

Christmas Devotional: Dec. 8-14, 2019

Away In A Manger

Away in a manger, no crib for His bed;
the little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Luke 2:6-7 NIV

The King of Kings and Lord of Lords is born in a manger with not so much as a bed to lie on. The humble beginnings of our Lord's life remind us that we are to be humble and thankful for what we have been blessed with. The true meaning of Christmas is reflected so poetically in the story of Jesus' birth that we cannot help but find ourselves grateful for all that was given to us on that day. The song describes how even when Jesus wakes, he does not cry out or make a sound. This day was a day of rejoicing, and the baby lying awake on the hay was no ordinary child, He was the Savior of men! The last verse of the song asks the Lord to stay beside us, to lead us, and to eventually take us to Heaven to live with Him. How often is that our prayer? Stay beside me Lord as I make my way through this earthly life.

How glorious and beautiful is the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. We celebrate His birth and the life that was given to us by Him through His life, death, and resurrection.

Questions:

- In your opinion, how does this carol reflect the love of Christ?
- What does this carol show you about our Lord at the beginning of His life here on earth?
- Why do you think God chose for his son to be born in a manger instead of a birth fitting of royalty?

Ding Dong! Merrily On High

Ding dong! Merrily on high
In heav'n the bells are ringing:
Ding dong! Verily the sky
Is riv'n with Angel singing.

The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

1 Kings 19:11-12 NIV

We seem to have so many bells and chimes and rings in our lives. Whether the microwave is letting us know that the "homemade" chicken nuggets are ready, or our car is beeping to tell us that our seatbelt is unbuckled, or that super annoying "aaaaee! aaaaaee! aaaaaee!" coming from our alarm clock is piercing through the dark bedroom to jolt us from our slumber; our lives are surrounded by noises and alarms. These alarms can mean so many different things.

From this classic, beautiful Christmas carol we are drawn a picture of the celebrating chimes from heaven. It's almost as if the author of this song is describing the way we might hear a call from heaven. In several different passages, scripture describes how someone heard from God. In some instances it was a booming sound like thunder and in others a still small voice.

Have you ever heard that gentle whisper calling you like Elijah heard in 1 Kings 19:12? God can call us in so many different ways. But what he calls each of us to is unique. He may be calling you to minister to a friend going through a tough holiday season. He may be calling you in your profession. God can use doctors to serve those who cannot afford treatment, contractors to build a school in a poverty stricken country, a lawn care worker to cut the grass of an elderly widow in the neighborhood, or whatever your talent might be. The important thing is for you to listen to His voice, just like the beautiful chimes from heaven. He is calling you to be a light in someone's life this Christmas.

So, go ahead and hit that snooze on your alarm clock, but answer the call of the Father on your life.

Questions:

- How have you heard from God in the past?
- What is God calling you to do for someone else this Christmas season?

Do You Hear What I Hear
Said the little lamb to the shepherd boy
Do you hear what I hear?
Ringing thru the sky, shepherd boy
Do you hear what I hear?

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Mark 16:15-16 NIV

Over 2000 years ago, the Savior of the world was born. Have you ever stopped to think about how people found out about His birth? The song "Do You Hear What I Hear?" gives us an example of how the news of His birth might have spread.

The song starts with the Holy Spirit asking the lamb, "Do you see what I see?" The Lamb then goes to the shepherd and asks, "Do you hear what I hear?" The Shepherd immediately goes to the King and asks "Do you know what I know?" When they shared what God had told them, an entire nation heard about the birth of their Savior, Jesus, and what His birth meant for the entire world.

Here's the great news: this too is our calling as followers of Christ - to share with others what we have been told! God reveals Himself to all of us in different ways, depending on our personalities and gifts. For some, He shows us visible things about Himself, like a star in the sky. For others, we hear His voice; and then some of us grow closer to Him best through our intellect. The question is what are we doing with what God gives us? We have to realize that God will use us to bring people to Him through what He has revealed to us.

In this song, God chose a shepherd boy's voice to tell others about what He had heard and, as a result, an entire nation heard about Jesus' birth. What about today? If we want people to know about a Savior that has been born, we have to take the time to share with others what He is revealing to us. Lives are changed when we tell the people in our lives what God has shown and done for us.

Questions:

- What has God shown or told you lately that you should be sharing with others?
- In what ways does God reveal Himself to you?

I'll Be Home For Christmas

Christmas Eve will find me
Where the love light gleams
I'll be home for Christmas
If only in my dreams

But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control

Philippians 3:20 NLT

The term home is simply defined as this: Where one resides. A familiar setting. A place of origin. Where's our home?

Our home is the place where we've spent most of our years growing up and making memories. It's where we took our first steps. It's where we learned to drive a car. It's where we had our first crush. It's the place where we graduated high school and college and maybe even met our spouse. Or our home may be the place where we now reside. A place where we've grown into the people we are now. Home for us is where we feel at ease with those we love the most. It's the place where we can be ourselves and not worry about the world outside. Home is where our heart is.

Or is it? According to Webster, our home is where we reside, it's our place of origin, our familiar setting. But according to the 1 Peter 2:11, our home isn't in this world:

Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul.

There is nothing wrong with enjoying places on earth. We have wonderful memories and experiences in different places our entire lives. But we weren't meant to be 100% at home here. Our home is with our Jesus in Heaven. Until He says it's time to be with Him, we'll stay here. And as much as we love our earthly homes, we'll never be fully satisfied. It could be what songwriter Laura Story says in her famous song, Blessings:

What if my greatest disappointments or the aching in this life is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy.

Only Christ can satisfy. Only His presence and peace can bring us pure, unadulterated joy. Only His comfort can truly take us off the ledge of disappointment and disaster. One day we will truly be Home with Him. Not just for Christmas but for eternity. And what a day of rejoicing that will be.

Questions:

- How can you allow Christ to satisfy you and to fulfill your every need this Christmas season, instead of relying on what the world can give?

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Mild He lays His glory by;
Born that man no more may die.
Born to raise the sons of earth;
Born to give them second birth.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

1 Peter 1:3 NIV

It's fun to look at a tiny baby and imagine what he will grow up to become. It could be anything – a pilot, a policeman, a chef, an astronaut, a pastor, or a million other options. The future is wide open and full of possibilities.

Jesus was born with one purpose. As it says in the carol, he was “born that man no more may die.” His birth was all about our new birth. In 1 Peter 1:3, Peter praises God for the “new birth into a living hope” – and all that is possible because Jesus laid aside his glory and offered Himself in our place, taking the punishment of death we deserved for our sins. His death and resurrection gives us new life. As you go about your business and your busyness of the season, intentionally take a few moments to slow down and remember that Jesus was born to give YOU a second birth. What a reason to praise Him!

Questions:

- How do you express your gratitude to Jesus for the new life He gives you?
- Who in your life doesn't yet realize the true reason for Jesus' birth? What will you do to share it with them?

Still, Still, Still

Still, still, still, One can hear the falling snow.
For all is hushed, The world is sleeping
Holy Star its vigil keeping
Still, still, still, One can hear the falling snow.

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”
Psalm 46:10 NIV

Still, still, still... These words do not seem to have a place in the hustle and bustle of a busy life, especially at Christmas time. Parties, presents and projects usually have us in a frantic frenzy as we rush from one event to the next. Often, before we know it, Christmas day has come and gone and we realize that, despite our good intentions, we never experienced the peace that comes from truly relishing in God’s amazing love for us.

Isn’t it interesting that God commands us to “Be still”? Do you think it’s because he knows we sometimes have a hard time doing it on our own?

What happens when we actually take time to be still? The answer lies in Psalm 46:10...”Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth”. When you are still before God, you better understand that whatever you are facing, whatever your day has been like, you can completely rest in the fact that God is God. He’s awesome and amazing and sovereign. He loves us more than we can imagine and He’s got things under control.

Spend time today purposely pursuing stillness in different moments. Perhaps you could wrap up in a blanket & head outside for a peek at the stars, wondering what that holy star looked like, the one that signaled Christ’s birth many years ago. Maybe take a minute to watch your young child sleep and you wonder what Mary and Joseph thought of their newborn son as you gaze at your own child’s sweet face. Open your Bible, read a favorite Scripture...then sit and wait.

Questions:

- What truths resonate in your soul about Christ as you take time to be still before Him?

The Christmas Song

Chestnuts roasting on an open fire,
Jack Frost nipping at your nose,
Yuletide carols being sung by a choir,
And folks dressed up like Eskimos.

I live in the high and holy places, but also with the low-spirited, the spirit-crushed, And what I do is put new spirit in them, get them up and on their feet again.

Isaiah 57:15 MSG

If there's one song that has the "Christmas Spirit" it's this one. It makes us think of a scene from a Norman Rockwell painting. Or maybe we imagine carolers coming to our doors while we offer them some tasty, homemade apple cider fresh off the stove. We attend parties at friend's houses and services at church. Let's not forget about being all bundled up on Christmas morning with our families while the most beautiful snowflakes fall to the ground.

And then in the midst of our Christmas illusions, our children storm into the room yelling "Mom!" or "Dad!" because someone hit them or because one of them use the other's pellet gun without asking or because one of the neighbors took the basketball away that they had or because they fell off the zip line. Oh, for the love of all that is good and right in the world, can we not stay in our little piece of Christmas paradise just a tad bit longer?

That's life, isn't it? No matter how perfect we try to paint the canvas of our lives, there will always be something extra put on it that wasn't in our minds when we dreamed it. Something that cramps our perfect picture. Something that breaks our heart.

A relationship that ended.

A loved one who died prematurely.

The betrayal of a friend.

Did you know that God isn't surprised by the interruptions in our lives? In fact, nothing surprises Him. Don't mistake bad things happening in your life as Him not being in control. No, this is not about His ability but about His sovereignty.

While we may wish that bad things would never happened in our lives, they will happen. Jesus said we'd have trouble (John 16:33), but He also promised that He'd calm us in the midst of it (John 14:16). So, no matter where we are in life, whether we expected to be on the path we are on or not, rest assured, that our God can make broken things beautiful.

Friend, we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who've been called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). Press on and trust in the One who will never let you down.

Questions:

- How have you seen God in control in the midst of life's interruptions?