



FINDING

*Christ*

This Christmas season, may we find Christ.  
May we understand the reason He came  
and the hope He brings.  
May we know the fullness of His salvation.

Devotionals by Carrie Wright



## Searching for Christ this Christmas

*"We stand between two proclamations: God has come and Come Lord Jesus. The first grounds our confidence that the second will be answered. The life, death and resurrection shape our hope in the return, reign and renewal that is to come."*

Recognizing His birth as what leads to the hope of our eternal life, gives us a reason to have joy at Christmas, no matter what we face. In fact, in the pain and suffering, we come to understand the ache inside us for what is to come.

We rejoice in Jesus coming to earth because it represents the Living Hope we have in life eternal. We have this hope because of Him, by Him and through Him.

Jesus. Emmanuel. God with us. The Savior of the world.

This is also where we find the ability to rejoice in suffering, to persevere in affliction, and to count it all joy in the hard of what we face. The internal conflict bears resemblance to the groans of the earth longing to be whole and complete again. We, too, feel this tension as we long for eternity yet remain purposed here.

These two opposing sides leave us with great hope, great expectation and great longing. All of which keeps us searching for more. It's the kind of more we often try to fill ourselves and yet always fall short. It's the kind of more we will never fully realize until the full day of completion which Christ is working out for us.

Oh yes, we want that day to be now but until then, we wait, we hope, we long, we ache, we search, we seek, we proclaim: God has come! Come Lord Jesus!





## Why Do I Love Christmas?

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," 1 Peter 1:3*

I'm a "decorate November 1st" Christmas-loving" kind of person. There's no shame or secret in this admission. It comes with judgement and question and I don't mind. I fully embrace my love of all this season means and brings for me.

The season is full of hustle and bustle. In fact, this year happens to be one with every aspect of life swirling for us. And yet there's this overwhelming sense of peace amid everything that feels complicated and chaotic. It's the peace I have knowing the Prince of Peace in the midst of whatever may be spinning. It's mine to claim and I'm claiming it in full force this year.

I know this season can be difficult for many. Grieving losses, mourning what should have been, hearts heavy with burdens, schedules filled with too much to do. I know it can be a host of difficulties and darkness, balancing custody schedules, wishing for what won't be under the tree, broken over who may be missing from your celebration. It can be so much to carry and often the weight of it seems to be heavier this time of year.

Christmas is also a time to pause and reflect on CHRIST, not just for a season but for eternal life. His gift gives us life and His Word promises it abundantly. He can do immeasurably more than we ask or even hope and we can do all things through His strength. It sometimes doesn't seem possible for us to make it through one more day, much less this holiday season, and yet He brings us every thing we need according to His will for each of us.

Christmas can be hard. Christmas can be wonderful. But it's not about the gifts or the decorations or the parties or the lights. It's about the Light of the World, the Wonderful Counselor and Savior. Christmas can be everything we need it to be when we call upon Christ for our every need. This is why I love Christmas.





## May It Be...

*"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Luke 2:38*

Mary's response to the angel is a reminder to me that our response to God could alter our role in His plan.

God's plan and purpose will be accomplished no matter what - and whether or not I'm part of it, depends on my response.

We see Isaiah ready and willing when the call came asking who would go. "Here am I, send me." Isaiah 6:8

We also see Jonah run the opposite direction when God called him..

Make no mistake. God's plan will be accomplished and is not dependent on my willingness to faithfully obey. My obedience and surrender ultimately plays a pivotal role in the process of Him shaping my character and my heart.

Mary had been chosen. She was specifically picked for this mission. And yet when the angel came to her, he didn't say she was already with child. No. He said she *would be* with child. If she had responded any other way than "may it be..." I wonder if there would be a different story to tell. Or at least a different person involved. Then again, her response is exactly why she was the girl for the job. She had already found favor with the Lord. In that moment she could have chosen her plan over God's, but she surrendered her desires to follow God's call and will.

When we surrender our right to ourselves, laying down the flesh and taking on the spiritual, we not only get to join in with God's purpose, we can be invited to be His vessel. When God comes to us with His plan, we can be ready to respond, "May it be..."





## The Humanity of Christmas

*"My soul magnifies the Lord." Luke 1:46*

As we talked about Mary's response to the news from the Angel of the Lord, we cannot miss this joy she exhibits as she rejoices over this proclamation.

Still I can't help but wonder if she was even the slightest bit scared. I need to know she was human - and female - by asking her what emotions she felt. Did she have any anxious thoughts? Was she concerned at all about the appearance of her pregnancy? Was she worried people would mock and make fun of her? Did she wonder if anyone would believe her?

It's all my own speculation but it brings me comfort to remember Mary's humanity with the balance of these very real and raw emotions. While highly favored, she was a young teen with thoughts and questions and feelings because she was fully human.

It reminds me that I can be filled with faith and still fearful. I can trust and question. I can believe and still have anxious thoughts. My humanity doesn't scare God away. The emotions I feel, the thoughts I battle, aren't too much for the God who created me.

I can be honest in my fears and yet still trust. I can admit my frustrations and still claim His peace. I can have my own desire and ultimately pray for His will to be done.

There's room for my humanity and it doesn't scare or push God away. He doesn't reject me or run from me because my faith falters. He doesn't reject me because I doubt. He knows every thought before one of them comes to be (Ps. 139:2).

When I am too much for some and not enough for others, I am completely accepted by Him just as I am. He lovingly chooses me and can handle everything that comes with me. Not only that, but He sent His Son for me and my humanity.

The same is true for you, too. He created you. He sees you - your fears and your frustrations, your doubts and your questions, your faith and your hopes. He's not scared off by anything that you feel or face. He chooses you - all of you.





## The Cost of the Call

*"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior," Luke 1:46-47*

I spent the entire first trimester of my pregnancy with morning sickness. I remember feeling so sick and yet being so relieved. That sickness represented life. That sickness was a reminder of the baby growing inside of me. The nausea I felt was a small price to pay knowing the purpose it was playing.

I wonder what symptoms Mary experienced during her pregnancy. I wonder if she got sick from the smell of certain foods or if she experienced waves of nausea throughout her nine months carrying the Messiah. I wonder how she reacted the first time she felt her baby kick. It's easy to consider her pregnancy as supernatural but she was fully human.

It reassures me to think that Mary may have experienced the physical aches of bearing the Presence of God Himself. From angelic prophecy to morning sickness, there was a process of growth she went through in carrying out the calling placed upon her.

I imagine the growth taking place inside her womb was mirroring the growth taking place in her spiritually. It wasn't just the joy she felt when the angel appeared to her. It was now the faith to walk each day knowing she was carrying the Son of God.

In the middle of a cave, with Joseph by her side, and absolutely no epidural, no doubt she experienced the pain of her contractions. This was the sign that He was coming. She was bringing the Holy of Holies into the world and it would be one painful push at a time.

This is the part of calling we often don't want to experience. The part that calls us to pain and struggle. The part that feels uneasy and unsettling. The part that asks us to be vulnerable and willing to experience that which stretches us beyond our own capacity into divine calling. It's not just experiencing the miracle. It's going through the entire process that stretches, shapes and grows us for what's to come.

This is also the part where it may be difficult to relate to Mary's faith. The object here isn't striving to be like Mary. It's striving to be like Christ. Growing in faith, stretching our belief, strengthening our walk to trust Him every step of the way. No matter our calling, knowing that both joy and pain can be part of the process He takes us through to accomplish His will and purpose.





## Self Sacrifice

*"When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife." Matthew 1:24*

Scripture tells us Joseph was a man of integrity and because of this, he didn't want Mary to be publicly shamed.

He had every right to disgrace her. His betrothed now found to be with child. Any number of emotions would have been warranted for what he was facing with her apparent betrayal.

Joseph honored the Lord by being obedient to take Mary as his wife but more than loving her, he accepted the role as earthly father to the Son of God. I can't begin to imagine the imposter syndrome.

On any given day I can feel as if I've failed as a parent. To come face to face with your own humanity while locking eyes with the Savior of the world must have been more than humbling.

He took on the role as surrogate father to the one who would bring salvation for all. He gave up his right to himself and the right he had to leave Mary to be a single mother, yet instead he surrendered. He obeyed. He offered his humble faithfulness and took on more than just the title of husband. He added the role of father with the ultimate shoes to fill.

Just like we talked about before, sometimes the call is costly and sometimes it costs us the way we thought things would turn out. Sometimes it costs us our willingness to surrender the right we feel we have to ourselves and what we had hoped. Joseph is an example of a life of faithfulness willing to sacrifice himself for the will of the Father, taking on a role I'm certain he felt ill-equipped for, yet embracing the Savior of the world as his own earthly son.





## What Are You Waiting For?

There was a man called Simeon. "He was waiting..." and "The Holy Spirit was upon him..." (Luke 2:25) "It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit..." (vs. 26) and he was "moved by the Spirit..." (vs.27)

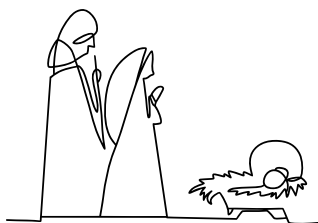
He was waiting for the Messiah; expectant, hopeful, and filled with faith. God had trusted him with this revealed truth and while he waited, he waited well. He waited filled. He waited hopeful.

Year after year, he waited. I'm sure he got discouraged. I imagine he probably wondered if he'd heard God correctly. Questioning if he'd misunderstood. Sometimes the waiting can be the hardest part. Often we question God, His plan and His timing.

What are you waiting for? Are you waiting for Christmas Day to feel joy? Are you waiting to buy and wrap presents? Are you waiting to give gifts? Are you waiting to send cards? Are you preparing to celebrate with family? Are you waiting for a change? Are you praying for a miracle? Are you hopeful for circumstances to be different? Are you dependent on someone or something else? Whatever it is you're waiting for, do you trust God with it?

Simeon waited longingly and expectantly. He waited with hope. He waited with assurance. He waited on the promises of the Lord and He waited with faith.

Today I'm hopeful. I'm celebrating the joy of Christmas in my heart, trusting that God will do what He's promised, in His sovereign time. I believe that while I'm waiting, I can be hopeful, filled, even joyful. I pray, too, that you find the Sovereign Lord faithful, just as He has promised, to deliver His hope and joy to you this season, even in the waiting.







## The Very First Missionaries

*"When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them." Luke 2:17-18*

From the very beginning, Jesus came to seek and save the lost. His birth began the declaration of His mission to go into all the world. Every person. Every where.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds, they may have been the least likely to be chosen. They were tending sheep, not the temple. Yet we might miss the significance of their responsibility.

If I picture these shepherds as outcasts, it shapes how I view them being the first told of Jesus' birth. It allows me to realize Jesus came for every single person. Even the ones in the far off places we may otherwise deem unreachable.

If I picture these shepherds with the job of tending the sheep that may have been used for the temple sacrifice, it takes on another meaning. Protecting those spotless lambs to one day be led to the altar as an atonement for sin gives new meaning to the job of these shepherds. That job feels much more important and yet a host of angels now come to announce the Peace He brings.

Imagine that! Not just one angel but a multitude, telling the Good News of Messiah's birth to the ones responsible for protecting the animal sacrifices needed to cover sin. They were told who He is, where He was and how He would be found. There was no mistaking His birth or His purpose. This information alone turns them into the first missionaries to share the news about Christ.

This perspective allows me to realize the importance of the Good News of Jesus and the reason we celebrate His birth. But it doesn't stop there. Becoming the atoning sacrifice to cover our sins and bring us salvation is the reason we share who He is and what He has done for us.





## Seeking Christ

*"When they saw the star, they were overjoyed."* Matthew 2:10

It seems unlikely that the wisemen showed up with gifts at the manger but they were absolutely part of the celebration of Jesus' arrival. Whether or not they showed up hours or months later doesn't take away the fact they they, too, were seeking Him.

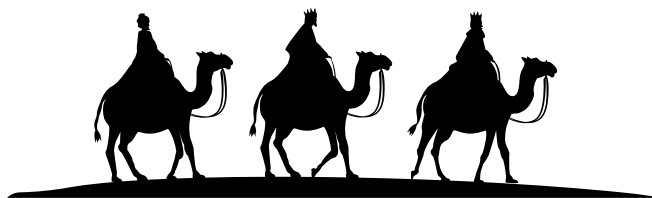
*"Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."* Matthew 2:2

It's important to go back to scripture even with stories that are so familiar. I know the wisemen came with gifts but often I miss that they were seeking Him out. They weren't just curious about a star. They were on a mission to find the King of kings.

I often wonder about my own determination to seek Him over my desire or my own way. Would I be willing to set aside my plan to seek His will? Would I be willing to surrender my own comfort for distant journeys? Would I protect Him and His name at all costs? Would I bring Him my gift of honor and worship?

The wisemen in the celebration of Jesus are a reminder of the journey I'm on to follow hard after Christ. To seek Him at all costs. To come before Him with my offering. To bring all that I have to Him. To be willing to risk and sacrifice for the honor and worship He deserves.

This season and everyday, may we be on a journey to know Him more and to seek Him in all we do.





## Hope

*A thrill of hope  
The weary world rejoices  
For yonder breaks  
A new and glorious morn*

Indeed, we are a weary world. I wonder if we would know Him if He walked among us today. Would we recognize Him? Would we welcome Him? Would we follow Him in curiosity? Would we betray Him? Would we rejoice in His birth or call for His death? Would we know Him who came to be the light of the world? Would we know Him as our eternal hope?

We have this hope. This isn't wishful thinking. This is an assurance.

Hope waits. Hope endures. Hope isn't weak or frail.

Our hope is our trust in a trustworthy God. A God who always is who He's always been and will forever continue to be.

Our hope is knowing God is faithful and sovereign, even when the broken, weary world we live in falls short of our dreams and desires.

This is the hope we have in Jesus who came to be the Savior of the world. Born as a babe, crucified as a man, resurrected and conquering death. Jesus who died for you and me and for us all.

Every word in scripture points to the hope we have in and because of Jesus Christ. This season of advent is a time of reflection and remembrance - giving gratitude for all He has done and remaining expectant and hopeful for all He will do.





## Hope

The foretelling of Christ's birth in the Old Testament was the hope of the patriarchs. It was the reason they clung to God in faithfulness believing in the Promised One to come.

Hope. It's a feeling of expectation and trust. It's not just wishful thinking. It's the assurance of what's to come because of the coming Messiah. It's founded upon faith and fact.

*"For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."  
Isaiah 9:6*

Mercy is not getting what we deserve.

Death and eternal separation. That is what we deserve. On our own we cannot come close to His righteousness or holiness...but in His great mercy, He has given us HOPE!

We have a reason to have hope because we have new life in HIM. Our living hope is eternal life with God because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is the hope we have. That is the hope we cling to. That is the expectation we have this season. Hope in Jesus and eternal life through Him.

This is the promise of hope. The promise we prepare for in this season is knowing Jesus came. This is the hope we celebrate, the assurance of our Savior. We anticipate His coming. We celebrate His birth. We love as people of hope because we have someone to place our trust in: Jesus.

hope



## The Tension of Hope

*Qavah* is one of the original words used for hope in the Old Testament. It comes from the word *qav* (pronounced *kav*) which means cord. Think of a cord being pulled tightly. There's a tension that comes with the stress of the cord being pulled. There's also a waiting or expectation for that tension to be released. That is the meaning of *qavah* (*kavah*).

The feeling of both tension and expectation can be present while you wait.

There have been three Christmas seasons where I sat broken and empty, desperate and longing, yet I was also filled with hope. Hope that God saw my brokenness. Hope that God was present despite how lonely I felt. Hope that, no matter how empty, He was able to fill and fulfill every longing.

I stand here today to tell you that I understand hope because I know the depth of loss, the tension of waiting with expectation, and the emptiness of having nothing but God Himself.

If this season is hard for you, or if hope in general is something you don't quite understand, please know both can be present: tension and expectation, waiting and hope together.

"I *qavah* for the Lord..." In Psalm 130:5 the hope of waiting for the Lord is filled with both tension and expectation. It's a hope that knows waiting can be difficult but that's there's something worth waiting for - God Himself.





## Living Hope

The New Testament brought the addition of "Elpis" to describe the Living Hope of Jesus' resurrection. The New Testament puts an added emphasis on this hope being in the person of God.

Over and over we see biblical examples of people focused on hope with no evidence that things would get better. They weren't dependent on their circumstances; they were holding onto the character of God. We look to the past evidence of Jesus risen to give us the hope for the future that God will eternally overcome. This isn't optimism. This is an active choice to hope in God.

Here's what I know. There is brokenness. There is hurt. There are things in this life we simply can't understand. No amount of explanation will ever get our finite minds to come to terms with the grief and pain we often have to bear. But God.

We don't put our hope in wishful thinking or the idea that everything will work out. That isn't what we're promised. We put our hope - our full faith, our assurance and trust - in who God is. We recall what He has done by sending His Son to die on the cross and then conquer death as the evidence of His character.

"Hope is the active conviction that despair will not have the final word."

-Kristi McLelland

I don't know what this seasons holds for you but I know we have this assurance that God Himself is our Living Hope.

As the Psalmist wrote in 39:7, *"But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you."*





## Every Single Detail

*"So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David." Luke 2:4*

When you understand every word of Scripture is Holy Spirit inspired and God-ordained, you begin to see the character of God on display in some of the details.

Mary and Joseph had already been visited by the angel with a supernatural assignment. Yet life in the day-to-day went on as usual. It was time to pay the tax of Caesar Augustus. Going about the daily routines and societal expectations landed them in the center stage of God's sovereign plan.

We could spend the whole month of December researching the prophecies fulfilled as it related to the birth and life of Jesus. We know he was from the line of David, just as it was foretold in Jeremiah 23:5. We understand why and how He was born in Bethlehem just as Micah 5:2 prophesied. Over and over, we see scripture proven true when it comes to the life and redemption that Jesus brings for every one.

When I think about Christmas and all I have to do, I can sometimes get overwhelmed. Decorations, baking, cooking, gifts, wrapping, cards, more gifts, more wrapping, and more cooking. It often feels like I can't get it all done (which is also why I begin November 1).

Yet not a single detail was left out. Not a single detail of prophecy was unfulfilled and not a single instance left to chance. Even down to what may have appeared or felt like the mundane was used to orchestrate the most magnificent of gifts for all the world.

He leaves no detail undone. Nothing is wasted and ordinary in our eyes can be the very thing that He sees and uses for the extraordinary.





## The Ache of Christmas

There were no lights, no decorations, no gifts. There was a tiny baby in a secluded manger. I can't even imagine Mary and Joseph surrounded by cows mooing and sheep baaing staring at their infant son with no accommodations and certainly no fanfare.

His name was to be called Jesus. She had pondered it in her heart for months. Now she was holding her son, her newborn babe, knowing he was the Messiah and not fully understanding how He would be the Savior of the world. When every one of His days on earth were planned by the God of the universe, it was with every single one of us in mind. That thought alone gives me pause.

A thrill of hope that the weary world could rejoice in. While we rejoice, I dare say Heaven's heart was breaking. Earth's gain of Jesus born as a babe became Heaven's loss of the Son of God. He knew what was to come. He knew what was planned.

*"The word became flesh and dwelt among us." John 1:14*

This season has a lot of opportunity to bring sadness and grief, reminders of those we're missing or grieving, magnifying the ache of what we don't have or what we had hoped for. Yet this season is the very epitome of the gift of life fulfilled. If you find yourself struggling through this season, I dare say you're not alone. Heaven must have felt the same.

There's still reason to celebrate and rejoice. The understanding of what was to come was also the way planned for each of us to have a relationship with Him. Sometimes the comfort and joy we experience can only come after heartbreak and hurt, but make no mistake. He is the bringer of comfort and joy for whatever you face. As heaven longed for the Son of God, joy came to the world, just as we can rejoice even in the midst of our longing.







## Joy

Joy. Biblical joy. It is not based on what we feel in our present circumstances. It is not controlled by anything we feel. It is a gift given that transcends our understanding and situational happenings.

It cannot be deterred or dictated by what may be going on around you. It comes from God alone and is our response to understanding who He is and why He came. When we think about the gift of Jesus and eternal salvation, we can experience His abundant joy even when what we face or feel is hard or heavy.

He fills us with joy.

*"May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace as you trust in Him." Romans 15:13*

His joy is a gift of the Spirit.

*"But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self control." Galatians 5:22*

Nothing can take away His joy.

*"Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy." John 16:22*

Joy is from Him because joy is who He is.

As we seek the Christ of Christmas, may we may experience the joy He brings, the gift of His spirit, as we understand Him as the source of our joy.





## Peace

What does it mean to be focused on peace?

The very definition means a state or period where there is no war. It also means tranquility or freedom from disturbance.

If you're a parent, or have cared for children at any point, you know what I mean. It's like that glorious moment when the kids are actually in bed (for real and no more being called or getting up) and you realize you have finally achieved a few quiet moments. If this is the kind of peace I look forward to after days filled with chaos and craziness and noise and fighting, I can only imagine the way we seek peace from the Lord.

*His peace guards our hearts. (Philippians 4:7)*

*His peace brings us joy. (Proverbs 12:20)*

If we have experienced any amount of unrest, unsettledness, uncertainty or chaos this year then no doubt we are in need of His perfect peace that keeps us steadfast. (Isaiah 26:3) We can trust in Him because He's holding us and providing us His peace even when our circumstances are anything but peaceful.

The same One called Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God was also called Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

The peace of God is described as a blessing. A promise. Something we can claim as our own. It is His gift to us as believers when our circumstances are anything but tranquil and serene.

Peace is part of God's character. Peace for us requires trust in who He is and complete faith to experience what is beyond our own understanding.

When we seek the Christ of Christmas, we will find Him and this is where we will also find His peace.





## Finding Shalom

Peace. Shalom. It's not just a state of mind or a hope for solace. It literally means complete or whole. A blessing of divine grace.

If anything has ever been out of place or missing, you've experienced the lack of this completeness. The opposite of shalom, peace, would be a state of brokenness. Life completely out of sorts. Pieces missing. Broken. Disrupted.

The peace we look for cannot be found "in this world" because this world and everything in it remains in a fallen state of brokenness. We can experience His peace knowing eventually He will fully restore everything that has been broken.

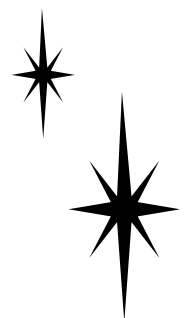
If you've ever walked hard roads of rejection and abandonment... If you've ever experienced the deep grief of loss... If you've ever felt the sting of being unwanted or never good enough... If you've had the very pieces of your heart shattered...

But God.

The redeeming God of peace has brought shalom to help restore what was lost, cast aside, and unwanted. The God of hope brought redemption for that which was destroyed. And a God of everlasting and lavish love mended the shreds of my broken heart.

Are you broken? Shattered? In pieces? It may not be well with your circumstances but I can personally testify to the peace God brings in the midst of all we face. He doesn't always restore the brokenness of our situations but He never leaves our hearts undone. His divine grace covers us, no matter what we feel or face.

Peace. Shalom. Complete. Whole. Grace-filled and grace-covered. Peace He brings. Peace He gives. Our Prince of Peace.





## The Most Wonderful Time of Year

*"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."* Hebrews 6:19

What if Christmas isn't the most wonderful time of year? What if Christmas is lonely, empty, and broken? What if Christmas represents pain, abandonment, or hard times? What if decking the halls brings reminders of memories too painful to look at? What if caroling Christmas tunes ring a resounding cord of dissonance? What if Christmas cheer is missing? What if the spirit of Christmas is buried deep beneath layers of hurt and hardness? What if Christmas isn't wonderful at all?

Christmas may be hard. The season you're in may be difficult. This season may represent the first of figuring out a new normal underneath the heaviness of grief or solitude. There may be no presents and the hustle and bustle may mean chaos and crazy schedules.

It may be hard to celebrate. It may be difficult to find peace. Cheer may elude you. Joy may be the opposite of what you feel. What's going on around you may make this season seem impossible to celebrate. What you may feel or experience may be anything but wonderful but the reason Christmas is meant to be the most wonderful time of year is because of what it represents.

This is the season of wonderment. This is the season of inspiring delight. The exciting wonder and the marvel of Christmas is not what we feel or face. It's the reminder that we don't face it alone. It's the message of hope sent from heaven above to make a way. It's not necessarily a way out of our difficult or painful circumstances, but it is a way to everlasting life where nothing is broken or destroyed.

Christmas doesn't make all our problems go away but it gives the hope that we have a Savior who came to this earth to make a way for us. Nothing we can face or feel is too difficult for Him. He is our Wonderful Counselor, our Prince of Peace. Emmanuel, God with us at all times, through whatever we're going through. Even when it doesn't feel anything close to wonderful, He is the embodiment of wonder and peace, hope and joy, for whatever we face.





## Wonderful

*"And His name shall be called Wonderful..."*

*Isaiah 9:6*

When you think about who Jesus is, what does the name "Wonderful" mean to you?

*"Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed." Luke 11:14*

The crowd was amazed at the miracles Jesus performed, but when I think about Jesus as my Savior, I am in awe of the humility it took for Him to come to earth. He was the Word made flesh who came to dwell among us. But He didn't just stop at coming to earth to live. He came to die. It's hard to type the words. It's hard to read them. Even harder to process.

*"But He was pierced for our offenses, He was crushed for our wrongdoings; The punishment for our well-being was laid upon Him, And by His wounds we are healed."*  
Isaiah 53:5

Wonderful translates miracle in Isaiah 9:6 where He is called the Wonderful Counselor. When we understand the true miracle of His birth, His perfect life, His sinless death and His victorious resurrection, we can stand in awe of the undeniable gift of who He is and what this means for us.

Anticipation of His arrival means knowing what He had to endure thereafter. Could there be any other name than Wonderful?

Think about His wonder today. What does wonderful mean to you?





## Redemption

*"Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer."*

Ruth 4:14

It's an unlikely part of the Christmas story but it is the very foundation of redemption.

The story of Ruth brings a grieving widow and a mourning mother, both left helpless and reeling from loss. Yet neither left without hope.

Nothing just so happens without His sovereignty and here inside these four chapters of Ruth we see her own redemption as a portrayal of what was to come.

Not only do Boaz and Ruth bring about the lineage of David (Ruth 4:18-22), but this picture of the kinsman-redeemer, the one sent to redeem Ruth from poverty and depravity, gives us the picture of Christ as our Redeemer.

His is the story of Redeemer and ours is the story of redemption. It is the reminder that nothing and no one is beyond His reach. None of us too far gone. None of us too flawed or fallen to be rescued by His redeeming love. Thank You, Jesus!

This love story of Ruth and Boaz gives us just a picture of the love that made it possible for us to experience our own redemption through Jesus Christ as God's Son, sent to atone for our sins and make a way for us to the Father.

We give Him praise as we understand Him as our redeemer and the atoning sacrifice to cover us with His blood so that we might be called sons and daughters of the Most High God.

In Him we have life and because of Him we are redeemed!





## Emmanuel

*"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14*

The idea of hope - tension in the waiting, eternal perspective, faith in the character of God - came colliding with the understanding of God as Emmanuel.

Emmanuel. God with us. It was a promise given to the Israelites hundreds of years before Jesus ever entered the world. That promise was the hope of having God with them - physically in their presence to save them from the darkness and persecution they faced. This wasn't just to be a deliverance of their dark and gloomy circumstances. This was to be the ultimate deliverance for every soul.

*"Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;" Psalm 23:4*

Some versions say the valley of the shadow of death. Jesus came to die. He came to take on death so the only thing we'd face is its shadow. When we deserved eternal separation and death, He stood in our place, took our penalty, and made a way for us to have full access to Holy God.

What you're facing may be more than just heaviness. It may be utter darkness. But God Himself, Emmanuel, came to bring light because HE IS LIGHT!

*"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12*

Emmanuel is not just God with us or God with them. This is God with YOU if you have received the gift of His salvation and know Him as your Savior. This is the gift of His presence that goes with you even in the darkest shadows and the lowest valleys. This is the assurance that you will not be overcome by the darkness because He is light.

I know this doesn't ease the anguish you may be experiencing. It doesn't fill the emptiness that aches inside you. I understand things may still be broken, heavy, and dark. The only thing I also know to share is the hope that we have in receiving Emmanuel, God with me, God with you, God with us.



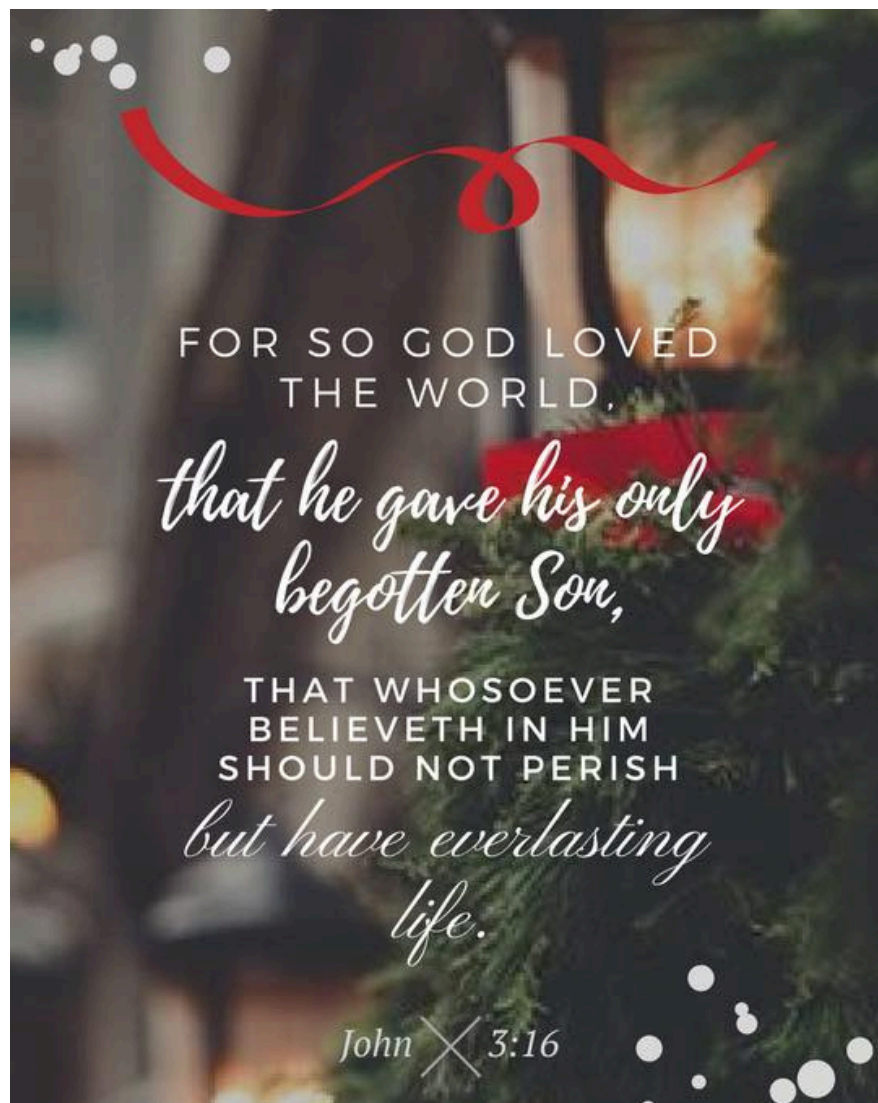
## For All the World

For God so loved the world...

He loved the entire world. Every single person who would ever inhabit the world. He loved us all, each and every one, enough to send His one and only Son to us.

He sent His Son to be both fully God and equally man. His only Son took on the sin of the world, my sin, and gave His life so that I might live. He gave His life for us. He conquered death for us. He made a way for us.

For God so loved the whole world. Every single one. All of us. Fully and completely. Without pause or question, He gave to us with no reservation or hesitation.







FOR

UNTO US A

*Child* is born,

UNTO US A

is given; and

the government will

be upon his shoulder, and his name

will be called

*Wonderful Counselor,*

MIGHTY GOD

*Everlasting Father*

PRINCE OF PEACE.

ISAIAH

9:6