



Crossway's  
Advent Devotional  
2022

# Follow the Light

Dave Ripper

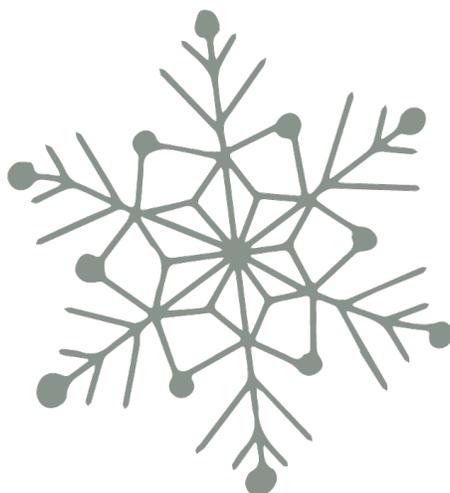
One of my favorite memories of Christmas as a child was walking to church on Christmas Eve. I grew up two blocks from the small Presbyterian church my family attended. Christmas Eve felt particularly special because the church placed lit candles along the sidewalk leading up to the sanctuary doors. It felt like a luminous, grand entrance. I always looked forward to it. It felt different, special, sacred even.

The theme of light continued all through the Christmas Eve service—culminating with the lighting of candles and the singing of silent night. Something warmed my soul as I heard Jesus proclaimed as the light of the world. As John 1:4-5 tells us, “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

As I grew older, I began to be more and more aware of the darkness in the world. Suffering was real. Loved ones passed on. Middle school had to be endured. Yet somehow, by God’s grace, these Christmas Eve memories seemed to instill a lasting sense of hope. Darkness doesn’t win. The light—Christ—does!

As we invite you to come home to Christmas this year at Crossway, you are invited to find your heart’s true home in Christ, the light of the world. As a simple prayer exercise, or perhaps during our Candlelight Christmas Eve services (we hope you’ll come and invite your friends and family), look at the light of a lit candle, and gently move toward it. May that be your prayer of dedication to God, that you want to draw closer to him—that you want to be in the light, as he is in the light (1 John 1:7).

Many blessings to you and yours this Christmas, friends!



# The Christmas Eve Spectacular

Doug and Amy Melder

For the past decade, we've been carrying on a Christmas Eve tradition in our home that my sister and I created in our childhood. It's a homemade pageant of sorts, unique to the year, audience and participants. I shared stories with my boys of xylophones and homemade oatmeal canister drums, Scripture readings and clunky Christmas carols on our upright piano, all listed in a program typed in pixelated Helvetica Bold 18pt font, on that paper that was connected by perforated lines. Apparently the memories were convincing of a fun time because my boys have devised their own every year since. On Christmas Eve, we open our home, share a meal together with family and friends, and enjoy the festivities the boys have planned. My only involvement is a reminder to be respectful (boys have a way of making everything silly and/or too intense) and every year we are blessed (and well entertained) by the performance of what has become: "The Christmas Eve Spectacular."

Isaiah prophesied the coming of the Lord Jesus and what it would mean, "the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned ... 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. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end."

We've watched a teddy bear play baby Jesus (no dolls here), sat through some pitchy, poorly rehearsed Christmas carols and watched a dark artistic video. But we've also celebrated this amazing good news together, in our own way, in our own home with loved ones gathered. We honor the truth that Christmas Eve really is spectacular because the prophecy has been fulfilled: Christ has come and we can have peace (as much as possible with all these boys).

This Christmas how can you embrace the simple, imperfect moments and memories and allow them to lead you to the spectacular light of the good news?



# In the Moment

Hannah Davis

Christmas is always a super busy time for my family. Buying gifts, decorating the tree, wrapping presents, cooking, baking, getting everything ready for Christmas at my grandparents.

I always expect Christmas to be a break from school, homework, work, errands, lists of things to get done. Everything that adds stress to my life. I somehow forget about all the planning and preparation that goes into Christmas. Planning and thinking ahead never seems to end.

I know it seems crazy after everything I just said about what needs to get done for Christmas, but Christmas Day is one of the few days a year where you can take a break from all of it. Take the day to spend time with family and celebrate the birth of Jesus.

I know at times it seems impossible to not think about everything you have to get done or plan ahead for. I struggle with it everyday. I am someone who is always thinking about what's next so that it doesn't jump out at me.

Matthew 6:34 says, *“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

Instead of worrying about everything going on, make a list. Make a list of everything you can think of that you have to do after Christmas. Put the list somewhere you will see it after the holidays and forget everything you wrote down. On Christmas Day, try and be in the moment, not thinking about anything except Jesus and family. In a world where everything is fast paced, take the opportunity to slow down, be present, be in the moment, and focus on Jesus.



# Home = Rest

Emeran Langmaid

I hate the Christmas season. After spending nearly 20 years in retail, Christmas takes on a different meaning. It's an emotional battle being on the receiving end of the Christmas shopping frenzy.

"Smile-smile-smile. Yes of course I can do that for you. I'm sorry, we're sold out. You can't treat my staff that way. I AM the owner."

Then there's creating a magical Christmas experience at home with lots of cookies, reindeer food, parties, teacher gifts ... santa.

It took me a long time to (1) be honest with my feelings about the "Christmas Season", and (2) reimagine how to do "Christmas" that focuses on the gift of Christ as our savior and redeemer.

My favorite Christmas carol is We Three Kings; so moody in its minor key. The chorus guides us to "thy perfect light". Christ is the light. Life is a series of journeys. Not all of them are easy, but through Christ, we can always come "home" to him.

He promises peace, rest for the weary, respite from trials and sorrows, and unconditional love.

Matthew 11:28 sums it up pretty well, *"Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*

Home = Rest. Welcome Home.



# Joy in Suffering

Jan Felo

Six years ago my husband died of pancreatic cancer. It was just a few weeks before Christmas and was a difficult time for our family. My daughter and family were in India, and my youngest grandson had just been born.

They were scurrying around to get the proper government papers so that they could bring the little one back into the country after attending the memorial service for my husband. However, in the midst of sorrow, Christmas came to bring us joy.

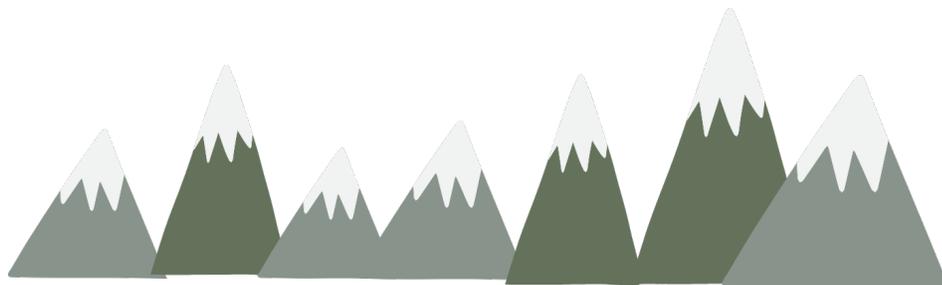
When Christ had been born the angel said to the shepherds, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11). As my family sat around the living room of my son, we all claimed these verses as we shared stories of my husband. It was a time to remember the coming of Jesus Christ and what He had done in our family.

The verses the Lord gave me after that moment in time are found in Isaiah 43:18-19.

*“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.”*

When Christ came, he came to give the world a new thing. For the next 33 years, we are able to see God in flesh showing what a new thing could be ours as we accept the love and faithfulness of God.

Will you accept the “new thing” that our Lord wants to give you at this wonderful time of year?



# Home

Kandice McBrearty

Full of empathy and grace.  
A place of safety and warmth.  
Home is where there's love.

With people that care.  
Where there is laughter and cheer.  
Home's where you belong.

With guidelines and rules.  
It's where what you do matters.  
Home is stern and just.

With second chances,  
And forgiveness encouraged,  
Home is where there's love.

When I think of home, I think of the words above. Love, empathy, grace, forgiveness etc. When I think of coming home from work I know that it will not be perfect. I know it will have its trials, but I know there will be laughter, joy, and peace. Unfortunately, I know that not everyone may think of these feelings when they think of home. For some, home may be a place of hurt and stress. But I don't think that is what God envisioned for us and not what he writes about in His word.

When I think of coming home I think of the prodigal son story in the book of Luke. A son who had moved away and squandered away his inheritance, was welcomed back home with arms wide open by his father. His father's home was full of love, forgiveness and empathy. The father threw a party in the son's honor with laughter and cheer, and the son felt again as if he belonged. However, the older brother was irate, thinking of the unfairness. Jesus is quick to tell us, though, that there is no room for that in His home. In His home, you welcome the lost soul back. "We had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15: 32). I encourage you to think this Christmas season about who you could invite back home. Who needs forgiveness and a second chance?

When I think of coming home, I also think of that day when I will be welcomed into my heavenly home. See the most important part of Christmas, the reason for the season as you may, is that a baby was born. The Messiah had come, as prophesied throughout the Old Testament. He had come to save us from our sins, so that we could ultimately come home and spend eternity with Him. While we dream about our heavenly home, I encourage us to think about how we can have more of the qualities of our heavenly home in our earthly home. What can you do this Christmas season, and beyond, to have a home known for its love, empathy, forgiveness, laughter, and God-honoring morals?

*Psalm 23:6 "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

# God's Gifts

Ellie Beatty

When I was a little girl at Christmas time there was always a flurry of activity in our home, baking cookies, wrapping gifts, decorating the tree, and setting up the manger scene next to the small wax Santa and his sleigh with the tiny, wrapped packages.

My father would go to our local library and check out large, beautiful picture books with photos of national parks or colorful paintings by famous artists, or scenes from around the world. These would remain on our coffee table throughout the Christmas season. I remember spending hours sitting on the couch near our lighted tree, thumbing through these beautiful books.

It was a family joke that Dad was kind of a Scrooge. He generally did not participate in the shopping or decorating, and after the final package was opened each year, he would announce: "Only 365 days until next Christmas" much to our dismay.

Now that many years have passed, I don't recall many of the gifts that I received on those Christmas mornings. However, I do recall the beauty in those library books. Even though I did not really know him yet, God was there, imprinting on my memory the beauty and the wonder of his creation.

It's a good reminder to me that God's gifts are not ephemeral like those under the tree, but are there for us every day, in every sunrise and sunset, in his steady love for us and his promise to walk with us through the fire and flood, on the good days and the bad. Ironically, my father, who was not interested in the trappings of Christmas, provided the most lasting Christmas gift.

Jesus said: *"Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven ... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (from Matthew 6:19-21).

This advent season let's notice and help our family and friends to notice the gifts of each day, the lasting gifts that will not break, rust, or fade, the lasting treasure that Jesus offers to us daily.



# A Favorite Memory

Pam Osgood

One of my favorite memories is the Christmas Eve my entire family (3 daughters, 3 sons-in-law, 8 grandchildren) attended Christmas Eve service with us. Everyone was dressed in festive red and green outfits and excitedly chatting about the holiday. I was secretly praying that the kids would not be too noisy or wild!

But as the worship team began playing and singing, magic happened! The kids were mesmerized! The lights were low, the Christmas trees were glowing and the music was beautiful as all sang along. My hopes and prayers were answered.

As the church body began to sing “Away in a Manger,” my entire family sang along. My heart was full. I knew that just as Mary was blessed and in awe with the birth of Jesus, I was truly blessed with the family God had given me to shepherd.

That night I fully understood how much God loves me and how much Jesus had sacrificed so that all these blessings could be mine.

The culminating event was listening to my family sing “Silent Night” while holding lit candles. It brought so much joy and laughter to all those around us when two of my sons-in-law sang a bit (to be kind) off key. It was hysterical when they attempted to sing the high notes!

Psalm 63:5: *“With singing lips my mouth will praise you.”*

It was a memorable Christmas!



# The Light of Christ

Reva Ledbetter

*“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” - Matthew 5:16*

One of the songs I first learned as a child was “This Little Light of Mine.” I never gave much thought to the meaning of the song. However, when the Light of the world came to us that first Christmas so long ago, it changed everything. This Light came into a very darkened world.

Today, we as Christians, are called to share the Light of Christ with others. How? By first loving God and then others.

How do we love others? Showing kindness, doing unto others as we would have them do unto us, giving to those in need (meals, Thanksgiving boxes, Christmas Give, mission trips, etc.). In doing so, we are truly being blessed ourselves.

Memories of Christmases past bring joyful thoughts of going to church on Christmas Eve, hearing the Christmas story, singing carols and receiving bags of candy with an orange and some nuts. Presents were not plentiful but that was not the point.

Christmas was a longed for occasion every year. It reminded us of Christ’s birth and brought much joy.

May the Light of Christmas light up your lives and others as we go through this and into the New Year. May His light shine for you and bless your life and others.



# Expectations

Donna Kraus

I think it's fairly common to assume that most of us folks who celebrate the season hold an idealized vision of the perfect Christmas in our heads. With each passing year, we hopefully look to create this magical Hallmark experience. It's so important to set realistic holiday expectations, thus finding Christmas and Christ right where you are.

Over a decade ago, my first husband lost his valiant battle with cancer. My two children and I slogged through our first Christmas without him, but at every turn we were faced with the excruciating reality that holidays, special milestone moments and ordinary family times would never be the same going forward and what had been our Hallmark experience had been seriously altered. His absence was painfully palpable as we had been blessed with a solid, loving family unit. For two such seasons we went through the motions of "holiday frivolity" in the form of social obligations, church and school music commitments and concerts, while approaching family traditions with lukewarm interest. We bounced around and accepted invitations from generous family and friends to partake in their celebrations and traditions, but remained on the outside looking in.

By year three, my twins were in their senior year of high school and I felt this sense of urgency to carve out our own Christmas niche and space again as they would be leaving home for college at the end of the following summer. The reality of being a widow AND an empty-nester forced me to re-evaluate how I wanted to treasure this sacred time with them. We had already scaled our gift-giving back considerably and more actively embraced our actual time together as "The Three Musketeers". The grief was still there, but it was softer and we could now laugh about days with Dad and dig deep into the rich gifts of faith and family that still lay just under the surface of our everyday lives. Christmas Eve arrived and we doubled down to connect with loving "friends as family" and then together sang at Midnight Mass as I had done for 25 years running as choir director in our family church. Then Christmas Day dawned and we settled in to spend the entire day ensconced in our own home, by ourselves, and surprisingly, we enjoyed it!

The simplicity, the quiet and familial intimacy that we shared was as comforting as a fluffy eiderdown quilt. Perhaps the Holy Family had felt that same peace that wondrous day. At the end of the day as we were traveling nearby to punctuate the day with dessert and good friends, I remember feeling a silent whisper of joy in my heart and such gratitude . . . we were on our way.

And as the car skimmed over the cold, frosted road and the moon hung like a spotlight in the sky, my daughter offered, "This was a pretty good Christmas after all."



# Home for Christmas

Georgia Burnett

When I think of going home for Christmas I think of long winter drives to upstate New York where my mom is from. I never had a Christmas day in our home in Maine growing up, until I was 16 years old because we always went to my grandparents house for Christmas. Going home there meant home to family, home to a cozy house, home to a one room country church with a candlelight service, home to gingerbread making and a Christmas morning full of family gifts and love.

It wasn't until I was older that I realized that what I really loved about going home for Christmas was the fact that I was surrounded by love. And that love at its source came from celebrating the gift of love that God gave to us through his son Jesus. We have always celebrated Christmas as Jesus's birthday in our family, baking cakes, buying balloons, having parties for Jesus on Christmas morning. As I am now raising my own kids we are celebrating in the same ways but "Home" has looked very different over the years. We have lived in a tiny condo, a small 100 year old house, a shared two family home apartment, a modern New England cape, and our current home with an In-law apartment for my parents.

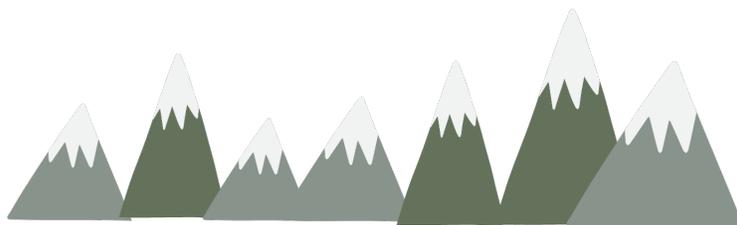
But the thing that all of those homes have had in common is still the love and the gift of Jesus.

*John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life".*

What a gift! I love seeing gifts piled under the Christmas tree. I love buying gifts and giving them to those I love. But there is no greater gift than what we have received in God's Son, Jesus Christ. The gift that we get to receive year after year, day after day, and yet we don't deserve it even once. It is a free gift ready for us to receive any day of the year.

Our homes have changed but God's love never does. I hope that you find that love this Christmas as you reflect on the gift of Jesus. I hope that as you open that gift and fully receive it, making your heart Jesus's home, it changes your Christmas and your life.

Welcome Home!



# Time of Thankfulness

Ethan Kraus

Most of my memories of the Christmas season involve my passions for music and the outdoors. Growing up in a large Catholic parish, my mother was the former choir director and would lead a midnight mass service. We grew up not too far from the parish, so once my twin sister and I were old enough to, we would always attend midnight mass after a yearly reading of the classic picture book *The Polar Express* by Chris Van Allsburg, to get us further into the true spirit of Christmas.

At mass, we would celebrate the birth of Christ by joining in song with some of my most favorite hymns, and in the morning after exchanging gifts, we would drive up to the lakes region or the mountains with our dog in tow, and close out the night by sitting by the fire and watching a favorite holiday classic (notably *White Christmas* or *It's a Wonderful Life*).

Several years later, my father passed from cancer in July of 2012, and since then, holidays became all the more difficult for my mother, my sister and me. It was much more grueling each year to attempt any feeling of joy or peace throughout a season which promotes such emotions. The Christmas season then felt like a chore in my high school years, which became flooded with chorus concerts, parties and other events where my father was extremely missed.

Flash forward to my post-college young adult life. After nearly a decade of finding this season difficult to get through, I remembered why it has always been an incredibly rewarding time of my life. Fellowship has been extremely important to me, and as a community, we are called to celebrate the birth of Christ by communing with those who we care about the most. Even if loved ones have passed on, and if certain family traditions have changed, Christmas is at its best when we remember that God is with us while we are celebrating this eventful time of year.

As Hebrews 10:24 says, "*let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works*".

The more we are called to serve others this season, the more acts of fellowship, strength and spirit we will receive in this time of thankfulness.



# Advent Hymns and Christmas Songs

Meredith Cote

Songs like *I'll Be Home for Christmas* paint a romanticized picture of what “going home for Christmas” looks like. But for many, myself included, going home for Christmas is much more complicated than a feel-good Christmas special. It often requires facing complicated dynamics, painful memories, and Christmas wishes left unfulfilled.

I have always preferred Advent hymns over Christmas ones. Not because I don't love a good rendition of *Joy to the World*, but they have always felt more true to my own experience, as well as the time in history we occupy. While Christmas songs are categorically joyful—celebratory songs that revel in a long wait now ended—Advent hymns dwell in that complicated space where human challenges pervade. While beautiful promises of redemption and salvation are made in Advent songs, these hopes remain unrealized and may be far off.

Though it isn't one of the most common, *Comfort, Comfort Now My People*, has always been one of my favorite Advent hymns. Based on Isaiah 40:1-5, here is an excerpt from this song:

“Comfort, comfort now my people  
Tell of his peace with no end  
Comfort, comfort those in darkness  
Tell them that God's pardon waits for them

The Glory of the Lord now on earth is shed  
In deserts far and near he will raise what's dead  
His peace has now been spoken  
His word is never broken  
The Kingdom of God is now here

Straight shall, straight shall be what's crooked  
Making all the rougher places plain...”\*

So as we anticipate the complicated emotions that surround “going home for Christmas”, may we rest and rejoice in He who made His home with us. He who brings peace without end, comfort to those in darkness, and makes the rougher places plain. The Kingdom of our God is here now, and may we eagerly await the day when the full measure of his promises will be fulfilled.

\*Lyrics from *Comfort, Comfort Now My People* by Page CXVI

# A Place of Rest

Forrest Barwood

The first time I got to come home for Christmas was after my first semester in college. The experience of returning home was delightful for so many reasons (including wonderful food and Christmas cookies) but the main thing I looked forward to was rest.

I was mentally drained from all the schoolwork and physically exhausted from swimming at the collegiate level. Being home was a reprieve to let my body and mind recharge and be restored.

After college, when I gave my life to Christ, rest took on an additional meaning. I found God as a place of rest and the restorer of my soul.

*Psalm 23 says, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul."*

What coming home for Christmas was during college, God became. Christmas is a wonderful time for me to lie down and rest in a comfortable place, letting go of the troubles of daily life and know that God is watching over me and protecting me. In that place of rest is also where I find it easiest for my soul to be restored. This restoration refocuses me on what God most wants for my life, which is living with Him.

This Christmas, may you find time to rest as you return home. Think of Psalm 23 and think of yourself as one of the flock, with the Shepherd watching over you and protecting you. In that protection we can rest and let the word of God restore our soul.



# Home

James Mangum

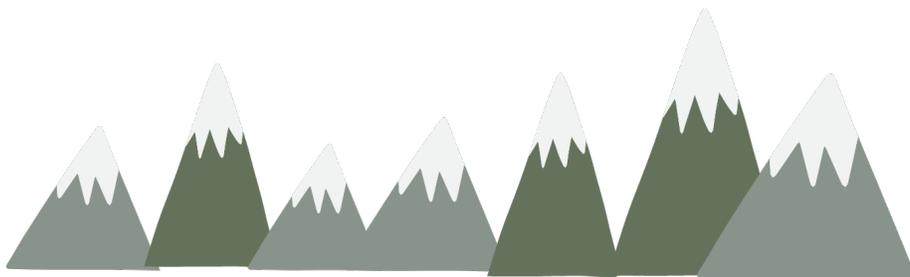
Ah, the smell of Gramma's sugar cookies fresh out of the oven! She also brought chocolates when she came to stay with us for a couple weeks over Christmas. Mom would 'hide' the large double-layer box of chocolates up high on the china cabinet, until she'd take them down and let us kids pick out a couple each. It's no wonder we mastered the art of climbing up there ourselves. (Shh, don't tell my mom!)

Now as a parent myself, I love to bring home Christmas goodies for the kids, often with an element of surprise to see their joy and excitement. Every year we host close friends for Christmas eve in our home for an Estonian-style dinner, followed by gathering by the Christmas tree, reading the Scripture of Jesus' birth, and singing Christmas songs. Being home with our family and loved ones for Christmas is so special to us. Home is where we are both known and loved, with our flaws and mistakes and all.

God sent His Son Jesus to leave His heavenly home, to come to earth, into the poverty of mankind, among sinful, selfish humans, so that He could make a way for us to find our heavenly home, with our heavenly Father, for eternity, where we are fully known and fully loved by Him.

In John 14, at the last supper with his closest friends, Jesus said, *"In my Father's house are many mansions ... I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also, and where I go you know, and the way you know ... I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but except through Me."*

I'm thankful for my family and the home we share. I'm thankful God sent Jesus to make a way—to be the way —home.



# Spectacle

Nolen Smith

Every year from about the time I was in middle school on, my family would dedicate a significant corner of our living room to the creation of a winter wonderland, which would have felt more at home in a department store than in our suburban dwelling. White trees stood with red and turquoise ornaments. A silver tree, the centerpiece, bore every other ornament collected over the years. At the base, a miniature white picket fence held back cotton stuffing.

This spectacle always filled me with joy, wonder, and a sense of celebration befitting the season. While Jesus' birth was full of joy, wonder, and celebration, however, it was not a spectacle. In the midst of family reunions in packed houses and hotels, Jesus was born in a barn, dirty and out of sight. For anyone nearby, nothing particularly special had happened, but angels started a party.

Luke's gospel tells us that an angel appeared to shepherds nearby saying, "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." Then Luke tells us that "suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'" (Luke 2:10b-11, 13-14)

As you continue through this holiday season, spending treasured time with family, enjoying nostalgic Christmas songs, weathering work parties, and enduring busy malls, remember that heaven celebrated a humble scene. In the spectacular moments, remember the party angels threw. In the uncomfortable, sad, frustrating, stressful moments, remember that God used a moment like this to enter creation. May He enter your moment as well.



# Coming Home for Christmas

Julie Meyer

Christmas has always been a holiday full of big emotions for me. As a child it was all about the excitement at presents from Santa and my parents' house full of family and friends. In my late teens, it was centered on grief of missing my Grammie. Marrying in my twenties, it was so stressful splitting holiday time between families. For my thirties, it was the joy at playing Santa and making Christmas special for our two children. Now in my forties, Christmas holds grief as my father is no longer with us, and anxiety that the life I want for my mother to have and to be with us for the holidays, will likely be impossible. However, this Christmas, I am experiencing a homecoming like nothing I've ever felt before...

Shortly after my son started second grade, he asked me and my husband if Santa is real. When he asked me first, I said "Where did you hear this?" The second time, a week later as I was walking out the door to attend a Bible study, he asked my husband and he said "We'll talk about it in the morning." As I got into my car, I was fuming. I was not ready to let go of the mystery of Santa for my son. How could this be happening?!

Driving to my Bible study, it was a clear night, and I noticed a bright and full moon shining right above the harvested fields. I was still fuming. I was talking out loud to God and questioning him, "What does it all mean? If I don't have my traditions and Santa isn't part of them, what, then, and how, will Christmas be special? What does Christmas mean?!" I changed the radio station to KLOVE and the chorus of We the Kingdom's "God So Loved" came pouring out –

*For God so loved the world that He gave us  
His one and only Son to save us  
Whoever believes in Him will live forever*

God's Word from John 3:16 answered me in a way that has moved me so very deeply to know Christmas for what it really is – the day everything changed for those of us who worship God, are blessed by the Holy Spirit, and who believe Jesus died to save us from our sins – it is this experience with John 3:16, in this time and space of my life, that has finally brought me home to Christ for Christmas.

May Christ and the true meaning of Christmas bless you all this year!



# The Perfect Christmas Tree

Erin Ripper

*John 1:14, NIV - 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.*

Decorating the Christmas tree has always been one of my favorite parts of the Christmas season. As a child, I remember hanging up tinsel and vintage ornaments on my grandparents' Christmas tree while listening to carols on my grandfather's record player (iconic, I know). In college, I would regularly take a break from the intensity of finals week to go back to my family's home and help decorate the tree. For some reason, I always felt that the perfect tree was central to finding the joy and wonder of Christmas, and the sense of home we all long for. Now, as a parent, I often find myself feeling this same pressure. If I can place the lights just right or find the best ornaments (non-breakable these days), this Christmas will be truly special.

But the reality is, a better Christmas celebration than we could ever imagine has already taken place. Jesus came to dwell among us—make his home with us. And God the Father, didn't go all out to decorate for his Son's coming. Sure, he lit up the sky with a star and a choir of angels, but he also chose a rough and dirty manger to welcome the Savior of the world.

God didn't need a tree, or tinsel, or lights to make Christmas wonderful. The presence of his Son and the hope he brought to mankind was enough. He knew that an unexpected and humble location would allow for his power to truly shine. So, this Christmas, as we fill our home with the decorations and festivities, may we remember to leave space for some imperfection—for the real, and raw, and often messy world that we find ourselves in. Because in doing so, we will find God's love and the deepest sense of home we can ever long for.





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