

# CHRIST - THE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS

A row of seven lit candles in various colors (yellow, orange, green, red) against a dark background. The candles are lit, with bright yellow and orange flames. The background is dark, making the candles stand out. The candles are arranged in a slightly staggered line, with some in the foreground and some in the background.

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY,  
JESUS!**

Celebrating the Savior

**God's Christmas Gift**

The perfect fit for every heart

**A Time for Reflection**

9 ways to maximize the season

## PERSONALLY SPEAKING

If you're finding it harder than usual to get into the Christmas spirit this year, you aren't alone. It's been an especially tough year for this weary world of ours.

The first two months alone saw popular revolts break out in 13 North African and Middle Eastern nations, following Tunisia's lead a few weeks earlier. Some were bloodless, others bloody, but all proved that there are no overnight fixes for longstanding social and economic disparities. We all hope for the best for the 300 million people in those countries, but we must also realize that change will be a long, slow, and probably painful process.

Nature struck next. An earthquake powerful enough to shift the earth on its axis rocked Japan. Tsunami waves crushed property and spirit alike. Over 27,000 people were killed or recorded missing, and damage to nuclear reactors raised the specter of a Chernobyl-level disaster.

Those weren't the only unsettling events of 2011, of course, or necessarily the worst for us personally. It's usually events that don't make headlines that affect us the most—the loss of a loved one, severe illness or injury, financial troubles...

As 2011 draws to a close, we ask the age-old question: If God is all-powerful and truly loves us, as the Bible says, why doesn't He do something to relieve our pain and suffering?

He did. He sent Jesus.

God feels our pain. He understands our heartaches and sympathizes with our losses. He longs to draw us close, to soothe, to heal, to comfort, to reassure. He wanted so badly to help us that He sent His Son in human form, to live among us; to experience our hardships, to be His hands, to reveal His heart, and to put us in direct, personal contact with His love and power. God didn't send Jesus to remove all of our problems, but to equip us to get through them and become better for them.

And that is why we have reason to hope this Christmas.



# A Time for Reflection

BY ABI F. MAY

**MANY PEOPLE LOOK FORWARD TO CHRISTMAS WITH MIXED FEELINGS.** There is happy anticipation of celebrations, good food, a break from work, and time relaxing with family and friends, but also the anxiety that comes from especially busy days of decorating, shopping, cooking, baking, and entertaining. Some also face the likelihood of friction when their family gets together, while others face loneliness.

No matter what

our circumstances or expectations, we can all have a meaningful and truly blessed Christmas if we will take a few minutes each day for quiet reflection on symbols of the season like these.

## ★ NATIVITY SCENES

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From live reenactments to miniature models in an endless array of styles and materials, the figures of the Nativity are a visual reminder of the central characters of the

Christmas story. Joseph stands tall and steadfast. Mary's head is bowed in humility as she reflects on the Christ Child she has delivered. Shepherds kneel in adoration. Three kings in fine robes approach with gifts in hand. The donkey that Mary rode to Bethlehem stands alongside sheep and perhaps a cow. All attention is directed toward the tiny baby lying in a manger. He is at the center of Christmas, yet the scene would not be complete without each of those other figures.

Each of us also has a role to fulfill in the scene of life. With Christ at the center, the picture is complete.

Christ beside me, Christ  
before me,  
Christ behind me—King  
of my heart;  
Christ within me, Christ  
below me,  
Christ above me—never  
to part.

Christ on my right hand,  
Christ on my left hand,



Christ all around me—  
shield in the strife;  
Christ in my sleeping,  
Christ in my sitting,  
Christ in my rising—light  
of my life.

—“*St. Patrick’s Breastplate*,”  
*adapted by James Quinn*



## ★ THE WREATH

One of the most universal Christmas decorations is the wreath, a circle of evergreen that is often adorned with ribbons, baubles, candles, or other trimmings. The circular shape reminds us that God’s love, which He sent to us in Jesus, knows no end. The evergreen reminds us that Christ lives forever.

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.

—*Isaiah 9:6–7*

## ★ CHRISTMAS TREATS

Gingerbread was possibly the first treat to be associated with Christmas. It was first baked in Germany during the Middle Ages, and over the years other sweets have become traditional Christmas favorites in various countries around the world: marzipan and colorful Christmas cookies throughout Europe and North America; fruitcake and trifle in English-speaking countries; *panettone* (sweet bread) in Italy, Latin America, and with a slight variation in Romania, where it is known as *cozonac*; *pan de Pascua* (sponge cake) in Chile; *vánoční cukroví* (iced Christmas cookies) in the Czech Republic; *stollen* (fruitcake with

marzipan) in Germany; *cougnot* (sweet bread) in Belgium; almond cakes in Spain; and *ponche crema*, a sweet hot Christmas drink in Venezuela—to name just a few. All can serve as reminders of the sweetness of God’s presence through Christ in our lives.

Sweet Jesus, is there anything sweeter than You? The memory of You is more delightful than anything else. Your name is joy; it is the true gate of our salvation.—*Saint Anthony of Padua (1195–1231)*



## ★ CANDLES

Twinkling lights, red ribbons, and shiny tinsel adorn homes and public places, announcing the arrival of the festive season. Candles, representing the light that Jesus brought to our world, are rarely missing among the decorations. They symbolize God’s light entering the world at Jesus’ birth.

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.—*Isaiah 9:2*



## ★ CAROLS

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Listening to Christmas carols or singing along while decorating the tree or baking Christmas cookies can relieve stress and lift your spirits. Singing carols together also draws family and friends closer and adds substance to the celebrations as you join the choir of angels who announced Jesus' birth.

Silent night, holy night,  
All is calm, all is bright  
Round yon virgin  
mother and Child.  
Holy Infant, so  
tender and mild,  
Sleep in heavenly peace,  
Sleep in heavenly peace.  
Silent night, holy night,  
Shepherdsquake at the sight;  
Glories stream  
from heaven afar,  
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!  
Christ the Savior is born,  
Christ the Savior is born!  
—*Josef Mohr*



## ★ BELLS

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“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, ‘God with us.’”<sup>1</sup> The jubilant sound of Christmas bells, proclaiming the arrival of God’s Son, is among the most joyful sounds we associate with Christmas.

Ring Christmas bells,  
merrily ring,  
Tell all the world, Jesus is  
King,  
Loudly proclaim with one  
accord  
The happy tale, welcome  
the Lord.

—*Mykola Leontovich*  
(translation: Ray Conniff)

## ★ CHRISTMAS EVE

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Many of us are busy right up until the evening of Christmas Eve, but we shouldn’t miss reflecting on the drama of that night 2,000 years ago. A young woman must give birth in a stable. Her newborn’s first bed is the animals’ feeding trough. But in the sky a new star has appeared, and on a nearby hillside angels proclaim to lowly shepherds that the Savior is born.

O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin, and enter  
in, be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas  
angels the great glad  
tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with  
us, our Lord Emmanuel!  
—*Phillips Brooks*

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1. Matthew 1:23



## ★ GIFTS

Christmas shopping starts earlier every year. Although we may not enjoy the shopping process, there's a special pleasure in tracking down something that will be a happy surprise for our children, other family members, and friends. While wrapping presents or arranging them under the tree, take a moment to remember the One who came to give His life for us.

Dear Jesus, it is Your birth I am celebrating this Christmas. The shepherds brought their wonder and worship; the wise men brought their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to honor You. I bring love and gratitude.

## ★ WHEN CHRISTMAS FEASTS ARE OVER

Sometimes the days following Christmas can seem anticlimactic. Presents have been given, and visitors have come and gone. We eat leftovers from Christmas dinner, and tidy up the house. In a few days a new year will begin—another round of ups and downs, happiness and pain. But the joy and magic of Christmas do not have to fade. We can keep Christmas every day by reaching out to God and being touched by His love.

Celebrate the feast of Christmas every day in the temple of your spirit, remaining like a baby in the bosom of the heavenly Father, where you will be reborn each moment in the Divine Word, Jesus Christ.—*St. Paul of the Cross (1694–1775)*

We can always drop a little love into the hearts of those we pass by, even if only with a word, a smile, or a look of sympathy, and they will know that God has loved them that day! His Spirit will tell them so. A little bit of love goes such a long way!

—*D.B.B*

## 3

If we stop to think about it, there's no limit to how useful our life can be. We can show we care to the unloved, give sympathy, be friendly and congenial, and lend a listening ear or a helping hand to someone in need. We can always be cheerful, and see the positive side of every situation, and help others to do the same. Anyone who wants to can really make a difference in the world, and can motivate others to do the same.

—*Maria Fontaine*



# God's christmas gift

BY PETER AMSTERDAM



**CHRISTMAS CELEBRATES THE MOST IMPORTANT BIRTH IN HUMAN HISTORY,** when the Creator of the universe entered our world in bodily form as both God and man in Jesus. An angel appeared to announce Jesus' birth to a few shepherds who were watching their sheep at night. "I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people," the angel proclaimed, "for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

As I was thinking about that, I was reminded of another event that took place a few days later. When Jesus' parents presented Him in the temple, in accordance with the Mosaic Law, they met an old man who had received a personal promise from God. The man's name was Simeon,

and God had told him that he would not die before seeing the Messiah. When Simeon saw the baby Jesus, he took Him in his arms, praised God, and said, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel."<sup>2</sup>

Both proclamations make it clear that Jesus came to bring salvation to "all people"—anyone who would believe in Him, regardless of race, religion, background, or anything else. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did

not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."<sup>3</sup>

"Whoever believes." Salvation is God's Christmas gift to you and me. ❖

If you haven't received God's ultimate Christmas gift, you can right now by welcoming Jesus as your Savior. Simply pray a prayer like the following:

*Jesus, I want to experience God's love and care, which are promised through You, "the way, the truth, and the life."<sup>4</sup> I open my heart and invite You in. Amen.*

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1. Luke 2:10–11

2. See Luke 2:26–32.

3. John 3:16–17

4. John 14:6



POINTS to  
PONDER

# The reason for the season

**JESUS TEMPORARILY RENOUNCED THE RIGHTS OF HIS CITIZENSHIP IN HEAVEN AND BECAME A CITIZEN OF THIS WORLD.**

Though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor that we through His poverty might become rich. He not only adapted Himself to our bodily form, but also conformed to the human ways of life, customs, language, dress, and living, that He might understand and love us better and communicate with us on the lowly level of our own human understanding. He did it that He might reach us with His love, prove to us His compassion and concern, and help us understand His message in simple, childlike terms that we could grasp.

—D.B.B

As you enjoy all the blessings of life this Christmas, stop and think about what meager

circumstances Jesus was born into. He had so much, yet became so little. He became nothing so that we could have everything. All that we have, we owe to Him.

—*Maria Fontaine*

Oh Christmas star, shine your light and guide us all to the true meaning of Christmas! Direct us to the Savior, the Prince of Peace, that we too may have peace in our hearts and good will toward all men.

—*Troi Fountain*

It is Christmas every time you let God love others through you. Yes, it is Christmas every time you smile at your brother and offer him your hand.

—*Mother Teresa*

There is a lot going on this Christmas. But it is not in the shops and the parties and the pulsating lights. To be part of it you need to find time to be

quiet, to be silent and still, to contemplate his presence in your hearts and in your minds. He is there. He wants to embrace you. Let him. And having discovered what is really going on at Christmas we cannot, in the end, keep quiet about it. We cannot live in a world that, in spite of the tragedies and sorrows, is still a world full of gifts, without saying 'thank you'. We cannot be part of what Christmas is really about without praising and glorifying God.

—*Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor*

Christmas is not a time or a season but a state of mind. To cherish peace and good will, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas. If we think on these things, there will be born in us a Savior and over us will shine a star sending its gleam of hope to the world.

—*Calvin Coolidge* ❖



# THE BEST PART OF CHRISTMAS

By JOSIE CLARK



AS I RUSHED AROUND THE STREETS OF MORELIA, MEXICO, the stoplights were crowded with beggars. It was Christmas Eve, and I had gone out with my 10-year-old daughter for some last-minute shopping.

“Look at her!” Cathy drew my attention to an old woman who had stopped begging momentarily and was rubbing her cold, bare feet.

“She’s someone’s grandmother,” I thought aloud, “but instead of being home with her family, she

is out here in her bare feet, trying to scrape together a little money for Christmas dinner.” Then an idea struck me. “Cathy, let’s go home and get together some food for her.”

It was already getting dark, so she probably wouldn’t be working that stoplight much longer. We raced home, found a couple of sturdy bags, and began going through our well-stocked pantry and refrigerator. Rice, beans, dried jalapeños, a jar of salsa, corn tortillas,

a cooked chicken. It was easy to fill the bags from our abundance. A loaf of bread, jam, bacon. I tied the bags with large bows, and we headed off to find the old woman.

At first we thought we had taken too long and missed her. Then we saw her trudging slowly down the street, her shawl wrapped tightly around her, probably on her way home.

“Hello!” Cathy greeted her and continued in Spanish. “We saw you at the

stoplight and brought you some food for Christmas dinner. We hope you and your family will feel God's love this Christmas."

The old woman looked at us with wonderment, and tears welled up in her eyes. Then she took Cathy's hands in hers and

kissed them. "Thank you. Thank you. God bless you. You are beautiful. You are a Christmas angel."

She took the bags and continued down the street.

Our own Christmas Eve was festive, as usual, and the next morning Cathy opened her gifts. When

I asked her if she was having a good Christmas, she replied, "You know, Mommy, seeing that old woman so happy last night, and having her kiss my hands—that was the best Christmas present I got. I think giving is the best part of Christmas! ❖"

At one time or another, each of us must face life's tough, emotion-wrenching moments. We might deal with the trials of rejection, poverty, terminal illness, conflict, loneliness, unhappy partnerships, or even death. No matter what difficulties we may face, love is the universal answer to them all.



The power of love—that spark of the divine inherent in each of us—smoothes and soothes, heals and restores. We long for it in our relationships; we desire it in our lives. We admire it in others; and want to cultivate it in ourselves.



We grasp for it with both hands and, if we are wise, we give it away with both, understanding that love, like music, is a melody that lingers in the heart long after the words have been sung. Love is what helps us to feel for each other, to put ourselves into our neighbor's places. It helps us to see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and feel with their hearts. Better yet, it teaches us to view others the way God sees them.



What better time than now to reach out in love and accept others into the embrace of our family's circle. ❖

It is the personal thoughtfulness, the warm human awareness, the reaching out of the self to one's fellow man that makes giving worthy of the Christmas spirit.

— *Isabel Currier*

# SPECIAL TREASURES

BY MARY ROYS

**EACH DECEMBER I ASK MY CHILDREN**, Toby and Kathy, now seven and nine, to go through their toys and clothes and set aside what they have outgrown or no longer use. Then I check what they've selected, weeding out worn-out items and exercising my veto power in a few cases, and box up the best of the rest to give to others who have less than we do. Besides instilling in the children a spirit of giving, I have found this to also be an

effective way to trim down on clutter and put “gently used” items that they no longer need or want to good use.

Last Christmas both of my children seemed more materialistic about the holiday—more focused on the presents they were hoping to receive, and less inclined toward giving. I wondered why, as well as whether or not they were aware of their change in attitude.

I decided to take an

indirect approach. “What do you think is the true meaning of Christmas?”

Of course they knew that Christmas is a celebration of Jesus' birthday, but they stopped at that.

“On the first Christmas, did God give us only His rejects?” I asked.

“No,” Toby replied thoughtfully. “He gave us the very best He had—His most special treasure.”

“And that is the true spirit of Christmas,” I explained.



“To give of our best to others, like God gave His best to us.”

The kids thought about this for a bit and then came up with a plan to give away some of their favorite toys, rather than just the ones they were tired of. Toby chose to give some of his favorite

Matchbox cars, and Kathy decided to give one of her dolls. We packed these with the rest of the items we had set aside, and I took the children with me when I dropped off our Christmas donations.

Instilling values in my

children is one of my greatest responsibilities as a parent, and teaching them to think of others before themselves is a big part of that. Giving sacrificially shouldn't be a once-a-year occurrence, of course, but Christmas is a perfect opportunity. ❖



# SILENT NIGHT

BY GEORGE GREY

“SILENT NIGHT, HOLY NIGHT!” What beautiful words to a beautiful song, written so long ago—a song that so perfectly captures the calm, serenity, and peace of that wonderful first Christmas night.

Nine-year-old Joan lay on her bed, listening to the Christmas carols that played

downstairs where her mom, Angela Jenson, was fixing their Christmas Eve meal. Joan smiled as she thought of how her mom loved to listen to those old Christmas carols over and over again. Her favorite, “Silent Night,” seemed to be playing for the hundredth time now. Her mom never tired of hearing

it.

Joan was an only child and lived alone with her mother in a quiet suburban neighborhood. She had spent most of the day inside the house. Now it was mid-afternoon and she was restless. She needed to do something outside. There would be plenty of time with

her mom and relatives during the Christmas celebrations, but now she felt like finding some friends to be with.

One friend's house was just down the street, on the other side—so off Joan went. She had been taught to be careful when crossing the street, and normally she was. This time, however, Joan's mind was busy with thoughts of the games she and her friend would play and things they would do before dark. Without stopping at the curb or glancing to see if there was any traffic, Joan ran into the street.

There was a sudden screeching of tires and an awful thud—and then the sound of a car roaring off. Angela heard it all from her kitchen. Her whole world hushed. Somehow she knew what had happened. She dropped her cooking and ran out the door. There, to her horror, Joan lay motionless in the street.

Anguish flooded Angela's heart and mind. The peace and calm she had felt only moments before had been

replaced with terrible pain. She raced to her daughter's side.

Other doors opened and neighbors came out of their houses to see what had happened.

"Quick!" Angela shouted, her voice quivering. "Call an ambulance. My girl is hurt!"

Kneeling over her daughter, Angela brushed the hair from Joan's face. Joan was unconscious, but breathing. Thank God! she thought, She's alive. There's hope. Then came a silent prayer. Oh, God! Please save my little daughter! Please don't let her die!

At the hospital the doctors found that Joan had suffered a severe concussion and her arm had been broken. Considering the force of the impact, the doctors said it was a miracle that it hadn't been worse.

Joan's condition was stable, but hours passed and Joan didn't regain consciousness.

Late into the night, Angela sat at her daughter's bedside and held her hand. Christmas seemed impossible now, yet

that old familiar strain ran through her mind. Silent night, holy night ... Angela buried her face in her hands. Oh, dear God, she prayed, will this be my silent night? Will Joan stay silent and still? Is she going to die? This was not the kind of silence she had ever imagined would befall her at Christmas. She felt so completely alone.

Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright. The words first echoed through her mind, and then she began to sing them softly.

Silent night, holy night.  
All is calm; all is bright  
'Round yon virgin,  
mother and child.

Holy infant, so tender and mild,

Sleep in heavenly peace.

Sleep in heavenly peace.

In the stillness of that hospital room, Angela began to feel a serenity that she had never experienced before. Then one word came clearly to mind: Pray.

There was nothing else she could do and no one else to turn to, so Angela bared her

soul to God in prayer for her daughter.

The peace that she had felt before she prayed remained with her throughout the night. Just as Angela watched over her daughter, she knew that God was there in that room, watching over both of them as He had watched over His newborn Son on this night long ago. Surely He understood a parent's love. Surely He was concerned and would answer her prayer.

Christmas morning came

softly as the first rays of sunlight pierced the room. "Mommy? Mommy, is that you?"

Angela raised her weary head. She had fallen asleep in her chair where she had been praying.

"Joan, are you all right?"

"Yes, Mommy, but my head hurts."

Angela reached over and kissed her dear daughter. Tears of joy began streaming down her face, as she whispered thanks to the One

who had stayed by their side through the night. "Thank You! Thank You for watching over us, and for answering my prayer!" Her daughter was back! That was all she could have wished for this Christmas.

But there was more to be thankful for. Her favorite Christmas carol had taken on a new meaning, for Angela had seen the power of prayer and experienced the perfect peace that trusting God can bring. ❖

**T**he world runs on faith. Defined as "believing" and "trusting", faith is—above all else—an action, one we practice nearly every moment of our lives. Our belief or trust is automatic on the most basic human level. In a material sense, we live by faith every day—from the magnificent to the mundane—by relying on the goodness of others, the principle of gravity, the diagnosis of physicians, even the descriptions in an encyclopedia.

**U**nlike a muscle, faith means taking chances. Sometimes we must dare to go further than is comfortable, further—at times—than we can see. That's how we practice faith; we actually create more faith—stronger faith—by trusting.

**T**rusting is a muscle. As we exercise our faith, our lives grow stronger. We build our faith like a muscle. And it becomes progressively easier to exercise trust and to believe. Until, somewhere along life's journey, we learn that an all-encompassing faith is our passport to joy. ❖



# occasion to love

BY MARIA FONTAINE

FOR MANY OF US, since we were young children, Christmas has been a special time of celebrating Jesus' birth, giving and receiving gifts, and spending time with family and friends. But Christmas is not only a time to enjoy these blessings ourselves; it is also the greatest opportunity of the year to tell the world about our precious Savior. Perhaps more than any other day of the year, it's a time when people think about the miracle that is at

the heart of Christmas— God sending His own dear Son into our world to lead us back to Him. Even in non-Christian cultures, people are interested in learning the true meaning of Christmas.

We who have experienced God's love in Jesus have a chance to give the very best gift this Christmas, not only to those we know best and hold dear, but also to neighbors and strangers who share our world. There are those

around us whose hearts are sad and weary, who cry out for a comforter, who yearn for a Savior. Some are overwhelmed by fear and uncertainty. Others are filled with despair and hopelessness because they have no goals and find no meaning in life. Others are laden with burdens of bitterness and guilt, or are imprisoned in emptiness, or are plagued by pain, or are otherwise beset by problems too big for them to solve on their own.



Jesus loves them and wants to take them in His arms. But He who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving must have our help! We are His eyes that can search them out, His ears that can hear their cry, His voice that can respond and comfort them, His arms that can embrace them.

Will you do your best to help them? Will you give of yourself? Jesus did. He stepped outside the most wonderful place that has


ever been created to come here to earth and endure discomfort, humiliation, mocking, and pain—all in order to save us.

You can make a difference this Christmas. Even the humblest attempt to share the little you may have can shine as a very bright light in others' lives, a ray of hope to penetrate the darkness that shrouds them.<sup>1</sup>

Reach out to others. Tell them how Jesus came to earth to love them, how He

died to save them, and how He rose again to deliver them into a wonderful new world that they can experience right now on earth and also enjoy forever in heaven. Proclaim that we celebrate the birthday of a living Savior who alone is the answer to their deepest needs.

As His Father sent Him, so He sends us.<sup>2</sup> Be Jesus' hands. Be His feet. Be His eyes. Be His lips. Heal the brokenhearted; free the captives; raise those



who are dead in trespasses and sins; welcome the rejected, the alienated, the ostracized.<sup>3</sup> Preach the Gospel to the poor; loose the bands of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, let the oppressed go free.<sup>4</sup> Give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

Freely ye have received, freely give.<sup>5</sup>

And let's not stop with Christmas! Let's keep sharing and giving and loving just as much throughout the year to come. Let's make each day a celebration of Jesus' birth, which brought the promise of new life for all. 🎁

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1. Matthew 5:14–16
  2. John 20:21
  3. Isaiah 61:1,3
  4. Matthew 11:5; Isaiah 58:6
  5. Matthew 10:8



## A Christmas Prayer

Loving God, help us to remember the birth of Christ that we may share in the songs of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wise men. Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing that Christ brings. May our minds be filled with grateful thoughts and our hearts with forgiveness.

—Robert Louis Stevenson

# CHRISTMAS IN THE AIR

Christmas is most truly Christmas when we celebrate it by giving the light of love to those who need it most.

—*Ruth Carter Stapleton*

Christmas is not made special by presents, decorations, and parties, but by what we give to others from our hearts. Giving from our hearts demonstrates true gratitude and appreciation for all God has given us.

—*Alex Peterson*

If instead of a gem, or even a flower, we should cast the gift of a loving thought into the heart of a friend, that would be giving as the angels give.

—*George MacDonald*

What is Christmas? It is tenderness for the past, courage for the present, hope for the future. It is a fervent wish that every cup may overflow with blessings rich and eternal, and that every path may lead to peace.

—*Agnes M. Pahro*

May you have the gladness of Christmas, which is hope; the spirit of Christmas, which is peace; the heart of Christmas, which is love.

—*Ada V. Hendricks*

Let us remember that the Christmas heart is a giving heart, a wide-open heart that thinks of others first. The birth of the baby Jesus ... meant the pouring into a sick world of the

healing medicine of love, which has transformed all manner of hearts for almost two thousand years. Underneath all the bulging bundles is this beating Christmas heart.

—*George Matthew Adams (1878–1962)*

A thoughtful Christmas gift doesn't have to cost a lot of money or require hours of searching through crowded malls. All that is needed is a big heart and an imagination.

—*Linda King*



A close-up photograph of a man and a woman embracing. The man is on the left, and the woman is on the right, looking towards him. They are both smiling slightly. The background is a soft, out-of-focus sunset over a body of water, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The overall mood is romantic and peaceful.

**FROM JESUS WITH LOVE**

# *The gift of a thankful heart*

What can you give Me this Christmas? A thankful heart is one gift I love to receive anytime. You make Me happy when you are appreciative of My blessings, great and small, because I love to see you happy. I love to see you smile, and that makes Me smile in return. I love to see you laugh, and I love to laugh with you. Each smile or laugh tells Me that you love and appreciate Me.

Think of specific things that make you glad, and thank Me for them. And when something happens that makes you feel happy or loved, thank Me for that. When you do either of those, it becomes a personal gift exchange between you and Me. I give you blessings, which makes you happy, and you give Me thanks, which makes Me happy.

It is even more beautiful when you find things to thank Me for in spite of difficult or unhappy circumstances. It's easy to be thankful when everything is going well, but when you can remain thankful in the midst of adversity, it shows even greater love and trust that I will work things out for you. That's special, and I give you special blessings in return.

So thank Me in happy times and in sad times, in laughter and in tears, in health and in sickness, in success and in failure, in times of abundance and in times of lack. Thank Me because you know that everything is in My hands and under My control.