



Foundation of Faith

Christmas Wishes – Belonging to the Family – There was no Room – Christmas with Children



THE GREATEST
GIFT EVER

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FOUNDATION OF FAITH

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The FOUNDATION OF FAITH is a journal of vital Christianity, published in the interest of the Church of God, that takes a clear and decisive stand for full salvation in Christ, the unity of all true believers, and the truths of the Bible.

The editors reserve the right to abridge and edit all materials and information submitted for publication. Research sources are listed for information only and should not necessarily be construed as an endorsement or recommendation.

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www.christianunitypress.com

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FOUNDATION OF FAITH (USPS 9008) is published monthly by Christian Unity Press, 5195 Exchange Dr., Flint, MI 48507, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Flint, MI, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Christian Unity Press, 5195 Exchange Dr., Flint, MI 48507, USA Volume 23 Issue 12

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Printed in USA.

FOUNDATION OF FAITH is published free of charge. All expenses are covered by freewill donations.

Editorial

Dear Readers,

How quickly another year has passed, and the last issue of the Foundation of Faith for 2025 is in your hands! A quarter of a century of this third millennium since Christ's coming has already passed. How quickly the years of our life pass! May the following articles about the year's end and eternity serve us for reflection and great blessing.

But now, to our topic: "The Greatest Gift." What does the size of a gift really matter? It is generally expected that a gift, when it is given, should be in proportion to the means of the giver. Perhaps you have heard someone say: "Well, from that rich person I expected more." Rightly or wrongly said (since the giving of a gift is a personal decision and unearned), the expectation arose that one ought to have given according to one's wealth.

A second measure of a gift is whether the recipient is worthy of the gift. From someone whom we have treated very badly, we would probably not expect a great gift—if any at all! But from those to whom we have done much good, we might possibly expect something in return. That is often how we humans reckon!

But let us look at the gift that God gave us at Christmas. For whom was this gift? For those who had sinned against Him. For those who offered Him defiance and disobedience, sometimes even hatred and curses. God gave His precious gift to such as would cruelly mistreat it. Yes, it was precisely for those who had no right to expect it! And the greatness of the gift? There is none greater! God's gift surpasses all others by such a measure as the endless heavens are above the earth. God's gift is as great as He is—and that is infinite! For God's gift is Himself, revealed in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer.

How do you stand in relation to this gift? Have you accepted it in reverence, humility of heart, and love, and taken it into your heart? Have you rejected it until now? And if you feel lonely at Christmas, or hurt, or misunderstood, or wronged, then remember how much God must love you—because He gave personally to you the greatest gift of all! Ponder this . . . and let yourself be completely transformed through His gift.

Ron Taron

The Christmas Gift

Many booths and stands had once again been set up for the Christmas market in Strasbourg. Everywhere, the most tempting things were being offered. The air was filled with the delightful scents of sweets, sausages, candles, and evergreen branches.

Johann Friedrich Oberlin would not have been a normal boy if he hadn't joined the crowds meandering through the Christmas market. Here and there he stopped for a moment, then secretly felt his coat pocket to make sure his purse—holding six precious sous—was still there. Everything around him made him feel happy and festive, and at each stall he wondered what he might buy his dear mother as a Christmas present.

Now he caught sight of a stand filled with especially beautiful things. He pushed and squeezed his way forward until he could see everything up close. He was so absorbed in looking for something special that he didn't notice what was going on around him. Suddenly, a voice caught his attention and made him listen closely:

"No, my good lady, I really can't sell you that dress for any less. I'm sorry, but there's nothing I can do!"

Johann Friedrich looked up. Next to him stood a poor woman, thin and shabbily dressed, and across from her stood the saleswoman, who didn't look much better off herself.

A sudden thought flashed through the boy's mind:

"Ah, dear Savior, you want us to seek Your kingdom first of all. Then I suppose I must part with my pocket money."

He hesitated for a moment, then his eyes lit up. Timidly he asked the saleswoman, "How much is the woman short?"

The shopkeeper looked at the boy in surprise and said, "If you don't have it, it's a lot—but to someone rich, it's nothing."

"Well, yes—but how much is it? Please tell me."

"Only five sous, young sir—just an insignificant bit of money. But if you're missing it, it can mean bitter hardship."

Johann Friedrich looked down in embarrassment. How should he decide? Couldn't the dear Lord send a rich man this way—someone who could reach into his full purse without even noticing the loss?

But then the boy caught the weary, sad look of the woman as she turned to go. "Then I'll just have to do without," she said quietly, shrugging her shoulders. "Maybe the winter won't be too cold."

"It's your fault if the poor woman freezes!" cried a voice inside the boy. "If Mother knew you wanted to buy her a gift instead of helping someone in need, she wouldn't be pleased at all."

The boy snapped out of his thoughts, grasped the woman's arm resolutely, and led her back to the stand. Then he took five sous from his purse and pressed them into the shopkeeper's hand.

"Here's the missing money," he said, nodded kindly to the poor woman—who stared at him in astonishment—and disappeared into the bustling crowd of the market.

The boy, Johann Friedrich Oberlin, grew up to be a famous man—not as a scholar, an artist, or a soldier, but famous for his kind and compassionate heart. To this day, the people of the villages where he served so faithfully still call him The Saint of Steinthal.

Paulus Langholf



The Young Shepherd

It was on the Crimean Peninsula. There, across the wide green grassland, large flocks of sheep still grazed deep into the winter. The shepherd's cart stood lonely in the endless field, and inside sat Peter, the young shepherd. He was the nephew of a German settler who owned the estate. Peter was about ten years old and rather delicate in build. But for tending sheep, the orphaned boy was just right.

Now he sat there, resting his head in his hands—and today was Christmas. It was almost more than he could bear: having to spend Christmas out among the sheep. No shining Christmas tree, no holidays, no festive meal in a warm room! And his loneliness was twice as hard to bear on this day. The three shaggy sheepdogs simply could not replace the company of kind people.

Slowly dusk descended over the steppe. Peter lit a small fire and prepared his simple supper. But as he ate, a tear ran down his cheek. Today was Christmas—and he was all alone.

Then a thought came to him: Christmas! And there were “shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.” Hadn't he often read that in the Gospel? The thought comforted him. With moist eyes he folded his hands and prayed that God would send him someone that night, so he wouldn't be so lonely. Then he lay down in his shepherd's cart and looked up through a crack in the roof at a bright star, that in his mind seemed like the Star of Bethlehem.

Suddenly, a cry pierced the silence. The dogs began barking loudly. Someone was calling for help! Peter

jumped out and saw that the dogs had knocked a man to the ground. He called them back and helped the stranger up. The man had a small wound on his arm. Peter carefully bandaged it. Soon he realized that the traveler was also hungry and thirsty. He then shared with him what little he had. His prayer had been answered: he now had company.

The stranger told how he had come to the lonely steppe. It was a sad story: he had lived a life full of carelessness and godlessness and was now wandering in search of work and food. Peter asked him why he did not return to his parents and ask their forgiveness. The stranger laughed scornfully.

But Peter quietly said that it was not right to speak so disdainfully on Christmas Eve.

“What—today is Christmas Eve?” the man exclaimed in surprise. “I didn't know that!” And suddenly his heart softened at the memory of the Christmas Eves of the past, in his dear childhood home. What Peter said to him fell on good soil.

The next morning, the estate owner arrived with a wagon to check on Peter. Peter explained everything to him about the stranger. The landowner made the decision to take care of the stranger and took him along.

Three weeks later, for the first time ever, Peter received a letter, full of joy and gratitude. The stranger wrote that he had returned to his parents—and found forgiveness.

Wasn't that a blessed Christmas out there on the wide and lonely grasslands?

G. D. N. T.

*It was a sad story:
he had lived a life full
of carelessness and
godlessness.*



God's Indescribable Gift

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

These words of the Apostle Paul are indeed a precious Christmas message. What does Paul have in mind when he speaks of God's indescribable gift? What is he thinking of when he exclaims that God deserves special thanks for it? He is thinking of the One whom he proclaimed in the previous chapter: although He was rich, Jesus became poor for our sake, so that we might become rich through His poverty. He refers to Jesus Christ, whom we celebrate during this Christmas season and praise as the miracle of miracles. The Lord of heaven and earth became man.

And Jesus Christ, the Son of God made flesh, is a gift, a present, indeed a gift of grace from our God. God was not obligated to send His Son into this world. If He had given us what we deserved, it would have been judgment and eternal destruction. But instead, God offers the world this gift of grace. Our hearts should overflow with thanksgiving for His great love and grace.

Why does Paul call Jesus Christ an "indescribable gift"? Because it is so inexpressibly valuable. No human being can even accurately fathom the value of this great gift. All the gifts given at Christmas time are in no way comparable to this precious gift from God. And yet, how few people appreciate the value of this gift.

How poor this world would be if Jesus had not come. But Jesus is given to us, and in Him we have great riches that cannot be described. In Him we have peace in a troubled world; peace that fills our hearts to the very depths. In Him we have hope, living hope for the future, that even goes beyond the grave.

And Jesus is there for everyone, without exception. Anyone who comes to Him will have their life enriched with heavenly and eternal goods. This is why he came into the world, so that we might become rich through His poverty. Yes, in order to make us rich in God, He left the riches and glory of heaven and became poor Himself. One would think that all people would appreciate God's great gift and thank Him from

the bottom of their hearts. But unfortunately, this is not the case, and many are still so blind that they do not recognize how much gratitude they owe God for it. But such people also have no benefit or blessing from this indescribable gift.

But all who have recognized the high value of the gift testify in word and deed that they are grateful with all their hearts. The angels' message of joy: "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" (Luke 2: 10–11), finds an echo in their hearts. All who open their hearts to the Son of God will experience this. They will then have an inexpressible and lasting joy because they know that Jesus came to reveal to us personally the Father who dispels darkness. He, Jesus, appeared to destroy the works of Satan, to bring a peace that the world does not know, that it cannot give, but also cannot take away from us. Only He who came from above can give lasting peace.

Oh, that those who are entangled and enslaved by sin would recognize that only one can help them, save them from sin, and make them truly happy. This is the One who came down from heaven, whose heart beats with love and compassion for the poor and those lost in sin. He knows the depths of human misery, and He is powerful and willing to help and save. This one is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came in the flesh.

This good news also applies to you, dear Soul. Remember that the Savior was born for you too, because His love drove Him to earth for you. Therefore, hurry in spirit to Bethlehem, look upon His lovely face, and know that here lies the One who, through His suffering and death, paved the way to the eternal Father's heart. He died to reconcile you with God; He wants to wipe away all your guilt with His blood. Yes, He came to give you abundant life so you too can join in proclaiming with the angels: "Glory to God in the highest." And also say with the Apostle Paul: "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" ■

There Was No Room

“There was no room for them in the inn.” (Luke 2: 7)

One lesson we can learn from this account is that Jesus found room nonetheless. It was not a beautiful and honorable place, this poor stable. But wasn't that a picture of His whole life and work? And hasn't it remained so to this day? Jesus is rejected, but He is still able to find a place where He is welcomed! It is worthwhile to read the Gospel from this perspective.

If the Pharisees and scribes did not want Him, He found room among the tax collectors and sinners.

If He is hidden from the wise and intelligent, He is revealed to the young.

Even if the powerful of this world reject Him, the poor and needy rejoice in His love.

While the foolish sinners hate Him, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness rush to Him.

While the self-righteous manage without Him, wounded consciences know nothing more beautiful than Him.

While the proud reject Him, He remains the Savior of the humble.

If those addicted to pleasure have no room and no time for Him, those who are sad are all the more willing to take Him in.

“He came to His own,” we read in John 1: 11, “and His own did not receive Him.” No room for Jesus! But then verse 12 is so wonderful: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name . . .”

Jesus found a place! People today are still looking for help that only Jesus can give. The question is: Do *you* have room for Him? ■

How Big?

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

In many countries, it is customary to bring a small gift to your host as a token of appreciation for their hospitality. A few years ago, I traveled to Germany and stayed with a Christian family. Because I couldn't think of anything to bring, I asked my host if there was anything in Canada that was hard to find in Germany. His answer was, “Oh, bring a certain kind of peanut butter; we can't get it easily here in Germany.”

I was happy to do so and asked how much I should bring. “Oh,” he wrote, “bring three of the big ones.” So we drove to the store and bought three “large” jars of peanut butter. They weighed 2 kg (4.4 lbs) each. Since I could only check in a total of 23 kg of luggage, there wasn't much room left for my clothes and other belongings, but somehow I managed to fit in the essentials.

When I arrived in Germany, I unpacked the gifts and brought them to the family in the kitchen. Their eyes widened when they saw the three huge jars of peanut butter. “What are we supposed to do with all this peanut butter?” they asked. “Why did you bring so much?” “Well, you said to bring three of the big ones.” “Yes, but here in Germany, a large one contains about 500 g (1.1 lbs).” How we all laughed! Yes, sometimes there are misunderstandings. Now they had an abundance of the gift, far more than they ever expected.

Isn't it similar with God's great Christmas gift? How much more does God give us in Jesus Christ than we can ever imagine! And that is no misunderstanding. In Him we have everything we can think of . . . and so much more. “Thanks *be* to God for His indescribable gift!” ■

Belonging to the Family



Imagine the following event: It is the afternoon of Christmas Eve. There is an undercurrent of anticipation in the orphanage! An obviously wealthy family has brought a large bag of presents for the orphans. It is a couple holding the hands of a little boy and a little girl. They wander from child to child, sharing some words of encouragement and Christmas greetings. The visitors' children are rather shy in the unfamiliar situation, where almost all the attention is focused on them. But they manage, by holding hands with Mom and Dad.

Only one child of the orphanage withdraws, looking unhappy, showing his disdain through scornful

glances at the scene. He was not a "true" orphan, but his parents had left him, as a two-year-old, at the doors of the home, and disappeared. Now, at age eleven, the pain and despair had brought him to the point where he could no longer be controlled. There was constant trouble, and the directors of the home were at their wits' end. As the result of his most recent rebellion and outburst of anger, which had led to an act of violence against another child, he was barred from participating in the Christmas celebration. Things just couldn't continue this way!

Of course, the caring visitors wondered about the boy's story. As the husband and wife looked at their

sweet little family circle and considered the fate of this boy, they were deeply moved.

Later, during their Christmas Eve celebration, through the night, and into Christmas morning, one thought continued to pursue them: “What if we—or one of our children—had been in his place?” They discussed it repeatedly, fell to their knees, and prayed . . . and on Christmas evening they returned as a family to the orphanage and began the process of taking this unwanted, sin-burdened boy into their family. Henceforth, he was to belong to them and they to him. He would receive all the rights and all the love of a devoted family: a father, a mother, siblings; a room of his own, a home where he would always be welcome and belong—and much more besides. What a Christmas gift!

God’s Christmas gift

Doesn’t this picture represent a faint sketch of the great Christmas gift of God? God gives a lost world—which

has sinned against Him and deserves only eternal condemnation—His best and dearest: His Son! And through Jesus’ death on the cross, everyone may receive forgiveness, salvation, and the right to become a child of God. John writes in his first letter, chapter three:

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!”

But not only called, also become, for in the next verse John continues:

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

What does it mean to be a child of God?

1. I enter a Father-child relationship with God!

How does a good and loving father treat his child? He provides for it, protects it, disciplines it, fights for it, gives his life for it. He allows it constant access to him.

He takes joy in his child and wants things to go well. He understands the child’s weaknesses and even its failures. He helps it up when it falls. He embraces it with his strong, loving arms. He regards it as his own possession, the apple of his eye, and much more.

2. To be a child of God means to belong to the family of God—His church.

As a child of God you are no longer an outsider, but have a place and a right within the family. It means to be a member of the family of God through the blood of Jesus and by grace. It means having many brothers and sisters with whom we may have fellowship and share life’s journey. It also means bearing the family name of the Father: Church of God. It means having a home: to dwell in the house of God. What wonderful privileges! And yet, how many despise these gifts of God and search for something else.

Only one child of the orphanage withdraws, looking unhappy, showing his disdain through scornful glances.

3. To be a child of God means to have an inheritance—and what an inheritance!

Peter writes: “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:3–5).

The heirs of a rich man look forward to inheriting his great possessions. But how immeasurable is the inheritance of God’s children! Infinitely great—far greater than we can imagine. And all of it undeserved, out of pure grace and love.

How great and exalted is the gift of God in His Son. Shall we not give Him our whole heart and life—our undivided love?

Ron Taron
Steinbach, MB

The More Abundant Life

*"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."
(John 10: 10)*

Blessed is the mystery: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1: 14). In this mystery lies all the blessedness that can fill a human heart with joy. Without this mystery, there is no salvation. The forgiveness of our sins, life, and blessedness depend on this mystery. The gospel stands or falls with this mystery. Jesus, fully God, fully man, was born of the virgin Mary. This message gives Christmas its wonderful splendor, Good Friday its holy solemnity, and Easter its living meaning. Without the fact of Jesus' incarnation, there would be no salvation from sin. Death and the devil and horrible darkness would envelop all of humanity, despite all the enlightenment and wisdom that the present age boasts.

Only One can give life to the full to poor humanity in need of comfort. The Christmas story tells us that He came, as well as how He came. The apostles who saw His glory preached it. They saw Him face to face, they heard His words, they were witnesses to His deeds. They were with Him on the night He was betrayed. They stood before the risen Lord when He blessed them, and they watched Him as a cloud took Him away before their eyes. "He has come!" resounded their message. When the Lord met Paul before Damascus, it undoubtedly became clear to him: "He has come!" Every believer who is made a new creature today is a living testimony to this: "He has come!" During this Christmas season, we may once again hear the ancient yet eternally new message from heaven: "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

And yet, how many shake their heads: "I hear the message well enough, but I simply can't believe it!" How many doubt: Did He really come? Is there really a Savior? Did He really come to heal broken hearts? Dear Soul, free yourself from this "if"!

We should have life!

Where Jesus is absent, there is death. If you do not have

Him, you are dead in sin. Only through Christ can you taste the power of the world to come. Do you call this life—a short time under the sun to breathe, cry, laugh, toil, go about your business, eat and drink—and then die? That is not life, life to the full! But if you stand in living faith in Jesus, there is life to the full. If your clothes have been made white through the blood of the Lamb, you have life, and have it to the full! When the Spirit of Jesus puts the prayer in our hearts and on our lips: "Abba, Father, all things *are* possible for You. . . . not what I will, but what You *will*," there is life to the full. Where Jesus has become the hope of eternal glory, where the blessed longing is always alive in the heart to "desire to depart and be with Christ, *which* is far better," there is life to the full!

More abundance

Jesus wants to give. He does not desire for us to live from hand to mouth; no, He wants to give us freely what we truly need here in life. From His abundance, we are to take grace upon grace. "I thank my God . . . that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge . . . so that you come short in no gift" (1 Corinthians 1: 4–7), writes Paul.

Jesus does not only point us to heaven. Of course, that is where He wants to complete His work in us. But the eternal life He gives us already has value now. We are to have what He promises here and now: life, life to the full. Those who have turned to Jesus already have heaven in their hearts right now.

In Jesus, we have a light that shines through this dark world into the light of eternity. For "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." Let us give thanks with fervent hearts for the wonderful gift that the wonderful love of God has given us in Jesus. When Jesus is born in our hearts, we too can exclaim with gratitude: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3: 1). ■

For Unto Us a Child is Born

“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. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” (Isaiah 9:6–7)

In this Bible passage, the prophet spoke of an event that believers had been waiting for since ancient times. He announced the birth of the King of Kings and said, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.” This promise was given by God to Adam and Eve. After they had sinned and were unable to make amends for their actions, the Lord spoke to them of the seed of the woman who would come and crush the head of the serpent. So Adam and Eve, and many after them, looked forward to the birth of this victorious Savior. The prophet Isaiah saw this event as a certainty and spoke of the birth of this mighty Savior: “[U]nto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.”

The fact that this Child was exceptional among all children is particularly emphasized by His birth. When, after a long wait, an heir to the throne of a country was born, the birth was announced by heralds. Here, however, an angel came from heaven and spoke of the birth of this Child. To confirm this message, the heavenly host appeared, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2: 14).

Never before or since has the birth of a child been accompanied by such circumstances. And not without reason, for it is written: “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh . . .” (1 Timothy 3: 16). The evangelist John said: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1: 14). He went on to say: “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3: 17).

In this Child, God drew near to humanity to renew the broken bond of fellowship. Through Christ, the Son of God, He extends His hand to humanity in reconciliation. Peace was to come to earth through Him, the Savior. The fear and lack of peace that dwell in the hearts of men shall be removed forever. Instead, the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, shall reign in their hearts; for He is our peace.

In Isaiah 9, we are made aware of the position of power and the various titles that this Son bears. It says: “And the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” The entire description shows us the majesty of the One who has taken upon Himself the dominion. He is a king, and all of God’s children throughout the ages worship and give Him glory.

He is called Wonderful, because He Himself is wonderful in His entire being and does wonderful things. He knows what to do at the right time, and therefore people can say, “You will guide me with Your counsel” (Psalm 73: 24). He acts as a powerful God and brings His work to a victorious conclusion. He is also called the Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace. Inconspicuous in His birth in Bethlehem, yet great and powerful in His appearance in this world. There is no one like Him, for He is God and the only One who can save humanity from eternal destruction.

In the quiet, dark night, our Savior was born in Bethlehem. Come to the manger in spirit and see in Him the light of the world. Put your trust in Him, and He will bring you the help you need. How do you stand toward Him?

G. Sonnenberg

Trust God— He Cares About the Details

Recently, I found myself in a situation where I pondered whether God would really put the pieces of my life properly together again. I did not say this out loud, but my concerns in the evening and my thoughts in the morning sure confirmed it. And this is precisely where the well-known Christmas story helps. It helps us to deal with our troubles.

Paul wrote to the Galatians: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son” (Galatians 4: 4). The NIV translation says “But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son.” So Jesus was not born too early or too late, but at the “set time.”

It almost seems as if God made it especially difficult for Himself, to show us that He can put all the puzzle pieces together. He had made so many promises about the coming of Jesus that no one but He Himself could have fulfilled them all. Through Christ, God fulfilled every single one, as if to tell us, “Look, I keep my word!” And we read the details of the Christmas story with amazement. They describe not only a historical event, but the incarnation of the Son of God.

Even before the foundation of the world, God had established His plan (1 Peter 1: 20). After the Fall, He gave the first promise (Genesis 3: 15) and pointed to “the seed of the woman”: Jesus Christ. Those who read the Bible carefully will discover repeated references and details in the Old Testament about how God’s plan would unfold. The prophets, so to speak, gazed through a lens into the future, and saw not only vague outlines but concrete details—for example, the place of birth: “Bethlehem” (Micah 5: 2). Because there were two places with this name at that time, Micah wrote “Bethlehem Ephrathah” under God’s inspiration, thus unambiguously determining the place of Jesus’ birth. When Emperor Augustus ordered a census, God used this pagan decree for His purposes. So Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem Ephrathah, so that what was spoken by the Lord might be fulfilled. God’s hand is already visible in this journey.

But let us look at what happened before that. It all began when Mary encountered an angel who told her of a completely unexpected pregnancy. Understand-

ably, she initially rejected such an idea and was hesitant until she learned that it would be a divine event. Adam Clarke comments that her situation was the most distressing and humiliating that could be imagined. Her reputation, her honor, and her very life was at stake. And yet she surrendered to God’s will and said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her” (Luke 1: 38).

How would Joseph, to whom Mary was betrothed, react to her pregnancy? The Bible says that he was “a just man” (Matthew 1: 19). He knew that he was innocent in this matter and could not simply allow himself to be drawn into it. Therefore, he decided not to expose Mary publicly, “not wanting to make her a public example,” but instead “to put her away secretly” (Matthew 1: 19). For him, the matter was settled—or so he thought. But that night, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, explained everything to him, and gave him clear instructions: that he should take Mary, his betrothed wife, to himself, for what was conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit. And the angel added: “She will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1: 21). This was the fulfillment of what the prophet had foretold: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, ‘God with us’” (Matthew 1: 23).

And what did Joseph do? He obeyed. He did as the angel commanded him. God took care of the details—first with Mary, then with Joseph. A single divine explanation changed Joseph’s plans. And yet, we can well understand his hesitation. As humans we think human thoughts, but God’s plans are not only higher than ours, they are also better.

Joseph and Mary went on the journey to Bethlehem Ephrathah. Everyone outside the family thought it was because of the census—and that was correct. But the real reason was deeper. The angel had encountered Joseph in a dream: “So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the



prophet” (Matthew 1:22). In other words, God keeps His word. He fulfills His promises by taking care of the details.

These thoughts move me deeply. I am reminded of the hymn “What a Mighty God We Serve,” (*Worship Hymnal of the Church of God*, Song No. 40). The fourth verse says: “Our God, to save from sin’s control, gave His Son a sacrifice; His grace abounding in the soul, makes the earth a paradise.” His grace, even more profound than His power, compelled His Son to leave heaven in order to save sinners from their guilt. Oh, how great is our God!

And this great God also cares for you and me—personally. He not only directs world events, but also my life, and yours. We often do not understand things that happen in our lives. Questions about “why” and “how” remain unanswered. But that’s okay. I don’t have to un-

derstand everything. It is enough to know that my life is guided by this higher hand—and that He takes care of the details.

Years ago, when we got married, we were given a wall hanging. I don’t remember who gave it to us. But to this day, the words on it have been a great help to me and have often calmed my stormy heart and given me deep peace when I took the words to heart: “Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring *it* to pass” (Psalm 37:5). The entire Bible encourages us to trust in the Lord and let Him guide us. This brings peace to our hearts and gives us security. So, I wish to conclude with these words: Don’t worry about the details. God will take care of them.

Harry Semenjuk
Wetaskiwin, AB

Thanking the Giver

There is perhaps no greater evil that blinds people of God's gracious provision than their pride. I'm reminded of King Nebuchadnezzar, who was made to live like a beast for a time because of his pride. The main truth that God wanted to reveal to Nebuchadnezzar through his dream and through his punishment, was that all his greatness had been given to him by God. It was God who had given Nebuchadnezzar his dominion. Daniel had told him that he would be forced to live like the beasts of the field, till he knew "that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses" (Daniel 4: 25b).

Nebuchadnezzar wasn't the only king who fell victim to his own pride and was then forced to reap the consequences. In 2 Chronicles 26, we read of Uzziah, who reigned in Judah for 52 years from Jerusalem. The Bible says of him in verses 4–5, "And he did *what was* right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. He sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God; and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper." Then, in the verses that follow, many of his accomplishments and military victories are mentioned.

Unfortunately, this great king grew proud. Verse 16 says, "But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to *his* destruction, for he transgressed against the LORD his God by entering the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense." The king had no right performing the duties of a priest, as God prescribed for the lineage of Aaron. Uzziah figured, since he was such an important king, he could do what he wanted. His disobedience to God was punished with leprosy; and he remained a leper until he died (v. 21).

He wanted to do something spiritual for God, but God did not accept his worship because it was rooted in pride. Pride always separates people from God; it never brings us closer to Him. Pride says, "look what I have done, and how great I am!" Pride robs God of the honor, glory, and thanks due His name alone. It doesn't matter what we profess to do for God, if we do it out of pride, God will not accept it because He knows that the motives are impure and selfish.

If pride separates us from God, what brings us closer to Him? Recognizing our great dependency on God and thanking Him for His provision brings us closer to Him. God not only gave Nebuchadnezzar his dominion, but he also gave him the food on his table,

the beat of his heart, and the air in his lungs. Scripture says in James 1: 17, "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."

What is the greatest gift that humanity has ever received? God Himself, through the incarnate birth of Jesus Christ. Think of Paul's words from Romans 6: 23, "For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our LORD." This incredible gift is the reason why millions of people around the world are celebrating the Advent season. This incredible gift becomes even more meaningful when we consider the reason why Jesus became man. He came to die for our sins and defeat sin and death through His glorious resurrection so that we can have eternal life in Him.

God is a wonderful Provider; He provided a way for salvation, and He provides for any other need we might have. What does the Lord desire of His creation for His perfect provision? Thankful and receptive hearts that recognize their dependency on God's merciful giving. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 147:7–11, "Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praises on the harp to our God, who covers the heavens with clouds, who prepares rain for the earth, who makes grass to grow on the mountains. He gives to the beast its food, *and* to the young ravens that cry. He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy."

The Lord takes no pleasure in pride. He takes pleasure in His children when we remain close to Him and trust in His provision for our lives. He takes pleasure in His children when we lift up our voices to Him in praise and thanksgiving. He takes pleasure in His chil-

dren when we recognize that everything we are and have, has been temporarily entrusted to us to glorify Him and to further His kingdom. He took pleasure in Nebuchadnezzar when he finally came to his senses again, lifted his eyes to heaven and blessed, praised and honored God with the words we find in Daniel 4:34b, “For His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom *is* from generation to generation.” And in verse 37 he concludes, “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works *are* truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.” When reading his words of praise and thanksgiving to God, it seems as though Nebuchadnezzar finally learned what God was trying to teach him: God is the giver of all good things.

Loved ones, during this Advent season, let us consider what our response should be for the good things that we’ve received from God in our lives, and continue to receive. Are we proud of who we are, and what we have? Or are we thankful to God for what He has provided? Do we recognize that pride separates from God and dependency and gratitude bring us closer to Him? Do we realize that at His command, everything could be taken away from us? In a minute, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye? It doesn’t matter what we own, how educated we might be, or the work that we do. Every person who is alive today, is alive today because of the goodness and provision of God. Every soul who has been forgiven and regenerated is eternally indebted to God for His sacrificial giving. He is a great Provider. Let us never forget to thank God and to praise Him, for His merciful provision.

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The Best Book



It was Sunday. Laura was sitting with her mom, dad, and Nicholas in the worship service. The pastor quoted many passages from the Bible, such as John 14: 6. Each time, her dad immediately opened his Bible and read along.

"Can I have a turn?" Laura asked quietly. Dad nodded. When the next Bible passage was mentioned, Laura eagerly turned the pages—but she didn't know where to look. Perplexed, she handed the Bible back to Dad. "How do you always find it so quickly?" she whispered.

Dad pointed to the top of the page. "Here are the names of the books of the Bible and the chapters."

After the service, Laura snuggled up to Dad on the sofa. "Can you explain that to me in more detail?"

Dad took his Bible. "The Bible has two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament tells of the creation, the history of Israel, and the promise of the Savior. The New Testament tells of Jesus, His life, death, and resurrection."

"And how do you know where something is?" asked Laura.

"The Bible consists of 66 books with chapters and verses. Anyone familiar with it knows where to look. For example, if you're looking for a story about Jesus, it can be found in the New Testament. Many different people wrote the Bible over many centuries, but it always conveys the same message."

Nicholas had been listening. "And what is that?" he wanted to know.

Dad smiled. "The most important message is that Jesus is the Savior. God loves us and sent Him so that we may have forgiveness of sins and eternal life if we believe in Him."

That evening, when Dad put Nicholas to bed, he asked thoughtfully, "Dad, how do we know that the Bible is true?"

Dad sat down next to him. "There is a lot of evidence. Jesus really lived; that has been proven historically. And everything that was predicted about Him in the Bible happened exactly as it was written. But the most important thing is that the Bible is alive. People experience what it says—forgiveness, peace, love. I experience it myself. You will realize the Bible is the best book when you read it, Nicholas. It shows us the way to God and to a fulfilling life. No other book has such power to change us."

Nicholas nodded. "Thank you, Dad! I want to trust the Bible too."

Irina Ritthammer

The Bible—A Special Book

Today, we want to look at a very special book. It is the most exciting, oldest, most widely read, and most important book in the world: the Bible! We will find out what makes the Bible so unique.

But first, let's examine its structure: The Bible consists of two parts—the Old Testament and the New Testament.

- The Old Testament has 39 books. It begins with the story of creation—the account of how God made the world. After that, the books tell the story of the people of Israel. There are also songs, poems, words of wisdom, and exciting stories of the prophets. The prophets delivered messages from God to the people. They also said that a savior would come—Jesus Christ. The last prophecy was transcribed about 400 years before His birth. And indeed, everything happened exactly as foretold—because the Bible is God's word.
- The New Testament has 27 books. It begins with the birth of Jesus. The first books, the Gospels, tell us the story of Jesus. Next comes the Acts of the Apostles, which tells us about the first Christians. In the letters of the apostles, we read important teachings, and at the end is the Revelation, which tells us about heaven and the end of the world.

The Bible—A Book of Records

- It was written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.
- There are 40 different writers, including kings, fishermen, prophets, and doctors.
- The Bible was written over a span of 1,500 years on three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe.

- It is the first book ever printed and has the most translations worldwide.
- The Bible contains the most beautiful message in the world: God loves us so much that He sent Jesus to save us.



Why is the Bible so special?

The Bible is God's Word. This means that God speaks to us humans through the Bible. It is also called the "living Word" because it speaks to us repeatedly in new ways. Whether thousands of years ago or today, the Bible provides comfort, gives help, and changes hearts. Maybe tonight you could read a passage from your Bible and ask God to speak to you. You will see that the Bible is a living book—for you too.

Irina Ritthammer

*"More than that,
blessed are those
who hear the word
of God and keep it!"
(Luke 11:28)*



Do You Already Have Your CHRISTMAS PRESENT?

“Have you finished your Christmas shopping already?” This is a question we’re all familiar with in the run-up to Christmas. Some people do their gift shopping very early, while others rush around the stores on the last day to buy those last few presents. Christmas and gifts—they somehow belong together. Unfortunately, we sometimes focus so much on the material things that we (often unconsciously) lose sight of the greatest gift of Christmas.

There are two sides to gift-giving: receiving and giving. Let’s first look at what we receive at Christmas:

The Greatest Gift

God sacrificed His only Son out of love for us. Imagine a family giving up their only child for some reason. This would be very difficult in reality. But even this comparison is only a weak image of the sacrifice Jesus made for us. The King of Kings became human, descended to a sinful earth, and chose the path of the manger, poverty, and the cross, even unto death.

In His Son, Jesus Christ, God gives us so much, absolutely everything!

“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?” (Romans 8: 32).

What does God give us through Jesus?

Peace

At Christmas, the angels proclaimed: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace . . .” (Luke 2: 14). Jesus brings peace to a world full of hatred, strife, envy, and unrest.

On one hand, it is peace with God, which no one in this world can give us. On the other hand, it also includes peace with our fellow human beings. It enables us to act differently in difficult situations, to remain calm when we might get upset, to give in on small things even though we are in the right, or to do something for the sake of peace, even if it costs us effort. Such actions, accompanied by love and forgiveness, radiate peace and have a positive effect on those around us.

Maintaining this interpersonal peace is not always easy, in fact, it is nearly impossible on your own. Especially in turbulent times in your life, when discord overwhelms you, you can pour out your heart and your troubled feelings to the “Prince of Peace” and experience how He brings peace.

Forgiveness

God saw our distress, our guilty consciences, our separation from Him because of sin, and our fear of eternal damnation. No person, no religion, no system could save us, only the blood of Jesus Christ.

Jesus came to make forgiveness possible for everyone who humbly turns to God in repentance. How a heart rejoices when it experiences this reconciliation with the heavenly Father! No material gift in this world can replace this joy.

Eternal life in glory

Through reconciliation, we become citizens of heaven. Wonderful homes await us there. We need not wander aimlessly and purposelessly through this life, but can have a firm goal in mind: glory with God.

Our gift to the Savior

Now let’s look at the other side: What is the best thing that you and I can give to the Savior?

The heart

The greatest and most valuable gift you can give to the Lord is your heart. “My son [my daughter], give me your heart . . .” (Proverbs 23: 26). After

you have experienced forgiveness of sins, don’t just sit back and be satisfied, but give your heart and your life to Jesus for His service. Don’t wait until you have changed yourself into a “perfect” human being, but surrender yourself to Him. He wants to mold us weak, flawed human beings into His image.

Don’t let your gift be just a beautiful shiny wrapped up present with no content inside. For example, being a perfect Sunday Christian and participating in everything at church, but remaining distant from Jesus in your heart, without a real, everyday relationship with Him.

Thankfulness

“Whoever offers praise glorifies Me . . .” (Psalm 50: 23). A heart with a grateful attitude toward life, both in inner disposition and outward confession, honors God.

Time

During Advent, time often rushes by. Therefore, consciously set aside daily times of quiet and fellowship with God.

Someone had a wonderful idea: to read the Gospel of Luke with its 24 chapters during Advent. If you start on December 1 and read one chapter every day, the life of Jesus and His sacrifice will unfold before your eyes in a special way until Christmas.

Gifts and talents

God gives us abilities, gifts, and talents. Isn’t His sacrifice worth using them to honor and show our love for Him? Even though He expects nothing in return, He is worth giving Him our all.

Finally, the question again: Have you received your Christmas presents yet? Have you accepted the greatest gift and in return given your best to the Savior?

May this Christmas be filled not only with earthly gifts, but above all with heavenly gifts.

*Dina Grötzinger
Eppingen, Germany*

Christmas with Children

Children observe us more than we realize. They see us rushing through stores, seeing our long to-do lists, and wrapping presents late into the evening. They hear the stress in our voices when another Advent celebration is coming up. They sense our exhaustion as we try to make everything perfect. And they learn. Not from what we tell them about Christmas, but from how we live. The question is: what are they learning from us?

There is a story about the popular Mayor Grünberg, whose birthday was celebrated every year. What started as a small, heartfelt celebration turned into a big City festival. The organization became more and more elaborate, the decorations more magnificent, the food more sumptuous. But then something unbelievable happened: the organizers were so busy with the preparations that they forgot to invite the Mayor himself. They celebrated his birthday without him. Absurd, isn't it? But isn't there a danger that our children will observe precisely this happening with us during the Christmas season?

For some people, the most important thing about Christmas is preparing and buying presents, writing wish lists, and getting what they want. What matters to them is how the table is set, how perfect the decorations look and whether everything is flawless. In some families, mom and dad are so stressed because they have so many events to attend, because everything has to be perfect, because expectations are so high and it's often all about outward appearances.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," says Jesus (Matthew 6:21). Our children see where our treasure lies. Not in what we read aloud on Christmas Eve, but rather where we invest our time, energy, and money during Advent. They learn our priorities, whether we want them to or not.

What was the story of the first Christmas? Mary and Joseph were far from home, without secure accommodation, dependent on the hospitality of others. "And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7). No cozy nursery, no stockpile of gifts, no festive table. A stable. A manger as a cradle. That

is the backdrop to the Christmas story. Without any romance or comfort.

But things got even harder. Shortly after the birth, the young family had to flee. "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt," the angel commanded Joseph (Matthew 2:13). Jesus became a refugee child. His family sought asylum in a foreign country, dependent on the people who took them in. Where is the glamour? Where is the luxury? Where is the perfect staging? Nowhere. And yet this is precisely where the greatest treasure in the world lies: God comes to us.

The first to learn of this birth were shepherds. Simple people on the margins of society, not the rich and powerful. "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people," the angel said to them. Immense joy—not because of magnificent gifts, but because of the presence of God. That is the message of Christmas: God's wealth is not revealed in outward splendor, but in His love that comes to us. In a child born in poverty, because God is not too proud to become part of our reality.

"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him," writes John (1 John 4:9). God gives us the most precious gift He has: Himself. Not things, but His heart. And in doing so, He teaches us what really matters. "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me" (Matthew 25:40). Not consumption, but compassion. Not hoarding but sharing. It is more blessed to give than to receive. says Jesus. That is the Christmas spirit. Do our children experience this?

We are painting the picture of Christmas which our children will take with them from their parents' home into their own lives. Not by teaching, but by example. It starts with having the courage to simplify. Buying fewer gifts, but more meaningful ones. Spending time together instead of rushing from event to event. When our children see that we can do without things, that we take time for what is essential, they learn more about freedom and priorities than through a thousand sermons.



We can involve others. Invite a lonely person to our home. Together with our children, we can think about who needs our help right now. Not just spending money, but investing time, getting involved in practical ways. “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another” Paul writes to the Ephesians (4:32). When our children see us opening our home to someone who would otherwise be alone, when they are allowed to help with practical support, when they feel that giving makes us happier than receiving—then they learn the message of Christmas with their hands and feet—and with their hearts.

We can create moments of silence. Don’t pack the Advent season full of activities but leave room to breathe. Read the Christmas story together and talk about it: What does it mean that Jesus was born in a stable? How would we have welcomed Mary and Joseph? Pray together, honestly, and simply. When our children see that we ourselves become silent before God, that this is important to us, it has a greater impact than any words.

We can tell the story. Not just the cute nativity scene with the ox and the donkey, but also about the flight, the poverty, the danger. About a family that risked ev-

erything. About a God who does not reside in palaces but is born in a stable. This is not a sentimental story. This is the love of the Bible.

I no longer remember many of the Christmases in my parents’ house. But I will never forget one Christmas Eve when we dispelled the loneliness of a dear elderly grandmother with songs and small gifts. Or when we brought Christmas bags to poor families—and saw the joy on the children’s faces.

What will our children remember later when they think of Christmas at their parents’ house? The expensive gifts will long be forgotten. Will they remember the warmth of genuine fellowship, reading the Christmas story together, the devotional family worship? Will they remember our stress or our joy in the presence of God? Like the organizers of Mayor Grünberg’s celebration, we too can celebrate a magnificent Christmas and forget the one it is all about. Our children will notice.

Let us celebrate Christmas with Christ in the center. Not through outward appearances, but through practical love. Not through many words, but through a true example.

*Hermann Vogt
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Through Depths to the Throne: How God Prepared David

David—shepherd, king, and poet, a man after God’s own heart—is presented to us in the Old Testament as a hero with harp and sling, the conqueror of Goliath, and a psalm writer with a deep love for God. In the New Testament, when we meet David again, he appears as the Messiah’s ancestor—a key relationship repeatedly discussed by Jesus.

However, that aspect reveals only part of the story. Before being crowned, David passed through deep valleys filled with dark times, long periods of loneliness, and bitter disappointments. His way to the throne was not paved with success but shone, instead, with tears. That is precisely why his life can give us hope today—especially when everything is falling apart, we see no way forward, and we hardly feel God’s presence anymore. David’s story shows that God shapes people in the depths.

David grew up in simple circumstances. His parents had no particular standing, and even within that household, David’s status was not special. In fact, when Samuel came to the house of Jesse to anoint a new king, nobody bothered calling David to be introduced to him! As the youngest, David did not count but was instead expected to stay outside with the sheep. However, God sees differently than we do: “The Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16: 7). Even if everyone else overlooks you—and leaves you feeling unnoticed, passed over, and small—remember that God does see you. So when He calls you, get up and follow boldly!

Considering David’s home life, how would he have been treated after being chosen? Perhaps with jealousy on part of his brothers? When David’s father sent him to the Israelite army with a care package for his

brothers, he was met with mockery instead of gratitude. We know that Eliab, his oldest brother, was very short with him, scolding, “Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness?” (1 Samuel 17: 28). The contempt comes through clearly as David is ridiculed and dismissed as a naive boy. If you share that experience—of being talked down to or unfairly criticized by people who are supposed to love and understand you—you will know that it hurts. Nonetheless, David did not let these hurts keep him down. Instead, he held fast to what God had put in his heart, always ready to stand up for the glory of God—to become a hero.

David’s time to be crowned, however, had not yet come. Instead, he had much to endure. During years of being on the run from Saul, he suffered from constant threat, loneliness, and persecution. With no home and no safe haven, David hid in caves, was always on the move, and was repeatedly pushed to the brink of giving up. Amidst these troubles, he composed Psalm 142, writing, “Look on *my* right hand and see, for *there* is no one who acknowledges me; . . . I cried out to You, O LORD: I said, ‘You are my refuge’” (verses 5–6). When your life is falling apart around you, God remains right there with you; when your friends, future, and even your life’s purpose seem to be deserting you, He is closer to you than ever before. When David fled to the cave of Adullam, God was there with him, and David learned to build on Him alone.

What was God’s goal? Why did He allow so much suffering and so many detours instead of raising David directly from shepherd boy to king? It was because God did not just want to fill a throne; He wanted to form the character of the man who would occupy it—

*“Look on my right hand and see,
For there is no one who acknowledges me; . . .
I cried out to You, O LORD:
I said, ‘You are my refuge,
My portion in the land of the living.’”*

Psalm 142:4–5

to shape him into a spiritual leader. In Psalm 40, David looks back, saying, “He also brought me up out of a horrible pit . . . and set my feet upon a rock” (verse 2). It is not in good times that maturity grows but rather during long nights of wrestling until the day breaks. To rule, we must first learn to serve; to bear responsibility, we must first be broken.

Finally, David became king. But did his education end at this milestone? It did not. Instead, God continued to test and work on him. God did not prevent Satan from tempting David to sin—David failed badly. His adultery with Bathsheba, for instance, and the murder of Uriah—these were not merely slip-ups; they were catastrophic sins. And yet, when the prophet Nathan confronted him with it, David did not seek refuge in excuses. His resistance collapsed, and he repented, begging, “Wash me thoroughly . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Psalm 51: 2, 10). Despite the profound pain expressed here, this psalm is a testimony to forgiveness. It shows that even the deepest guilt can lead to new life—as long as the petitioner’s heart is broken, not hardened. God does not need perfect people; He needs humbled, sanctified hearts.

There is also another point to consider: the psalms. These deep, honest, holy songs were not born in the splendour of David’s palace but out of deep pain. The darkness that threatened to suffocate him, even in his royal chambers, became a source of inspiration for verses that carry people through difficult times to this day. Take Psalm 42: 5, for instance: “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And *why* are you disquieted within me? Hope in God.” That is no platitude; it is lived faith. In the depths, God became David’s haven and shepherd (Psalm 23)—not in theory, but in pain. And

that is why his words can become ours as well, even if we see no way forward ourselves.

If you are going through such depths yourself; if you are feeling overwhelmed, burned out, or hurt; if you see no way forward, no change coming, no hope on the horizon—be assured: God is near to you. “The LORD *is* near to those who have a broken heart” (Psalm 34: 18). He is at work, even if you cannot notice it right now. His paths are quiet, deep, and sometimes hidden, but they lead to healing. They lead to new, perhaps even greater, strength—to a life matured by suffering.

God turns your pain into song, your weakness into strength. “My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12: 9). This is not just theory; it is the experience of David, and it can become yours.

“Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, *bless* His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits” (Psalm 103: 1–2).

*Hermann Vogt
Gifhorn, Germany*

Sayings of David—a light in the darkness

Psalm 23
Psalm 91: 2
Psalm 34: 19
Psalm 62: 1, 7
Psalm 63: 7
Psalm 30: 5
Psalm 27: 1, 14
Psalm 46: 1
Psalm 138: 3

Reflections at Year's End

"Praise is awaiting You, O God, in Zion; and to You the vow shall be performed. O You who hear prayer, to You all flesh will come. Iniquities prevail against me; as for our transgressions, You will provide atonement for them. Blessed is the man You choose, and cause to approach You, that he may dwell in Your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, of Your holy temple." (Psalm 65: 1–4)

No more deeply than at Christmas do the praises and petitions of the devout poets of the Old Testament, saved for us in the Psalms, resonate in the hearts of Christians. Where else could more wonderful and exalted words be found to capture the feelings of gratitude that fill the heart of every child of God when looking back at the many blessings received during the past year?

With the beginning of a new year, one enters entirely unknown territory—where many difficult and dark paths may lie. This thought could fill the heart with fear and dread, if not for the assurance of being under divine protection and shelter, which the Book of Psalms describes on nearly every page (e.g., Psalm 23 and Psalm 91).

"There will be silence before You, and praise in Zion, O God, and to You the vow will be performed." The Christian's heart should often—indeed, daily—take time in God's presence for introspection in the mirror of His holy nature. But especially at the close of the year this should be sought: first in the quiet of one's own room, and then, where possible, in the house of the Lord.

The beginning of verse 1 in the Amplified Bible says: "To You belongs silence [the submissive wonder of reverence]." This translation aligns well with Psalm 62, where David says: "Truly my soul silently *waits* for God; from Him *comes* my salvation" (verse 1) and "My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation *is from Him*" (verse 5). God's children must remind themselves again and again: True prayer is not about trying to align God's will with our own, but rather means surrendering quietly and willingly to God's will.

Many a father's and mother's heart grieve over a child who has turned from the faith. Despite years of earnest intercession, all prayer and admonition seem to have had no effect. Perhaps a mother and her children pray for the salvation of the father, or devout children for unsaved parents. Another year has passed, and the heart seems as resistant as ever. Certainly, it is not easy in this situation to praise God in quiet surrender. And yet, even here, faith must prove itself and say: "My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation

is from Him." God is still the mighty God who answers prayer, as the psalmist describes Him.

This surrender as expression of praise is what the Lord desires from His children in anticipation of the coming year. There are people of the world who enter the New Year with stubborn

indifference, determined to accept everything it brings as the decree of an inevitable fate. But this is not the surrender that identifies the conduct of a believing child of God. The one whom the Lord finds and blesses shall enjoy deep comfort in knowing that their life is guided by a wise and loving Father. "Blessed *is the man* You choose, and cause to approach *You* . . . We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house" (verse 4).

Although one must be prepared that the new year may bring many unwanted changes, the believer lives in the confident assurance that the growth and development of their spiritual life need not suffer. For the faithful of the Old Testament, it was a great comfort to have a "home" in the courts of God (verse 4). How much more blessed is the New Testament believer, whose "citizenship is in heaven" (see Philippians 3: 20). ■

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Report:

50th Anniversary and Bible Course in Mexico



From July 18th to 20th, we had the privilege of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Church of God in Neustädt, Mexico. We were thrilled to have sisters and brothers join us from countries on several continents, including Bolivia, Canada, Germany, Mexico, Paraguay, and the United States. With ten couples in ministry in attendance, each sermon was brought by a different brother. In addition, a choir from Germany and several local choirs enriched the services and blessed us through their songs.

Looking back, we can wholeheartedly join the psalmist in saying, “For the LORD *is* good; His mercy *is* everlasting, and His truth *endures* to all generations” (Psalm 100: 5). The retrospective portion of our celebration led us all to realize how much thanks we owe to God—and to the people who let God guide them—for establishing this congregation. We heard from several people who were there from the very beginning and who had experienced all the difficulties and blessings that entailed. In listening to their testimonies, it became clear that human hands were not the only ones at work; it was God who planned and carried out this work with His hands and through His Spirit. Many souls have already come to Jesus as a result, and even

during the anniversary services, more came to seek help from God. God truly answered our prayers: He was present among us, working in a visible and tangible way, and we were able to experience His glory.

Our prayer for the future is that He always open our ears (Isaiah 50: 4–5) so that we may hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Revelation 2: 29) and let Him guide us according to His will. We want to stay close to Him!

Following the anniversary services, the Bible course was held. More than 100 participants registered for this one-week course. Led by the brothers Klinger, Mielke, Reiß, and Stieben, it addressed current, relevant topics.

As a congregation, we were also heartily grateful for the rain God graciously sent this summer! It was the most rain we got in three years.

In light of all these earthly and spiritual blessings, we cannot help but proclaim, “To God be the glory, great things He has done!” To Him be all glory and praise, forever and ever! May He and His glory alone continue to fill and guide the Church of God in Neustädt.

*John Reimer
Neustädt, Mexico*

No Need to Worry!

In the “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus made some very profound statements. His intention was that His followers should conduct their lives according to these statements.

At the turn of the year, one of these statements is intended to give us guidance for the new year. But there is more: Jesus attaches a promise to it, i.e., whoever obeys this command of His can expect it to be fulfilled. We quote Jesus according to Matthew 6: 33: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

To fully understand this statement, we need to look at the context of the text. Jesus is speaking to His disciples, whom He had destined for a great task in the future, namely to reach the whole world with the gospel. Of course, Jesus knew how easy it is to get lost in the things of this age, in everyday concerns. Consequently, in the preceding verses, Jesus speaks against worrying. It does not matter what kind of worries they are; worries are worries.

Worries have a paralyzing effect, affect a person’s inner state, and prevent them from fulfilling their tasks. Understandably, Jesus takes a stand against this. But Jesus does not stop there; He goes one step further and shows them the way by pointing out the correct ordering of things in their lives. It seems to me that He is saying: Important things first! You should give priority to the kingdom of God and His righteousness. And before the disciples can ask how that will be possible, He adds: “All these things shall be added to you.” In plain language: “I will take care of getting you through!” Peter must have understood this, because years later, he writes, “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

We are on the threshold of a new year. Given the situation, it is understandable that people may be worried. What kinds of worries are there, and how can they take hold of us? Some people wake up with worries and take them to bed again in the evening. Worries are age-dependent and therefore vary greatly.

As young people embark on their lives, their worries are different from those of older people, who may be concerned about issues such as: Who will look after me in my old age? Will I be put in a retirement

or nursing home? Will I be a burden to my children? Will I have enough money? Worries are not limited to people with meager means; wealthy people simply have different worries.

Worries—why do we worry? Did you know that worrying has never changed a situation? Has anyone ever gotten a new winter coat by worrying?

Has anyone ever been cured of an illness by worrying? There are certain things in our lives that we simply have no control over. What’s more, many worries later turn out to be completely unjustified because the things we were worried about didn’t turn out the way we thought they would. What a thought, to have worried for nothing! Someone writes from their life experience that about 90% of our worries and fears do not come to pass.

We would prefer not to say it, but the fact is that worry is basically a lack of trust in God. We think we are responsible for everything. Do I not trust my God to bring me through? Will the great God who has carried me this far not also care for me in the new year? Do we not sing in a song, “None who wait on God shall be put to shame”?

So let us realign ourselves at the turn of the year and allow Jesus’ words to light our way. They want to show us what matters. It’s about putting important

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things first! Our focus should be on the kingdom of God. Christ's kingdom should be expanded and built up. It should not be held back by worries of any kind. It should not be neglected because of worries. It should not be hindered by worries.

The kingdom of Christ should have our full attention and support. This should not be a theory that sounds good but should be demonstrated in our everyday decisions and in our thinking. It should be evident in our behavior within the local church. We have only one passion, and that is Christ and His kingdom. We are not concerned with things that are visible but with things that are eternal. We seek those things which are above.

Jesus made a promise about this attitude: "All these things shall be added to you." He had just been speaking of worries about food and clothing. Referring to this, do you know what Jesus means? Doesn't it mean: "If you give priority to My cause, I will take care of your needs"? Isn't that a liberating statement? For me, it means nothing other than these two words: Worry not! We should almost write these two words down and put them somewhere visible in our homes so that we don't forget them. Now it really only depends on whether we believe Jesus' words. Dear brother, dear sister, why worry when He cares for us?

The disciples took Jesus' command to heart. They gave practical and visible priority to the kingdom of God. In their thoughts and actions, they committed themselves to the kingdom of God. They carried out their mission. They put their own interests aside and sought only one thing: the kingdom of God. And if we could ask them today, "Did you ever lack anything?" they would confess with radiant eyes, "Never!"

At this point, I am folding my hands in silence. I have made my decision. This year, I will seek "above all," as one translation puts it, that is: first, "the kingdom of God and His righteousness." I want to do it. And you? God bless you and your decision!

Blessed new year—worries are unfounded!

*Harry Semenjuk
Wetaskiwin, AB*

*"We wish
all our readers a
blessed
Christmas
and a rich measure of
God's Grace
for the new year."*





Christmas Wishes

*From the Father of lights
Ask for a robe of white
For God, the giver of provision
Desires to grant you His salvation*

*Oh, ask of Christ in your great need
To be your Bread of Life indeed
You need this gift of love, unshaken
So that to hell you won't be taken*

*From the Savior ask for rest and peace
May your joy and steadfastness increase
All who come with broken hearts in prayer
Through the cross will find atonement there*

*Let your wish be that God blesses you
With gifts of His love that keep you true
The deceptions of this present age
Still have many blinded and enslaved*

*Oh, may all your Christmas wishes be
Things that last for all eternity
Take them from Him, your strength will increase
And you will live joyfully in peace.*

H. D. Nimz