



**25 DAY
ADVENT
DEVOTIONAL**

meet Him at the
manger

STUART & JILL BRISCOE



Meet Him at the Manger – 25-day Advent Devotional

By Stuart & Jill Briscoe

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25-DAY ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

meet Him at the *manger*

It's easy to see Christmas as bright lights and glittering gifts. But seasonal joys don't sustain the soul like Scripture's message of Immanuel—God with us. In this 25-day Advent Devotional, Stuart and Jill Briscoe encourage you to consider the true joy of Christmas. With heartwarming stories, inspirational verse, and biblical teaching, they cut through distractions to the real miracle of Christmas: God with us; Immanuel in the manger.

by Stuart & Jill Briscoe

DAY 1

What Advent Is All About

Luke 2:11-12

There are certain signals we all recognize that warn us Christmas is on its way. The day after Thanksgiving, the busiest shopping day of the year, reminds us that Christmas is near. Holiday advertising is everywhere we look and in everything we hear. Christmas jingles won't let us forget what's just around the corner. We're told of every financing plan imaginable to ensure that we can afford all the gifts we "need" to buy for all the people on our growing list. Websites assume their "Christmas look," and retailers put on their most elaborate displays. Families also begin the task of tying all their loose ends together—in the hope that, for a few days at least, they can "be a family" in the holiday spirit.

The most significant indicator, however, that a special day is drawing near is on our church calendar: the beginning of Advent. THE SEASON OF ADVENT IS THE TIME WE PREPARE, NOT FOR EXTRA EXPENDITURES OF CASH, BUT TO REMEMBER THE CHRIST CHILD WHO CAME TO LIVE AMONG US. We attempt, once again, to consider that God actually assumed our humanity and was born and entered our world to secure our redemption.

"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:11)

So while we will no doubt be caught up in all the hurried activity of the Christmas season, let us also take time this Advent to prepare our hearts to welcome once again the God who laid aside His glory and assumed our humanity because of His great love for us. There are few truths in this world that can be more wonderful, more startling, more exciting than this.

Dear Lord, for some of us the Christmas story is so familiar that it's become ho-hum. Please deliver us from this kind of response to your wonderful Good News. Let us see your glory in fresh ways. Open our hearts to the hallelujah chorus of the angelic hosts. Help us to seek You as diligently as the wise men. Draw men, women, boys and girls to Yourself this Christmas. May we all experience Christmas anew in our hearts. In Christ's name, Amen.

DAY 2

A History of Anticipation

Luke 2:28-38

Half the fun of Christmas is waiting for its arrival. Children, and many adults, can hardly stand the tantalizing anticipation of fun and gifts. But even apart from Christmas, a lot of people spend their lives waiting. They wait for the perfect love, or the perfect job, or the perfect home, or the perfect situation. And sadly, these people are waiting for things that will never appear... because they don't exist.

This is one of life's absurdities—waiting on unrealistic hopes. In this sense, waiting is a tragic waste of time.

Others, however, are waiting for something sure and substantial. Their hopes have a foundation. And the assurance of their hope gives them strength to carry on, sometimes in very difficult circumstances.

The nation of Israel had a long tradition of waiting. We see in the Old Testament that people in every generation had set their hopes on what God would do. From Abraham to Elijah, God's people eagerly anticipated the fulfillment of all His promises.

Centuries later, in the New Testament, we find the tradition of waiting continued. In Luke 2, which tells the story of Jesus' birth and the events that followed, we find the story of two people who were waiting. One was Anna. She was looking forward to the "redemption of Jerusalem." The other was Simeon, who was waiting for the "consolation of Israel." They, like their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, were eagerly waiting for God to burst into their circumstances and do what He had promised to do.

Then, when the Christ child was born, both Anna and Simeon took Jesus in their arms and rejoiced. They saw the baby Jesus as the answer to their waiting.

Coming up to them at that very moment, [Anna] gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:38)

Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." (Luke 2:28-32)

Reflection:

DAY 3

Light for All

Luke 2:30-32

How tragic it is that people often live in despair, believing what they have is all there is to being alive. And yet, what tremendous consolation to realize that **THERE IS MUCH MORE TO LIFE THAN OUR PRESENT TROUBLE.**

The Israelites who paid attention to their heritage knew that there was more. Their people had hoped in a God who brought something more to life's experience. But for many years, the people outside of Israel's borders had no such hope. They didn't have the prophecies, the promise of blessing.

When Simeon looked upon the baby Jesus in the temple, he said an incredible thing:

*"For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."
(Luke 2:30-32)*

This child was the hope not only for the Jews, but for all other people as well. And the Gentiles certainly needed some light to banish their hopeless despair. Consider what some of their philosophers were saying at the time, "Best of all for mortals is to never have been born. But for those who have been born, to die as soon as possible is best."

Gentile sages regarded life as punishment and birth as humanity's greatest misfortune. The world was evil. Life on earth brought sorrow. This earthly body was a prison of the spirit. Even if there was no hope of a hereafter, the grave would be a welcome place of rest.

See, some people spend their lives waiting, but they don't know what they're waiting for. They only know that there must be more to life. Others have had a picture of hope for centuries, and they are waiting, too. **THE GREAT NEWS IS THAT THE OBJECT OF OUR ANTICIPATION HAS COME TO US.** Christmas commemorates the end of a long, long wait: The consolation of Israel, and the light of revelation to the Gentiles.

God of perfect timing, Word of wisdom rare,
Eternal God, incredible to see you sleeping there.
How can it be, dear Lord of life, You came to tell us all,
Our only hope of Heaven lay within that cattle stall.

Many ways to Jesus, seekers take to find,
Many people looking for a Savior for mankind.
Many different wonderings, for many want to know,
Just who was born at Bethlehem a long time ago.

Was He just a good man, a teacher kind and true?
Or was it God who came to Earth to save a chosen few?
Was it all a story, improbable and wild,
Or God that day, in bed of hay, a tiny human child?

What do I know of Jesus and His changing, saving grace?
What difference is there in my life, has Christmas taken place?
How dare I live a selfish life when God gave His for me,
The choice is mine, and now's the time to let Him set me free!

So Christmas now this season could be a different thing,
This year I could accept Him, and hear the angels sing.
So as I bow, right here, right now, and call upon His name,
My world, because of Christmas, will never be the same.

God of Perfect Timing, Jill Briscoe © 2011

DAY 4

The Visit

Luke 1:76-79

There are so many ways to celebrate Christmas. It's different in America than in England, our home. And those of German, Korean, Italian, or other heritage would agree that Americans celebrate Christmas in very different ways from their own countries.

When we first came to live in America, we experienced our first American Christmas soon after arriving. A number of traditions and terms seemed strange to us and the children. For instance, "Father Christmas" became "Santa Claus." But it was fun seeing Christmas celebrated in a different way.

All these years later, I'm not always sure which terms are English and which are American. But one word I do remember well is *visit*. Now, in England, a visit doesn't mean that you just drop by for a while some afternoon. It means to come and stay—most surely overnight and probably several successive overnights.

A couple of weeks after moving here, Stuart said to me, "There are eight or ten people coming to visit." So, I took a whole day making up that many beds. I thought, *How am I going to provide sleeping quarters for all these people? I wonder how long they are coming for?*

When Stuart came home, he asked, "What are these beds doing all over the place?" I said, "Well, you said all these people were coming to visit!"

Sometimes I prefer the King James Version of the Bible because the words simply hold more meaning for me. I love the way the song of Zachariah reads in Luke 1:76-79:

"And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow

of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

The Dayspring has come to visit us, and this is certainly the English sense of the word. (I knew God was an Englishman all the time!) Jesus came the first time to earth to stay a long overnight—33 years of visiting. He didn't just drop in; He came with the purpose of staying in the guest room of our lives. Though we often put Him in the “stable,” so to speak, He didn't come for that reason. He came to stay. He came to settle in.

Reflection:

DAY 5

Visiting Made Real

Luke 1:76-79

Why has Christ come? What has He come to do on His visit? Consider again the song of Zachariah:

“And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:76-79 KJV)

The Greek word for visit means something like a doctor who is coming to see a sick patient. Somebody decides that this person is so sick the doctor must move in to take care of the person. The doctor is saying, “I need to visit this person, to observe her, to reflect on this illness, to find a cure.” The Dayspring on High, Jesus, the Dawn of Heaven, came to our world to stay overnight, to settle in, to look at this sin-sick person called the human race. He came for a long-term visit in order to assess the damage, diagnose the problem, and establish a cure.

We have been visited by the Dawn from Heaven—not just for a brief time, but long enough to make a difference. And Jesus came not that we might be host to Him, but to settle in and take care of us.

Jesus did bring some of His “home” with Him, however, which is heaven in our hearts now and in eternity to come.

Dawn in my darkness, deep in my heart,
Tell all the shadows to swiftly depart.
Send out your love light, dispelling despair,
Dawn in my darkness, tell me you're there.

Dawn in the drabness of dreary days,
Color my life with perpetual praise.
Paint with your paintbrush a heavenly view.
Dawn in my darkness, tell me it's you.

Dawn in my darkness, bring me new hope,
Wake up my spirit and help me to cope.
Use me to tell others, just who you are.
My dayspring, my sunrise, my bright morning star.

Dawn in My Darkness, Jill Briscoe © 1996

DAY 6

Christmas: The Divine Initiative

Isaiah 9:2-7

If God had not taken the initiative to redeem fallen humanity by sending His Son into the world, there would have been no incarnation, no Christ, no Gospel, no reconciliation with Him. If God had not acted, there would be no resurrection, no working of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and no revelation of God instructing us how to love. I'm so grateful that God took the initiative.

As Isaiah's well-loved prophecy describes:

*The people who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined....
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 9:2,6-7 NKJV)*

By saying, “*The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this,*” God is essentially saying, “I am the God of unshakable plans. I will accomplish everything I intend to accomplish, and nobody—*nobody*—will frustrate my plans.”

The title *Lord of hosts* means, “I am Commander in Chief of heaven’s innumerable angels and unbelievable resources.” The Lord of hosts stands, not only as a God of unshakable plans, but of unlimited resources as well. And when He speaks, He speaks with ultimate authority. This was the initiative behind Christmas. Christ came into the world with all the resources of heaven behind Him. All the forces of heaven stood on tiptoe, weapons in hand, anxiously awaiting His slightest command.

WE NEED TO REMIND OURSELVES THAT CHRISTMAS COMES FROM DIVINE INITIATIVE, THE UNSHAKABLE PLANS OF A LOVING GOD WITH UNLIMITED RESOURCES AND UNBOUNDED ENTHUSIASM. Do you find yourself caught up in His enthusiasm? Excited by His unshakable plans? Swept along by the mind-boggling concept of unlimited resources being released into your world? “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” We can confidently write this next to every one of the promises of God.

DAY 7

Christmas: The Divine Invasion

Isaiah 9:2-7

I don't understand why people get so perturbed at the miraculous nature of Jesus' birth. If the zeal of the Lord of Hosts will accomplish it, then nothing is impossible. The Virgin Mary giving birth to Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit is nothing less than the divine invasion of God into this world. This is a source of great joy. The fact that God brought His Son into the world in this way once again demonstrates His unlimited power and wisdom.

But if you think the virgin birth itself was a miracle, how about the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, coming to earth as a human being? PERHAPS THE GREAT MIRACLE IS NOT SO MUCH A BABY BORN OF A VIRGIN, BUT THE AWESOME IDENTITY OF THE BABY. This babe born of Mary was the one who created and still sustains the universe, holds all authority and power in heaven and on earth, and is the ultimate source of meaning and purpose for all creation.

The Son of God vacated His heavenly throne for a lowly stable. This miraculous birth was nothing less than a divine invasion, where the almighty Word of God became a fragile human baby, unable to speak.

But we have allowed the divine invasion of that initial Christmas to degenerate into something sentimental. We have lots of clean straw and colored lights and beautiful oxen and well-behaved donkeys. A lovely girl with a halo around her head sits among shepherds kneeling and regal wise men adoring. There they gather, beautifully and sentimentally, around the manger in which the most magnificent child you ever did see slumbers silently.

Yet the Son of God was born to demonstrate His power and dominion:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder...

Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. (Isaiah 9:6-7 NKJV)

There was something majestic and eternal about this invasion. God came to earth as a human being in order to secure the redemption of His creation. What a divine idea!

Reflection:

DAY 8

A Time for Giving

Luke 1:42-45

When God the Father scattered the Milky Way and hung Saturn's rings in place, He thought about Christmas. As God the Son, working in unity with the Father, fashioned the lumbering oxen and the gentle cow with His creative power, He thought of the day when the Father would speak and He'd become flesh. On that day He would gaze with "baby eyes" upon the very creatures He had made.

God the Holy Spirit, moving as a shadow upon the face of the waters in Genesis days, knew one day it would be necessary to move again. This time He would overshadow Mary's womb, that "the Holy One" to be born of her should be called the "Son of God."

Isaiah told us that God's gift would come via special delivery, a son born of a virgin. This son would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Four hundred years later, as an elderly Elizabeth was thinking about the promised gift, God was busy wrapping His Christmas present from heaven in human flesh. And Christmas came early for Elizabeth. When Elizabeth welcomed her cousin Mary, the outcast, ostracized, pregnant girl, God pulled back the wrapping to let her have a peek at His present. Elizabeth's own baby leaped in her womb for joy, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit, saying:

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy." (Luke 1:42-45)

Encouraged and strengthened by her cousin, Mary also prepared. She knew the anointed One was coming soon—as she was the earthly vessel for God’s divine action.

God couldn’t have a Christmas without a Mary. He needed more than just a devout person, someone who attended synagogue and said her prayers. The child Christ needed a body to live in! So Mary offered the gift of hers:

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.”
(Luke 1:38)

Christmas is a time for giving. The prophets gave their promises. Elizabeth gave her praise. Mary gave her body. Joseph gave his reputation. The innkeeper gave his stable; the shepherds, their time. And God gave His Son. Tell me, do you see your present there?

What are you giving for Christmas?

DAY 9

Mary: The Ultimate Trust

Luke 1:30-35

Mary, the mother of Jesus, had a unique experience. She is the most celebrated woman of all time—but there's plenty of encouragement we can gain from her story.

One day, an angel comes to Mary with the most incredible announcement:

“Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son... The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”
(Luke 1:30,35)

Mary would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Not only that, but the child conceived in her would be none other than the Son of God, who would be born in order that He might establish an eternal kingdom. Now that's quite a mind-blowing bit of information for a humble fourteen-year-old girl living in a little country town like Nazareth!

It's understandable that Mary should ask, *“How can this possibly happen, since I'm a virgin?”* She is told that this would be a work of the Holy Spirit. And she says, in effect, *“All right, I'm the Lord's servant. I'm open to what God wants to do with me. May all that You have said be fulfilled in my life.”*

We are told later in the midst of this, Mary quietly treasured up in her heart all that was happening. Young Mary learned to be still, to listen, and to observe. SHE LEARNED TO DIG PAST SURFACE APPEARANCES AND TO ROOT HER MIND IN THE DEEPER SPIRITUAL REALITIES. She received from the Lord great and wonderful promises. She mulled over them, treasured them, and prayed about them. She wanted to make sure that she understood them fully. She took the time to live in light of them.

Mary's praise, through eyes of faith, gave her insight into God's redemptive work in the wider world of proud rulers and humble servants, of rich and poor, and of Abraham and his descendants forever. When we trust God, Who holds all futures in His hands, He sometimes gives us a glimpse into His divine purposes on earth—a vision that would otherwise remain hidden from our eyes. This girl in her early teens already had a broader mind and clearer perspective than most people gain in an entire lifetime. God entrusted the Christ child to the care of this humble peasant girl who submitted her life to Him.

Mary's humble submission to God marks out for us a challenging pattern to follow. She gave up all claims to her own body, her own reputation, and her own future. With such faith, God will do great things, for nothing is impossible with Him. At this Christmas season and throughout our lives, may we, like Mary, say to our Lord, "I am Your servant. May Your will be done in my life."

DAY 10

Joseph

Matthew 1:18-21

Now Joseph and Mary were married. In the culture of the day, the marriage was done; the ceremony was over. All that remained was the consummation of it. In everyone's eyes, Mary was Joseph's wife. But she had just told him that she was pregnant. And since everyone knew that the consummation had not taken place (it, too, required a ceremony), Joseph was in great turmoil. His only solution was to divorce Mary as quietly as possible.

Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:19-21)

Joseph's story is pretty relevant to us, isn't it? You might be thinking: *That's me—I'm thinking about divorce this Christmas.* Maybe you're thinking about a divorce that's already happened or is about to happen or that seems likely down the road. Such thoughts remind us of close relationships now shattered and lying all in pieces. You've got a heavy heart.

The fact that Christmas is a *family* time makes it worse, doesn't it? When a family with broken relationships gathers to celebrate, it can be really difficult. A lot of people dread Christmas for that very reason. A lot of people have heavy hearts, and they're tossing and turning as the holidays approach. Maybe you're living next door to a Joseph. Maybe you work with one.

In Matthew 1, God tells Joseph, "Take Mary as your wife. Don't be afraid to commit yourself to this marriage." Sometimes, of course, it may already be too late for a marriage. But perhaps God is talking to us, giving us a new plan of action, one that we

need to consider seriously. When Mary told Joseph that she was pregnant, it was a bolt out of the blue. It didn't fit into any of Joseph's plans for their life together. And it was unlike any situation he had ever encountered.

But Joseph wanted to do the right thing. And, difficult as it was, he did what God told him to do. He took this pregnant girl to be his wife and set on an adventure that the two of them would share. They would have to trust God through all the uncertainty and the questions from people who knew them. Joseph did an incredible thing: He welcomed the Christ child before the child was even born. While Christ was being formed within Mary, Joseph made a secure place for the incarnate Son of God to grow up in this world. He welcomed Jesus into an intact, stable family—not a wealthy or prestigious family, but a family under God's care and guidance.

LIKEWISE, AS WE WELCOME THE CHRIST CHILD INTO THE SHAMBLES OF OUR EVERYDAY EXISTENCE, GOD WILL HELP US AS WE GO. Joseph was a believing man, and even believing people can have messy relationships. But the Christ child waits to be welcomed in, where He can grow in our lives and change us into God's true children.

Lion of Judah

Genesis 49:9-10

*You are a lion's cub, Judah;
you return from the prey, my son.
Like a lion he crouches and lies down,
like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?
The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until he to whom it belongs shall come
and the obedience of the nations shall be his.
(Genesis 49:9-10)*

Lion of Judah, great I AM,
Yet Son of God and gentle lamb.
The One who made all human life,
Yet babe in womb of Joseph's wife.
Majestic One who naked came,
To dress Himself in human shame.
Naked twice—in crib, on cross,
Lord of all who suffered loss.
Lion of Judah, great I AM,
Yet Son of God and gentle Lamb.

Lion of Judah, great I AM,
Yet Son of God and gentle lamb.
Powerful voice of God most high,
Yet limited to a baby's cry.

Mighty Father from above,
Yet needing now a mother's love.
Helper, hope of Israel,
Helpless now, Immanuel.
Lion of Judah, great I AM,
Yet Son of God and gentle lamb.

Lion of Judah, Great I AM,
Yet Son of God and gentle lamb.
Majesty displayed in space,
Lets me look into His face.
Meekness brings you near today,
A Christmas babe in trough of hay.
A mighty God, a tiny child,
Omnipotence so meek and mild.
Lion of Judah, great I AM,
Yet Son of God and gentle lamb.

Lion of Judah, great I AM,
Yet Son of God and gentle Lamb.
You came to Joseph, shepherd, king,
To those who needed songs to sing.
So hurting women, broken men,
Could find new life, be born again.
Because of Him, the gentle lamb,
Lion of Judah, great I AM!

Lion of Judah, Jill Briscoe © 1991

The Shepherds: Least and Lost

Luke 2:8-15

Christmas proves that God takes a deep interest in the so-called “unimportant people.” He arranged to have Jesus, the Son of God, born to a young peasant girl in an obscure village. It’s almost as if God were going out of His way to say, “Listen, we know that people of privilege expect privilege. It’s the underprivileged who never expect anything, so I’m going to aim at them. I’m going to give them the privilege of playing a leading role in My redemptive plan.”

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

(Luke 2:8-11)

In that cultural context, shepherds were nomadic lowlives. When the gospels tell us that there were shepherds living out in the fields, that’s exactly what it means. They had to live by their wits in a rugged wilderness. They were rough folk who were always on the move, never putting down roots. When shepherds passed through town, people warned each other. Folks locked up their valuables and their daughters, keeping a respectable distance between townspeople and migrants.

God sent a myriad of singing angels to announce the Good News to disliked and distrusted shepherds. In His unfathomable grace, God chose lowlife shepherds to be the first to hear of Christ’s birth. **ONCE AGAIN, THE LORD OF THE UNIVERSE DEMONSTRATED THAT HE INTENTIONALLY REACHES OUT TO THE UNDERPRIVILEGED, THE DISPOSSESSED, THE SHUNNED, THE LOWLY, AND THOSE WITHOUT HOPE.**

Why a dramatic visit from angelic messengers? Because the people of Israel in those days had not heard a prophetic voice for hundreds of years. They were dull of hearing;

their hearts were calloused. Their interest in the things of God was at a low ebb. With the angels' appearance God intervened into their affairs and burst onto the scene to grab their attention in no uncertain terms.

These least and lost shepherds listened to the angels' message, and in the midst of this encounter "*the glory of the Lord shone around them.*" It is impossible for any human being in a natural condition to look upon God and survive. But, occasionally, in various ways, the Lord gives mortals a glimpse of His brilliant glory, majesty, and purity. That is what happened here. Although the shepherds probably had been told over and over again that they were worthless, God in His glory shined upon them.

Reflection:

The Wise Men: Jesus Seekers

Matthew 2:1-12

Much legend and tradition surrounds the story of the wise men. We're told there were three wise men, that they were kings, that they came from the Orient, and that they found Jesus in the manger. But none of this is clear from the account in Scripture.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him...." On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they had opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. (Matthew 2:1-2,11)

The biblical account in Matthew 2 doesn't tell us how many there were or that they were kings. The text says they were "magi," wise men—literally meaning astronomers, astrologers, or philosophers. They came from the east, but nowhere does the Bible tell us that they came from the Orient—at least not what we think of as the Orient. And contrary to our Christmas pageants, the Scriptures don't tell us the wise men found Jesus when He was still in the manger. In all probability, they didn't see Jesus until He was a two-year-old.

Though many elements of the wise men's story that have grown out of tradition and a lack of information, they, who came from far away and laid their gifts at the feet of Jesus, still have much to teach us. They were true Jesus seekers. So let's take a look at what may have motivated their journey.

The wise men were probably astrologers or astronomers—men highly respected for their wisdom. Astrology is based on the idea that the movement of the stars powerfully influences the affairs of humanity. Those who hold such beliefs spend a great deal of time trying to understand what stellar movements in the heavens might mean for life

on earth. These men, possibly descendants of the soothsayers in Daniel's time (Daniel 2:2), studied the stars to discover truth. They wanted to know something of the hidden, inner workings of the universe.

However, beyond their curiosity, these men already had some knowledge of the truth. In part, that knowledge probably came through Jews who, in their historic captivities in Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, had left many pieces of information concerning the Scriptures. These men not only had access to the insights of astronomy and philosophy, but to the vast riches of the Old Testament as well. This is why the magi, presumably from Babylon, went to considerable trouble to find the one who would be born King of the Jews.

A Quest for Truth

Acts 17:26-27

What could have possibly motivated the interest of the magi? We know the magi advised kings in those days. The birth of a new king would at least have been of political interest to them. But they seem to be driven by more than political concerns. Something more significant was motivating their inquiry. And even though they engaged in astrology—which the Lord had specifically forbidden His people to be involved in—God still used their faulty understanding to lead them to the truth.

Likewise, contemporary American culture exhibits a great interest in spiritual matters of all sorts. But when you explore that spirituality, you find people all over the map. It's not traditional or historic spirituality—at least not the kind one would expect in a country with a Judeo-Christian heritage.

We have many nominal Christians, inside and outside the church, whose understanding of Christianity is mixed with all kinds of mysticism and New Age thinking—a synthesis of mutually contradictory teachings. But even though they may be seeking spiritual truth where the truth cannot be found, I believe God works in those with a spiritual hunger.

My wife gave a talk one year at a Christmas tea at a hotel in downtown Chicago. A lady came up to her afterward and said, “I’m a sorcerer, a magician. I have a business. I have never before heard the Christians’ Christmas story, so someone invited me today. And I’m so excited.”

When Jill inquired why, she explained, “Last night I had a dream. Now I knew that Christians believed that Jesus was born in a manger, and Mary was the mother, but I have never, ever heard the details of the story—about Joseph and the angel visiting him, and all the other parts. As you began to read the whole story today, the hair on the back of my neck stood up. I dreamed it last night, verse by verse, just as you read it.”

Jill was able to say that God had brought her there because there was a bigger “star” pointing to Jesus than the stars she had been involved with. This lady was a wise seeker, and she’d find the God whom she was seeking.

From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. (Acts 17:26-27)

We must be able to communicate the Gospel to the spiritually hungry, no matter what kind of spirituality they’re into. People wander winding paths of spirituality because they’re looking for the truth. They’re looking for Christ, but they may not know that yet. The wise men were looking for some kind of king, but they certainly didn’t understand the true nature and mission of the Christ child. Until we understand seekers, we won’t be very effective in building bridges between them and Christ.

DAY
15

A Diligent Search

Matthew 2:2,8

“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

*When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.
(Matthew 2:2-3)*

Imagine arriving at your destination after two long years of travel, only to have things fall apart. That’s what happened when the magi came to King Herod asking about the “one who has been born king of the Jews.”

Herod was frightened and called together the wise men of Jerusalem to find out where the Messiah was to be born. He then secretly met with the magi under the pretense of sharing their concern for the search. He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him” (Matthew 2:8). But Herod had no such intentions. He was a paranoid, power-hungry murderer. He had no qualms about killing members of his own family. What he really wanted was to exterminate the possibility of this new king’s arrival.

The wise men went to the right place and asked the right questions, but they were probably disappointed with the answer: “He’s not here.” But they didn’t relent. They had come this far, and they weren’t giving up now.

I wonder how easily you’ve been put off in your search. It’s interesting to hear the reasons people give for ending their search. One person says they went to church, but because they couldn’t understand the sermon, they didn’t go back again. Or another person says they heard about someone’s uncle who ran off with the worship director, and that’s reason enough not to go to any church anywhere.

IF WE'RE SERIOUS ABOUT SEARCHING FOR GOD, WE WON'T LET ANYTHING GET IN OUR WAY. A genuine quest for God involves a lot of looking, reading, listening, and praying. If we're diligent in our search and ask honest questions, God will reveal Himself to us, regardless of where we're coming from.

Dear God, I've been searching for answers. I believe You sent Your Son into the world to bring glorious gifts of joy and meaning to people like me. It's hard to imagine such grace on my behalf, but you are a God of unbounded resources and unshakable plans. And so, Lord Jesus, I ask you to come into my life and establish your throne. I'm excited about the possibilities because there is no end to Your power and love. Thank You for what You will do. Amen.

Reflection:

A Response of Worship

Matthew 2:9-12

Many people start out seeking, but deep down they aren't willing to bow to anyone. So even if they find Christ, their search will hold little satisfaction for them. Not so with the magi. They took their search to its logical conclusion. With wisdom and passion, they followed their clues and found the truth—the Christ child. When they found Jesus, they fell at His feet and worshiped Him. THEIR SEARCH MAY HAVE BEGUN OUT OF SHEER INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY, BUT IT ENDED IN WORSHIP.

The star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. (Matthew 2:9-11)

As part of their worship, the magi brought very valuable gifts to Jesus. Gold was a gift worthy of Christ's royalty. Frankincense was a gift to honor His deity. The bitter myrrh marked His humanity. Once they found who they were looking for, they didn't hold back.

Sometimes we search, but we're unwilling to open our lives to God once we find Him. We withhold our love, our honesty, our past, our pride, our future. What was at stake for these wise men? Do you really think they expected to find the infant son of a peasant couple to be the King of the Jews? What might it mean to them politically to worship another human being in such unimpressive circumstances? What were they opening themselves up for, having acknowledged that this child held a position superior to them? Yet they set aside all these possibilities and gave their gifts.

Each of us in one way or another is searching and seeking. We must be wise in our seeking, seek wholeheartedly, and respond willingly and honestly to the truth we find.

I pray that this Christmas season you will make room in your heart for seeking and worshipping the King.

Divinity wrapped in a baby,
How simple, yet simply profound,
Like the kings and the shepherds I worship,
And bow myself down to the ground.

Unspeakable gift, softly spoken,
Unimaginable love made so clear,
Immeasurable grace of the Father,
Bringing us, all nations, so near.

Divinity wrapped in a blanket,
Eternity visiting time,
Stopped all the clocks in the heavens,
As God chose to make Himself mine.

Taken from *Divinity Wrapped in a Blanket*, Jill Briscoe © 2000

DAY
17

God's Grand Communication

Luke 2:10-12

Christmas is many things to many people: a celebration, a cosmic visit, a time for family traditions. I'd like for us to see it in one more way: Christmas is a communication. It is God saying something to human beings, something that we would have no clue about except that God decided to say it:

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:10-12)

God is desperately concerned that we understand the truth about ourselves and about His interest in us. Centuries ago, in an ordinary world, in the midst of all kinds of bad news and at a time when most people had little reason to expect anything good, a baby was born. Through the great void of silence and despair, God shouted a message to us loud and clear.

IT WAS A COMMUNICATION OF JOYFUL ASSURANCE: *“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy...”* Why should the angels be singing above this small planet, so insignificant in a huge universe? What could possibly have happened to make the heavens over small Bethlehem split open to reveal a totally different dimension? There was joy in heaven; a host of beings knowing something we humans didn't yet know—a wonderful thing had taken place in our midst.

IT WAS A COMMUNICATION OF GRAND DIMENSIONS: *“I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”* This good news and joy incorporates all people everywhere. That straw-filled cubbyhole in Bethlehem has become the doorway to the rest of the world, not only at *that* time but for *all* time.

IT WAS A COMMUNICATION OF GLORIOUS SIGNIFICANCE: *“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”* There have been and will be many “saviors.” Many great people have walked this world—leading people to something better, helping them learn a little more truth, teaching them a better way to live. So the birth of a savior was not terribly significant. But this Savior was also the Christ, the promised Messiah. This child was the Savior! This child was “Christ the Lord,” which in Old Testament terms referred to God Himself.

God Himself had come to visit the earth and all the people on it. This indeed was significant news.

DAY
18

Great News That Will Bring Glorious Joy

Luke 2:8-18

“This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:12)

No doubt there was more than one baby lying wrapped in strips of cloth on the night of Christ’s birth in Bethlehem. For the poor of that day, who had nothing else to wrap a baby in, that was nothing unusual. But to put a baby in a manger was most unusual. And so, the sign was given to the shepherds. “You can go and hunt around Bethlehem, but you’re only going to find one baby—a poor little baby—wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. That is the One.”

Scripture has always insisted that God’s message be verifiable. You can check out what God says and find it to be true.

There are a lot of people who give an academic nod to the Christmas story. They would have absolutely no problem nodding their way through this statement, *“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”* Who wouldn’t nod in agreement to a communication of this nature? But how many of us would actually go search for the baby and dare to prove God true?

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. (Luke 2:15-16)

GOD HAS COMMUNICATED CHRISTMAS TO US SO THAT WE MIGHT VERIFY IT AS TRUE IN OUR LIVES. He wants us to go, like the shepherds, and see if the Savior has really come. Has God actually visited you, where you live, in the middle of your ordinary life? Do you have the energy, curiosity, or the will to come to the manger yourself and see what you find?

At Christmas time God cups His hands over His mouth, as it were, and shouts at the top of His voice, so that with all the din going on around them, human beings might hear what He has to say: “Listen! I’ve got great news that will bring you glorious joy!”

Meditate on the doorway of heaven flying open with joyous, thunderous praises of angels ringing out. Try to comprehend the grand dimensions of their message. Listen carefully to what God is communicating. He has something important to say to all of us, in all places and at all times, and it’s a message worth listening to.

Reflection:

DAY
19

God Speaking Our Language

John 1:1-2,14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-2,14)

The opening verses of John's Gospel may not seem related to Christmas at first. But they tell us something incredible. The eternal God who was before all things determined to leave eternity, break into time, take upon Himself our humanity, and be born as a baby. Can it really be true that the invisible God, the idea behind all things, the motivating force who existed before all things, came to earth as a baby of Bethlehem? I believe so. But why?

It's impossible for us to comprehend God. Just as you can't pour an ocean into a thimble, you can't fit the mind of God into the human brain. So God decided that He would translate Himself into a language humans could understand. And that's why Jesus was born. He came to interpret God to us in our own language. The invisible God doesn't make sense to us without Jesus, the visible expression of God. The Word became a baby in order to interpret God to us.

The Word also became flesh in order to identify with us. How does God identify with a mere mortal? Let's look at the facts of Jesus' birth and early life.

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34). His mother was pregnant before she should have been—not a big issue these days, but certainly a big issue in that culture and time. That meant that Jesus was ostracized by many people from the beginning, because His very birth was questionable in the community.

“There was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7 NASB). Jesus’ parents had no place to stay, and thus he was born in a stable. Jesus was homeless right from the very beginning of his life.

“Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt” (Matt. 2:13). Soon after Jesus’ birth, the paranoid and murderous king Herod forced Mary and Joseph to flee for their lives to Egypt. Jesus and his family were refugees for two years.

JESUS COULD EASILY HAVE CHOSEN TO BE BORN IN VERY DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT HE CAME TO IDENTIFY WITH ORDINARY PEOPLE. Ordinary people live in stressful circumstances. Ordinary people are surrounded by misunderstanding about who they are and what they are about. In Jesus, God identified with humanity at every point of our pain.

God, whom we can’t see, is interpreted to us in Christ. He didn’t sit in heaven indifferent to our pain, but identified with us in Christ, even to the point of taking upon Himself our sin. Out of love, the sinless One chose to die a shameful death on a cross. He dealt with the one thing that stood between us and God.

So as we travel to that long-ago manger to meet the Christ child, let us see more clearly the Father who sent Him. A child in a manger is not intimidating. A child is meek and gentle. But the child can lead us to the man who is Jesus. This is the reason for the season.

DAY
20

God Became Flesh

John 1:14

I'm sure you've sometimes grumbled about the way the news is covered. I know I have. Sound bites of information seem to satisfy a good many people. Rather than really thinking through the issues of the day, people want someone else to do their thinking for them. They want information packaged in capsule form to make the few catchy slogans go down easily. This is all some people want to bother with. Tragically, such a passive approach leads to a very superficial understanding of the world in which we live.

Similarly, there's no shortage of half-hearted greetings and superficial slogans about Christmas. I don't know how many people have wished me "happy holidays" or have hoped I have a "blessed and merry Christmas." All this is good and appropriate. But we are in real danger of reducing Christmas to superficial sound bites—and, unfortunately, many of the sad people around us are satisfied with a slogan or two.

Yet the SUBSTANCE OF CHRISTMAS can be summed up in one incredibly brief statement: "*The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.*" (John 1:14). If this were our greeting instead of "happy holidays," perhaps the season celebrations would have more depth to them.

I'm absolutely convinced that our understanding of Christianity stands or falls on what we believe about the statement, "*The Word became flesh.*" I would ask you a very serious question this Christmas season: Do you really believe the Word—God—became flesh?

I understand why people don't believe it. After all, it's a ridiculous statement—unless it's true. And if it's true, then almighty God, Creator of the universe, has been in our midst. That's a discomfiting thought. Think of it: God—the Word—became a person and lived among us persons. It does seem to be a logically incompatible statement. If He's God, He's God; if He's man, He's man. But He certainly can't be both at once. However, this logic assumes that we know everything there is to know about both God

and human beings. And, if we don't know everything about them, how can we possibly conclude that God becoming a person is impossible?

Today many people who don't believe that the Word became flesh still celebrate Christmas. All of us want the festivities and the good feelings of the season. There's no question that the light that comes from God through Christ shines on all people. But that does not mean that all people automatically live in the good of it. The sun shines on everybody, but you can choose to live in a cave if you wish.

However, this fundamental truth requires more from us. If God has become a person, this presents a problem. Scripture says that in Christ we have seen the God of the universe. He has already been here. It's one thing to think of an adorable baby surrounded by gentle beasts, but ARE WE READY TO DEAL WITH THE REALITY OF GOD LIVING AMONG US, REVEALING HIMSELF TO US?

DAY
21

Seeing Jesus' Glory

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
(John 1:14)

As we consider God living among us as the man Jesus of Nazareth, we see Jesus dying on a cross *for our sakes*. At that time, crucifixions were ordinary, everyday occurrences—nothing special. And it was not unusual for a good person to die on a Roman cross. Undoubtedly many innocent people suffered such torture at the hands of the oppressive Roman government.

No, Jesus dying on a cross was not particularly noteworthy—*unless* He was *indeed* the Word made flesh. If He was God come to us in order to settle something permanently, then the cross and the resurrection were both events that demand our attention and our response.

What makes sense of the crucifixion is the incarnation. Incomprehensibly, God became a person, became flesh. IT IS GOD IN CHRIST, GOD AS MAN, AND NOBODY ELSE, DYING ON THE CROSS, ASSUMING OUR SIN, WHO HAS SOMETHING TO OFFER TO OUR WORLD.

John 1:14 says, “*We have seen his glory.*” The apostles and others saw the glory of God in person, who lived among them and spoke to them. In the Christmas manger, we must see the wonder and marvel of the Word made flesh. Jesus’ glory remains veiled to us if we don’t, and thus we trivialize Christmas. But if we see His true glory, then we will worship Him truly.

He came not trailing clouds of glory.
He came not wearing heaven's crown.
He left behind His Father's golden city
And chose as birthplace Bethlehem's little town.

Equality with God was His by nature,
And worship by the angels was His right.
The honor due Him by His heavenly Father
He left to come and save us Christmas night.

He laid it down, He laid it down,
And taking human form became a man.
He laid it down, He laid it down,
And chose instead the world's redemptive plan.

So who I am to seek the world's dim glory?
And who am I to fight for worldly crown?
What right have I to choose to work in city,
In rural country or in tinsel town?

And who am I to grasp some vain ambition?
Or who to choose a partner for my days?
Am I superior to the Christ who saved me?
Do I have rights to keep or give away?

I'll lay them down, I'll lay them down,
And make Him Lord of all I want to be.
I'll lay them down, I'll lay them down,
Lay hold instead of all He wants for me!

The Crib, Cross, and Crown (Part 1)

John 17:1-5

There's something beautiful and delightful about the birth of the Christ child. Each Christmas season there is opportunity—for a short time, at least—to concentrate not on the suffering and sin we see in our world, but on the beautiful baby in the crib. And of course, the beauty of this baby's birth led to the wonder of the Savior's life.

But as we contemplate the innocent baby's birth, which led to the sinless Savior's life, we arrive at a very unpleasant conclusion: The life Jesus lived ultimately condemns the life we live. When we evaluate our lives against His, we can only admit the hopelessness and helplessness of our condition. We can't live as He lived, and we can't undo the consequences of our own shortcomings.

If we look only at the crib, we arrive at a point of despair. For the beautiful crib led to Jesus' majestic and superb example—and that leads us to a sense of helpless inadequacy. Yes, a crownless crib leads to hopelessness.

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you... I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”
(John 17:1,4-5)

If we read Scripture very carefully, we will recognize that before the crib there was the “crown” of Jesus. The baby that was born in Bethlehem shared glory with the Father before the world began. And after the cross, that crown was replaced. In other words, the earthly life and ministry of Jesus served as an interlude in His eternal reign as the Lord of all glory. And though His life ultimately reveals our hopelessness, the death and resurrection by which He took back His crown is the light of hope that shines on our darkness.

We should always beware of the doctrine of the crownless crib. We cannot really consider the Son of God in a crib apart from His cross and His seat upon the throne of heaven. For if we forget these we will lose our sense of who Jesus really is and what He has accomplished.

Kneeling with kings at the crib of my Savior,
Singing in praise with the angels on high;
Here with Your people, wondering about You,
I'm thinking of Jesus and wanting to cry!

Father, I love You for giving me heaven
Wrapped in the form of a newborn so small,
But how could You stand to know all that would happen
When You left Him in Bethlehem in an animal stall?

Treasured in glory and praised by creation
God as a baby to humans on loan;
Why didn't You run down the stairway of heaven,
Snatch up Your God Child and take Him back home?

What's that You're saying? You left Him to save me?
You love me as much as You love Your sweet Son?
You gave me Your heart when You gave me Your Jesus
And my Father's full giving is only begun.

I bring You my life and the years lent for living
For Your crib-and-cross sacrifice tear me apart;
When You count all my tears as I kneel at this altar,
May You know it worthwhile when You look at my heart!

The Crib, Cross, and Crown (Part 2)

Luke 9:23

The crib, the cross, and the crown are fundamental to who Jesus is. Similarly, they're fundamental to the Christian life as well.

Think of the crib as a place where the miracle of rebirth and regeneration takes place. Being born again is fundamental to our spiritual experience. But the crib isn't enough. If Christ has been born in us, we must grow and mature as His disciples. Jesus said:

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)

Taking up our cross means submitting our wills to God's will. Jesus willingly accepted God's will for our sake, and it cost Him His life. **THOSE WHO INVITE JESUS CHRIST INTO THEIR LIVES MUST IDENTIFY WITH THE WILL OF GOD AS SURELY AS CHRIST IDENTIFIED HIMSELF WITH THE ETERNAL PURPOSES OF THE FATHER.**

Our society has fallen ill to the disease of meaninglessness, a sickness that leads to hopelessness and superficiality. So many people have given in. “Life is falling apart,” they say. “I'm just not going to think about it.” Yet just below the surface, a fear about the future eats away at us. We can't completely avoid the nagging issues of life.

Christians, however, need not remain in such a “Slough of Despond.” **FOR BELIEVERS THERE IS NOT ONLY A CRIB AND A CROSS, BUT THE SURE PROMISE OF A CROWN.** We live through all eternity with the risen, ascended King of kings and Lord of lords—who wears a glorious crown. And we too will receive crowns for faithful service to Him.

Now then, this produces a different breed of person in society. Instead of focusing on the material world—worrying about politics or the nasty people we must deal with; trying desperately to preserve our youth because we're so frightened of aging; tightly

gripping all that we own because that's all we've got—we can live confidently and with hope because we live in light of the crown.

Those without a crib have yet to experience new life in Christ. Those without a cross have not given over their self-centered lives in exchange for the abundant God-centered life. And those without a crown have no depth or sense of hope. Crib, cross, and crown—are all three present in your life?

Reflection:

DAY
24

The Spirit of Christmas

Luke 1:26-38

You hear a lot about the spirit of Christmas at this time of year. But the *spirit of Christmas* needs to be superseded by the *Spirit of Christ*.

The spirit of Christmas is annual; the Spirit of Christ is eternal. The spirit of Christmas is sentimental; the Spirit of Christ is supernatural. The spirit of Christmas is a human product; the Spirit of Christ is a divine person. These distinctions make all the difference in the world.

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” (Luke 1:34-35)

The angel explained to Mary that she was actually going to experience the birth of Christ through the Holy Spirit in her life. The angel said to her that the power of the Almighty, through the Holy Spirit, was going to rest upon her. The baby to be born of Mary would be the One whose kingdom would never end. This light of Christ wouldn't just flash into Mary's life and then die away. With the coming of this child, God was about to establish His eternal kingdom.

Christ can also be born in our lives. IT IS THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT WE ARE BORN AGAIN. IT IS A SUPERNATURAL, SPIRITUAL WORK THAT MAKES US CHILDREN OF GOD, BROUGHT INTO HIS FAMILY AND KINGDOM. The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians living in Galatia, *“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you”* (Gal. 4:19). Paul was not talking about an annual event, but about a perpetual indwelling. The Spirit of Christ in us is not sentimental, beginning and ending with a sweet baby in a manger, but it is supernatural, powerful, and life-changing.

Living in the Spirit of Christ does not mean that people try hard to be more noble, good, and kind for a specific season every year. No. For Christians, God is, in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. THE HOLY SPIRIT ENABLES PEOPLE TO BE WHAT THEY'RE NOT AND TO DO WHAT THEY CAN'T. The Spirit of Christ is actually God, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, being born in the lives of people, in all times and seasons.

Let us concentrate on experiencing the Spirit of Christ from now to *next* Christmas—and throughout the many years and Christmas seasons to come. The spirit of Christmas will come and go and be glamorized and trivialized. But all the while, the Spirit of Christ is being born into one person after another, and God's eternal kingdom is being established in our lives.

DAY
25

Joy Is Jesus

John 15:9-11

Joy is Jesus wrapped in swaddling bands,
Joy is Jesus in Mary's loving hands.
Joy is Jesus making sorrow sing,
Mending deepest heartaches—what a gift to bring!

For from the highest heavens, knowing well His plan,
God laid Him in our hostile arms, the precious Son of Man.
Knowing all before Him—the crib, the cross, the cost—
He came to die at Calvary and seek and save the lost.

That's you and me and everyone who's living on this earth,
That's men and women, black and white, who need and want new birth,
That's those of us with broken hearts, and those who celebrate,
It's those of us who love and laugh, and those of us who hate.

If empty was the manger, and empty was the cross,
If Jesus' tomb was occupied, then all of us are lost.
But here lies heaven's treasure, God's precious, dearest prize,
In Him will all our future hopes and dreams be realized.
So may His joy now fill you, and the peace of God be known
Till we celebrate our Christ-masses around our Savior's throne.

Joy Is Jesus by Jill Briscoe © 1995

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for Christmas time and for the Christ child in the manger. The birth of your Son is interwoven with His spotless life, death, and resurrection. We bow in the face of such perfection, love, and grace.

Now, dear Lord, we bow quietly before you, thankful that, through your Son, you revealed to us the truth about ourselves. Teach us what it means to allow your peace to reign in our lives. And may the fullness of the real meaning of Christmas transform us into the people you have designed us to be.

Amen.

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