

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 11 • Issue 12

IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVE

Give the best to get the best

Through Darkness to Light

What the first Christmas changed

The Christmas Butterfly

God's surprising sign



PERSONALLY SPEAKING

Christmas is different things to different people.

For some it's a time to enjoy family and friends, a time to love and be loved; for others it's the loneliest time of the year.

For some it's the warmth and security of hearth and home; for others it's a stark reminder of all they don't have and maybe never will.

For some people it's the moneymaking opportunity of the year; for others it's a seemingly inescapable financial disaster—a sinkhole of overspending that will take them months to climb out of.

For some it's cause for deep reflection; for others it's an occasion to party and forget it all.

For some it's a chance to splurge on gifts for loved ones and to receive in kind; for others it's a chance to give of themselves to needy strangers, expecting nothing in return.

For some it's beautiful lights and colorful decorations—a brief once-a-year escape into a world where all is merry and bright; for others it's hope in the promise that one day all wrongs will be made right and there will truly be “peace on earth, goodwill toward men.”¹

For some it's a jolly old man in a red suit and long white beard, saying “Ho, ho, ho!” and making children's wishes come true; for others it's a baby boy in a manger who will make God's wish come true.

For us at *Activated*, Christmas is an opportunity to join millions around the world in celebrating Jesus' birth and sharing His love with others. We hope that this issue of *Activated* will help make this Christmas your happiest and most meaningful yet.

May God bless you and make you a blessing this Christmas season and throughout the coming year.

Keith Phillips
For *Activated*

1. Luke 2:14

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CHRISTMAS

IN THE HEART

He who has not Christmas in his heart will never find it under a tree.

—*Roy L. Smith*

Christmas is not a date. It is a state of mind.

—*Mary Ellen Chase*

Christmas is the season for kindling the fire of hospitality in the hall, the genial flame of charity in the heart.

—*Washington Irving*

Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love!

—*Hamilton Wright Mabie*

Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.

—*Attributed to a seven-year-old named Bobby*

Christmas is forever, not for just one day,
for loving, sharing, giving, are not to put away

like bells and lights and tinsel, in some box upon a shelf.

The good you do for others is good you do yourself.

—*Norman Wesley Brooks, "Let Every Day Be Christmas"*

Remember this December, that love weighs more than gold!

—*Josephine Dodge Daskam Bacon*

The joy of brightening other lives, bearing each others' burdens, easing others' loads, and supplanting empty hearts and lives with generous gifts becomes for us the magic of Christmas.

—*W. C. Jones*

Christmas takes place in the heart. It is opening our hearts to others, giving of our time and energy to others, forgiving when needed, and accepting others as they are, in our hearts. It's doing for others what Jesus did for us. It's letting God's Spirit reign in our hearts, and giving His love preeminence in our relations with others.

—*Robert Rider*

Christmas is not as much about opening our presents as opening our hearts.

—*Janice Maeditere*

The spirit of Christmas fulfils the greatest hunger of mankind.

—*Loring A. Schuler*

Open your presents at Christmastime but be thankful year round for the gifts you receive.

—*Lorinda Ruth Lowen*

The message of Christmas is that the visible material world is bound to the invisible spiritual world.

—*Author unknown*

The earth has grown old with its burden of care, but at Christmas it always is young.

—*Phillips Brooks*

Let Christmas not become a thing
Merely of merchant's trafficking,
Of tinsel, bell and holly wreath
And surface pleasure, but beneath
The childish glamour, let us find
Nourishment for soul and mind.
Let us follow kinder ways
Through our teeming human maze,
And help the age of peace to come
From a Dreamer's martyrdom.

—*Madeline Morse*



THROUGH DARKNESS TO LIGHT

BY JOANNA HANSSEN

JESUS, THE LIGHT

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined.—*Isaiah 9:2*

Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but the Lord will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory.
—*Isaiah 60:1,19*

In Him [Jesus] was life, and the life was the light of men.—*John 1:4*

I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.—*Jesus, John 8:12*

IT'S CHRISTMAS EVE. A MONTH AGO THE SUN DISAPPEARED BELOW THE HORIZON AND WILL NOT BE SEEN AGAIN UNTIL MID-JANUARY.

Norway at this time of year is not as dreary as you might think, though. The snow-covered landscape glistens from the light of the moon and stars, and the sun's reflected rays dance across the night sky. The colors can take your breath away.

It has been incredibly beautiful and clear this year, and I've spent a lot of time at my big window that overlooks the ocean and islands. I've been fascinated by the special "blue light" that lingers around midday, and the enchanting effect of familiar objects seen in a different light, literally.

It's only been four days since the winter solstice, but the change has been remarkable. Before, the colors were intense and dramatic—dark orange and red, deep purple, and navy. Now, they are pastels—pink, lavender, and pale cyan. It won't be long before the sun peeks over the horizon.

The darkest hour is just before dawn, and we have waited for the light in more ways than one. As the tilt of Earth on its axis has hidden the sun from us for a time, our sinful human nature hid God's face from us.¹ But when Jesus was born, a new age dawned. God shined the light of His love and truth on the world, bringing new hope, new life, and new beginnings to all who receive Him.

Happy Christmas! Happy new start!

JOANNA HANSSEN IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN NORWAY. ■

1. *Isaiah 59:2*

GIVING TO JESUS

BY LILY NEVE

THREE YEARS AGO, I BEGAN WRITING CHRISTMAS CARDS TO JESUS—OR RATHER, BIRTHDAY CARDS.

I got the idea after reading an article about giving birthday gifts to Jesus, either directly or indirectly. Examples included the gift of praise for His love and unfailing care, the gift of faith, and gifts to others of service, kindness, forgiveness, and a listening ear.

The list got me thinking. What did Jesus most want from me? What could I give Him for His birthday that would mean the most to Him?

When the time came to send my Christmas cards, I picked up my pen and wrote one to Jesus.

Dear Jesus, I began. Happy Birthday!...

Some of the things I pledged to Jesus these past Christmases were probably one-time acts. Others were things I wanted to continue to do in the coming year or indefinitely. None cost money, but most cost time or involved small sacrifices. All, I believe, will have eternal benefits.

Last year I wrote my birthday card to Jesus on December 12. My plan was to give Jesus a different gift each day leading up to Christmas Eve.

In case you're curious, my gift list this year includes:

- ✓ **FAITH:** turning my worries and fears over to God, and trusting that His plan for my life will work out for the best
- ✓ **LOVE:** loving some folks who have seemed unlovable lately
- ✓ **FORGIVENESS:** forgiving a certain person who doesn't even realize she hurt me
- ✓ **ENCOURAGEMENT:** finding the best in others and commending them for those qualities
- ✓ **SUPPORT:** doing whatever I can to help others reach their full potential
- ✓ **PRAYER:** praying for friends and family throughout the coming year

My prayer is that these gifts will continue to have positive effects long after Christmas is past.

Let us remember that the Christmas heart is a giving heart, a wide open heart that thinks of others first. The birth of the baby Jesus stands as the most significant event in all history, because it has meant the pouring into a sick world of the healing medicine of love which has transformed all manner of hearts for almost two thousand years. Underneath all the bulging bundles is this beating Christmas heart.

—George Matthew Adams (1878–1962)

LILY NEVE IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY
INTERNATIONAL IN SOUTH CENTRAL ASIA. ■

Can you spare some love?

BY EVELYN SICHROVSKY

LAST CHRISTMAS A DOCTOR INVITED MY FAMILY TO PERFORM A SHOW FOR ABOUT A DOZEN OF HIS ELDERLY PATIENTS.

As it turned out, only five were well enough to attend. It was the smallest audience we had ever performed for, but the beautiful smiles on those wrinkled faces made it worth the time and effort. Afterwards, we visited a few more frail seniors in their homes. One woman with a walker greeted us outside and led us into her dark little house, where I sat with her on her bed and we sang Christmas carols together in the local dialect.

When we left, she waved through her one small window and gave us a smile that brought tears to my eyes. As we drove home, I thought about her and the others—alone, poor, ill, yearning for love—and my own problems seemed petty. It's Christmastime again, and I'm reminded that there are millions like that woman. Can you spare a little love for one near you?

EVELYN SICHROVSKY IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN TAIWAN. ■



Portrait of Love

Adapted from Virginia Brandt Berg

THE CHRISTMAS SEASON IS HERE AGAIN. Christmas decorations are up in the streets and shopping areas, Christmas music fills the air, and store windows are filled with Christmas displays and gift ideas.

As I stood in front of one store window and watched a band of animated elves dance and play on little tin horns, I wondered what such a scene had to do with Christmas, the birthday of Jesus, God's Son. Why had the store chosen elves over a nativity scene?

Then it struck me: many people fantasize about Santa Claus and elves because they find it hard to believe the Christmas story. Why would God choose to reveal Himself to us in human form? That seems irrational, illogical, but that's exactly what God did. When God wanted to manifest His infinite love for us, He sent it in a tiny baby, who in manhood would teach us God's ways and lead us back to Him. That is a deep and wonderful truth—and something we can really celebrate.

VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG (1886–1968), WAS THE MOTHER OF FAMILY INTERNATIONAL FOUNDER DAVID BRANDT BERG.



THE ULTIMATE CHRISTMAS GIFT

ADAPTED FROM DAVID BRANDT BERG

THE BIBLE TELLS US, “GOD IS SPIRIT”¹ AND “GOD IS LOVE.”² HE IS THE GREAT SPIRIT OF LOVE WHO CREATED YOU AND ME, THIS BEAUTIFUL WORLD, AND THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE. Then, to show us His love and to help us understand Him, He sent us His Son, Jesus Christ, in the form of a man.

Although He was predestined to be the King of kings, Jesus was not born in a palace. Instead, He was born on the dirty floor of a barn and laid to sleep in the animals’ feed trough.³ His arrival received no official recognition from the rich and powerful of His day. Instead, He was visited by

a few poor shepherds who had heard the news from a band of angels. “There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”⁴

When Jesus began His life’s work at the age of 30, He not only preached His message, but He lived it among the common people, as one of them. He ministered to their spiritual needs, but also spent a great deal of time tending to their physical needs, healing them when they were sick and feeding them when they were hungry. He loved without partiality, even at the cost of His reputation.⁵ He befriended drunks, prostitutes, and sinners, the outcasts and downtrodden, and proved that no one was beyond the reach of God’s love and forgiveness. Salvation was so simple, He said, that all it took was the faith of a little child.⁶ And right living came down to just two things: loving God, and loving our neighbors as ourselves.⁷

In Jesus, God shared His love with the whole world. But He also loves each of us individually. God loves *you* so much that He gave the most cherished thing He had, His only Son, so you could have everlasting life.⁸

1. John 4:24
2. 1 John 4:8
3. Luke 2:7
4. Luke 2:8–14
5. Philippians 2:7
6. Matthew 18:3
7. Matthew 22:37–39
8. John 3:16

Would you like to know beyond a shadow of a doubt if Jesus Christ really is the Son of God and the way of salvation? You can. All you have to do is ask Him to come into your heart. You can do that this very moment by praying this prayer:

Jesus, thank You for coming into my world so I can experience the Father’s love and forgiveness. I open my heart and invite You in. Amen.

THE CHRISTMAS

BUTTERFLY

BY LYNN MATSUMOTO

“LET’S HAVE A CHRISTMAS PARTY ON CHRISTMAS EVE,” YOKO TAKAHASHI SUGGESTED TO HER HUSBAND ONE DECEMBER MORNING. “I’M SURE THE CHILDREN WOULD ENJOY IT.” KOICHI DIDN’T ANSWER. He just said he would be home late and left for work.

December was usually the most stressful month at his company, and it was especially so this year with the sluggish economy. He wondered if he would be laid off someday, like so many others. Just two days earlier, he had attended a farewell party for one of his colleagues.

The shopping streets in Tokyo were gorgeously decorated with bright lights and glistening Christmas trees, but the passengers crowding onto the early-morning commuter train looked tired, even though their day was just starting.

Koichi couldn’t shake his anxious thoughts. *What would happen if I were laid off? We wouldn’t be able to make the mortgage payments on our home. Our kids are still very young. ...*

When he reached his office, he turned on his computer, plunged into his email, and quickly became occupied with the day’s work.

Around three o’clock that afternoon, his phone rang. It was the police. “Mr. Takahashi? Your wife was involved in a traffic accident. She is being taken to the nearest hospital. I’m so sorry.”

Koichi jumped from his chair. “I don’t believe it! It must be a mistake!” he cried. He kept telling himself this as he made his way to the hospital. *She was perfectly healthy and whole this morning!*

At the hospital, he found Yoko wrapped in bandages and connected to machines. Her car had been hit by a truck that ran a red light, he was told. She was in a coma and had a broken arm.

“We’re doing everything we can for your wife. But we don’t know if she will make it. Even if she regains consciousness, she will suffer serious aftereffects,” a doctor told Koichi.

After gazing at his wife for a long time, Koichi wandered out of the hospital. Without realizing it, he was talking aloud to his wife. “Don’t leave us! The kids need you! When you recover, let’s

do all the things we wanted to do together!” Passers-by looked at him and wondered what was going on. He didn’t care.

Then he remembered that Yoko had recently started reading the Bible. He had flipped through it a few times and had to admit that there were some good things in it, but he still thought that religion was for those who either had too much leisure time or were weak in character. Rather than delve into religion, he reasoned, they should work harder and contribute more to their companies or society.

But now he couldn’t stop thinking about God. *I wonder if God exists. I wonder if He would answer my prayer. But it wouldn’t make any sense to pray if He doesn’t exist.*

Still, he couldn’t shake the urge. *Yoko would want me to.*

Finally Koichi prayed sincerely from his heart, “Dear God, if You exist, please spare Yoko’s life.”

Just then, a butterfly fluttered by in front of Koichi. On its vivid purple wings were white and light-blue designs. Though Koichi had often hunted for butterflies and other insects as a child, he’d never seen such a beautiful butterfly—and in December!



He felt this butterfly had been sent as a sign. In his mind was a distinct message: *Your prayer is answered! Your wife will be well!* To his surprise, Koichi felt warmth and peace flood his heart.

Five days later, when Koichi entered the ward for his daily visit, a doctor approached him. “Your wife has regained consciousness. It’s unexplainable! We found no damage to her brain.”

Koichi rushed into Yoko’s room. Yoko smiled and greeted him in a weak voice. He told her to not try to talk, but she couldn’t hold it in.

“I was in a beautiful field of flowers, and a lovely butterfly was

flying around me. I felt so happy. Then there was Jesus. He told me that it was not yet my time to die—that I needed to go back and take care of my family.”

Yoko was discharged from the hospital a few days before Christmas.

On Christmas Eve Koichi hurried home from work, carrying gifts for his family. Yoko, her arm still in a cast, was with their children in the living room.

“Let’s sing ‘Silent Night’ together! Christmas is the day Jesus, God’s only Son, was born,” Yoko said.

Then Koichi noticed a new ornament near the top of the

tree. It was just like the butterfly he had seen outside the hospital. *Why is that here? Butterflies have nothing to do with Christmas—or do they?* But he didn’t think about it long, engulfed as he was in happiness and gratitude for his wife’s miraculous recovery.

Yes, God exists. God, who has such a big, warm heart, has answered my prayer.

LYNN MATSUMOTO IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN JAPAN. ■

THE

“WAIT UP!” A GIRL CALLED OUT FROM BEHIND ME. IT WAS A COLD, RAINY WINTER MORNING IN TAIWAN. As I turned around, a petite girl about my age ran up and said, “I thought all foreigners returned to their home countries at Christmas. You won’t find it the same here.”

“I know,” I replied, “but I am a volunteer worker here. I can’t afford to return home this Christmas. I do have friends here, though, so I will be okay. I also have Jesus, who is with me no matter where I am.”

“I have heard of your Jesus,” the girl said. “I am Buddhist, and so is everyone else in my family. I once met a missionary who tried to convert me to your religion, but it sounded too complicated. I had too many questions that he couldn’t answer.”

Your Jesus! Your religion! I was always being met with this barrier. It was always “your religion” and “my religion.” Not only that, but these people whom I had grown to love seemed to delight in finding new ways to challenge me. It wasn’t that they didn’t care to listen to what I had to say—they listened patiently and respectfully—but I needed to find the key, some way of showing them that finding Jesus wasn’t complicated. Suddenly I had the same overwhelming desire that I often have when I meet someone new—the desire to show her that Jesus was not just a religion, that He was real, and that He loved her.

Then it dawned on me. *Christmas! That’s it! Tell her the story of Christmas!*

I invited her for a cup of coffee, and we went to a small café. There I told her the story of Jesus and how He came to earth to set

an example of how to love one another. I also explained how His death on the cross made it possible for us to have eternal life. We must have talked for an hour or two. She’d ask a question, and I’d try to explain, using examples from the Bible and life. She listened, but still looked skeptical. It was clear that I wasn’t getting through.

It got late, and we both needed to get home. As we headed for the train station, her questions kept coming. She was sincerely searching for truth and open to hearing about Jesus. How could I make Him real to her?

It started raining, and she cried out, “Oh, no!”

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“I forgot my umbrella in the shop I was in before I met you. What am I to do? And it wasn’t even mine. I’d borrowed it.”

BARRIER

BY SONIA PURKISS

Without thinking I told her, “Here, take mine. I have another one at home.”

She looked surprised, but thanked me and took it.

We kept talking until we reached the train station, where I gave her a tract that spoke of Jesus’ love for her. “Think about our conversation,” I told her, “and if you decide that you’d like to accept Jesus into your life, all you need to do is pray the short prayer on the back of the tract.”

“We talked a lot today,” she said. “Thank you for listening to me and for patiently answering my questions. Thank you for telling me the story of Christmas and about Jesus. I felt sorry for wasting your time, as you still hadn’t convinced me. ...”

Not surprising! I thought, as I had sensed how she felt.

“But now,” she went on, “I think I understand what you have been trying to tell me. You see, what convinced me was not what you said, but what you *did*.”

I couldn’t imagine what I could have done. We’d only sat and talked, then walked and talked some more. “What was that?” I asked.

“You gave me your umbrella. Without hesitation, without a second thought, you just *gave* it to me, a complete stranger until just a little while ago. If the gift you say Jesus wants to give me is even more powerful than what I felt when you gave me your umbrella, then I will definitely pray that prayer.”

My train arrived, and tears filled my eyes as we hugged. She looked happy. I was elated.

As I sat in the train going home, I realized that the barrier I had so often wondered about had actually come down 2000 years ago, when Jesus came to earth. He didn’t just talk about love, He *showed* love; He *was* love. *It’s so simple*, I thought. *I gave her an umbrella, and that simple gesture opened her understanding to the fact that Jesus’ love is a gift.*

“Lord,” I quietly prayed, “this Christmas and always, help me to follow closely in Your footsteps, so my actions will speak more loudly than my words.”

SONIA PURKISS IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL AND AN ACTIVATED STAFF WRITER. ■

IT'S ALL ABOUT



HOW EASILY LOVE SEEMS TO GET LOST IN THE SHUFFLE OF GETTING TO WHERE WE WANT TO GO! IT'S EASY TO GET SO PREOCCUPIED WITH "DOING" THAT WE FORGET TO LOVE.

We've all inadvertently done that at one time or another. We know that the right thing is to treat others with love,¹ and we usually try to do so, yet in those moments when we're faced with a need that requires a greater measure of love and unselfishness than usual, it's easy to make choices that squeeze love out of the picture. But the right choice is always the loving choice. It pays to remember the importance of those little acts of love, being kind or courteous or simply taking time for others.

Taking time for love is an investment. You don't "get your money back" the same day, but when it does come back to you, it has multiplied and appreciated in value. Not everything can be measured in immediate, visible results. Sometimes the best and most lasting things take time to get started and time to show their worth. That's the way it is with love.

No matter what your to-do list says each day, imagine that written above your own top priority are God's top two: love God, and love others.² Getting *your* first priority done without doing *God's* two means you really only did third best. Sometimes we forget that all our accomplishments are nothing without love.³

If we make an effort to love God, then it will show in our interactions with others. Of course, we're human and make mistakes, we have good days and bad days, and God understands that, but if we want to change the world for the better, we need to make an effort to put love into action. "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another."⁴

How can we show love? One of the beautiful things about love is that it adapts to the need. There's no set formula, so part of loving is finding out what the need is and how to meet it. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- ♦ Try to see others through eyes of love; find and encourage their good qualities.
- ♦ Build others up; commend people for doing a good job. Everyone appreciates being appreciated.
- ♦ When someone does something that bothers you, or you find yourself becoming critical, try to put yourself in that person's position. What might have caused them to act the way they did? How would you want them to react if your positions were reversed?
- ♦ Connect with people. Something as simple and seemingly small as a smile or sympathetic word can be the turning point in a stranger's day and possibly the start of a lasting and meaningful friendship.

LOVE

BY MARIA FONTAINE

- ♦ Do little “extras” to lighten the load someone is carrying, and thereby convey understanding and concern.
- ♦ Make an effort to get to know your friends and co-workers better. What makes them tick? What matters most to them? *Who* matters most to them? What do they dream of doing someday? What has been their proudest moment?

Maybe you already try to be loving, but sometimes you feel you don't have any more love to give. Maybe you feel that you don't receive enough love yourself, so therefore don't have much to give. Those feelings are natural. And it's true—our love isn't sufficient. If human love were sufficient, we wouldn't need Jesus so much, and neither would the world.

But when we run out of love, Jesus always has more. His love is wonderfully sufficient, unconditional, unlimited, and without end. The secret to having more love for others is to tap into Jesus' love. Tell Him, “Jesus, I need more of You in my life. I need more of Your love.” Then put little and big deeds of love into action, and He will give you more of His love. The more you give, the more Jesus will give you in return. Keep it up, and you will not only become more conscious of His unfailing, ever-present love for you, but you will always have love to share with others. Like the widowed mother whose story is recounted in the Bible, whose little bit of oil and handful of flour, when mixed with faith, kept her and her son and the prophet Elijah alive through three years of famine,⁵ you will see your love multiplied many times over.

MARIA FONTAINE AND HER HUSBAND, PETER AMSTERDAM, HEAD THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

1. 1 John 4:7–8
2. Mark 12:30–31
3. 1 Corinthians 13:3
4. John 13:35
5. 1 Kings 17:1–16

“No matter what your to-do list says each day, imagine that written above your own top priority are God's top two: love God, and love others. Getting your first priority done without doing those other two means you really only did third best.”



MY PRAYER FOR YOU THIS CHRISTMAS

BY CARYN PHILLIPS

DEAR ONE,
NO GIFT COULD FILL YOUR HEART WITH ALL THE SPECIAL THINGS YOU DESERVE, SO THIS CHRISTMAS I OFFER A PRAYER INSTEAD, ASKING THE ONE WHO KNOWS YOUR EVERY NEED TO GIVE YOU HIS VERY BEST.

First I pray for your happiness. Not the fleeting kind that comes from happenings or new acquisitions, but deep abiding happiness that will be there even when nothing special is going on.

Next I pray for peace in your heart. I don't mean a lack of excitement, an empty feeling, or surcease from activity or challenge, but rather a sweet knowledge that God is in control, and that He won't let anything happen to you that you and He can't work out together—a quiet certainty that gives you rest inside, even when you are working hard or the pressure's on.

My prayer wouldn't be complete without praying for you to have faith. Some people think faith means blindness to reality—an overly optimistic outlook that denies the facts. But real faith, the kind I wish for you, is based on the most wonderful realities of all—God and His love and His

promises to you. That kind of faith knows that God wants only the very best for you and will bring it to pass. That kind of faith comes from reading His Word. That's the kind of faith that moves mountains.

I pray for you to have wisdom and understanding, so that you can look at life around you and then to heaven above, and find the answers and explanations and guidance you need—God-given wisdom that gives you patience and faith for others and points the way in difficult moments.

And last but not least, I pray for you to experience love—great love, overflowing love, patient love, wise love, sweet love, fun love, exciting love, purposeful love, abiding love, strong love, encouraging love, God's love in all its wondrous forms.

God came down at Christmas in the form of a little baby to give us all these things—happiness, peace, faith, wisdom, and most of all, love. So my prayer is that this Christmas you will take Christ into your heart, believe His promises, and experience all the wonders He has for you.

I pray this for you because I know that Jesus wants to give you all these things, because He loves you. And I do too.

CARYN PHILLIPS IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN THE U.S. ■





"WHAT SHALL I GIVE THEE, MASTER?"

BY DAVID BRANDT BERG

WHEN CHRISTMAS COMES, I'M ALREADY REFLECTING ON THE PAST YEAR, WHAT I DID OR DIDN'T GET DONE THAT I MEANT TO OR SHOULD HAVE, AND I'M ALREADY THINKING ABOUT MY GOALS FOR THE NEXT YEAR, HOW I CAN AIM HIGHER OR DO BETTER. That's when the message of an old song comes back to me:

What shall I give Thee, Master?
Thou who didst die for me!
How can I give less than give of my best,
When Thou hast given all to me!¹

Jesus is the Master, and Christmas is His birthday. Putting the song in that context and thinking ahead to next year, the question becomes: What goal for the new year can we present to Jesus on His birthday?

He taught that whatever we do to help someone in need, in essence we do it to Him.²

Giving to the poor is giving to Jesus. Giving people comfort when they are heartbroken is giving to Jesus. Giving people love and understanding and forgiveness is giving to Jesus. Giving people solutions to their problems and answers to their questions about life is giving to Jesus. Giving people the good news of salvation in Jesus is giving to Jesus. There are so many ways we can give back to Him.

Let's give Him our best. Let's love others for Him.

DAVID BRANDT BERG (1919–1994) WAS THE FOUNDER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

THE GIFT OF GIVING

A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

A Christmas Carol, written by Charles Dickens and first published in 1843, has been retold in numerous versions and forms. A timeless story, it is much more than an account of a mean, miserable old man—Scrooge—who changes his ways after a Christmas Eve visitation by three spirits. It is a reminder that it is only when we give to others that we truly celebrate the spirit of Christmas. Giving may be material, like a beautifully wrapped present or a monetary gift to someone in need, but true giving is more than that; it extends to sharing ourselves. Why not make your celebration of Christmas extra special this year by sending a card, making a call, visiting, or sending a gift to people you know who are particularly lonely? Perhaps there is someone at work who will be spending Christmas alone. Or perhaps you have a neighbor who would appreciate some extra kindness. Isn't this what Christmas is all about?

1. Homer W. Grimes

2. Matthew 25:40

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

Let My love warm your Christmas

No matter how down you may be—if you are out of work and have an empty wallet or bank account, if you're lonely or sick or have suffered personal loss, if war or hatred or injustice or others' indifference has chilled your heart—My love can change that. Let My birth and all that it heralded be remembered. Let My love fill you and give you purpose. Evils also plagued the world at the time of My birth and throughout My life on earth, but in the midst of such great darkness came the brightest light the world has ever known; amidst great suffering the greatest gift was given. My Father sent Me in the form of a weak and helpless baby to grow up and live as one of you and experience the same hurts you do, and to suffer at the hands of unjust men. I became one of you in order to save you.

Let the truth and love that I brought that first Christmas Day shine in your heart now.
Let Me wipe away your fears and tears.
Let My love warm your Christmas.

