



# Foundation of Faith

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*The Perfect Gift*  
*What Child is this?*  
*Closing the Books*  
*Waiting in Suspense*



An  
Unfathomable  
*Love*

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## Editorial

*Dear Reader,*

*More than 2000 years have passed since the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we still celebrate Christmas every year, proclaiming God's love and sharing with the world the wonderful news first brought to the shepherds one night. "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10–11).*

*When Jesus was born, people had long been awaiting the Savior, yearning for His coming and crying to God, "Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down!" (Isaiah 64:1). It was as though they were praying, "God, please come down from Heaven to help, save, and heal us."*

*God heard their voices and answered this prayer in a wonderful way. The shepherds were the first to seek and find the Child in the manger, and since then, untold thousands—even millions—of others have also heard the message. In the words of the Apostle Paul, "God has revealed them to us through His Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:10).*

*What was it that God revealed? It was the birth of Christ, the manger, and the cross; it was the salvation of all people for all time. As it is written, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).*

*Dear Reader, would you like to receive and accept God's love through Jesus Christ? Have you opened your eyes, ears, and heart, and have you experienced this great joy yourself? Jesus came to Earth, into poverty, so that we could become rich through Him—rich in inner peace and joy and eternal life.*

*We wish all our readers a blessed Christmas!*

*H. D. Nimz*

# A Christmas Present in Prison

**Y**ears ago, I was asked to preach at a prison in Michigan. I was sitting next to the prison warden when approximately 700 convicts marched in.

After the singing and prayer, I got up to preach. It was difficult for me because I could hardly suppress my tears as I looked at these miserable people. At the end of the sermon, I left the podium and walked over to the prisoners. I shook hands with each one. On the last bench sat those who were condemned to life imprisonment. One of them especially seemed to be severely marked by the consequences of sin. I put my hand on his shoulder as I wept and prayed for him.

At the end of the service, the warden said to me, “Do you realize you disregarded the prison rules when you left the podium?”

I answered, “Yes, but I felt an urge to approach these poor people and pray for them, because Jesus has come to seek and save those who are lost.”

“May I tell you the story of the prisoner for whom you especially prayed at the end?” the warden asked.

“Please do so,” I answered. The warden proceeded to share this story.

“Thomas Galson had been placed in this prison about eight years ago for murder. He was, without a doubt, one of the worst criminals we have ever had here. He caused us a lot of trouble.

“About six years ago, I was on duty in this prison on Christmas Eve. It was bitterly cold on my way home early that Christmas morning. As I hurried along, I noticed a shadow on the prison wall. I stopped and discovered a small, poorly dressed girl. She was shivering with cold. In her hand, she was holding a small parcel in a firm grip. I asked her, somewhat sharply, ‘What are you doing here?’

‘Are you the governor?’ she asked back.

‘Yes, but who are you, and why aren’t you at home?’

‘Please, sir, excuse me, but I have no home. Mother died two weeks ago in the poorhouse. And before she died, she told me that my father was here in this prison. And she thought that perhaps he would be happy to see his daughter. And it’s Christmas today, so I wanted to give him a little present.’

‘No,’ I replied shortly, ‘that’s against the rules.’ And

with that, I went on. But then she grabbed my coat, and I heard the pleading voice again,

‘Oh, please, don’t go away!’ Big tears filled her eyes, and she trembled, not only with cold but also with trepidation.

‘Dear Sir,’ she then said, ‘supposing your little girl’s mother had died in the poorhouse and her father was in prison, don’t you think she would like to see her father then? And what if it was Christmas and your little girl wanted to bring you a present?’

“I was now deeply moved and could not hold back my tears and answered,

‘Yes, little girl, you shall see your father.’ I took her hand and went back to the prison with her. I gave the order to have her father brought to the office. When the prisoner saw his daughter, his face darkened, and he said in a sharp tone,

‘Nellie, what are you doing here? Go back to your mother!’

‘Oh, please, Father, mother is dead! She died two weeks ago. She told me to look after my little brother. She also told me that she never stopped loving you. But my little brother has died now too, and I am all alone now. But since it’s Christmas today, I thought, because you loved my baby brother, maybe you’d like to have a Christmas present from him.’

“She proceeded to open the little package and took out a lock of hair and put it in her father’s hand. Overcome with emotion, the convict began to cry. Sobbing uncontrollably, he pressed the child to his chest.

“I could no longer bear the sight and went outside. When I came back after some time, the girl was sitting on her father’s lap. The man faced me and said, ‘Warden, I have no money.’ Then he took off his jacket and begged me, ‘Don’t let the child go out into the cold again. Let me give the child my jacket. I will work from morning till night to pay for it.’ As he did so, tears flowed down the cheeks of this man who had been so hardened till now.

‘No, Galson,’ I answered, ‘keep your jacket. Your little girl should not suffer any need. I will take her home with me.’

“With great relief, the man replied, ‘God bless you for that.’

“The most wonderful thing happened. That visit and that gift on Christmas morning also became the turning point in the life of this hardened criminal. He sincerely repented and found forgiveness and peace in the blood of the Lamb. Since that time, he has not caused us any more trouble.

“Some years later, I revisited this prison and preached to the prisoners. However, I never saw Thomas Galson again. When I inquired about him, I was led to a small, newly built house in a quiet part of town.

When we knocked, a young girl opened the door. It was Nellie Galson. Her father had been pardoned and released from prison. He led an exemplary life and was hardworking and thrifty. He could not praise and glorify God enough for His grace and faithfulness and His wonderful leading, especially for the Christmas gift that Christmas morning in prison.”

Yes, Christ came into the world to save sinners from their sins. We should be eternally thankful to God for His indescribable gift! ■

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## Homecoming on Christmas Eve

**I**t was a cold Christmas Eve. The father just returned from the barn to the house. He shook the snow from his boots and sat down by the stove. “Are you thinking about it?” whispered the mother. “Today is our remembrance day!” The father raised his eyebrows, because he never allowed this matter to be brought up. It had been a night like tonight, when his daughter left her father’s house, never to return.

On this Christmas Eve, the church in the city was decorated magnificently. Attracted by the brightness of the lights, a poor girl came in, dressed in a light dress, shivering with cold. She stood beside the door while the preacher spoke of the One Who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. The poor girl looked into her own heart. She needed someone who knew her sins and would forgive her. At the end of the service, she approached the preacher and in passing said the words, “He was wounded for my transgressions. That was spoken for me.”

She went out into the cold winter night. A coughing attack seized her. Staggering and half-starved, she wandered past the houses. She entered the suburbs, took a side path, and after a while noticed a light. This light had been burning behind the window pane every

evening since she left her father’s house. She stood still and opened the garden door. She climbed up the steps to the house and put her hand on the door handle. Had the front door been locked, the poor daughter might have been found dead on the threshold the next morning. But since she left, the door was never locked. And so she could enter quietly. The old dog growled at first. But then he recognized the daughter of the house. She approached the dying fire and sat down by the stove, exhausted and broken.

When her mother came down the next morning, she noticed a pile of rags by the extinguished coals. The rags moved, and the mother recognized her own daughter. No condemnation, no harshness, no indignation was felt by the daughter when she met her parents. Full of joy and love, they embraced the girl. “Mother,” she whispered, “He has been wounded for my transgressions.”

“Yes, my daughter, if your mother has such indescribable joy in seeing you again, how much more does God rejoice in having finally found you!”

The poor, dying daughter repeated, “Wounded for my transgressions.” Those were her last words. After a few moments, the peace of God and the seal of His forgiveness transfigured her face. ■

# An Advent Prayer: “Amen, Come Lord Jesus”

(Revelation 22:20)

In the Advent season, the four weeks leading up to Christmas, we are often reminded of the prophecies foretelling the coming of the Messiah. To the Galatians, the apostle Paul writes, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman” (Galatians 4:4). Jesus Christ, the Savior, the Redeemer. “He will save His people from their sins.” When Jesus, the Prince of Peace, Immanuel “God with us” enters our heart, He transforms us. He transforms our nature.

## **Come into My Heart and Life, Lord Jesus.**

Everyone has a deep yearning for God. Man was created to have communion with God. When sin entered the world, it disturbed this sacred communion. Jesus came to restore the broken relationship between man and his maker. We will only find inner peace when Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, enters our hearts and lives through the new birth.

When Jesus enters a heart, something remarkable happens: Hate is replaced with love; pride is replaced with humility; impatience is replaced with patience; rudeness is replaced with kindness, and immorality with self-control. When Jesus enters a heart and life, the lamb-like nature comes in. We need someone to give us strength in temptation, to be a friend when we are lonely, someone to show us

the way when we go astray. Jesus is that Someone. He has promised us, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). “In this world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

**Come into My Home, Lord Jesus.**  
A beautiful song in our hymnal states,

“Happy the home when God is there and love fills everyone, when with united work and prayer the Master’s will is done.”

When Jesus saw Zacchaeus up in the sycamore tree He said, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” Don’t just invite Him to come for a visit on Sunday, invite Him to stay. When Jesus enters a home, things displeasing to Him must depart. A young lady was saved one evening, and on that very evening she came home and gathered up all of her Hollywood magazines and threw them out. A youth group in the USA came together and brought their rock tapes and records and burned them on the church parking lot, because they were convinced Jesus would not approve of them. Ask the Lord if there is anything in your home He does not approve of. He will surely show you if there is some housecleaning needed. A good question to ask ourselves is this: “If Jesus were sitting next to me, would I watch the same pro-

grams on TV that I usually watch? Would I visit the same sites on the internet that I wouldn’t even want my parents or my spouse to know I visit?” In a home where Jesus dwells there is love and respect between husband and wife, between children and parents, and between siblings.

## **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

In the book of Revelation we read about a lukewarm church where Jesus is standing outside knocking (Revelation 3:20). Brothers and sisters, we need Jesus on the inside. We must respect and obey Him as the Head of the body, the church. Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Paul admonishes the believers in Ephesus to endeavor “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Jesus wants to be in our midst. Let’s make Him feel welcome. “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20). When He comes, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Is He Lord of your life? Will you be ready when He comes? Use this season to prayerfully answer these questions and you will have a most blessed and meaningful Advent! ■

Art E. Lange  
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# God's Great Love

*"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).*

This is just a single Bible verse, and yet, what infinite wealth it holds! This glorious verse has been called "the gospel in a nutshell," and rightly so. Let us take a closer look at this precious verse and see what wonderful thoughts we can draw from it.

1. God loved the world so greatly and so deeply that He gave something. True love consists of devotion and sacrifice; it gives itself. When we have true love, we recognize and prove that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Oh, how we long to serve and give to those we love! Yes, love is a strong motivating force.

But look at God's great love. By what He gave us, we can see how great His love is for us. He was ready and willing to give His greatest treasure, His only begot-

ten Son. And why? For what purpose? "That whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

2. The word "whoever" includes you and me. What a wonderful thought! It includes all people, if they will only believe. Oh, what a perfect plan of salvation! And to really believe God also means to obey. Those who truly believe the Word of God will obey it. He who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ with all his heart also does everything God has commanded. And the one who believes in Jesus and obeys Him will also gain eternal life.

God wants none to be lost, but He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). But all who do not accept this salvation, who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not obey Him, will

be lost. And this, despite all it cost God to make man's redemption possible.

3. Since God has such a great and amazing love for us, He has also made preparations for us to live with Him and dwell with Him forever. Eternal life. What a glorious promise given to us all! As children of God, who have received and accepted the Lord Jesus in faith, we will already experience God's blessings here on earth. These blessings include lasting joy, a spiritual life and a godly life. When we depart from this earth, we will go into heavenly glory, to be with the Lord forever and ever. We will then be privileged to see the face of the Lord, Who redeemed us from our sins with His blood.

This great love of the Father first became visible when His Son was born in Bethlehem. ■



# The Perfect Gift

“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”  
(2 Corinthians 9:15).

God has given us many gifts. Life is a gift. Salvation is an even greater gift. Wisdom and health are gifts. The world we live in is a gift. It is our Father’s world. Yet John 3:16 speaks of a more indescribable gift. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” God gave His only begotten Son. It is this gift we celebrate at Christmas.

James says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17). This applies to the gift of the Son as well. First, He is from above. Jesus told His listeners, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. . . . I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:32-35).

Secondly, He is the perfect gift. “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:11-12). As the perfect gift, He gives us the gift to become children of God. How? See 1 John 1:9 for the answer. Thirdly, He is the light of the world (John 8:12). Fourthly, as in the Father, there is also no variation or shadow of turning in the Son. The Bible asserts, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

Someone took a video of his two-year-old daughter opening her birthday present. The little girl was excited about the wrapping paper and the ribbon. She tore at it and had great fun opening it, removing the paper

and ribbon. But when she came to the box inside the wrapping, she wanted to get up and go off to play. “No, no, open the box!” She wasn’t interested; the fun was in the process and in playing with the paper. Finally, they got her to look inside the box, which contained the heart of the present.

How often people do the same thing with Christmas. It is to celebrate our Savior’s birth. But it is wrapped with the decorations of Christmas cards and Christmas trees, pretty lights, shopping malls and the hustle and bustle of the season. That is the wrapping. But the perfect gift is Jesus Christ, Who came to be your personal Savior. Accept His gift this Christmas and do not just concern yourself with the outward glamor.

Christmas is more than the decorations. How often legends and fantasies displace what is real. Some children know only about Santa Claus, and the make-believe stories people have made up about Christmas, rather than the real reason for the season. We know Jesus is the reason for the season, the heart of the perfect gift. Do you know Him? He wants to be your Savior. This Christmas season will soon be over again. The lights will be put away. The decorations will be taken down. Only if we have experienced Him will we have something that will last and not pass away.

Jesus came into a cruel world. There was no room for Him in the inn. He told His disciples, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). In Bethlehem, at the time when Jesus was born there were many things not in keeping with the idyllic presupposed dream people often associate with Christmas. The same is true today. There are many who find this Christmas season difficult. The trauma of the past year may still be weighing them down. Worries about the future, heartaches, or



shattered hopes may numb the feeling of celebration. If we find Christmas difficult, Jesus invites us and says, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Paul says, “Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God that sur-

passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). This is also a gift of God. These gifts are for you and not just for the Christmas season. Receive them and do not be content with the sparkle of the season. ■

*Gerry Mielke  
Hamilton, Ontario*

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## The Word Became Flesh

**W**hen John began to write his gospel letter, he set his gaze into the depths of eternity, aiming to express the great mystery of God in human words. “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1). We humans must always find a beginning. We cannot grasp unending eternity and cannot measure infinity with our finite minds. Within eternity, we seek a fixed point to focus on. We call this “the beginning.”

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This statement sounds high and exalted. It broadens our view a little and opens our understanding of the wonderful harmony of the Godhead. From this Deity, light and life radiated over all creation. All things were made through Him. Nothing disturbed the flow of the holy love of God, which pulsed throughout the universe until darkness came, until the great chasm occurred.

John continues, “And the Word became flesh” (verse 14). Shouldn’t we hold our breath before this overwhelming fact? The Word, the Eternal, through Whom all things are, in Whom is life and light, the Word itself became flesh. The glory of God clothed in our wretched flesh and dwelling among us. Whom all

the heavens cannot grasp, for Whom the earth is hardly a footstool, He humbled Himself and dwelt among us. And this event, which shook the heavens and tore the heart of God, leaves mankind so cold, so indifferent, as if it had never happened. “He came to His own; and His own did not receive Him” (verse 11).

“And we beheld His glory” (verse 14). The glory of humility, of patient suffering, and selfless love radiated everywhere from the lowly garment of flesh and blood. Was it not glorious when He lay there in the manger, the first stage of His degradation? When the miracle of God’s love was revealed in such an indescribably humble way, when no room was found in the inn, when the infinite God was laid in a manger? Was it nevertheless glory, incomprehensible glory? And we saw His glory on the cross, when in death He was left with nothing but the timbers of the cross and the crown of thorns for His bleeding and wounded godly head. It was glory, divine glory, the “glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (verse 14).

My soul, be silent and worship. Human words are far too inadequate and the spirit of man much too small to grasp the wonder of God’s love. Eternity will not suffice to fathom the depth of this mystery. How will we understand it? My soul, adore Him! ■

# The Birth of Christ

**T**he glorious story of the birth of Jesus is the cornerstone of the Gospel, the first stage in the sequence of wonderful events that culminate in the ascension of the risen Lord. Jesus' miraculous birth is as essential to the work of redemption as His death on the cross and His resurrection.

The birth of Jesus was an event of "great joy" because our Savior and Deliverer from the power of sin came into the world. All other means had failed. The voices of the prophets, who proclaimed the love and grace of God and who warned, admonished, and pleaded had, with few exceptions, fallen on deaf ears. The sacrifices of the Mosaic Law, although significant and foreshadowing the sacrifice of Christ, had no power to take away sins. They were also mostly performed as a mere ritual. And in the world outside of Judaism, the darkness and despair of paganism reigned throughout the earth. In the first chapter of his letter to the Romans, Paul describes what paganism was like.

Christ came into this world that was languishing under the curse of sin. With Him, a new hope dawned, for a "great joy" was proclaimed. In this Christmas season, let us reflect on what His coming meant for the people of that time. Also, what does it mean for us, who have accepted Him as our personal Savior?

## **The Infinite Love of God for Sinful Men**

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). This wonderful "for" opens a view into the value of man, as well as into the love of God. It is important for us to correctly grasp this wonderful thought. Through it, we will receive the right knowledge of the infinite value of the soul and be driven to more serious efforts to save the lost. If the salvation of the human soul is so important to God, then we cannot and must not be indifferent to it.

## **The Great Mercy of God**

His mercy is the expression of His love. Men had turned their backs on God, had willfully transgressed His holy law, and had replaced Him with idolatry. Even His chosen people had put the traditions of men in the place of God's commandments. Nevertheless, God took pity on the people and in His divine mercy sent His Son for their salvation. Shouldn't we then offer Him praise and thanks for His "incredible gift"?

## **The Incarnation of Christ**

Christmas reminds us that the Son of God took on our human nature. Not only in appearance, but in actuality He became a man, as we are men, and He was "tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). By suffering and being tempted, by experiencing human life from childhood to adulthood, He can take pity on us in our sufferings and joys, in our temptations and struggles. The Lord of glory is not ashamed to call us His brothers. Can there be a greater joy than that of calling Jesus our brother?

The return of the Christmas season should also remind us that Jesus is God's best gift to the world. So let us also give our best to win the world for Christ—our money, our prayers, our compassion, our active participation in every good word and work, and ultimately ourselves.

Christmas should also remind us of our duty to seek the happiness of others. It was a day of joy when Jesus came into the world. May His joy, living in us and through us be shared with others. Seek to make others happy because Jesus has made you happy. The Christian life, reflecting Jesus' life on earth, should be a continual blessing for the world. Our life should be full of service and joyful love for others, not only at Christmas but every day. ■

## God is Love

The oil lamp burned dimly and barely illuminated the low, sloping attic room of a shoemaker's workshop, seen through the recessed window. Crouching on the stool, head resting in his hand, was the master William Senf, a man in his forties. His eight-year-old only son sat at the table in front of an open Bible, memorizing Scripture. In the background however, deeply shrouded in shadows and leaning against the wall, stood a woman at the stove, her eyes fixed on the pot. A deep silence hung in the room; one could only hear the singing and humming of the boiling water.

After some time, the boy recited half-aloud to himself the Bible verse he had quietly learned by memory: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Since he was having trouble, he repeated the verse once more and for the third and fourth time: "For God so loved the world . . ."

Then, suddenly the father spoke up from his brooding. "Stop it right now, Fred! I have had enough! After all, it's not even true!"

The boy stared at his father with open mouth and big eyes, without uttering a word. But from the mother standing by the stove came an audible sigh, and a soft voice said, "Oh, Father, sin not! It always hurts my heart when you say such things!"

"Give it up," cried the master harshly. "There are many things that hurt my heart as well! Keep your faith to yourself. You see what it has brought us. We have become beggars! And God loves the world? Am I to believe this when we barely have enough bread to eat, and rheumatism gets into my bones to where I am bedridden for four months, and have to watch us lose our customers? Am I supposed to believe in God's love when our little Mary dies, just when she

was old enough to help you? And then your brother, who already has enough money, cheats you of your father's inheritance? I am supposed to believe in God's love when I never get ahead, even though I'm up before dawn every morning and get to bed at midnight, while others who live an easy and comfortable life have everything they need? No, do not tell me anymore that there is justice in the world and that God is love! It all goes the way of nature, and God does not care about the world. No, there probably is no God at all."

His wife Lisa was silent and removed the pot of boiling water from the stove to make the evening soup. After a while, she asked, "And are you happier now, since you no longer believe?"

The man looked at his wife in astonishment. He probably had not expected this question. While he was thinking about an answer, the door opened and the son of their neighbor, a little curly-headed boy rushed in with a bright red face. "Hey, Fred, has the Christ Child been at your house already? Look at this!"

"The Christ Child doesn't come to us!" Mr. Senf hollered out. He frightened the boy so terribly that he dropped the nut he had taken out of his pocket, and without picking it up, he backed away.

The master had become even gloomier by this incident. "Everyone is excited about Christmas," he furiously called out. "Why can't we be happy? What have we done to deserve such bad things? Thieves and cheaters have plenty, and the honest, hardworking people are starving. You cannot even trust anyone anymore. One is the devil of another."

"Stop it," said the voice near the stove. "It is true; there are many bad people in the world who think only of themselves. But not everyone is like that. There are many, very many, who have a heart full of compassion and do much good in the world, all in secret so that no one sees it. And they do not even expect a thank you

or a reward for it. By this love, however, it is quite clear that there is a God in heaven, for this kind of love does not come from flesh and blood, but is poured out from above into the hearts of people. God touches the hearts so they become warm, full of compassion. And He directs the hearts to show mercy where it is needed.”

“Like us, for example!” scoffed Mr. Senf. “Yes, yes, we have received so much love and mercy from the people that I can’t even buy Fred something for Christmas! And now I say to you for the last time, Lisa, do not start your foolish talk with me again. Keep your faith, and let me keep mine! I am no doubt wretched in it, but I do not perceive that you are any better off!”

Lisa served the meal, but neither she nor the master had much appetite. Only Fred emptied his plate.

Christmas Eve came two days later. Mr. Senf looked around the room for something he could have taken to the pawnshop like others had done, but he found nothing. This was terrible. His haggard face revealed the despair raging inside of him. Lisa avoided him and was careful not to irritate him even more by words or gestures. She, too, suffered badly; indeed, she suffered doubly, for in addition to the poverty into which they had fallen, there was the sorrow that her husband had lost his faith. “If you’ve lost God, you’ve lost everything.” This saying always sounded in her ears and overwhelmed her, so that she could hardly believe and pray.

When it became dusk, the master left. He did not say where he went, and Lisa did not dare to ask. Outside on the street, Senf got caught up in the busy, cheerful hustle and bustle. Here a person came running with a fir tree, there another hurried with a large parcel. Here a boy tried the honey cake he had bought at the Christmas market, over there a wandering trader offered his goods. Everything was full of Christmas joy. And he?

It was as if he no longer belonged to the world, as if he could only see it all from afar. This drove him out of the city. He did not want to see it anymore either. He wanted to run away, but where to? He did not know that himself. His ability to reason seemed to have left him. He heard, saw, and thought nothing, but just felt it was a very cold day.

Suddenly, he bumped into an iron railing. He could not go any further, and seemed to wake up, when he heard a roaring noise at his feet, and saw rolling waves of water in the semi-darkness. He had come to the riv-

er. The railing had stopped him, otherwise he would have fallen in.

“And wouldn’t that have been the best thing for me?” he asked himself. “It’s quiet down there. He who lies there has it good; his heart beats no longer; no more tears for him to shed. You should go there too!”

He clasped the railing with both fists. It was low and easy to jump over. He bent over and stared into the icy surge. Suddenly, it became light around him. The moon emerged from the dark cloud, illuminating the river and its surroundings, causing an eerie feeling. Senf flinched. The moon appeared to him like a huge eye, gazing down on him reproachfully and asking, “You, what are you going to do? Shame on you, you coward! Think of your wife and child you’re leaving behind in misery. And think of whose hands you’ll fall into if you jump!”

As if haunted by evil spirits, the master hurried away, back to the city, to his family. He had convinced himself he had lost faith; yet, it turned out this was a deception. There was still a remnant of faith in him after all, which could not be removed by any reasoning.

In the darkness, he arrived at his home. He noticed the bright light shining through the keyhole. He tore open the door. There he remained standing, paralyzed. The room had turned into an image of festivity. A fir tree was flickering on the table, and under the tree lay piled up what Fred needed for clothes and what his wife Lisa needed for the kitchen. Beside that, sparkling in the light, lay two brand new pieces of gold.


As the father was numb and unable to utter a word, his wife came to him, crying and laughing at the same time. Then Fred clung to him, cheering and rejoicing. “Father, Father, where have you been? Just look, look at those fine pants and the nice jacket with flaps on the pockets and the handsome hat! And there, there, just look, Father, just come here!”

The master let himself be led. But he was still unable to say a word until two big tears finally rolled down his cheeks. He took a deep breath, and asked, “What is this? Who did this for us?”

“I don’t know,” Lisa said. “The lady would not tell me her name; she said it was not necessary.”

“So,” replied Senf, “you didn’t know her, and she wouldn’t tell you her name? Why did a total stranger come to bring us so many gifts?”

Now Lisa took her husband by the hand and said seriously, “I will tell you, William, how this unknown



lady came to do this. Love sent her here, the love you no longer want to believe in. She heard of our distress and came here as the messenger of God, Who sent us a message through her and inquired whether Mr. Senf will now believe that 'God is love.'"

The master covered his eyes with the hand Lisa had been holding onto. It hurt his heart, and yet he felt so happy and blessed. His heart battled between light and darkness, faith and doubt, until finally the first won the victory.

Suddenly, he hugged his wife and cried with tears, "Lisa, you are right. God is love! Listen, do I hear bells ringing?"

"Yes, announcing the Christmas Eve service," replied Lisa.

"Come, dear Wife; come, my son," cried Senf, making a quick decision. "Let us visit God in His house. I have much to ask of Him, and much to thank Him for . . . and much to believe in!" ■

# What Child is This?

More than 150 years ago, a carol writer from Great Britain, William Chatterton Dix, posed a profound question:

What Child is this who laid to rest,  
on Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet  
While shepherds watch are keeping?

So, Carol Writer, we will think about your question, “What Child is this?”

He certainly looks like a baby, unlike some artists' portrayals; He has no halo or shining aura. He just looks like a newborn baby.

What about that question everyone asks when seeing a new baby, “Whom does He look like?” Does He look like His mother, Mary? Perhaps. Does He look like His father, Joseph? No, there's no resemblance at all. But look at Joseph for a moment. He looks so proud, and protective and full of awe. His expression tells us he knows he was specially chosen to be called this Baby's father. His ancestry was right so this Baby would be of the natural lineage of David; his heart was right so he could hear, believe and respond to angelic messages.

But, back to the Baby. No, He doesn't look like this special man, Joseph, for He was conceived of the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 1:3 tells us Who He looked like. This Baby didn't just resemble His Father but He was the exact image of His Father, God Almighty. We couldn't see all that because He was all wrapped up in a blanket of humanity and then, we didn't know what His Father looked like, to recognize the similarities. Jesus would tell His followers more than thirty years later that He came to show them the Father. Whether we recognized the similarity or not, the fact remains that the Baby in the manger was totally like God, for He *is* totally God.

The Baby looked so helpless lying there. That's because He was. This was God being totally human. He traded the splendors of Heaven to absolutely identify with us. He traded celestial air for earthly air;

they heard Him cry, as any baby does, as earthly air filled His tiny lungs—stable air at that. He traded His position of authority, as when He spoke the universe into being, for the helplessness of a baby who was totally dependent on His parents for food, shelter, protection, and even His learning.

Yes, this Little One is totally God and was totally human. Even though He looked like any other baby, He was different. Although all babies look so innocent, this One was not only innocent, He was perfect, not carrying the taint of sin in His veins as all other babies have, including us. So, what Child is this? This is a perfect God-man.

Why did this One Who inhabited eternity identify so perfectly with us, that He became this Baby? It was the only way to reconcile guilty mankind to a holy God.

Take another look with me at this Baby.

Look at those little hands. They were the hands that would touch blind eyes and bring sight, touch deaf ears and cause music to be heard, touch fevered foreheads and health would be restored. These were also the hands that would be pierced, so we might be made whole.

Look at the little arms. These were the arms that would pick up little children and bless them. These arms would be stretched over the city of Jerusalem as He would cry “How often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks?” (Matthew 23:37). These arms would be stretched out on a cross to embrace humanity.

See His eyes closed in sleep. These are the eyes that would look into the heart of the woman who washed His feet and would proclaim that she loved much because she was forgiven much. These eyes would see Zacchaeus hiding in the tree and He would invite Himself to his house to change his heart and life forever. These were the eyes that would look down through the corridors of time and see you and me and say, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).



See His tiny lips. These are the lips that would say in tenderness to the woman dragged in by the accusing crowd, “Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more” (John 8:11). They would say in authority to Lazarus, “Come forth,” and on the cross “It is finished!” (John 19:30). His lips would say in mercy, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34).

These little ears, look at them.

These are the ears of a shepherd, the Good Shepherd, Who would continue to hear, down through the centuries, the bleating of the lost sheep, hearing that has never dulled in spite of all the noises of strife, hurry, confusion, and wrong. He listens to us.

Take a look at these little feet.

They would walk not only the dusty roads of Israel but also with us on our own roads, showing us the way

to walk with our God and with our fellow man. These are the feet that would fulfill a promise of restoration after the fall in the garden just three chapters into the Biblical record: The seed of the woman would bruise the serpent’s head.

Oh, over the manger cradle where the Little One lies, there appears to be the shadow of a wooden cross. But I also see the outline of an empty tomb.

So What Child is This?

What Child is this?

This, this is Christ the King,  
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;  
Haste, haste to bring Him laud  
(hurry, hurry to bring Him our praise),  
The Babe, the Son of Mary. ■

*Wanda McLaren, Hamilton (CA)*

## A Wonderful Message

*“Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”  
(Luke 2:10-11).*

**T**hat is the wonderful message once proclaimed with such clarity in the fields of Bethlehem. The Savior of the world came to break the chains of vice, to free from the bonds of sin, to destroy the

work of the devil, and to release the souls of those in bondage.

Darkness covered the earth. Separated from God, burdened and enslaved by sin, people went about



their lives helpless and hopeless. They were unable to find the peace they longed for as eternity rapidly approached.

All hope for rescue had gone. They could not find salvation through the law. The thousands of animal sacrifices could not purge their sin. Only God Himself could save them. In a prophetic vision, the prophet Isaiah foresaw the great Savior coming and proclaimed, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

### **He is Called Wonderful**

He, Who came to bring salvation to the world, is wonderful. His life was wonderful. Christ, Who was with the Father from eternity, is wonderful. The world needed a wonderful Savior to save them from their sins and bring them back to God. Wonderful is His love as He extended His loving arms to embrace the whole world as He died on Calvary’s cross. Wonderful is the power of His blood that can cleanse even the vilest sinner from all sin. This Savior, Who came to take away our sin and bring salvation, life, peace, and joy is indeed wonderful.

### **He is Called Counselor**

He has counsel, even when all human wisdom fails. In His wisdom, He can make a way, even where there is no way. He has counsel for the sinner for whom, from a human standpoint, there is no hope. He has help for the lost soul that is shackled by Satan’s fetters. He can free us from the bonds of sin, addiction, and vice and lead us from the realm of godlessness to the pure light of God.

### **He is Called Mighty God**

His is the might and power of God. He has power to heal the sick, to break the shackles of death, to still the storm, and calm the waves. He has power to cast out demons and to free humans from the power of Satan. With His saving grace, He has the power to melt a stone-hard heart and save a soul entangled in sin. He is the mightier One. He is mightier than the mighty and more powerful than the powerful. In triumph, He can exclaim, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). He is “alive forevermore” and has “the keys of Hades and of Death”

(Revelation 1:18). He is victorious in battle. Darkness flees from His presence, and His enemies are destined to be made His footstool (Hebrews 1:13).

### **He is Called Everlasting Father**

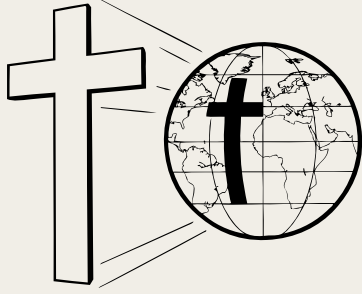
What a thought! He rules from eternity. He has no beginning or end. Before the world was created, He is God, from everlasting to everlasting. He is the Father of all that is good, Father over His whole family on earth and in heaven (Ephesians 3:15). “A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows is God” (Psalm 68:5). He is fatherly in His love, in His guidance, in His care, and in His compassion.

### **He is Called Prince of Peace**

The name Prince of Peace rings out into a world full of unrest, sin, passion, war, uprisings, and strife. He came to bring peace by shedding His blood on the cross in order to take away the enmity between God and mankind. Indeed, He came to bring His peace for restless hearts, for families, for young and old, for those of high standing and for the lowly—peace for everyone. Millions have received this peace which the Prince of Peace offers. Despite the restlessness of the nations, despite the wars, despite Satan’s fury, despite strife and unrest, He is and remains the Prince of Peace. He says, “My peace I give to you” (John 14:27). All who come to Him in faith can experience this peace.

Let the message resound. Go tell it on the mountains and in the valleys. “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy . . . There is born to you . . . a Savior” (Luke 2:10-11). This Savior can free from all sin (Matthew 1:21), can free from the power of darkness and from the evil one. Go tell those who are discouraged, those who are without comfort, those despairing, those on the fringes of society. Go tell everyone. A Savior is born, bringing light, life, and salvation. Here is hope and salvation for all mankind. His peace is like a spring of water and His righteousness like the waves of the sea.

Behold this great wonder of God. In your mind’s eye, see the Babe in the manger. Only the great love of the Father could give such an indescribable gift. Dear Friend, if you are still living in sin or have addictions, if you are still not completely free from sin, come to the Savior. Accept the gift of salvation so your heart may be filled with the peace of God, and then you can experience the real meaning of Christmas. ■



# Radio Program Message of Salvation

Friedrich Krebs  
Kitchener, ON

## Christmas—With or Without Jesus?

*Christmas without the scent of fir, Christmas roasts, gifts, candles—unthinkable for many. But Christmas without Jesus? What is the most important for us?*

Year after year, we celebrate Christmas. But why? Is it only because the 24th and 25th days of December are an old custom? There must be a deeper reason for it. There certainly is. Yet the real reason for Christmas has apparently disappeared or been forgotten by so many people. It so happens that people all over the world celebrate Christmas, although only very few people think about the Christ Child. And that's exactly why we ask the question, do we celebrate Christmas with or without Christ?

Some years ago, a newspaper reported that the "Christ Child" was stolen from the manger at a church in Germany. The theft caused outrage in the church community. There was no trace of the perpetrator. Apparently, it was an antique lover who saw the opportunity to expand his collection.

The service was not cancelled because of the theft. The sexton had to procure a "replacement Christ Child" so the manger was not empty during the Christmas celebrations. And if need be, they could celebrate Christmas without Baby Jesus in the nativity scene. But let's try to imagine how it would seem to any of us if we celebrated our own birthday party without being physically present.

In a small town in America, there was a very popular mayor. As proof of their appreciation for his many

efforts and good deeds, his birthday was celebrated annually in his honor. The small town hall was sufficient, and when everything was festively prepared, the respected, invited guest was allowed to enter. At the center of the celebration, the mayor would take his designated place of honor. After a number of years, this traditional birthday was celebrated yet again, but after the festivities were over, they discovered that the popular mayor had not even been present. This time, they had forgotten to invite him. His special birthday celebration had occurred without him present. Doesn't this happen every year with the birthday celebration of Jesus?

The coming holidays are to remind us of the supreme gift from heaven, and that God Himself has placed a Person at the center of this celebration, Someone we must not forget. The real Christ Child is not stolen but largely forgotten.

In a Christian periodical, I found the strange sentence, "Many are waiting for Christmas, but who is waiting for Christ?" Christmas not only reminds us of Jesus' first coming, but also of His second coming. But who is waiting for Him?

Only a few expected Him at His first coming. And the manner in which He came did not correspond to the ideas of the people. How could a helpless child in



the manger help the desolate, suffering people? But the message of the heavenly messenger was, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11). He is the Savior and Lord of the world. And Isaiah says, “His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:5). And that is exactly what He wants to be to you and me.

God has given us a gift we all need very much. In Romans 8:32, we read, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” What is given to us through Jesus Christ cannot be compared to any other Christmas gift. Therefore, we do not want Jesus to be hidden or even robbed from us by the spirit of the times, by stress, or by the loud Christmas bustle.

We know that faith in Jesus has become an “outdated religion” for many. That is why so many people’s hearts feel unsatisfied, lonely, and empty at Christmas, despite all the partying and celebrations. There is simply no substitute for Jesus. Gerhard Tersteegen wrote this poem:

Thou art my rest, no earthly treasure  
Can satisfy my yearning heart,  
And naught can give to me the pleasure  
I find in Thee, my chosen part.

May we all feel the same way deep in our hearts when Christmas comes around. The wise men of the east had come to seek and worship the Heavenly King. And wise people still do the same today.

Because Jesus Christ is the light and joy of the world, Christmas without Him can only be dark, cold, and empty. A truly blessed Christmas, filled with deep joy, can only exist with Jesus. ■

## What Does Christmas Really Mean?



Some young people from Pforzheim, Germany, gathered some thoughts on what Christmas means to them personally, or how they would explain Christmas to a friend.



*Christmas is when God comes to us in the stillness to save us. For this reason, Jesus became human and can understand our human side, and He can pay our debt for us. His willingness to be humble is indescribable.*



*For me personally, Christmas is the most beautiful celebration of the year. This celebration makes me aware that the God Who created heaven and earth came down as a human to live and die for me personally.*

*At Christmas, Jesus (God's Son) came down to earth for us. He grew up in poor circumstances and lived on this earth like us. At the end—without having done anything wrong—He was sentenced to death and crucified. That was the only way for us humans to be saved from sin and to gain a place in heaven. That is why Christmas is also called the celebration of love, because God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son Who came down to earth.*



*To me, Christmas primarily means the birth of Jesus Christ. He came down to earth because He loves us so much, He wanted to make a way back to God for all people. The true Christmas season celebrates the birth of the Creator of the universe, Who humbled Himself out of love for mankind. Christmastime also means enjoying memorable, cozy times with family. This means a time of recuperation and a definite change from the usually stressful pre-Christmas time. Christmas is one of the most important and beautiful celebrations of the year for me.*



*For me personally, Christmas is a time of rest when you can reflect back on what Jesus sacrificed to come down to this earth.*

*In the Old Testament, the Jews had many holidays when they put down their work and remembered how their ancestors departed from Egypt. That also had personal consequences for their descendants, as they were now living in the Promised Land.*

*Christmas is also a celebration during which we should remember what Jesus did for us, and where we can think about the personal consequences it has for us.*



*Christmas is a celebration of joy within us, with the goal of taking time to reflect. It should remind us of the birth of Jesus that took place in cold and hostile surroundings.*

*Despite the difficult circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth, it is the beginning of Jesus' perfect work of salvation here on earth, full of love and compassion towards mankind. Through the birth of Jesus Christ, through Christmas, the beginning of redemption for every human came into the world.*



*Christmas—God gave mankind the greatest gift of all time, in which Love Himself left the heavenly splendor, humbled Himself, and became human. He did that to save you and me.*

*When I think of Christmas, I am grateful for God's grace and love that He demonstrates towards us. He came down to earth to give us eternal life. God manifests His glory through Christmas.*



## You Need To Stick With It

Dear Julian,

I just reread the message you sent me on December 30th. I didn't get to answer it right away, since it required some peace and quiet for me to respond.

This is that quiet time. You wrote to me, "I bought many things to make our New Year's Eve memorable. I bought things like alcohol, cigarettes, fireworks, and gag gifts. Nicole, Dominik, Tobias, Petra, and many other friends you don't know will party with me here throughout the night. I also chose proper music to dance to. It'll be a great party . . . ." That's what you wrote to me. I repeat it because I'm afraid it was such an amazing party that you don't even remember what you shared with me.

At the very end of your letter, you wrote a few sentences that brought to the surface feelings of compassion and sympathy for you and your friends. You wrote, "Another year is over, and I got so little from life. You need to stick with it if you want to get something out of life. That is my New Year's resolution. That's why I'm starting it off right on New Year's Eve."

I saw you in front of me. Your face displayed a yearning of hunger for life. Please answer me honestly. Was your hunger satisfied at least a little bit during your great New Year's Eve party? You don't have to answer me; I already know. Nothing remained for you except great disappointment and a bad conscience.

A song we often like to sing with our youth group has lyrics that fit your situation perfectly:

They won't find what they're searching  
In pleasure and fortune and fame;  
And burdened with sin and hurting,  
The masses return again.

He who has the  
Son has life; he  
who does not  
have the Son of  
God does not  
have life.

**1 John 5:12**

I know you too well not to know that you are disappointed. It isn't because of your friends, but let me use a picture—you look in a place where gold cannot be found. This sentence from your letter spoke to me: "You need to stick with it if you want to get something out of life. That is my New Year's resolution."

You see, that's a good resolution! But now you have to go look for the gold . . . I mean where you can truly find it. I know the place where you can start again. In my Bible, one verse says, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12). You see the "gold" has a Name, and if you're really determined to find life in the next year, then, dear Julian, turn away from the wrong path and make sure you find Jesus in this next year.

I wish this for you with all my heart,  
Your friend Lukas

# Jesus Bids Us Shine . . . .

**I**t was Christmas Day, 1984, on the high plains of Chihuahua, in Mexico. It had snowed a bit in the evening, and a cold wind was blowing, when a knock was heard at the door of the pastor's house. When the door was opened, it revealed a shy, poorly dressed boy standing there, of about fourteen or fifteen years of age. His name was Benjamin.

"Is there no service tonight?" he asked. There was no service, but he was invited in for a warm meal. Against the will of his parents, he had secretly left the house, walked a few kilometers to the main road, and then hitchhiked to this village.

After dinner, the pastor took him to his office and showed him the church building. Among other things, the pastor asked him if he knew the story of Joseph and Benjamin in the Bible and if he knew that his name meant "son of joy." Unfortunately, the boy knew very little of the Bible. The pastor now had an opportunity to share with him some thoughts and Scriptures from God's Word.

When he was asked why he had come, since his parents and the people around him opposed the church of God, he said, "In a neighboring village, there is a family who now lives differently than all of us, after they started attending the worship services here. Even their children are different. They no longer take part in our evil pranks."

After that, Benjamin attended the services two or three times. It was still not very easy for him to come to church. He walked a few kilometers across the fields to the home of a family from the congregation, who then took him to the services. Then, suddenly, the shocking news came that he had died. A horse had kicked him so hard

that he bled to death internally. God alone knows how much he understood from the messages he had heard. This boy, all alone in his family, was looking for the Lord Jesus and wanted to get to know Him.

"This family lived differently!" Often, we do not even know we are being watched. Jesus came from heaven as the Light of the world, which is why we celebrate Christmas, and why we should follow Him. He said in Matthew 5:16, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

A light is not heard, it just shines. Our walk speaks louder than our words. It doesn't matter whether you are big or small, let your light shine.


You may ask, "How can I shine? What can I do?" First of all, it's important that you have given your heart to the Savior. Then ask Him to help you be a light. Be willing to receive God's power so you can shine for Him. If we have a lamp at home or lights on a Christmas tree, but we haven't connected them to the electricity, they are of no use. The light bulbs need electricity to shine. Likewise, we need power from the Lord Jesus to be a light for Him at school, at home, or wherever we are. We need to shine, whether we remember we are being watched or not.

During this Christmas season, don't think first about all the presents, the many lights, or the Christmas decorations. Think about the most important thing: "I am to be a light for Jesus!"

Let us be a light, as we sing in the beautiful song, "Jesus Bids Us Shine."


Edeltraut Nimz

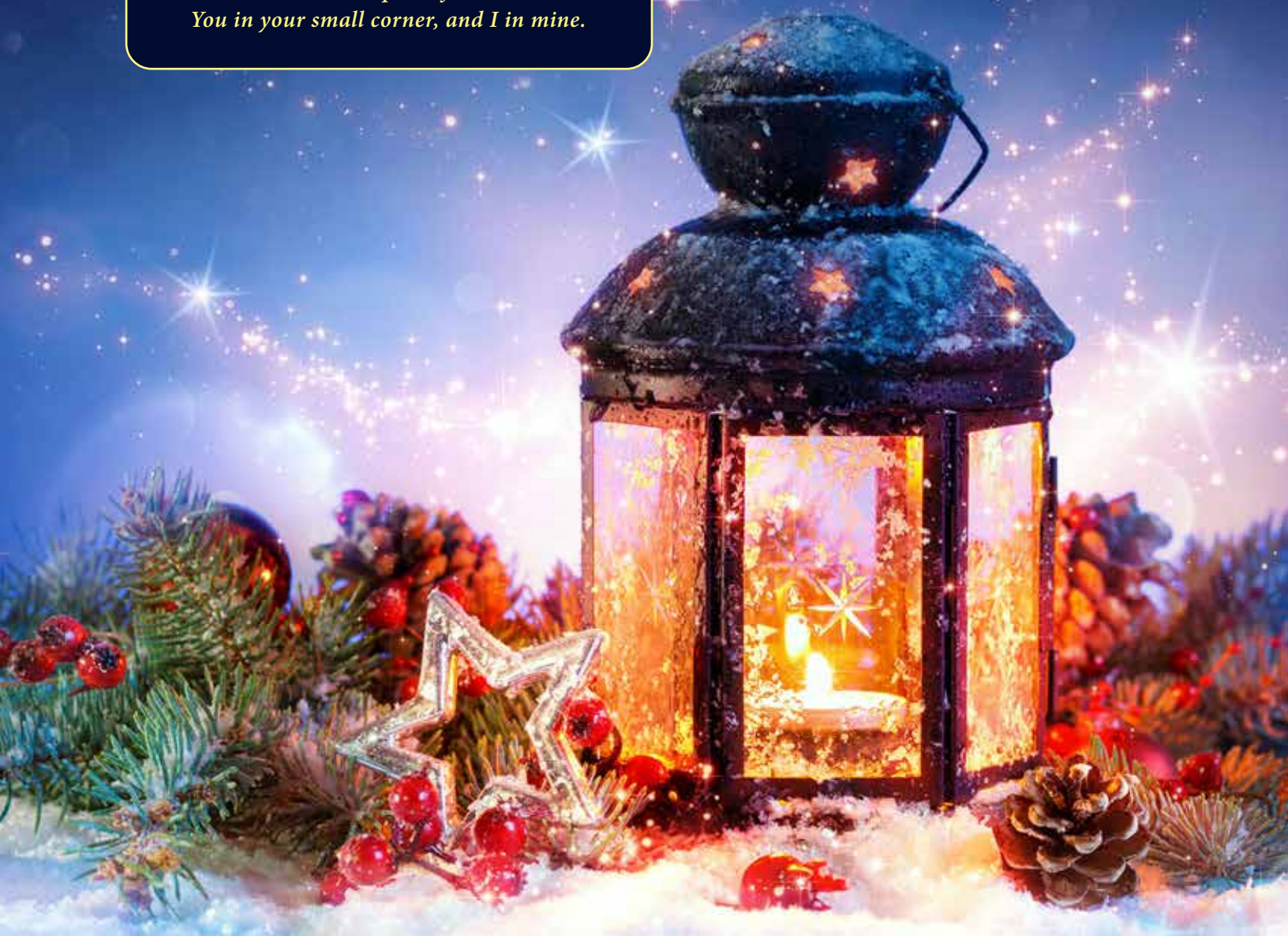


 *Jesus bids us shine with a clear, pure light,  
Like a little candle burning in the night;  
In this world of darkness, we must shine,  
You in your small corner, and I in mine.*

*Jesus bids us shine, first of all for Him;  
Well He sees and knows it if our light is dim;  
He looks down from heaven, sees us shine,  
You in your small corner, and I in mine.*

*Jesus bids us shine, then, for all around  
Many kinds of darkness in this world abound:  
Sin, and want, and sorrow—we must shine,  
You in your small corner, and I in mine.*

*Jesus bids us shine, as we work for Him,  
Bringing those that wander  
from the paths of sin;   
He will ever help us, if we shine,  
You in your small corner, and I in mine.*





## Waiting in Suspense

**W**earily she lies in her little room as old age ties her to the bed. Well over eighty, she is now waiting for the doors of heaven to be opened for her. There is something blissful about this waiting.

When we were children, in the weeks, days, and hours leading up to the Christmas celebrations, we waited for the door to the Christmas parlor to open and for us to be allowed to go in and enjoy the lights of the Christmas tree and the presents. It was a sweet waiting. But even more joyful can be and should be the Christian who is waiting for the coming glory of heaven.

“I can’t imagine how it will be one day in the world to come. I constantly think of the word ‘glory,’” said the pilgrim mentioned above. She is right. We cannot imagine it either, because it is written, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

How glorious it must be for us to have successfully fought the suffering of this time and be allowed to go home to our Lord! We will be “at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). How glorious it must be when Satan, sin, and death are eliminated and when the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s kingdom! (Matthew 13:43). All the glorious images in which the Word of God speaks of this future should delight our spirit. But we say boldly that they are only shadowy images. The reality will be so much more magnificent that the Word will then be fulfilled, “Eye has not seen... the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

“It is actually a good thing I cannot yet imagine the coming glory,” said our above-mentioned sister. She is right. If we already know before Christmas what kind of gifts we will receive, then the suspenseful waiting is not as enjoyable. This is why people hide the gifts meant to delight one another. Perhaps sometimes there are hints that one should guess. But this is done





so skillfully that it cannot be guessed; yet the suspense becomes all the greater.

So it is with the hints about what is to come in God's Word. We are to wait with excitement at the door of the future world and be full of joyful hope, because the glory of God, which we are then to see, is unspeakably great.

But do we have to be past the age of eighty to anticipate our future in heaven? Or do we first become so ill that we have no hope of earthly improvement? The Lord Jesus says, "Be like men who wait for their master" (Luke 12:36). This word applies to all who abide in Him, whether young or old. As children of God, we should all stand on the boundary between time and eternity, turn our backs on the transitory, and turn our face toward the eternal, not as dreamers but as those who have become free, who already let themselves be led here by the eternal Spirit. By God's grace, with His help we too can be such Christians. ■

EP

## *You Must Be Ready!*

“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Then Peter said to Him, “Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?”

And the Lord said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”

Luke 12:35-48

# Closing the Books

Just as businesses close their books at the year's end to assess how they are doing financially, Christians should use the same opportunity to take stock of their lives and see how they stand before God and their neighbors. Scripture calls us to examine ourselves, and there is surely no better time than the end of the year to think about how fleeting life is and about how we are spending our limited time on Earth. Because it is impossible for us to stand still in our spiritual lives, we have either drawn ahead or fallen behind during the last year. We should examine ourselves carefully to see whether we have followed the direction of the Holy Spirit and have grown in the knowledge and grace of our Lord. Are we closer to God today than a year ago? Do we love Him more than ever? Is He worth more to us than all earthly treasures?

The end of the year reminds us of how time flies. An old saying goes, "Time and tide wait for no man." We can stop a clock, but nobody can stop time. Even the ocean tide can be controlled using dikes, but the tide of time, bringing us ever nearer to the boundless sea of eternity, cannot be held back.

The longer our lives, the faster time seems to fly. With more and more responsibilities, problems, and obligations, it seems time passes faster and faster, and our to-do list grows longer than the days and years we have left.

When we are young, things seem different. Worries play a smaller role, and time seems to pass so slowly that we would speed up the gears of time if we could. But we can move the hands of time just as little as we can move the sun in the sky. The rich grow just as old and weak as the poor. Blessed are those who accept the inevitable and use their time well.

We should see each year as a precious gift from God. This also means we will have to give account one day for what we have done with these gifts, and the more God blesses us, the greater our responsibility grows. "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). So many people waste this time and only wake up when it is too late to

make up for what they missed; the years come and go but bring them no satisfying or lasting blessing.

We must dedicate our own lives to earning heavenly treasure, our greatest good. This is the path to happiness, helping us to advance the good of humanity and help build the kingdom of God. Everything we give to the Lord will last for all of time and eternity. Everything we do in the name of Jesus and everything we give to the Lord will yield treasures for His loyal servants to enjoy forever. If everyone were to lead a truly Christ-like life, unfathomable blessings would follow.

It is almost incomprehensible how blind some people are. They live as though this world could never change or pass away. Yet the world is in chaos, and it is clear that "we have no continuing city" here (Hebrews 13:14). From the cradle to the grave, our lives are perpetually in flux, and we never cease to be reminded that we are only "strangers and pilgrims on the earth," like all who came before us (Hebrews 11:13). But with God, we are safe and secure, both here and for all eternity. The following poem expresses these thoughts nicely:

Abide with me, Lord, as the time flies by;  
The years so quickly flee.  
Your mighty arm, so merciful and nigh,  
Let it be close to me.  
O let the heartbeat of Your love stay  
With me while I'm on earth, Lord; I pray:  
Abide with me.

Abide with me; You are my rock and shield.  
Earth's treasures pass away.  
Lead me and guide; to You I gladly yield.  
Your Word will always stay,  
So as this year comes to an end, Lord,  
This is my prayer until the end, Lord:  
Abide with me. ■

Karl Heinrich Keck

## For the Turn of the Year

**T**ime rushes by on silent wings. Like the water of a stream, the minutes, hours, and days flow by. And so the years hurry on toward eternity. This is a serious, solemn thought. How short is this lifetime; how transitory and trivial are the things of this world! Yes, how vain is life and yet so important and so meaningful!

Just as thick clouds of smoke rise and then elude our eyes as we gaze to the distance, so is life. “For what is your life?” cries the apostle. The answer echoes back solemnly and seriously: “It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14).

Yes, human life is of very short duration: minutes, hours, days, months, a few years, and then it crosses over into long, never-ending eternity. Like the flower of the grass, man blossoms, withers, and disappears, and his place can no longer be found. Like a breath, he is gone. Like the restless weaver’s bobbin, he hurries through life. With quick steps, he hurries toward the grave, toward the gates of eternity. There is no stay, no rest; tirelessly, he hurries on.

Oh, that we mortal men would consider that we have no permanent place here! But so many are blind to this serious fact; they think and act as if they will always remain on this earth. They live for themselves, for the perishable, for this world, and do not prepare to meet their God. They do not prepare themselves for an eternal home. When they are called away, they must wander through eternity without home and rest. Oh, the seriousness, the importance, and the transience of life!

We are placed in this world to live for God, and for eternity, and to serve God and our fellow men. Recognize the opportunities offered to us to help those in sin, through a kind word of love, through prayer, through our true

Christian life. See the millions who languish and thirst in darkness and sin because no one offers them the bread and water of life. Oh what misery to see so many enslaved by the fetters and bonds of sin! What are we doing to help relieve the great need of our fellow men?

The last hour of a year sounds again, and a new one begins. Let us be still and close our ears for a few moments to all the noise and activity of this world. Let us look back on the past year and remember that with every moment we are coming closer to eternity, every beat of the heart is a drumbeat in the funeral march to the grave. Only a few moments more, and everything will be over. Oh, let us stop to contemplate! Do we not see the signs of the times, the hardness of the heart of man, the rampant injustices, and the godlessness!

Let us examine ourselves. What are the hidden motives of our hearts and lives? Can God’s Word, His Spirit, and the voice of the heart and conscience speak to us? May each one test himself in the light of eternity, in the light of the Holy Scriptures. Let us measure everything according to the standard presented to us and then lay aside what hinders us on the journey to eternity. Let us examine ourselves and allow God to search our hearts so there is no hidden enemy somewhere within, a sin that stains the conscience, a guilt that gnaws at the heart and plunges the soul into ruin.

First, examine your own heart and then look to the One Who can help, Who hung with outstretched hands on the cross on Golgotha, the great Redeemer of mankind, Jesus Christ. He holds the fate of individuals and peoples in His hands. His blood can cleanse from all sin, and through His grace, He can give victory and comfort. Yes, He can lead us through the New Year and through all times and eternity. ■

# *In Joyful Celebration*

Rejoice, ye heavens! Sing praises ye angels in choirs!  
Sing to the Lord, this the Savior of mankind inspires.  
Behold and see, God is so loving and free,  
Seeking the lost He desires.

Behold and wonder, the Highest to us has descended.  
Behold such love that forevermore is love and unending.  
Marvel herein, He bears and purges our sin;  
Prayers and praise are ascending.

O King of glory, the marvel of Your incarnation  
Has filled my heart with thankfulness and adoration.  
My life is Yours, You I will always adore,  
Ever avoiding transgression.

Faithful Immanuel, o be born in my heart as well.  
Come now, my Savior, for without You I'm destined for hell.  
Come live in me, fully united with Thee,  
Your love deep within me will dwell.

Lover of mankind, I praise You ever with one accord:  
O that I may live here to please you alone, o my Lord.  
Take me, I pray; help me to strive everyday  
In all things to honor your Word.

***Gerhard Tersteegen (1667-1769)***