

DECEMBER 2022

# inspiration

M A G A Z I N E

## God Keeps His *Promises*



For the Man Who  
Hated Christmas

Chasing the Spirit  
of Christmas

The Ultimate  
Superhero



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## God Keeps His Promises!



Did you know that nearly 80% of the 2,500 prophecies in Scripture have already been completed – without error? David's article on **page 5** gives you a sampling of the incredible promises fulfilled with Jesus' birth – and the odds of that accomplishment!

Christmas is evidence that when God makes a promise, you can rely on it happening.



## EDITOR'S CORNER



Roone Acree

God's promises aren't just words on a page. They are healing truths we weave into the fabric of our lives. One such promise for me is my son, Joshua. He is a miracle who fulfills the desires God put in my heart. I'm very grateful for him.

In this world that holds so many broken promises and deceptions, the faithfulness of God is a priceless treasure. This month we're celebrating God's trustworthiness! Every one of the thousands of promises God has made in His Word are "yes and amen" in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20). I encourage you to declare His truth over your life today.

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*By Roone Acree*

Even Stretch Armstrong can't hold a candle to our living Savior.



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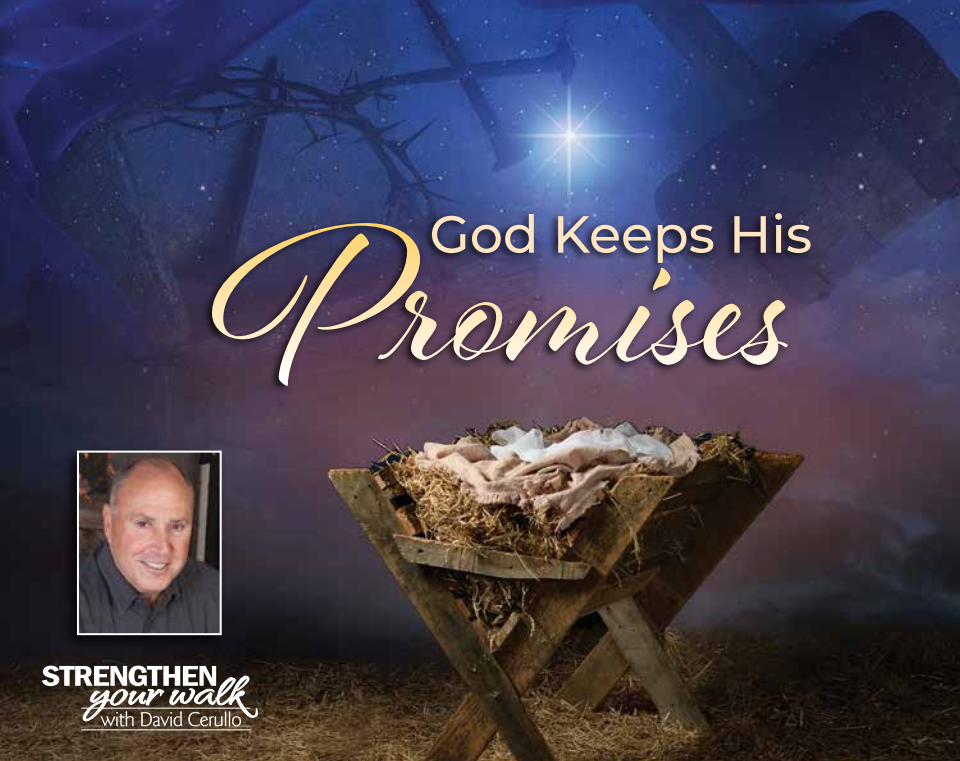


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## God Keeps His *Promises*



**STRENGTHEN**  
*your walk*  
with David Cerullo

This holiday season, I am praying for you to experience a wonderful breakthrough of God's love as you celebrate the birth of His Son, Jesus. Instead of feeling isolated or depressed, He wants you to draw closer to Him...to experience His amazing power and peace!

No matter what you may be going through, have confidence that you can trust Him. He wants you to know that He is Immanuel, the God who will be *with you* through it all. The familiar Christmas story reveals so many wonderful truths about God and His love for us, but one simple truth always stands out to me:

God always keeps His promises!

The Bible reveals the Lord as being utterly dependable and true to His Word...forever faithful to His covenant promises:

*God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? (Numbers 23:19).*

You see, through the birth of Jesus at Christmas, God fulfilled His greatest promise of all – the promise to send a Savior to redeem humankind from our sins:

*You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).*



*In the final 24 hours of Jesus' life, 29 specific Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled.*

## PROPHECIES FULFILLED

Christmas is an incredible reminder that we can depend on God to carry out every promise He's made to us. Just look at this small sampling of Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by Jesus:

- Adam and Eve were promised that a Savior would one day come and crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15).
- This promised Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).
- He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
- He would be anointed by the Holy Spirit to perform miracles (Isaiah 35:4-6; 61:1-3).
- He would be born of the lineage of Abraham and David (Genesis 22:18; Jeremiah 23:5).
- His ministry would be preceded by a messenger to prepare His way (Isaiah 40:3).
- He would be betrayed by a friend for 30 pieces of silver (Psalm 55:12-14; Zechariah 11:12).
- He would be rejected by His own people and then wounded, bruised, and pierced as the sacrifice for our sins (Isaiah 53; Psalm 22:16).
- He would rise from the dead and then ascend to the right hand of God in Heaven (Psalm 16:10; 68:18; 110:1).

In the final 24 hours of Jesus' life, 29 specific Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled, and these amazing predictions came through several different people over the course of five centuries from 1000 to 500 BC.

Do you see how remarkable this is? Mathematicians have calculated that the odds of Jesus fulfilling only *eight* of the Messianic prophecies would be one out of  $10^{17}$  (a one followed by 17 zeros). This is equivalent to covering the entire state of Texas with silver dollars two feet deep,

marking one of them, mixing it up with the others, and then having a blindfolded person select the marked coin at random!

## GOD'S TRACK RECORD

Perhaps you're thinking, *That's nice information, David. But what does it possibly have to do with the things I'm going through today?*

Friend, this has *everything* to do with your life today! You see, if you want to determine someone's reliability, you must look at their *track record*.

**The same God who fulfilled His promises in intricate detail through the life of His Son, Jesus, will be faithful to fulfill every promise in His Word for YOU today!**

Just as your Heavenly Father could look down through the centuries and foresee the details of Jesus' life, nothing in *your* life is catching Him by surprise. All the promises in His Word are true for you (2 Corinthians 1:18-20), and He is able to work *everything* together for your good (Romans 8:28).

## A TIME OF MIRACLES

So, what would it take to make this your best Christmas ever? What comes to mind when I ask you that?

Perhaps you would respond, "David, I really need a financial breakthrough this Christmas," or maybe you're crying out to God to heal your body or restore your family.

Whatever your most pressing need is right now, remember this: Christmas is a time of miracles, and the Lord can heal situations you may have been tempted to give up on.

One of my favorite stories is the account

*Christmas is a time of miracles, and the Lord can heal situations you may have been tempted to give up on.*

of how a blind man named Bartimaeus received his sight (Mark 10:46-52).

When he heard that Jesus was passing by, Bartimaeus began to call out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (v. 47). People told him to be quiet, but Bartimaeus was desperate for a miracle, so he continued to cry out.

Hearing his passionate cries, Jesus called him forward and asked him one of the most incredible questions in history:

**“What do you want Me to do for you?”** (v. 51).

Do you see how stunning this is? The Creator of the universe was asking a man to request whatever he wanted. It’s as if Jesus gave him a blank check, with instructions to fill in the blanks with whatever he needed the Lord to do for him.

## WHAT DO YOU NEED TODAY?

Of course, the blind man knew *exactly* what he wanted – he wanted to receive his sight. In all likelihood, that’s not *your* need today. But this Christmas I’m convinced Jesus would ask you the same question...

**What do you want Me to do for YOU?**

I encourage you to take a few minutes to ponder how you would answer this probing question.

Do you need a healing in your body? A financial breakthrough? A restored relationship with your spouse or children? A new job?

The Bible says you don’t need to be anxious and stressed this holiday season. Instead, “*Let your requests be made known to God.*” When you do this, you’re promised that “*the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 4:6-7).

Whatever your need may be today, remember that you have a Heavenly Father who keeps His promises. I am praying this will be the best Christmas you’ve ever had, full of God’s peace, presence, and provision in your life!

Your friend and partner to reach the lost,



P.S. On page 28 we share a powerful resource to help you claim God’s promises for ALL the blessings and breakthroughs you need!



Want something to get excited about? We have just reached our goal of 4.8 MILLION people who have responded to our *Love of God* video in the past year! That’s nearly five million indicated salvations!



Hearts are hungry and open for God, but let’s not rest on what God has done! Our Heavenly Father doesn’t want any to miss out on the eternal life Jesus offers – and neither do we.

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It's just a small, white envelope stuck in our Christmas tree. No name, no identification, no inscription. It has peeked through the branches of our tree for the past ten years or so.

It all began because my husband Mike hated Christmas – oh, not the true meaning of Christmas, but the commercial aspects of it – overspending, the frantic running around for last minute gifts.

Knowing he felt this way, I decided one year to bypass the usual shirts and ties to reach for something special just for

Mike. The inspiration came in an unusual way.

Our son Kevin, who was 12 that year, was wrestling at the junior level. Shortly before Christmas, there was a non-league match against an inner-city church team. These youngsters, dressed in sneakers so ragged that shoestrings seemed to be the only thing holding them together and lacking protective headgear, presented a sharp contrast to our boys in their spiffy blue and gold uniforms and sparkling new wrestling shoes.

Well, we ended up walloping them. We took every weight class.

And as each of their boys got up from the mat, he swaggered around in his tatters with false bravado, a kind of street pride that couldn't acknowledge defeat.

Mike, seated beside me, shook his head sadly, "I wish just one of them could have won," he said. "They have a lot of potential, but losing like this could take the heart right out of them." Mike loved kids – all kids – and he knew them, having coached little league football, baseball, and lacrosse. That's when the idea for his present came.

That afternoon, I went to a local sporting goods store and bought an assortment of wrestling headgear and shoes and sent them anonymously to the inner-city church. On Christmas Eve, I placed the envelope on the tree, the note inside telling Mike what I had done and that this was his gift from me. His smile was the brightest thing about Christmas that year and in succeeding years. For each Christmas, I followed the tradition – one year sending a group of mentally handicapped youngsters to a hockey game, another year a check to a pair of elderly brothers whose home had

burned to the ground the week before Christmas, and on and on.

The envelope became the highlight of our Christmas. It was always the last thing opened on Christmas morning, and our children, ignoring their new toys, would stand with wide-eyed anticipation as their dad lifted the envelope from the tree to reveal its contents.

As the children grew, the toys gave way to more practical presents, but the envelope never lost its allure. The story doesn't end there.

You see, we lost Mike last year due to dreaded cancer. When Christmas rolled around, I was still so wrapped in grief that I barely got the tree up. But Christmas Eve found me placing an envelope on the tree, and in the morning, it was joined by three more.

Each of our children, unbeknownst to the others, had placed an envelope on the tree for their dad. The tradition has grown and someday will expand even further with our grandchildren eagerly waiting to take down the envelope.

Mike's spirit, like the Christmas spirit, will always be with us. ❖

**Nancy Gavin.** This true story was originally published in *Woman's Day* magazine (12/14/1982). This was the first-place winner out of thousands of entries in the magazine's "My Most Moving Holiday Tradition" contest where readers share their favorite holiday tradition and the story behind it. The story inspired a family from Atlanta, Georgia, to start [WhiteEnvelopeProject.org](http://WhiteEnvelopeProject.org) and [Giving 101](http://Giving101.org), a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating youth about the importance of giving.



# Give the Greatest Gift

**"What you are is God's gift to you,  
what you become is your gift to God."**

– Hans Urs von Balthasar

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***The Christmas Carol*** have in common?

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## FROM OUR MAILBOX

Dear Inspiration Ministries,

My heart is filled with joy that I have friends and family  
in Christ Jesus who do not know me but who care about me.  
I have been a Christian from birth, but I was a sleeping one.

My life is characterized by pains:

- ~ A step-grandfather who sexually molested me
- ~ A father who didn't care about his children's welfare.
- ~ A mother who abandoned me.

To crown it all, my husband passed on when I was 27 years old,  
leaving me with three children and one unborn child in my womb. I  
cried and pleaded with God to visit me and change my story.

I never believed that my life would change until I stumbled  
into Inspiration TV when it popped up as an ad. The day I  
clicked on it, Jesus changed my life and my Christian perspective!

**Boldly Walking** with Kim Crabill [a **Strengthen Your Walk**™  
series] has changed my views about who God is, who I am, and  
how to boldly approach His court with praise. I have learned to  
throw away fear, and I dare to believe that God has a purpose  
for me and my kids.

I wake up now and pray even if I'm struggling, but I am still  
pushing. I seek your prayers for strength to continue in Christ.  
It is not easy because my greatest challenge is how to feed my  
kids. We live by the crumbs and help of good Samaritans, but I  
know God is about to change my story.

– Glory, Calabar, Nigeria



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# Chasing the Spirit of Christmas

Wise men still seek Him.



by Ben Cerullo

How's your Christmas shopping coming along – has it sucked the Christmas spirit right out of you? Trying to find perfect gifts for the ones I love sometimes threatens to rob me of my Christmas joy. I've heard that the tradition of giving gifts is based on the wise men in the Christmas story, but I believe we want to give good gifts because we are made in the image of **THE Giver**, the King of Glory who gives Himself to us.

Think about it: God created the world to **give** it to man, the ones to whom He gave His own image! And ever since then, He's been pouring out gifts of all kinds, both necessities and blessings – life, light, hope, faith. When we were ungrateful and rebellious, He gave His Son to redeem us and His Spirit to empower us. Every day God gives us everything we need to live victoriously. The unchanging God is the giver of all good things (James 1:17), and we're made to be like Him.

Even knowing all that, sometimes I need to revisit Luke's

account of the worshiping wise men to retain my joy. These pagan scholars from the East studied the stars but knew about the prophecies of a coming King. So when one unique, gloriously brilliant star appeared in the sky, they noticed. Believing it to be the herald of God's promised gift, the wise men left their lives behind and set out to worship the promised **Gift of God**. After months of arduous, desert travel, they arrived in Jerusalem and began asking questions.

The news of their arrival prompted the earthly king to call on the local religious scholars for details about this prophesied King. The Jewish leaders quickly came to share their vast knowledge. They loved the respect and riches studying the Word brought to them, but they had no desire for that Word to *come to life* and disrupt their status quo. Unlike the wise men who traveled far and left their old lives behind, these fools – living just six miles from the King's birthplace – clung to their way of life and missed the actual **Gift of God**.

## The Wisdom Of Worship

The wise men's gifts reveal their heart attitude toward God and show us how to celebrate Christmas with joy and wisdom!

**Gold** Gold reminds us to value our King. The generous, loving Creator who made you, redeemed you, and sustains you gives Himself to you! Celebrating that amazing truth adds value to every moment of life.

**Frankincense** Temple worship always included this fragrant oil. Today, *we* are the temple, and the most important holiday preparation is cleansing our hearts so that His spirit can burn brightly in us! Jesus-centered hearts bring the fragrance of Heaven to earth. What a joy to take Him to those who haven't found Him yet.

**Myrrh** Myrrh was an oil used on dead bodies before burial. As believers, we have been buried with Christ and now live in His resurrection power. Myrrh reminds us that our earthly lives have eternal purposes. Only when we choose to die to the chaos around us can we live fully in the purposes and power of Christ.

As we wrap up this look at the wisdom of the wise men, it occurs to me that the chaos of Christmas is a gift in itself. It exposes when I'm acting like a foolish Pharisee and forgetting to seek the joy, hope, and peace that can only be found in Jesus. Nothing compares to the glory and goodness of God. Wise men do still seek Him. ❖

# Melekh Hakkovod

God Is the King of Glory

*Melekh Hakkovod* captures the full essence of God as the King of Glory – His worth, majesty, and power. He is the substance of true glory and its only source.

All around us are fragmented glimpses of His matchless beauty: newborn babies, roaring waves, watercolor sunrises, children laughing, puppies playing, bolts of lightning. The world is awash in miraculous beauties and terrifying displays of power, yet all are but a sliver of God's splendor.

Seeing the King of Glory isn't a common experience. It requires a heart of worship that recognizes His incalculable value and unfailing love. The psalmist describes such a person as one with clean hands and a pure heart who does not trust in idols or a false god (Psalm 24).

Moses was such a man. But it was only after facing Pharaoh, witnessing miracles, leading whiny rebels, receiving the covenant, and building the tabernacle that he ventured to plead, "Show me your glory." Though *Melekh Hakkovod*

graciously replied, "I will make all my goodness pass before you," Moses still needed protection when God's glory passed by (Exodus 33:18-22).

Pressing in to know God as *Melekh Hakkovod* is for the faith filled, humble, courageous, and mature. It will change you, bringing clarity and discernment in a world where what is unseen created all that is seen (Hebrews 11:3). Knowing God as the King of Glory reveals the mind-boggling, awe-inspiring realities of God's true nature!

*Who is this King of glory?  
The LORD of hosts,  
He is the King of glory  
(Psalm 24:10).*

Let's close with one more stunning truth. God took all of His greatness and placed it in the womb of a teenage girl. The *King of Glory* put on a cloak of humanity, so He could die for those who had turned their backs on Him. May we all celebrate Him with great thanksgiving and joy this Christmas! ❖

## Sing to the Lord

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: 2 CHRONICLES 30

Revivals spread throughout the land, and some in Sweden's state church were concerned. To them, this sparked worrisome patterns. In his account, hymnody expert J. Irving Erickson described one particular concern: Many believers came to church services early to sing, but the state church felt this was too radical. Seeking to stop the practice, officials announced anyone singing before a service would be fined.

On the first Sunday after this decree was announced, people in one church began to gather. In the past, there would have been spontaneous singing, but no one seemed willing to challenge the new law. Many studied the actions of one man who formerly was eager to sing. This Sunday, the man was silent, explaining he was too poor to pay any fines.

The man's mood changed when a farmer agreed to pay any fines. Freed from worry, the man began to sing. His singing was unusually loud. As Erickson described, he "sang the coldness and listlessness out of the hearts of the people."

Encouraged by this boldness, the pastor preached a sermon that stirred every heart. When the farmer went to pay the fine, officials decided not to collect. Soon after, the rule was withdrawn. They couldn't stop God's people from singing.

The Bible reminds us that singing is a central part of our spiritual lives. Be free to sing unto the Lord. Don't be intimidated. Praise Him boldly. Sing His praises!

Would you be willing to risk being fined for praising God publicly?

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THURSDAY

December

1

*The children of Israel... kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, singing to the LORD, accompanied by loud instruments.*

2 Chronicles 30:21

### PRAYER:

Father, give me the boldness to share my testimony with others. I praise and worship You. In Jesus' name, amen.



*Ask it of Me, and I will certainly give the nations as Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as Your possession.*

Psalms 2:8 NASB

## All for Christ

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 2

Charles Thomas (C.T.) Studd seemed destined for fame. A highly honored athlete, twice he was declared the best all-around cricket player in England.

Born on this date in 1860, Studd was the son of a wealthy Englishman. His family life changed when his father, Edward, heard D.L. Moody preach. Stirred by the message, Edward gave his life to Christ and dedicated his resources to spreading the Gospel.

Studd's turning point came after hearing a missionary speak about the need for workers in China. He realized God was willing to give His people the nations *if they asked*. Studd asked, believed, and put his faith into action.

Following through on this commitment, in 1885, Studd and six colleagues sailed to China. This began a lifetime dedicated to missions that also took him to India and Africa.

One colleague commented that he remembered Studd for *courage*. He would never "sound the retreat." He had absolute "conviction that he was in God's will" and had the faith that "God would see him through." He simply was willing "to risk all for Christ."

Ask God to give you this kind of confidence, a burden for souls, and a willingness to believe God for favor. Pray that He would shine His light on the nations, that the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth "*as the waters cover the seas*" (Habakkuk 2:14). Commit your life to spreading the Gospel.

Make a list of people with whom you can share the Gospel this week.

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## Only One Life

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: 2 CORINTHIANS 5

People spend much of their time trying to make their lives count. Many focus on their careers, seeking ways to accumulate wealth, gain fame, or experience pleasures, but Charles Thomas (C.T.) Studd recognized how quickly all these things are here and then gone. In the end, our lives consist of only "a few brief years, each with its burdens, hopes, and fears."

Based on this realization, Studd wrote a poem, "Only One life." In the end, he wondered what would last. The simple answer is "only what's done for Christ."

The time would come when he would face God and need to explain his choices and describe what he had done with his time and resources. How would God evaluate the choices he made?

His prayer was that God would help him stay faithful, please Him, and serve Him with joy. He prayed he would burn with a desire to live for God and be filled with a conviction to do His will. He wanted to be able to say it was "worth it all." He wanted to burn out the lamp of life serving God.

God has a calling just for you. He has given you special opportunities and assignments. He has equipped you in special ways. He also has given you His Word. As you look back at your life, will there be things you wished you had done?

You have one life. Make it count for eternity.

What will you do today that will count for eternity?

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*We must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.*

2 Corinthians 5:10 NLT

### PRAYER:

Father, I commit my time, talents, and treasures to You. I desire to serve You. Use me to impact lives for Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems.*

Daniel 5:16 NIV

## Knotty Problems

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: DANIEL 5

According to legend, Alexander the Great marched his army into Gordium (a city located in modern-day Turkey). Upon arriving, he encountered an ancient chariot, its yoke tied with tightly entangled knots. He heard the story that anyone who unraveled these knots would be destined to become ruler of all Asia.

Encouraged by that account, Alexander determined to find a solution. Despite all his efforts, he could not unravel the knots. After taking a fresh look, he realized that it made no difference *how* the problem was solved. Instead of trying to unravel the knots, he sliced them in half with his sword. He had *outsmarted* the ancient puzzle.

That same night, the city was hit by a thunderstorm that Alexander believed was confirmation of the tradition. Alexander went on to conquer much of Asia, but his reign lasted only a few years.

The phrase Gordian knot entered the lexicon as shorthand for an obstacle that seemed impossible to solve. Likewise, cutting the Gordian knot is now commonly used to describe a daring solution to a seemingly insurmountable problem.

Do you ever encounter problems with no apparent solution? The Bible tells us God can help us solve even the most perplexing challenges. He did that very thing for Daniel, enabling him to “*solve difficult problems.*”

Ask God for His help to solve the problems you face – *any* problem. Seek His wisdom. Don't doubt.

What challenging situation are you facing right now?

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## Giving as Worship

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 2

This time of year, much attention throughout society is placed on selecting and giving gifts. Malls are busier than ever. Stores advertise specials to lure frazzled shoppers. Websites are crammed with products to order. People inevitably feel pressured as they ponder what to give to the people on their list.

To keep things in perspective, we need to remember that the tradition of giving around the birth of Jesus began with the wise men. Their focus was not on themselves or others, but Jesus. After they had traveled hundreds of miles and endured countless obstacles, they were *overwhelmed* to see Jesus and Mary.

Their giving was an act of *worship*. They “*fell down, and worshipped*” Jesus. Next, they “*opened their treasures*” and shared the gifts they had brought with them on their long journey.

As you enter the Christmas season, think about this not as a secular holiday, but as a time to celebrate Jesus' birth. Do not start with gifts or parties, but begin with Jesus Himself. Allow your heart to be filled with worship and gratitude! Praise God for sending Jesus. Praise Jesus, and make Him the Lord of your life.

Think of a meaningful offering that would be appropriate to express your worship. Follow the example of the wise men. Open your treasure storehouse, and make Jesus the focus of your worship and your gifts this Christmas.

What meaningful gift can you offer to Jesus today?

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*When they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.*

Matthew 2:11 KJV

### PRAYER:

Father, thank You for sending Jesus into this world. Help me give You gifts that reflect my love for Jesus and appreciation of what You have done. In His name, amen.



*My spirit is weak  
within me; my heart is  
overcome with dismay.*

Psalms 143:4 CSB

## Dismayed or Afraid?

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 143

Selma Sundelius Lagerström had every reason to feel discouraged. Born in Sweden in 1859, her father was a pastor, yet he was known to have alcohol problems.

Her life turned dark when both she and her husband (a Bible school teacher) began experiencing mental problems. For a time, both were confined to a mental hospital. Throughout these troubles, Lagerström continued to look to God.

Writing out of her life experiences, Lagerström wrote many poems and hymns. We feel her heart in a poem she wrote called "Are You Dismayed, Lonely, Afraid?" This became the basis of a hymn.

She asked her readers if they felt forsaken or alone. She encouraged them to turn to God. She knew He would lavish them with hope, mercy, and love. He promised blessings "in abundant measure."

Friends might fall short, but God is our constant consolation. He is faithful and true and provides "comfort in tribulation." When we are tired, we can flee to his side. We might feel weak, but He can give us courage. We might lack confidence, but God can guide us and light our path. He is our "true defender."

She ended this poem with a call to praise God and a reminder that He promises never to forsake us. We can depend on Him until the end. "He is the same forever."

Do you feel dismayed? Lonely? Afraid? Turn to God. You can trust Him.

### PRAYER:

Father, thank You for being with me. When I am afraid or lonely, I will trust in You. Thank You for giving me hope. In Jesus' name, amen.

Reflect on how God is with you in your loneliness and fear.

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## Misdirected Attachments

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 15

During Jesus' earthly ministry, many religious leaders disagreed with Him, feeling they were serving God. They were dedicated to guarding against false teachings and protecting their people from corruption. To them, their traditions were guardians of their faith and insurance against error.

They may have been sincere without realizing their trust in traditions enabled them to drift away from God and His commandments. In effect, they had made God's commands spineless.

Jesus cited the book of Isaiah to help people understand that their worship was, in God's sight, misdirected. Their teachings were but rules taught by men.

Any of us can become guilty of the same problem. We may start out trying to serve God but become more attached to our traditions than to God or His Word. We can be so dedicated to our interpretations that we are closed to God's direction. We can fail to see how we have done anything wrong.

Allow God to search your heart and mind with the penetrating power of the Holy Spirit. Allow Him to examine your interpretations and traditions. Allow Him to convict you of mistakes and free you from deception. Do not be defensive before God or assume that you are right. Ask Him to help you to be sensitive to Him and committed to His Word. Focus on God Himself and worship Him in spirit and in truth.

How have you allowed holiday traditions to take the place of Jesus?

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*You cancel the word of  
God... You hypocrites!  
Isaiah was right when  
he prophesied about  
you... "These people  
honor me with their  
lips, but their hearts are  
far from me... for they  
teach man-made ideas  
as commands from  
God."*

Matthew 15:6-9 NLT

### PRAYER:

Father, search my heart. Show me if I have allowed anything to take Your place in my life. I submit my life to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

*You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.*

John 15:16 CSB

**PRAYER:**

Father, thank You for choosing me. Help me serve You and fulfill Your purposes. In Jesus' name, amen.

How can you stand up for your faith in your day-to-day life?

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# Chosen

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JOHN 15

Anders Carl Rutström had strong convictions. At a time when Sweden's state church tried to control what was taught from pulpits, Rutström held to his Scripture-based beliefs and would not compromise.

So strong was the opposition that he was banished to Germany for a time. Eventually, he was allowed to return but was arrested after a few months. He later died in prison, a martyr for his faith.

His testimony helped inspire revivals that took place in Sweden in the nineteenth century. Even after his death, Rutström continued to have influence, encouraging a return to biblical beliefs through the many hymns he wrote.

Perhaps his best-known hymn, "Chosen Seed and Zion's Children" stressed Jesus' teaching that each of us has been *chosen*. Our path may be "rough and thorny," but we can rejoice amid the trials we face. We can look to Jesus, our "kind and loving Savior." He is our salvation and shield and delivers us from every fear.

Rutström prayed that God's people could be united in "one heart and soul," always focused on Jesus, "our Lord, and Savior King." He also prayed that the Spirit would unite us. We are "members of one body," and God desires that we "grow into a perfect whole."

Rutström left a legacy encouraging believers to focus on their relationship with Jesus. He encouraged believers to have a biblical *foundation* and be united body serving Jesus.

# The Glory of God

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JUDE 1

Although Johann Sebastian Bach was one of the most important composers in history, his primary goal was not success or riches but *pleasing* God. He wrote that the goal of music was not to entertain or demonstrate talent but to bring glory to God. He sought to provide spiritual truth in every piece he wrote.

Preparing for Christmas in 1734, he wrote an oratorio that told the story of Jesus' birth. This oratorio opens with a celebratory chorus that proclaimed, "Rejoice and be joyful, come, praise these days!" It was a cry to rejoice, "serve the Most High with cheerful choruses," and "honor His name!"

This oratorio was packed with prayer. Bach's plea? "O Jesus, set by me yourself your light, that I may discover and know what delights you."

Bach expressed wonder at Jesus' humility, amazed that the "great Lord and mighty King" would sleep in a manger. As Bach thought about Jesus, he offered his life to Him: "Take it! It is my spirit and mind, heart, soul, and courage, take it all, and may it please you well!"

After Bach's oratorio, he celebrated Jesus' triumph. Because of Him, we have victory!

Throughout this time of year, do not allow your heart to be dominated by celebrations and gifts. Make Jesus *your* focus. He has triumphed over sin and given *you* victory. Make it your goal to please Him and bring glory to God!

How can you honor Jesus throughout this holiday season?

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*To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*

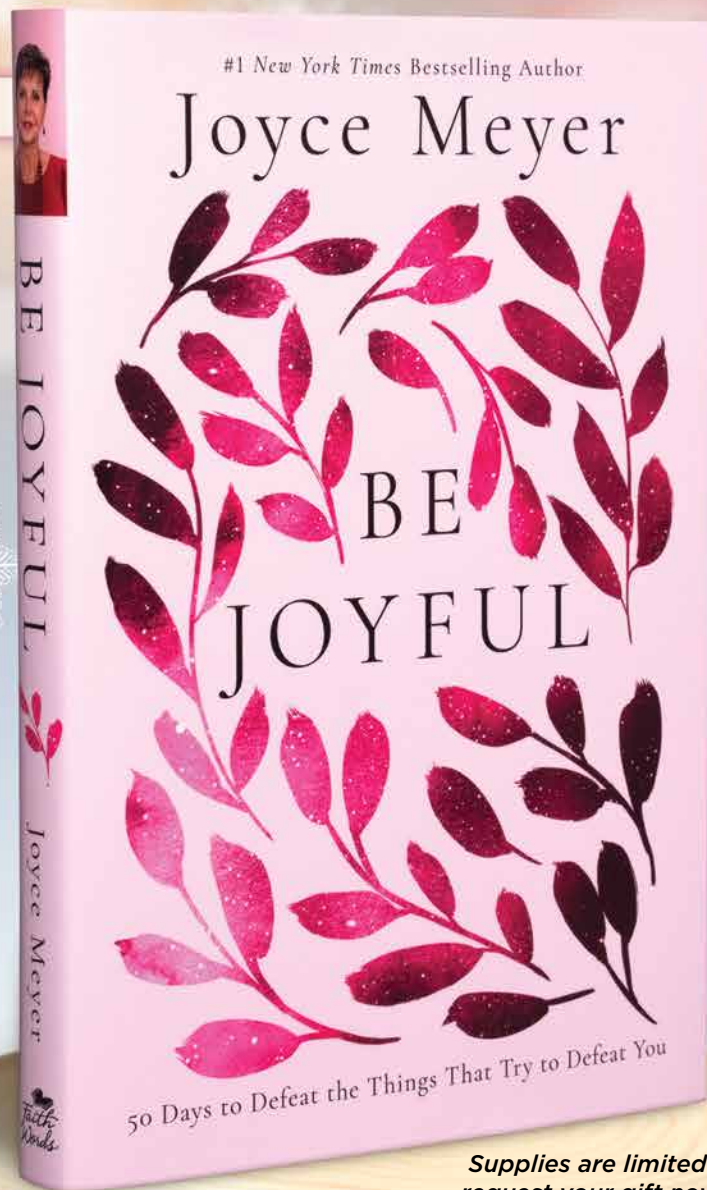
Jude 1:25 KJV

**PRAYER:**

Father, thank You for sending Jesus into this world. I want to bring You glory through everything I do. May my life please You. In Jesus' name, amen.



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*That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep.*

Luke 2:8 NLT

## Ordinary Shepherds

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

How ordinary the night must have seemed for these shepherds. There must have been no reason to anticipate that anything would be different. We can imagine these men in conversation, talking about mundane things – like their troubles, disputes, work conditions, and, of course, their sheep – with no obvious reason to feel encouraged.

We can imagine that the sky was particularly dark, lit only by twinkling stars. How alone they must have felt. Yet God was in their midst. Were these men conscious of God's presence? At that moment, He was with them. He knew their needs. He had great things in store for them.

Many people have similar attitudes as they look at their lives and the world they face. It is all too easy to feel alone, discouraged, overlooked, or taken for granted. Sometimes God can seem so distant. People can feel hopeless.

The story of these shepherds reminds us God is with us all the time. The Christmas story reminds us that His promises are true, and we can trust Him. He is always with us.

Spend time alone with God. Realize that He is with you, and you are not alone. Allow Him to take away your fears and give you peace and hope. He is with you even in the darkest of nights. He promises never to leave you. You can trust Him and embrace the future with joy.

### PRAYER:

Father, thank You that I am not alone and that You are with me. I trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

How can you tangibly remind yourself that God is always with you?

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## Rejoice!

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PHILIPPIANS 4

Today, some Christians celebrate what is called *Gaudete Sunday*. The title comes from the Latin words *gaudium* (joy) and *gaudeo*, which means to rejoice. *Gaudete* also was the first word in the text read for this day's liturgical church service.

In this Christmas season, it is appropriate to focus on joy, which is central to the Christmas celebration. The wise men “rejoiced with exceedingly great joy” when they saw the star that led them to baby Jesus (Matthew 2:10). When the angel told Zacharias that his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son (John the Baptist), the angel told him, “You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth” (Luke 1:14).

Perhaps the quintessential Christmas hymn “Joy to the Word” expresses clearly why Jesus' birth is an occasion filled with joy. Paul reminded the Philippian Christians that, in every circumstance, God can fill us with joy.

Some believers continue to celebrate Gaudete Sunday. Whether or not we share in this celebration, we can be filled with joy: Jesus was born to save us from our sins (Matthew 1:21). He will come again, and He has gone to prepare a place for us (John 14:2).

The world is full of problems, but God sent Jesus to give us hope. He died for our sins so that we might be forgiven and spend eternity with Him. He fills us with His Spirit and joy.

Reflect on the reasons you must be joyful now even in tough times.

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*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! [...] Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*

Philippians 4:4, 6

### PRAYER:

Father, I rejoice in all that You have done for me. Fill me with Your joy. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Give us this day our daily bread.*

Matthew 6:11

## God's Presence

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 6

When John Cennick was nine, he heard his dying aunt exclaim that the Lord had stood by her. Because of His presence, she could be “as bold as a lion.” John, who was born west of London on this day in 1718, felt he knew the Savior but did not have this confidence.

He found himself addicted to sinful habits, unable to change. At 13, he left school hoping to find work but gambled away much of his income.

One day, with his heart unbearably heavy, he entered a church to pray. As he knelt, he seemed to hear Jesus say, “I am your salvation.” Trusting in Him, the burdens rolled off. His desires changed. He spent the rest of his life serving Jesus, in particular writing poems and hymns.

Perhaps he made the most impact with a prayer designed for children to declare before meals. It was called, “Be Present at Our Table, Lord.” He hoped that this prayer would help believers focus not on food or the preparation but on Jesus, to remind them that we owe everything to Him (James 1:17).

Cennick's prayer was that God would “be here and everywhere adorned.” Shifting the focus toward eternity, he prayed, “grant that we may feast in paradise with thee.”

As you eat, be grateful for all God provides and thankful for what Jesus has done for us. Remember that Jesus is “*the bread of life*” (John 6:35).

Write a prayer giving God all the burdens weighing down your heart.

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## Your Heart

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 16

For centuries, Jesus' birth has been celebrated in the winter. This has led to traditions built around that time of year.

English poet Christina Rossetti illustrated that atmosphere with a poem she wrote called “In the Bleak Midwinter.” This became the basis for a carol, recently named the best Christmas carol in a poll of leading choirmasters and experts.

Rossetti used the imagery of winter to picture inhospitable conditions, with “frosty wind made moan” and the earth “hard as iron.” She imagined cold temperatures with snow falling. However, this was not the environment in which the Messiah, the King of kings was born. To keep His birth in context, Rossetti described the importance of His Second Coming – “Heaven cannot hold Him,” and “Heaven and earth shall flee away when He comes to reign.”

Even though Jesus is a mighty Savior, He was willing to *humble* Himself to be born in a stable. He could be worshiped by cherubim but was willing to be adored by common beasts of burden. Showing their reverence, angels and archangels gathered around Him as cherubim and seraphim thronged the air.

Rossetti made this personal, wrestling with the question, “What can I give Him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; if I were a Wise Man, I would do my part; yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.”

Give Jesus *your* heart. Your life. Your all.

Have you fully surrendered your heart to Jesus?

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*Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”*

Matthew 16:24

### PRAYER:

Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for all You have done for me. I surrender my life to You. In Your name, amen.



*It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost.*

1 Timothy 1:15 NASB

**PRAYER:**

Father, thank You for sending Jesus into this world to die for my sins. Use me to reach others with this Good News. In His name, amen.

What creative ways can you use to share the Gospel this Christmas season?

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# All About Jesus

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: 1 TIMOTHY 1

Many in our commercially crazed culture would be amazed to realize that the original focus of the Christmas celebration was not giving gifts or spreading goodwill but sharing the Gospel.

Believers in the first centuries of church history struggled amid a frequently hostile, pagan culture. How, they wondered, could they reach souls for Christ? They decided to focus on the birth of Jesus and make this an event everyone could embrace.

This was a reason Christmas was celebrated on December 25, a day to celebrate the Persian god of light. Church leaders picked this day because they wanted to capture the attention of people throughout society.

Christmas still presents an opportunity for evangelism and witnessing. On the surface, many people might be focused on parties, gifts, good times, and family, but the birth of Jesus remains at the heart of this story.

The carols declare the Gospel. The Christmas imagery, for all its commercialism, still draws upon the manger, the magi, baby Jesus, and other images of the season. Churches are filled with programs and the singing of timeless, Christ-centered music.

This also is a time when many are asking questions and seeking answers. What an opportunity to share the Gospel!

This season, ask God to open doors for you to share your faith and tell others what Jesus means to you. Tell them the real reason for the season.

# The Stable Scene

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

The stable where Jesus was born often has been pictured as a place filled with animals. While no animals were named in the Bible, various animals have been included in many paintings and featured in nativity scenes.

Many scenes include a donkey, carrying Mary toward Bethlehem and then resting in the stable. This image was featured in a carol called "Little Donkey," written by Eric Boswell.

His background was as an engineer, scientist, and physics lecturer, but he discovered that God had given him a musical gift. A publisher looking for a new carol surprisingly turned to Boswell, who wrote a song specifically appropriate for children.

In this popular carol, Boswell pictured this donkey plodding down a dusty road, carrying the pregnant Mary. Taking small liberties with the story, Boswell wrote, "Ring out those bells tonight, Bethlehem. Follow that star." The donkey is pictured carrying Mary. The prayer? "Do not falter, little donkey, there's a star ahead; it will guide you."

What made this carol so popular? Its simplicity. Its innocence. Its timelessness. Like the Christmas story itself, this carol moved the hearts of adults and children.

Reflect on the simplicity of the Christmas story, how Jesus was born of a virgin to bring salvation, how He is *Immanuel*, God with us (Isaiah 7:14). It is a story with a message so clear, so simple that even a child can understand and believe.

How are you trusting in the Star of Bethlehem to guide you this week?

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*She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.*

Luke 2:7 NLT

**PRAYER:**

Father, thank You for sending Jesus into this world. He is my Savior. My Lord. I trust Him. In His name, amen.

*Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.*

Psalms 25:16 ESV

## Lonely

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 25

According to a recent study, more than half of all US adults consider themselves lonely. Loneliness can be crippling. It can lead to depression and create an atmosphere of anxiety.

Loneliness is a problem for people of all races and income levels, and it impacts both men and women. Surprisingly, those who are young are more likely to feel lonely than those who are elderly.

Parents or guardians are particularly prone to loneliness, perhaps because of the impact of being apart from family members who have moved away from home. Physical ailments are another barometer. Those with health issues are much more likely to feel lonely.

Loneliness can be a problem during the Christmas holidays as people remember special days from the past. They miss relationships and happier times, and they feel left out.

If you know someone who is lonely, reach out to them during this time of year. Phone them. Visit them. Pray with them. Invite them to church. Bring them a meal.

How about you? If you face loneliness, remember that God is with you right now. Fill your mind and heart with His Word. Spend time with Him in prayer. Confess His promises. Worship and praise Him. Sing songs and hymns of faith.

If you are able, reach out to other believers in your church or community. Seek Christian fellowship. Seek to be an instrument for the Lord, and minister to the lonely.

How can you practically reach out to a lonely person this season?

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## Our Day of Joy

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

Andrew L. Skoog was born in Sweden on this day in 1856. After his family immigrated to America, Andrew had a very diversified career as a church music director, schoolteacher, organist, newspaper editor, and Sunday School superintendent. For several years, he served on the Minneapolis city council. He also wrote more than 300 hymns and anthems.

In his biographical profile, J. Irving Erickson described how Skoog "wrote songs that were simple, rhythmic, joyous, and full of hope." This was never clearer than his Christmas anthem, "Our Day of Joy Is Here Again."

As Erickson described, "Skoog caught the joy of Christmas in simple fashion." He communicated the basic story of the Gospel in just a few words.

This began with a cry to join the heavenly choir, singing "with voices clear and strong," singing "Glory to our God...glory to our Lord and King." It was a reminder of their message of peace and goodwill.

Skoog reminded listeners, "When darkness lay upon this earth, a glorious light did shine." God demonstrated His love by sending a gift of priceless worth.

Reflecting the humility of being born in a manger, it was so amazing that God's own Son should humble Himself so dramatically to become an example for all of us.

The world is full of people who know elements of the Christmas story. But how many know the Savior?

How can you proclaim your joy of the Savior's birth to a weary world?

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*The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God.*

Luke 2:20 KJV

### PRAYER:

Father, help me to reach the lost with the Good News. Thank You for filling my life with joy. In Jesus' name, amen.

*An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*

Luke 2:9 NIV

## Powerful Messengers

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

In his classic painting *Mystic Nativity*, completed circa 1500, Sandro Botticelli portrayed his vision of the scene at the birth of Jesus. Botticelli pictured angels hovering above Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus. He imagined them as winged creatures, filled with innocence.

Many people throughout the ages have had this same concept of angels. It's been reproduced in songs, paintings, and poems, but the Bible gives us a different picture. These angels were *powerful* and *awesome*. Angels had the *power* to destroy entire armies (2 Kings 19:35) and could deliver judgment (Revelation 14:19).

We see angels outside Bethlehem telling shepherds about the birth of Jesus with dramatic and *awe-inspiring* impact. These men were stunned to witness "*a great company of the heavenly host*" (Luke 2:13) dedicated to praising and worshiping God and serving Him.

The shepherds learned that angels could be *frightening*. These weren't the innocent creatures of Botticelli's painting. The sight of these angels caused the shepherds to be "*terrified*."

That night, these angels stressed a message of praise, saying, "*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests*" (vs. 14).

This Christmas when you think about angels, remember the reaction of those shepherds. Think about how *overwhelming* it must have been for such awe-inspiring creatures to be united in praise to God. Join with the angels and give glory to God.

### PRAYER:

Father, You are worthy to be praised! Thank You for sending Jesus to save me from my sins! I worship You and exalt You. In Jesus' name, amen.

How well does your picture of heavenly messengers line up with the Bible?

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## Faithful Generations

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 1

Generations passed. Beginning with Abraham, Jesus' genealogy includes a vast variety of characters – men like David, who was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22); kings like Hezekiah, who generally served God faithfully; as well as rulers like Manasseh, who "*did evil in the sight of the LORD*" (2 Chronicles 33:2) were all in Jesus' family.

Some in this genealogy were generally righteous, some generally ungodly. Yet through every generation, God's promises remained true. He had promised to send a Messiah who would save His people from their sins. In the "*fullness of time*" (Galatians 4:4), Jesus was born.

Men and women may have been flawed, but God remained faithful. The Bible tells the story of His faithfulness and how His promises remained true generation after generation.

God's promises were true no matter who was king. They were true when His people followed Him and when they rejected His Word. They were true when His people were victorious in battle and when they suffered embarrassing defeats. They were true when they ruled an expanding empire and when they were taken into captivity. They were true whether the people believed them.

God continues to accomplish His purposes, despite the flaws of men and women. His ways can surprise us. He can seem silent, as if unaware of world conditions. We may not always recognize His presence, but He remains faithful. We can trust in Him.

How has God proven His faithfulness in your own life this year?

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*All the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.*

Matthew 1:17

### PRAYER:

Father, thank You that You are faithful. Help me to be faithful. I trust in You. In Jesus' name, amen.



*Therefore the LORD Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and she will name Him Immanuel.*

Isaiah 7:14 NASB

## O Come, Immanuel

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ISAIAH 7

John Neale was a brilliant student with a passion for the Gospel. After he finished preparing for the ministry, some were concerned that he was too evangelical, too different. As a result, as a minister, he was assigned to the remote island of Madeira, located five hundred miles west of Morocco.

It was there in 1851 that he discovered “O Come, O Come, Immanuel,” a hymn written in the ninth century by an unknown author. Neale translated the hymn into English, and it soon became a favorite Christmas hymn that is still sung worldwide.

This hymn has a powerful Messianic message, telling of the hope Immanuel would bring freedom to Israel, which is a “captive” and “mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.” There is joy in the promise that “Immanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.”

The melody accompanying these words is in a minor key reminding us of our problems on earth as well as the hymn’s ancient origins. The text reminds us that Jesus will “take us home.” Truly, we are exiles and should be eager for Him to come again.

At Christmas, we celebrate that Immanuel has *already* come. We know that He is with us in our daily lives, and we rejoice that He is our soon-coming King.

When you sing this song, renew your declaration that Jesus is Immanuel, Messiah. In every circumstance, be of good cheer. Because of Jesus, God is with you!

Reflect on the fact that Immanuel is always with you – even in tough times.

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## A Glimpse of Heaven

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

These shepherds spent their lives carrying on traditions, caring for sheep in patterns established by previous generations. Their work went on day after day, in all seasons of the year, in heat and cold. There were no sick days or vacations. We can imagine how monotonous their lives could have seemed. They were not celebrities or considered important people. They were just shepherds who were taken for granted.

God supernaturally spoke to these men. An angel stood before them, his appearance *electric*. They were *terrified* even after the angel assured them that he brought a message of “*great joy*.”

Astonished, they heard an announcement of the birth of “*a Savior, who is Christ the Lord*.” Amazingly, they were invited to witness this child, for this was an event for “*all people*,” even ordinary men like these shepherds.

What they saw must have been a glimpse of Heaven itself. They saw a multitude of angels praising God, giving Him glory. The sights and sounds must have been amazing. It was a place filled with worship, *overwhelming* in splendor, *breathtaking*.

As we celebrate the Christmas season, we can experience a glimpse of Heaven for ourselves. We can join in praising God when we realize that Jesus came to set all of us free. He gives every life meaning, even ordinary people like these shepherds. Jesus points us to the Father, so we can spend eternity with Him.

When do you feel like you've been given glimpses of Heaven?

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*An angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them... 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.”*

Luke 2:9-10

### PRAYER:

Father, thank You for sending Jesus to be my Savior. Thank You for giving me meaning. I look forward to spending eternity with You. In Jesus' name, amen.

*An angel of the Lord suddenly stood near them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.*

Luke 2:9 NASB

**PRAYER:**

Father, thank You that Your angels are with me. Thank You for the victory they provide. In Jesus' name, amen.

When have you felt the presence of angels?

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# God Sent His Angels

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

Phillips Brooks had a special passion for children, and he wrote the popular carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem" for a Sunday School. He also developed a special appreciation for the role angels played in the lives of God's people.

Born in December 1835, Brooks went on to become the rector of important churches in Philadelphia and Boston. In 1877 he wrote a hymn called "God Hath Sent His Angels to the Earth Again."

Brooks began by celebrating the role of angels in announcing Jesus' birth, but he also emphasized that angels were present throughout His ministry. As they celebrated His birth, the angels declared, "Peace, goodwill on earth."

Brooks recalled how faithful angels were by Jesus' side when He was tempted in the wilderness. Then, on the night before He was betrayed, "Faithful angels gathered at his side; and when in the garden, grief and pain and care bowed him down with anguish, they were with him there."

Brooks recalled how angels still help "all his faithful children." The Bible tells us that angels are God's special messengers, but they also protect His people. His angel "encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them" (Psalm 34:7).

God has sent His angels to be present and to watch over you. God cares for you and loves you. Be grateful for the protection God provides for you through His angels.

# The Supernatural

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 1

For many people, Christmas is just a secular holiday. It's merely an event to encourage good feelings and a time for parties, decorations, shopping, and gifts. However, the Bible tells a different story.

First, Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, the King of kings, the Son of God, the Messiah. It was a spiritual event of cosmic importance, filled with the *supernatural*. Just think about the miracles that took place, beginning with the virgin birth itself.

God communicated through dreams. Three times an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream: to tell him that Mary had conceived a child of the Holy Spirit, to take Mary and baby Jesus to Egypt, and then to return from Egypt. In addition, God communicated with the magi through a dream (and the stars).

Think about the role played by angels. Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she would give birth to a Son. An angel appeared to Zacharias, father of John the Baptist. Angels appeared to shepherds announcing Jesus' birth.

This Christmas, remember that we serve a *supernatural* God. He created all things. As Gabriel declared, "Nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). That message is still true!

Don't allow your life to be dominated by commercialism and materialism or by temporary things that will not last. God is the God of miracles. Things we consider supernatural are *natural* to Him. Call on Him. Expect miracles. He can do *anything*!

What does the Christmas season mean to you?

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*An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."*

Matthew 1:20 NASB

**PRAYER:**

Father, I commit these needs to You: \_\_\_\_\_. Thank You for the answer! All things are possible! I have faith in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

*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."*

Luke 1:19

### PRAYER:

Father, help me to stay focused on You. Thank You that Jesus was born and came to die for my sins. In Jesus' name, amen.

How can you use your holiday decorations to focus on Jesus' birth?

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## So Glad!

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: LUKE 1

Decorating Christmas trees is a custom celebrated in many cultures. It was a tradition in Norway, home of composer Marie Wexelsen. Marie felt it was important to keep this tradition in perspective though. This was her inspiration for writing the hymn, "I Am so Glad Each Christmas Eve."

Her thought was that this hymn would be sung when the tree was being decorated to allow parents to teach their children about the true meaning of the Christmas celebration.

It was a night of gladness, "the night of Jesus' birth," when the star shone like the sun and "angels sang on earth." It was all about the birth of "the little Child in Bethlehem," the King who "came down from Heaven above to help a world in need." It was a reminder that He is the Son of God, and "still He loves His little ones and hears them when they pray."

As we sing His praises, He opens the "palace of the King." Parents were encouraged to explain the symbolism of the tree, "which fills the room with light" to tell of the "wondrous star that made the dark world bright." This song reminds children that the star continues to shine, pointing us toward Jesus.

However you celebrate Christmas, remember to focus on Jesus. People of all ages need to be reminded that He loves them. We are called to share the joy of the season.

## Jesus Left His Throne

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PHILIPPIANS 2

Emily Elliot was puzzled. A compassionate person, she showed her concern for children through her Sunday School work. As the daughter of the rector of St. Mark's Church in Brighton, England, she had a burden for those who were ill and even published a book of hymns designed for the sick. But she still struggled to understand why Jesus would leave the splendor of Heaven to come to earth.

As she thought and prayed, she realized how much Jesus wanted to save people from their sins. This was so important that He was willing to humble Himself and become a servant, even to the point of dying on a cross. What *amazing* love!

Pondering this mystery, she wrote a hymn, "Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne." She realized Jesus left Heaven to come "to earth for me," yet there was "found no room" for Him in Bethlehem. Not wanting this to happen to her, she prayed, "O come to my heart, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for Thee."

This hymn, first sung at her father's church, reminds us that Jesus came to give us life and reach everyone with this Good News! Sadly, millions reject this gift. They have no room in their hearts for the Savior.

Make sure there is room in *your* heart for Jesus. Put Him on the throne of *your* life. Allow His love to flow through you so that others may know Him.

How have you made room in your heart for Jesus this Christmas season?

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*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who...existed in the form of God...emptied Himself by taking the form of a bond-servant...He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death: death on a cross.*

Philippians 2:5-8 NASB

### PRAYER:

Jesus, I humble myself before You. Thank you that You came to earth to die for me. Help me share Your love with others. In Your name, amen.



*The wisdom of this world is foolishness to God... The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise; he knows they are worthless. So don't boast about following a particular human leader. For everything belongs to you.*

1 Corinthians 3:19-21 NLT

**PRAYER:**

Father, show me how I can prepare for the future. Give me an understanding of the conditions I face. I trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Reflect on what you hope to accomplish with God's help in the coming year.

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## Present and Future

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 3

The pages of history are filled with explanations about the events taking place and projections about the future. Many predictions are just speculation, but some reflect confident conclusions.

Many historians are convinced about their accounts of the past, while scholars are sure about the meaning of trends they observe. Many politicians confidently lobby for their recommendations about laws and policies. Even our friends and family can be positive about their understanding of the issues we face and the choices we must make.

We can look back at the predictions people have made in the past and see how often they have been wrong. Even the most definite predictions have often proven to be misguided.

Our understanding is *limited*. This is true for even the most intelligent observers, the most insightful analysts, the most informed, and the most famous and popular.

The Bible reminds us, *"The wisdom of this world is foolishness to God."* As Paul wrote, *"We see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror."* Everything we know *"is partial and incomplete"* (1 Corinthians 13:12). God does know the future, and He knows everything about the present.

As you approach the beginning of a new year, commit your way to Him, confident that He will direct your path. Continually seek His wisdom. He understands the present and already knows the future. Place your hope in Him.

## Planning for Tomorrow

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PROVERBS 27

History is filled with predictions that, in retrospect, can seem humorous. Many predictions made by people who, at the time, seemed able to predict the future have been proven wrong. Often, they were very wrong.

In 1903, a bank executive warned that the automobile was only a fad while "the horse is here to stay." How wrong he was! Equally misguided was the warning the father of financier J.P. Morgan made to his son. His prediction? Electricity was just a passing curiosity.

In 1876, the president of Western Union dismissed the telephone as a "toy" when Alexander Graham Bell offered to sell him the patent. His comment? "The idea is idiotic on the face of it. Furthermore, why would any person want to use this ungainly and impractical device?"

We can laugh at predictions like these. However, it is likely that some predictions made today might seem just as foolish in the coming days.

What will happen in the coming year? The media is full of speculation. Politicians make their predictions. Economists are filled with their guesses. Each of us has thoughts and even worries about our personal lives.

As you think about what's coming in 2023, remember that God knows what will happen. He can help you prepare for the future. Humble yourself before Him. Seek His wisdom. Ask Him to guide your choices and help you to be prepared.

Reflect on a time when you planned without consulting God.

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*Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.*

Proverbs 27:1

**PRAYER:**

Father, I commit my future to You. Guide me. Help me to be prepared. I trust in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Do not remember the former things... Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

Isaiah 43:18-19

**PRAYER:**

Father, I commit this situation to You: \_\_\_\_\_. Thank You that all things are possible with You. I trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

What impossible situation do you need to trust God with right now?

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## Road in the Wilderness

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ISAIAH 43

We tend to approach life based on our own perceptions, experiences, and knowledge. We may “remember the former things” and focus on the way things have been in the past. We can see things as they are and assume they always will stay in that condition.

God says that He can do *new things*. He can *change* any situation and reshape any object. As He told the prophet Isaiah, we might see a wilderness and assume it *always* will be a wilderness that cannot be crossed. God says He can create a path through that wilderness no matter how impossible this might appear.

We might see a desert and assume it always will be dry, a place where vegetation cannot grow. It is difficult to sustain life, but no matter how barren a place may seem, God can make *decisive* changes. We may see a desert, but He can create “*rivers*” during this desert. This means that He can produce results that seem impossible and overwhelming.

We must not think of God in terms of our limits. The Bible urges us to realize that nothing is *impossible* to Him; He has no limits or boundaries.

As you face the future, don't limit yourself to your understanding. In whatever situation you find yourself, reflect on God's creative power and limitless character. He is the One who said He would do a new thing.

## The Puzzles of Life

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ECCLESIASTES 8

John Spilsbury was looking for a way to teach geography to children. Born in England in 1739, he developed a simple idea. Drawing on his engraving skills, he attached a world map to wood and carved each country into a separate piece. Children would be challenged to fit the pieces together. In the process, they would gain a greater sense of the world and see the part played by each country.

Spilsbury's idea became an enormous success, spawning the development of many types of puzzles, all based on the same concept of breaking down whole pictures into smaller parts and challenging participants to fit the pieces together.

These puzzles give us a picture of life, which can seem like a giant riddle. Our challenge is to put these pieces together, seeking to understand the whole.

This is a never-ending process. The Bible tells us that, at every stage, “*Our knowledge is partial and incomplete.*” We never can know more than “*part of the whole picture*” (1 Corinthians 13:9 NLT). We even are warned that God has made it impossible for us to “*find out the work that is done under the sun*” (Ecclesiastes 8:17).

Ultimately, this process is designed to help us realize our limits and *turn us to God* to seek His wisdom.

As you face the beginning of a new year, ask God to give you wisdom about the future and help you put together all the pieces.

What puzzle pieces are you hoping to fit together in the new year?

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*Then I saw all the work of God... For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.*

Ecclesiastes 8:17

**PRAYER:**

Father, I seek Your wisdom and direction for my life. Guide me. I commit my way to You. Thank You for directing my path. In Jesus' name, amen.

*“You also were with Jesus of Galilee.” [...] He denied it with an oath, “I do not know the Man!” [...] “Surely you also are one of them”... He began to curse and swear. [...] Immediately a rooster crowed. [...] He went out and wept bitterly.*

Matthew 26:69-75

**PRAYER:**

Father, I confess my need for You. Forgive my sins. Thank You for Your power, forgiveness, and the opportunity to begin anew. In Jesus’ name, amen.

What sins do you need to confess today?

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# New Beginning

TODAY’S BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 26

Peter must have felt like a complete failure. Just hours earlier, he confidently told Jesus, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You” (v. 35). Then just a brief time later, he did this very thing, denying Jesus three times in very public settings. He even swore that he did not know Him.

It was a devastating moment. After realizing what he had done, Peter “went out and wept bitterly.” This could have been the defining moment of his life. He could have given up and concluded that Jesus never would be able to forgive or use him again.

This same Peter became the rock of the church, used by God in mighty ways. He preached before thousands of people on the day of Pentecost, boldly declared the Word (Acts 2:14-36), fearlessly appeared before rulers, rejected compromise, and declared the truth of the Gospel (Acts 4:8-12).

As you think about your life, you may have made mistakes. You may feel like a failure. You may have said or done things that displeased God. The Bible tells us that no matter what you have done, God can give you a fresh start. If you confess your sins, God promises to forgive you (1 John 1:9).

Right now, stand on God’s Word. Allow Him to set you free and begin anew. Let Him give you a clean slate!

# New Songs

TODAY’S BIBLE READING: PSALM 33

Johann Steuerlein played a vital role in local politics in central Germany, but his greatest impact came as a composer. Unusual for his time, Steuerlein focused on writing biblically based songs. He is said to have converted the entire Bible into songs.

Facing the beginning of a new year and writing out of his personal life, he wrote a particularly appropriate hymn, “With This New Year We Raise New Songs.” Believers could praise the Lord for His support when they faced difficulties, and Jesus, the Prince of Peace, would help His people serve Him.

Knowing the pressures we face, Steuerlein prayed that we would remember the truth that God would “keep from us superstitious fears” and banish false doctrine. He prayed God would “guard us against all sin” and renew us from within so that we would realize His mercy knows no end and we could depend on His forgiveness.

Steuerlein prayed that God would help His people lead holy lives, remembering that the day will come when He will wipe away all tears. Until that day, he prayed that He would help us maintain “our faith and love, till we behold Thy face above.”

As you prepare to end one year and begin another, ask God for His perspective on your past. He can give you discernment as you enter a new year. All the while, boldly sing songs of joy and trust Him.

In which areas of your life do you need discernment in the coming year?

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*Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous!... Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings! Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.*

Psalm 33:1-3 ESV

**PRAYER:**

Father, thank You for all Your blessings of the past. Grant me Your peace, favor, and wisdom in the coming year. In Jesus’ name, amen.



# The Ultimate SUPER hero

Even Stretch Armstrong  
can't compare to our living Savior.

Most everybody remembers that favorite toy they received at Christmas.

For me, it was Stretch Armstrong. You know, that muscle-bound action figure made of latex and goo that you could stretch around the earth's orbit and back. I got him when I was six.

He had been on my wish list awhile and was one of those gifts you just can't wait to open. Somewhere between a jumbo bag of licorice and a handmade sweater from my grandmother that felt like burlap and porcupine quills...I tore open the wrapping. And there he was...Stretch Armstrong.

The superhero of superheroes.

He was the essence of strength and resilience. You could pull, prod, or poke his body, and no matter what kind of abuse you dished out, he would always shrink back to his original shape – good as new.

And he was never vanquished by his enemies. He was never outdone by any plot unfolding against him. Even if he was pinned down by enemy fire – trapped between a box of corn flakes and a toaster oven – he would find a way to escape and defeat his nemesis with his pliable powers and superhuman strength.

To me, Stretch was the epitome of tenacity and courage. The paragon of goodness and decency. I considered him to be the perfect superhero – and yet, as I grew older, I realized that he was but a mere shadow of the divine superhero my heart actually yearned for.

Now that's not a slam against Stretch or anyone wearing a mask, cape, or black underwear, but I believe there is something within us that longs for the true Redeemer of our souls. Someone who can conquer our enemy and give our hearts eternal joy.

Jesus is that someone...and nobody in the vast pantheon of superheroes can hold a candle to His goodness. Jesus conquered death and was resurrected just for us. He leads us to salvation because He loves us enough to give us life with Him in Heaven.

All things must submit to Him because He was given all authority in Heaven and earth (Matt. 28:19). And He understands us intimately and completely. He *gets* our weaknesses and struggles because He Himself was tempted in the world just like we are.

There's an expression that says, "The Gospel is the only story where the Hero dies for the villain." Well, in our case I believe that's true. We are all sinners who have fallen tragically short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). All of us are villains because our sinful nature runs contrary to God's ways, putting us at enmity with Him.

That is why Jesus is better than any superhero. He doesn't just defeat our sinful nature – He transforms us into what He is. You can pick any character out there –

Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Spiderman, or even Stretch himself – and all have cool powers and abilities. But none of them are in the business of transforming us to look like them.

Only Jesus Christ wants to make us into *His* image. And He wants to supernaturally fill us, so we can fully experience the power of His love and grace in our lives.

So let's rejoice this Christmas because we have the One who has rescued us from our sin and darkness. We can trust in Him because He knows our name and loves us with a love that conquered death itself.

We don't have to look to a world full of fictitious superheroes. We just have to look to the one Savior that delivers on His promises in His everlasting Word.

Jesus. The living Savior. The ultimate superhero.

The One who is worthy of our worship. And the One who died so we *all* could live.

*Merry Christmas.* ❖



**Roone Acree** is the senior staff writer and editor in chief of *Inspiration Magazine* at Inspiration Ministries.



# Looking for the Perfect Gift for Jesus?

**Sow seeds to win the lost!**

Christmas is a great time of year to remember this powerful truth:

*“God so loved the world that He GAVE...” (John 3:16).*

He gave us something of much greater value than any earthly possession: God gave us His SON!

Sowing seeds into the good ground of Inspiration Ministries is your chance to give God a gift.

Your seeds allow us to sow the Gospel around the world every second of every day. In 2022, our *Love of God* salvation video was presented to more than 30 million precious souls!

And over 4.8 million of them have said YES to Jesus as their Lord so far this year! One day in Heaven, millions of people you never met on earth will thank you for sending them the Gospel.

Remember, your gift, in the enclosed response form, only counts toward your 2022 taxes if it's postmarked by **December 31**.

Or you can sow an immediate Christmas seed for souls at [inspiration.org/souls](https://www.inspiration.org/souls). God bless you!

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# A Merry Heart...

does good, like medicine. – Proverbs 17:22



What's the most popular Christmas wine?

*“But, I don't like Brussels sprouts!”*

How do chickens dance at the Christmas party?

*Chick to chick!*

Why would you invite a mushroom to a Christmas party?

*He's a fungi to be with.*

Where do sheep get their hair cut?

*At the baa-baa shop.*

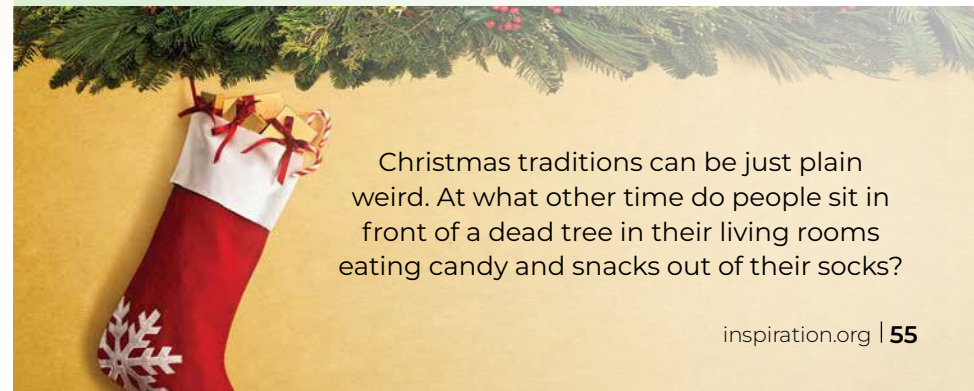
What happened when the snowman annoyed the snowwoman?

*She gave him the cold shoulder.*



Got some clean, Christian humor you'd like to share?

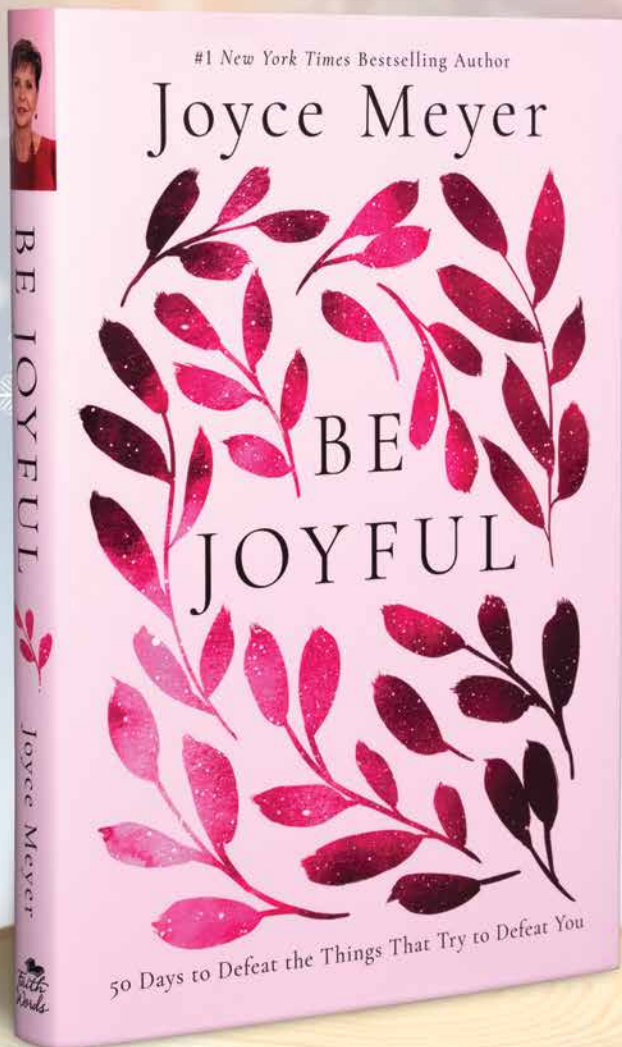
Email it to: [MerryHeart@inspiration.org](mailto:MerryHeart@inspiration.org)



Christmas traditions can be just plain weird. At what other time do people sit in front of a dead tree in their living rooms eating candy and snacks out of their socks?

# The **JOY** of the Lord Is Your **STRENGTH!**

Leap into 2023 with fresh joy and power!



You are designed and equipped to live with JOY! Let Joyce Meyer guide you on the path to victory with her powerful book *Be Joyful: 50 Days to Defeat the Things that Try to Defeat You!*

**Turn to page 28**  
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receive your  
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