



Bulletin

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Miracle in a Manger

THE HOPE AND REDEMPTION OF CHRISTMAS BY JIM DALY

THIS TIME OF YEAR, THE WORLD IS ALIVE WITH LIGHTS, DECORATIONS and music. But for people going through dark times, the Christmas season may not seem merry or bright.

The very first Christmas was difficult for a lot of people. Like Mary, Jesus' mother. She's often portrayed as an adult woman who was ready to begin a family. In reality, she was young and unmarried, and became pregnant under scandalous conditions. She may have also faced ridicule for her story about an angel telling her that her baby was conceived by the power of God. Jesus' birth itself took place in an environment better suited for peasants and farm animals than a king.

Then there was the terrible event now known as the Massacre of the Innocents. King Herod felt so threatened by Jewish prophecy foretelling the birth of a king that he ordered the death of every male child 2 years old and younger in the region.

A lot of people that first Christmas had plenty of reason to lose hope and to question God's faithfulness. But it was *into* those difficult circumstances that Jesus was born.

If you're struggling this Christmas, take heart. There *is* reason to hope. The first Christmas wasn't about hot cocoa and mistletoe. It was about the Son of God entering into our pain and struggle to bring hope and redemption to us all.

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LET IMMANUEL COMFORT HURTING HEARTS

Christmas is wonderful! However, for some it can be a very painful time. One of the most helpful ways we can minister grace to hurting hearts is by reminding them of one of our Savior's most precious names: *Immanuel*.

The angel who spoke to Joseph in a dream identified the significance of the name Immanuel, "which means, God with us" (Matthew 1:23). When the Son of God became man through the Virgin Birth, God drew near to us. He entered our broken, sin-laden world to reconcile us to God and carry our griefs and sorrows (Isaiah 53:4). We can bring the comfort of the gospel as a balm for the hurts of our people. We can remind those who grieve that the God who collects their tears in His bottle (Psalm 56:8) has already drawn near to them in Christ and will continue to be present with them in their time of need.

The birth of Jesus Christ is a significant proof of this. He who bore the grief of our sins can bear us up in times of grief and loss. Immanuel, God with us, invites us to

bring our burdens to Him. In Christ, we are never alone! God is close by. He is "near to the brokenhearted" and "daily bears us up" (Psalms 34:18; 68:19).

In times of profound loss, the Lord Himself draws near and says: "I will never leave you" (Hebrews 13:5). No loss we suffer will be able to separate us "from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39). Through personal faith in Jesus, the "great priest over the house of God," we may continually "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Hebrews 10:19-22). In Christ, God has drawn near to us so that we might draw near to Him.

Our lives are always a mixture of joy and sorrow. We are "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," as the apostle Paul reminds us (2 Corinthians 6:10). Immanuel delivers God's comforting presence and promises. This month, let's apply Immanuel's comforting salve to wounded hearts.

—*Paul Tautges*

A CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL



This month, we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Rejoice, for He has come and given us new life!

On Christmas Day, pause with your family to discuss the beauty of what has happened. The newborn Jesus was cradled in a manger, as promised. All the promises of Jesus' coming had come to pass.

In the season of Advent, we prepare our hearts for the coming King. On Christmas Day we rejoice, for the King has come. Jesus gave us new life through His sacrifice. As you celebrate Christmas, take time to respond in worship because "the Word became flesh."

Open the Word to show your children how they can respond to the good news of Jesus' coming. Isaiah 53 perfectly lays out why Jesus came, what it meant, and how it would look. Read these verses with your kids to help walk them through why Jesus came:

Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our
transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that
brought us peace,

and with his wounds we are
healed.

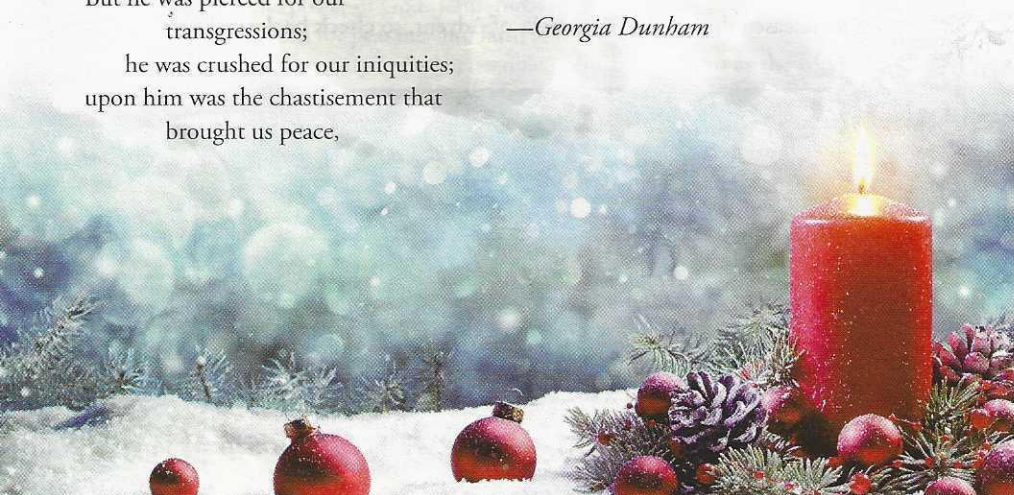
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to
his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

ISAIAH 53:4-6

Christmas is about the celebration of Jesus, our Savior. Charge your family to walk in faith. We have freedom from sin in Christ Jesus! What a truly amazing gift to celebrate! Take time to give thanks to the King of kings, the Prince of Peace, the author and perfecter of our faith.

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord"
(Luke 2:10-11).

—Georgia Dunham



WELCOME TO ADVENT 2023

This month, we continue to celebrate Advent in the lead-up to Christmas.

Observing Advent is a wonderful way to prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus Christ. Advent reminds Christians of Jesus' birth, His presence with us and His second coming.

Advent is when we remember God's promises to send a Messiah and how Jesus Christ fulfilled every prophecy written about Him. Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection made it possible for us to have a relationship with God and to one day spend eternity with Him.

However, Advent doesn't only celebrate the birth of Jesus; it's also a time to rejoice and hope in Jesus Christ's second coming. In the same way that people waited with anticipation and prepared for the Messiah's birth, Advent reminds us to anticipate and prepare for His return. By reading the Bible, praying and fasting, we can prepare our hearts and deepen the relationship we have with Jesus.

Advent is a beautiful season of the year and an excellent time for families to discuss Christian beliefs and values, their faith and Jesus' return. Focus on the Family offers resources that will help you and your family dig deeper into the love God showed when He sent His Son Jesus to be born.

Sign up for this season's amazing **Advent resources from Focus on the Family** at focusonthefamily.com/advent-2023. Then **watch your inbox for Advent updates** that will help you and your family draw closer to Christ this Advent season. These resources will help your family grow in faith, feel the anticipation of Christ's return and encourage you to share the love of Jesus. New content will be released during the four weeks of Advent, so **check back often!**

For more information on any of the topics in this bulletin, go to FocusOnTheFamily.com or call 800-A-FAMILY [232-6459]. To reach Customer Service regarding your subscription, please call 1-800-692-9912. To check out more ministry resources, please visit us at www.tyndaleperiodicals.com.

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