (the gospel) announced to the shepherds on the first Christmas has been celebrated throughout the centuries. Mary was chosen by God to bring the Son of God to the world. An angel told Joseph that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised His disciples that although He was leaving, He would still be with them because His Father would send them the Holy Spirit to help them, teach them and help them remember the things He had said. The Holy Spirit brought gifts with Him to enable Christ's disciples to carry on His work. There would be specific, individual gifts but the abiding gifts of faith, hope and love would be given to all believers.

Faith is the revelation of the good news.

Through faith we see God for who He really is. His nature is revealed to us through faith. Faith is not blind. It allows us to see the miracles that God has wrought through His Son. As C.S. Lewis says, "The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation. They say that God became Man. Every other miracle prepares the way for this, or results from this."

When you believe in the miracle of the Incarnation and invite the Christ who chose to be born in a manger to take residence in the manger of your heart, you experience the greatest miracle of all - forgiveness of your sins, reconciliation with God and a place in His forever family.

In faith, the servants of God in the Old Testament looked forward to this miracle and the revelation of God's presence. Disciples in the New Testament and followers of Christ ever since that time have all come to God through abiding faith.

All we need to know about God we see in Jesus. Through faith in Him, we see the nature of God revealed.

For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on His shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). For the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ (Colossians 2:9).

Hope is the fulfillment of the good news. We hope because of God and God does not disappoint.

God's word in the Old Testament prophesied of God's salvation through the coming Messiah. His word in the New Testament recorded that salvation obtained through the miraculous birth, sinless life, sacrificial death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. As the men of old believed God would deliver what He promised, men today look back upon that accomplished fact in history. The Son of God gives all believers *the hope of glory* (Colossians 1:27).

Like Abraham, our faith is in a God who fulfills His promises. Our hope is not a "hope so," but "I know He will." *Now we want each of you to demonstrate the same diligence for the final realization of your hope, so that you won't become lazy but will be imitators of those who inherit the promises through faith and perseverance.... We have this hope as an anchor for our lives, safe and secure* (Hebrews 6:11-12, 19). Peter calls our hope a living hope (1 Peter 1:3).

Paul said of Abraham: *He did not waver in unbelief at God's promise but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, because he was fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. Therefore, it was credited to him for righteousness. Now it was credited to him was not written for Abraham alone, but also for us. It will be credited to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification* (Romans 4:20-25).

The greatest of these is love. **Love** is the good news.

God does not need faith. Neither does He need hope. We do. He provides what we need so that we might see the love He has for us. We love Him only because He first loved us.

There is no other religion that speaks of a God who loves His people so much that He chose to send His only Son to die on their behalf in order to have a relationship with them.

God is love. It was love that brought Jesus to earth. It was love that enabled Him to endure temptations and shame so that He could be our perfect substitute. It was love that led Him to the cross. It was love that resurrected Him from the dead.

He loved us and wants us to love others the same way - sacrificially. *As the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you. Remain in My love. If you keep My commands you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commands and remain in His love. I have spoken these things to you so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is My command: Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, that someone would lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you* (John 15:9-14). The King of kings chose to be born in a stable because of His love for us. There is no greater love. Love is the gospel story.

Scripture references are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible

The Shepherd-Kings

God made some amazing promises to David about his part in God's plan to give the world the Savior they so desperately needed. In the psalms, God inspired David to tell of the coming of Jesus in terms that cannot be misunderstood.

As a boy, David was a shepherd who counted on God to help him protect the sheep from predators. His experience as a shepherd enabled him to defeat Goliath. Jesus came as the door of the sheep and the good shepherd who gave His life thus enabling His followers to defeat the Goliaths in their lives through His saving grace.

Son of David

During the life of Jesus, many who recognized Him as Savior addressed Him as the Son of David. At least fourteen times in the New Testament Christ was called the Son of David.

City of David

Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion (that is, the City of David) (2 Samuel 5:7).

For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11).

Throne of David

God promised David your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne will be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16).

Isaiah spoke of the coming of Jesus when he said, For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (Isaiah 9:6-7).

The Eternal King

And He said to them, "How can they say that the Christ is the Son of David? Now David himself said in the Book of Psalms: 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.' Therefore David calls Him 'Lord': how is He then his Son?" (Luke 20:41-44).

Jesus, born of the virgin Mary, lived a sinless life. David knew that God would fulfill His promise to him. Being a sinful man, however, he knew his place. God is the Lord. David was His servant. As a king, David served God with the awe the perfect and eternal King deserves. So should we.

Gift Giving

Close to Christmas nearly everyone is thinking about what gifts they are going to be purchasing, wrapping, mailing or placing under the Christmas tree for loved ones. It is the season of concentrated gift giving.

Much thought is often put into the gifts you purchase. In fact, while I was typing this sentence, the doorbell rang. It was the delivery of a Christmas gift I had ordered online for my husband. I hope he likes it.

We love to give gifts on Christmas, but we also will be receiving gifts. As recipients, we have a choice to make. We may use it or place it in the back of a closet. We are not obligated to use it, but whoever has given us the gift hopes that we will use it and like it. If you love the person who gave it to you, you know they spent some time thinking about what gift would suit you. Using the gift makes a statement to the giver – that you value and appreciate the gift you have been given.

As Christians, the most important gift we have been given is the gift of salvation. It was given to us by the Christ who chose to be born in a manger, lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial death and rose from His grave. For those of us who have accepted that gift, He is preparing a place for us to be with Him for all eternity.

God's Holy Spirit also gives you gifts for service. They are tailor made for you. He is pleased and glorified when you give Him thanks for those gifts and use them for His service. You can ignore your spiritual gift and neglect the good work God has begun in you, but it can insult God, grieve Him and become sin to you.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness (Romans 12:6-8).

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30). Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin (James 4:17).

His Right Hand and His Holy Arm

Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory. The Lord has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations (Psalm 98:1).

Then God said, *“Let us make man in Our Image, according to our likeness...(Genesis 1:26).* God created man and blessed him. His relationship with man started out with gifts and blessings.

Then Adam and Eve sinned. Even after God pronounced His curse on the serpent, the woman and the man, He gave them gifts. *Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them (Genesis 3:21).* And still, because of His great love for them, He banished them from the garden – *“lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and live forever” (Genesis 3:22).*

Just as a drowning person cannot reach up, grab her own hair and pull herself up out the water, there has never been a possibility that mankind could provide salvation for himself. The death of innocence also emphasized the impossibility of anyone ever providing justice for himself or interceding for another. Only God could do that. And God did.

Then the Lord saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him....I looked, but there was no one to help, and I wondered that there was no one to uphold; Therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me...(Isaiah 59:16, 63:5).

God's *own arm brought salvation.* Over the centuries, His people prophesied of His salvation through the sending of His only Son to provide salvation, to bring righteousness and justice. Then there was an intercessor.

Jesus' birth marked the day when one Man could do what no other man could do. Tempted, tried, subjected to unjust suffering, but never yielding to anything but the will of the Father, *when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...(Hebrews 1:3).* *For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted (Hebrews 2:18).* *Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25).*

With the coming of Jesus, there is now justice. With the coming of Jesus, there is now salvation. With the coming of Jesus, there is now righteousness. And thankfully, with the coming of Jesus, there is now an intercessor.

Christmas is God's gift to us, filled with blessing. *For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory.*

Seeing the Heart of Christmas

God had demonstrated His love and His presence to His people for centuries, but many of them did not see it. So...*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14).

The highly favored woman and the just man saw Him first. God prepared Mary to give Him birth. He prepared Joseph to see Him come into the world. They knew why He had come. Angels told them why.

The simple men saw Him. The shepherds came to see the Child. Angels told them where to go and why He had come.

The wise men saw Him. The star led them to Him. They had been told to visit the King of the Jews and they came to worship Him. The gifts they gave may have enabled Mary and Joseph to take care of the Christ Child as they were gifts of great worth. They were also symbolic. Gold was given to royalty. Frankincense was an incense offered in worship. Myrrh was an anointing or embalming oil. The wise men saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him.

Simeon and Anna had been waiting for Him, assured that God would allow them to see Him with their own eyes. And He did. When they saw Him, they prophesied about Him.

When you see the Child in the manger, you are looking at the heart of God.

What a privilege it must have been for these few to have seen the Child and known who He was from the very beginning!

I was not there at His birth and neither were you. Even so, we can see the heart of Christmas - God's love.

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone (Hebrews 2:9).

He who has seen Me has seen the Father (John 14:9). *For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily* (Colossians 2:9). *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him* (John 1:1,2,18).

Our Father's Perfect Timing

But when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent His Son, born among us of a woman, born under the conditions of the law so that he might redeem those of us who have been kidnapped by the law. Thus, we have been set free to experience our rightful heritage. You can tell for sure that you are now fully adopted as his own children because God sent the Spirit of his Son into our lives crying out, "Papa! Father!" Doesn't that privilege of intimate conversation with God make it plain that you are not a slave, but a child? And if you are a child, you're also an heir, with complete access to the inheritance (Galatians 4:4-7 The Message).

If you are a Christian, you have probably experienced the perfect timing of God the Father in your life. Even the day of your salvation may have been an example – you were in the right place at the right time to hear the words about Christ that spoke to your heart and His Spirit prompted you to say, "Yes, I believe."

There are occasions when something happened at just the right time that can only be explained by God's perfect timing. These could include near misses that could have resulted in a terrible accident, or something as simple as an encouraging phone call that came just when you needed it.

I'm sure, like me, many things come to mind when you consider God's perfect timing in your life.

The birth of our Savior happened *when the fullness of the time had come, when (in God's plan) the proper time had fully come, when the time came to completion, when the appointed time arrived, when the time was right, when the set time had fully come, when the appropriate time had come, when the chosen time came, when the right time arrived.* Every biblical translator agreed that it was perfectly planned. Old Testament prophets looked forward to the fulfillment of the promise of the day when the Christ child would be born of a woman and provide salvation for us. We look back on the perfect fulfillment of that promise.

Knowing that the first coming of Jesus was perfectly timed by the Father, we also know that the Father has perfectly timed His coming again.

And they will see the Son of Man arrive on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send forth his angels with the sound of a mighty trumpet blast, and they will gather together his chosen ones from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven...However, no one knows the day or the hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows (Matthew 24:30b-31, 36 NLT)

I look back upon the fulfilled promise of the first coming of Jesus and look forward with eager anticipation to His coming again. I am so grateful for our Father's perfect timing.