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JESUS' CHRISTMAS WISH LIST

6 great gift ideas for the man who has everything

CHRISTMAS RUSH OR CHRISTMAS REASON?

"Please let me stop and look at Jesus!"

THE SEARCH FOR PEACE

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“Joy to the world!” When sung full throttle by anyone who has experienced that joy firsthand, those four words from the old familiar Christmas carol really pack a wallop! Why? Because they carry the Spirit of God and a powerful message from God.

It is, of course, an echo of the angel’s proclamation to a few startled shepherds on a hillside near Bethlehem on the first Christmas Eve: “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people” (Luke 2:10).

That just might be the most powerful and far-reaching proclamation since God said, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). I believe it is, for two reasons.

First, those “good tidings” are actually the best possible news: In sending Jesus, God threw open a door for us to make our way back to Him.

Second, it’s a universal proclamation from the only One with truly universal authority. God is the Father of us all, so when He sent an angel with a message to “*all people*,” He didn’t mean “all Christians” or “all good people” or all of any other selective group. He meant *all people*. You can never be too bad. You can never be too young or too old. You can never be too distant. You can never be too different. *All people*.

Whoever you are and wherever you are, that includes you! He reaches out every day and He will keep reaching out after this Christmas is past, but there’s no better time to open your heart and experience His love and joy than right now. I pray you will.

From all of us at *Activated*, may you and your loved ones have a very blessed merry Christmas!

Keith Phillips

Keith Phillips
FOR THE ACTIVATED FAMILY

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Simple joys that warm Christmas

BY CARI HARROP

I WAS THINKING ABOUT MY MOM on her birthday, and realized that there was something very special about my childhood—the times we spent together. More specifically, I was thinking about the Christmases when I was small. The thing that made each memory special wasn't the number or value of the gifts we received or the Christmas parties we attended. Rather, it was the simple things.

First there was the Christmas when we made an extra effort to do things together as a family, when we made a nativity scene in our living room out of an old board topped with miniature pine trees and figurines that we'd made and dressed ourselves.

The cold little house we lived in another year was warmed by a cassette tape of Christmas carols—a first for us children—and the joy of finding oranges in the stockings we had hung out, along with nuts and raisins wrapped in foil. That year we also had a Christmas tree with homemade ornaments depicting the gifts of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness,

goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Galatians 5:22–23 KJV).

Then there was the Christmas when I was smaller still. We strung popcorn and hung it on the tree. There was hardly any left by the end of December, for a little mouse, cleverly disguised as a three-year-old in pigtails, nibbled away whenever she thought no one was looking.

There was also the Christmas when I was nine, when we six girls awoke to a surprise—a line of white shoe boxes, each clearly marked with one of our names and each containing something special that we needed or could play with—skipping ropes, jacks, a hairbrush or hairclips, small clothing items, etc. What treats those were for us children of full-time volunteers!

Thinking about those special occasions caused me to want to give my own children that same love, excitement, and warmth this Christmas. I want them to have happy memories to

look back on. That's when I realized what it was that made those moments so special: It was my parents' love and the time they gave us, which demonstrated that love. It was also our parents' faith in Jesus and God's Word that gave us what we needed—His love and salvation and a purpose in life—reaching and winning others with God's love.

No, we didn't have a lot, but we had the Lord and one another—and that's what made those such happy and special Christmases. 🌲

CARI HARROP IS A VOLUNTEER WITH THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN INDIA.

BY VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG

CHRISTMAS RUSH OR CHRISTMAS REASON?

I WAS STANDING IN THE DOORWAY OF A DEPARTMENT STORE a few Christmases ago, enjoying a lovely Nativity scene in a store window, when a mother and her little girl came hurrying by. Catching a glimpse of the beautiful scene, the child grabbed her mother's hand and exclaimed, "Mama! Mama! Please let me stop for a minute and look at Jesus!" But her mother replied wearily that they weren't even half through with their shopping list and didn't have time to stop—and walked on, dragging her disappointed daughter behind her.

The child's words rang in my heart for a long time after that. "Please let me stop for a minute and look at Jesus." I thought of all the minutes that had sped by me that busy Christmas in the mad rush of life that is accelerated at the height of the shopping season. How many minutes had I spent shopping and buying presents and preparing decorations and food in the great wind-up to Christmas, and how many had I spent with the One whose birth and life is the true meaning of this celebrative season?

Jesus is always so very close to us. He is "at our right hand" and "closer than a brother" (Psalm 16:8; Proverbs 18:24). He is within speaking distance. His birth is the essence of Christmas. His gifts to

all—peace, love, and joy of heart—are the essential magic of Christmas. With arms outstretched He holds out these gifts to us and says, "Come to Me. I will give you rest. Learn from Me, and you will find rest for your souls" (Mathew 11:28–30). But these we will never receive if we forge on, endless shopping and to-do lists in hand, too busy to stop and even notice He's right there.

Like the old saying, "Dew never falls on a stormy night," we rarely experience the sweetness and joy of time spent with Jesus while in an anxious and feverish rush of accomplishment. But the dew of Heaven and the blessings of Christmas fall peacefully on our hearts and lives when we stop for a moment to get quiet and remember Him. To go on without Him is forfeiting the only real, lasting joy and perfect love that can be experienced in this life and shared forever.

Why don't we stop and enjoy—really enjoy—what Christmas means? Cut down our task lists. Enjoy the beauty. There are so many wonderful things about Christmas and so many beautiful things to see. It would be a shame to miss it all, wrapping this and wrapping that, rushing for this last thing and that, cooking and preparing so much for a feast, cluttering



It is Christmas
on the highway,
In the thronging
busy mart;
But the dearest
truest Christmas,
Is the Christmas
in the heart.
—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

“LORD, FORGIVE!”

The day before Christmas had been full of incidents, some of them unpleasant. Father seemed to be burdened with worries as well as bundles. Mother’s anxiety had reached the breaking point on many occasions throughout the day. Wherever the little girl went, she seemed to be in the way. Finally

she was hustled off to bed. The feverish excitement of the Christmas planning had completely unnerved her. As she knelt by her bed to pray the Lord’s Prayer, she got all mixed up and prayed, “Forgive us our Christmases, as we forgive those who Christmas against us.”

As we watch the tense, nervous shoppers this season, we might feel like praying as the little girl did, “Forgive us our Christmases.”

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

our Christmas with so many unnecessary things. And should we not stop to enjoy anything of life until after Christmas, the fury with which we proceed will send us reeling into the New Year sighing, “I just survived Christmas!”

Jesus came to bless our lives. That is why we have Christmas. He said He came to bring us life, and that we might have it more abundantly (John 10:10). And the apostle Paul tells us, “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Peace and life in all their fullness need not elude us. They are ours to enjoy this Christmas if we’ll give Jesus a chance in our lives and a place in our hearts.

Let me take a minute with Jesus. The true presence of Christmas is found with Him. Let the celebration of His birth touch

my heart in a new way this year. Let me learn more about the gifts He gave me so long ago on Christmas. Let me be a part of Christmas itself by being more like Him. Let me stop and look at Jesus.

Dear Jesus, I want each day that comes
To share some part with You,
Where I can sit, receive Your peace,
And hear You speak to me.

A place where I can turn aside
And leave the cares of life,
Where I can get the strength I need
To banish storm and strife.

A quiet, serene, and trusting place
Where You alone can give
The very blessing that I need—
Here would I rest and live. 🌲



light

THE
everlasting

BY ARIANA KEATING

THE CHRISTMAS WHEN I WAS SIX YEARS OLD, our teacher taught my class a poem titled “Where Jesus Was Born.” The poem tells the story of three boys who went to see Jesus. One was blind, another was mute, and the third was lame. Despite their infirmities, they helped one another make their way to the manger where Jesus was born. Because of their love for one another and their eagerness to see

the newborn Savior, God gave them a special Christmas present—He healed them.

I remember that poem and the joy we had performing it for our parents and friends. As a child, I imagined the three little boys were around my own age, and I was so happy that they were healed on that special night. Now, I can’t help but think of all the other people whose lives have been changed because of Jesus’ birth—probably far more than we will ever know.

There was once a man walking the road to Bethlehem, leading a donkey that carried his expectant wife. Nine months earlier Joseph’s life had taken a sudden change—for the worse, it seemed at the time—yet there had been a glimmer of hope: He had been promised in a dream that all would be right. He held on to that promise; he hoped and prayed and patiently waited. That first Christmas night all fears were washed away. As the tiny Babe lay in the manger, peace flooded Joseph’s worried soul.

On the hills outside Bethlehem a lowly shepherd watched sheep all night. Life was hard for him. He had taxes to pay and a large family to feed. His country was occupied by a foreign army, and he longed for the day when he would be free. That night of the first Christmas, as he sat under the starlit sky, he prayed like he had every other night for as long as he could remember for an answer to his problems. That night his prayers were answered, and as he watched the Babe sleeping in the manger he knew that God was going to work everything out in the end. Light came into his life that Christmas night.

There was a wise man in the East who, in his quest for truth and mean-

ing in life, had long searched the night skies for a sign. Despite all of his knowledge and the riches he had accumulated, he longed for something more. So he searched once more for the answer to his heart's desire, for peace of heart and mind, using all of his knowledge and skill. The answer came with a wondrous new star that heralded our Savior's birth and led him to the young Child.

The heart of man is the same the world over. There is always a need for love to make life truly complete. Two thousand years later, there are still many who are waiting for their heart's desire. A busy working mother yearns for even just a moment of serenity after another day of juggling job and family. A businessman has deadlines to meet, a boss to please, and bills to pay, but he knows there must be a way out, some way to relieve the pressure and stress he feels. A student, unsure of his future, searches for his place in life. He needs to find someone who will help him make his way in this world full of uncertainties.

For each one, the answer is the same as it was for those others that long-ago night in Bethlehem. The same love that touched the hearts of those who were in need of hope, faith, and comfort two thousand years ago can still touch the hearts of those who are searching today. Let the love of Christmas shine into your life. On that first Christmas night, love came down from Heaven to dwell among us, love that brings joy to the hearts of sincere seekers and light to the world—love that will never fade and light that will never grow dim. 🌲

ARIANA KEATING IS A VOLUNTEER WITH THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN THAILAND.

WHERE JESUS WAS BORN

BY CHARLES W.H. BANCROFT

There's a beautiful legend that's never been told,
It may have been known to the wise men of old,
How three little children came early at dawn,
With hearts that were sad, to where Jesus was born.

One could not see, one was too lame to play,
While the other, a mute, not a word could he say.
Yet led by His star, they came there to peep
At the little Lord Jesus, with eyes closed in sleep.

But how could the Christ Child, so lovely and fair,
Not waken and smile when He heard the glad prayer
Of hope at His coming, of faith at His birth,
Of praise at His bringing God's peace to the earth?

And then as the light softly came through the door,
The lad that was lame stood upright once more;
The boy that was mute started sweetly to sing,
While the child that was blind looked with joy on the King!



BY MARIA FONTAINE

SINCE IT'S JESUS' BIRTHDAY, it makes sense that we would want to give Him something special, like we often give gifts to our loved ones or do something special for them on their birthdays. But what do you give to the King of the universe, the One who has everything? I was mulling over that question when it occurred to me that we could simply ask Him what He would like most from us. Here are six of His answers:

JESUS' Christmas Wish List

The Gift of Love

You know how it is about birthdays—everyone likes to feel special on their special day. Well, I'm no different, and Christmas is My birthday.

What do I want most?—You! Having you and your love means more to Me than anything else. At this special time when everyone likes to get together with those who mean the most to them, I want to get together with you. That would make My birthday extra special this year—having some special time with you.

It doesn't have to be a big, elaborate thing. I'm pretty easy to please in that way. I just want to be with you. We can do whatever you'd like, just so long as we're together, you and I. We can sit and chat, or we can read something meaningful together and stop and reflect on it. Or we can tell each other what we love and appreciate about each other. These are some ideas of ways you can show that you love Me and haven't forgotten whose birthday it is.

The Gift of Giving

Christmas is a time of giving. It's when My Father gave His only begotten Son, Me, to the world. It's when I came to earth that I might

lay down My life in order to give eternal life to all who would receive it. It's when people give gifts to others in commemoration of the gifts that My Father and I gave them. This Christmas, I ask you to give Me the gift of giving. Give to others, as you would give to Me.

Christmas celebrates God's "goodwill to men," but I want it to also be a time of man's "goodwill to men." Take a moment to ask Me what you could do for someone else. Return My Father's goodwill by sharing some of your own.

The Gift of a Thankful Heart

Thank Me for everything that happened to you this past year. Thank Me for the blessings, and thank Me for the tests and challenges that strengthened

your character. Thank Me for the love that you received from others, and praise Me for opportunities to show love to others. Thank Me for *everything*.

It brings Me joy to hear your thankful praises. They bond your heart with Mine and draw us closer, and they can make this Christmas the best you've yet experienced. And it doesn't have to stop after Christmas. Whenever something happens that makes you happy or makes you feel loved, thank Me for that gift. Then it will be a personal gift exchange between you and Me. I give you blessings to make you happy, and you make Me happy by giving Me thanks. As you continue to thank Me for everything, I'll give you more and every day will be like Christmas.

The Gift of Prayer

It's a sacrifice to pray for others. It costs you time and effort, but it's a sacrifice that pleases Me.

If you haven't made prayer a habit, don't worry; I see your heart. If you don't know where to start, don't worry; I see your heart. If you don't feel eloquent, don't worry; I see your heart. If you think you don't have much faith, don't worry; I see your heart. It's your love and concern that moves My hand to meet the needs of those you pray for.

So put your love into action, your faith to work, and My promises to the test by praying for others, and I will more than repay.

The Gift of Forgiveness

Christmas is a wonderful time of year to make things right. And making things right often starts with you taking the step to forgive someone, even if you feel that the other person is the one who should be seeking forgiveness. Has someone said or done something that has hurt you? Forgive. Are you harboring bitterness in your heart toward someone? Forgive.

The Gift of Sharing My Love

I would have gladly come to earth to live and die for you alone, but I also love everyone else in the world just as much. I want nothing more than for everyone to have a chance to experience that love, but many don't even know such love exists. They need someone to tell them and show them.

It has been rightly said that I have no hands but your hands, no feet but your feet, no eyes but your eyes, and no mouth but yours. If you want to give Me a truly wonderful gift this Christmas, lend Me the use of *you*. Let Me fill you with My love, and then let that love flow through you to others. 🌲

AS YOU ENJOY THE BLESSINGS OF CHRISTMAS, STOP AND THINK ABOUT THE MEAGER CIRCUMSTANCES JESUS WAS BORN INTO. HE HAD SO MUCH, YET BECAME SO LITTLE. HE BECAME NOTHING SO THAT WE COULD HAVE EVERYTHING. ALL THAT WE HAVE, WE OWE TO HIM.

Finding Christmas

I GREW UP IN COMMUNIST ROMANIA, where there was a state ban on religion, so “finding Christmas” wasn’t easy.

“Don’t use the word ‘Christmas’ at school or with people you don’t know,” I remember being told when I turned school age. We only used the word at home because some members of my extended family were old enough to have grown up before the ban and still secretly kept the holiday. With everyone else, the tree was to be called “the New Year tree.” Christmas was “the winter holiday.” If we children received gifts, there was no mention of Christmas attached.

I was only a few years old when we got our first tree. It had real candles on the branches, and each day for as long as it was up, my reward for being good was having the candles lit for a few minutes.

I remember, a few years later, looking at the only Orthodox icon in our house

through the branches of the Christmas tree and wondering if there was any connection between the two. *Who is that pictured there? Why do we keep a picture of someone we don’t know?*

I also remember the first Christmas I celebrated in the countryside with other members of my family. The people there had a bit more freedom, and we listened to Christmas carolers sing about the first Christmas. It was beautiful, but it didn’t make much sense to me.

It wasn’t until I was nearly grown and the Communist regime had collapsed that I prayed to accept Jesus as my Savior and got a chance to learn about Christmas and other truths from the Bible.

Several years later I became a full-time Christian volunteer and celebrated my first Christmas in a real Christian way, thanking God for sending us Jesus and sharing the message of His love with others. That was bliss!

BY PRISCILA LIPCIUC

Then I got married and I became a mother. Our little apartment was filled with Christmas music and every corner was decorated, but my face was tearstained most of the time. I was happy, yes, but my heart also broke at the thought of God having to resort to giving up His only begotten Son, Jesus, to save us. You see, since becoming a mother, the thought of giving my own dear Emanuel for someone else was more than I could bear. I might choose to give my own life for another one day, but never my son’s!

The thought of God having to let go of His only Son, knowing what was to befall Him, was overwhelming. I was happy and thankful that God chose to do what He did, but it also broke my heart. The joy was there—the ever-present joy of Christmas—but so was the realization of the magnitude of the sacrifice that God made for us.

Every Christmas I still shed a few tears when I remember the pain behind our joy, but the joy far outweighs the sadness. And that’s as it should be. It was a price God was happy to pay, for our sakes! 🌲

PRISCILA LIPCIUC IS A VOLUNTEER WITH THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN ROMANIA.

Welcome, all wonders in one sight!
Eternity shut in a span.
Summer in winter. Day in night.
Heaven in earth, and God in man!
Great little one, whose all-embracing birth
Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heaven to earth.
—RICHARD CRASHAW (1613–1649)

Christmas

Touched by love on Christmas Eve

BY JOANNA ADINO

SOLANGE WAS ONE OF SEVERAL DOZEN PATIENTS I met while caroling with friends in a hospital one Christmas Eve. Each patient was suffering and hoped for a little love and comfort, but young Solange—in bandages and casts from head to toe—was special. As we sang for her, she began to cry. Soon she was sobbing almost uncontrollably.

“Jesus loves and cares for you,” I reassured her.

Then Solange explained that she and her family had been in a car accident. Her father, mother, and sister were all killed. She had lost her family. Solange had been in a coma for three days, but had survived against all odds.

I prayed with her to receive Jesus as her Savior, and gave her two Christmas posters I’d brought with me—one with a text on the back about Heaven, and the other

with a text about Jesus and His great personal love for each of us. I also prayed for her healing and promised to visit her again.

“Joanna,” she said, “my heart is touched because you are here, because you are concerned for me, a total stranger, and because you would spend your Christmas Eve with me.”

Solange remained in the hospital for three more months, and I visited her as often as I could. Each time I took her one of the Family’s inspirational cassette tapes such as *Fear Not* or *How to Win*, or read to her from the Bible to encourage her and strengthen her faith. By the time Solange was released from the hospital, the miracle that began in her life on Christmas Eve was complete; she was happy, whole, and recovering from her emotional trauma.

JOANNA ADINO IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN BRAZIL. 🌲

FEEDING READING

Why Jesus came

TO SHOW US WHAT GOD IS LIKE:
2 Corinthians 4:4
Colossians 1:13b,15
Hebrews 1:3

TO GIVE HIS LIFE FOR US:
Matthew 20:28
John 6:51
John 10:11
John 15:13
Romans 5:6

TO RECONCILE US TO GOD, SO WE CAN HAVE ETERNAL LIFE:
Luke 19:10
John 1:29
John 3:16
1 Timothy 1:15
1 John 3:5
1 John 4:14

TO DESTROY THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL:
Acts 10:38
Hebrews 2:14
1 John 3:8

TO BETTER OUR LIVES:
Luke 4:18–19
John 10:10b

Joyeux

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

Noël

A RECENT FILM by Christian Carion, *Joyeux Noël* (2005), retells the story of a well-documented event that occurred on a battlefield in France on Christmas Eve, 1914.

One engagement of the Great War (WWI) involved some 3,000 soldiers from the Scottish, French, and German armies. On Christmas Eve, the German side began to sing "Silent Night." The Scots answered with a bagpipe accompaniment, and soon all three sides were singing the same song in unison from their trenches 100 meters apart. Imagine them singing together, in three languages, from the same trenches where a few hours earlier they had been killing one another. What a contrast!


Coaxed into peace by the warmth of this universally loved song, the warring sides ventured out of their trenches and agreed on an unofficial truce. In some places along the line, the Christmas truce lasted for ten days. Enemies exchanged photos, addresses, chocolate, champagne, and other small gifts. They discovered that they had more in common than they realized, including a cat that wandered from side to side and made friends with everyone, which both sides claimed as their mascot.

The erstwhile enemies communicated as best they could in each other's language. The German commander, Horstmayer, said to French Lieutenant Audebert,

“Without
an enemy
there can
be no war.”

“When we take Paris, it will all be over. Then you can invite me up for a drink at your house in Rue Vavin!” “Don't feel that you have to invade Paris to get a drink at my house,” Audebert replied.

The friendship that was forged between the warring sides went beyond mere pleasantries. The morning after the Christmas truce ended, each side warned the other of artillery shelling that they knew was coming from their artillery units. Their newfound sense of camaraderie was so strong that each side even sheltered soldiers from the opposing side in their trenches to keep them from harm.



What brought about this incredible transformation? It all started with a shared love of Christmas music.

This incident reminds us that there *is* a cure to war, and that is to stop demonizing our enemies and learn to love them, as Jesus enjoined us to do (Matthew 5:44). That's far easier said than done, some argue, and they're right. But it's not impossible. We need to learn to look beyond the external differences of race, color, and creed and realize that everyone shares a common need—love. Everyone needs to love and be loved. If we would each make an effort to get to know others with whom we seem to have little in common, we just might find, as the soldiers on that battlefield did, that we have quite a bit more in common than we realized.

Jesus also told His followers, “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9 KJV). To put that in context, the land of Judea was in turmoil at the time. The Romans were a cruel and oppressive occupying force that crushed any resistance. On a personal level, the Roman-sanctioned king, Herod, had set out to try to kill the newborn Prince of Peace by massacring all of the male babies in Bethlehem, because he considered Jesus a personal threat. Throughout His public ministry, Jesus' life was often in danger as jealous religious leaders of His own people sought to destroy Him.

But in spite of all the hate the Devil could muster against Jesus, love prevailed. At the end of Jesus' earthly life, when His enemies finally managed to have Him crucified, it seemed that they had triumphed. But to their dismay, three days later Jesus rose victoriously from the grave, giving us the promise that we too can be raised to eternal life in Him.

Considering that WWI lasted over three years after this incident and claimed nearly 20 million lives, and considering that more than 150 wars have been fought since then, claiming untold millions more, one might conclude that the gesture of friendship and goodwill of that Christmas Eve was in vain. The soldiers that participated were severely reprimanded. Their superiors, in an attempt to make sure that this incident would not be repeated, ordered increased shelling the next Christmas. But despite these orders, it was reported that similar incidents did occur. Nevertheless, looking beyond the success or failure of these temporary truces, this story of peace in the midst of war lives on and continues to break down the barriers that make enemies of potential friends. Ultimately it's a testimony to the power of God's love, which is the essence of Christmas. 🌲

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS
A VOLUNTEER WITH THE FAMILY
INTERNATIONAL IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

THE SEARCH

for peace

SAFE IN THE ARMS OF JESUS

Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His gentle breast;
There by His love o'ershaded,
Sweetly my soul shall rest.

—FRANCES J. CROSBY (1820–1915)

“GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST,” angels proclaimed to shepherds on the first Christmas Eve, “and on earth peace, goodwill toward men” (Luke 2:14).

Although peace has been the goal of mankind for thousands of years—and the desire for peace is never so great as it is at Christmas—it seems that our ability to find or establish peace continues to elude us.

Today bloody hostilities continue. As Pete Seeger’s well-known folk song from the 1960s asked, “Where have all the flowers gone? ... When will they ever learn? When will they ever learn?”

True peace on every level, from international conflicts to our personal lives, has become more difficult than ever to achieve.

In the Bible, the word “peace” means much more than the absence of conflict. It carries with it the connotation of health and well-being. In the Old Testament, two Hebrew words, *shalom* (peace) and

THE REASON for it all

BY DAVID BRANDT BERG

NONE OF US CAN REALLY GRASP HOW GREAT GOD OUR FATHER IS. He's so beyond our comprehension that He had to make Someone who could show us His love, Someone who was within our realm, Someone we could see, Someone we could feel, Someone we could experience, Someone who would bring God down to the level of our comprehension, one Man who was like Himself, whom He called His Son.

God shared His love with the whole world, but He also loves *you* so much that He gave His most priceless possession, the most cherished thing He had, "His only begotten Son," so that you could have everlasting life (John 3:16). He loves you dearly, more dearly than the spoken word can tell. You can never understand the love of God. It's too great; it passes all understanding (Ephesians 3:19). You just have to receive it and feel it with your heart.

This is why Jesus came that first Christmas Day, so you could know His Father's love. This is the reason for it all! 🌲

If you haven't yet received Jesus as your Savior, you can right this minute by asking Him to come into your heart with His love, life, liberty, truth, peace, plenty, and happiness here, now, and forever. Simply pray:

Dear Jesus, thank You for giving Your life for me. Please forgive me for the wrong things I've done, come into my heart, give me Your free gift of eternal life, and teach me more about Your love. Amen.

shalem (health or full), contained this concept of the word. Peace included inner (spiritual, emotional) peace, health, abundance, harmony with life on every level, even "in the midst of storm," when life's problems seem to snuff out any kind of peace.

In the New Testament, the word *eirene* in the original Greek means "peace," both figurative and literal, and it is used over 100 times. For example, the expression "go in peace" means "stay warm and eat well" (James 2:16). On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus said to His disciples: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you. ... Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

As in the Old Testament, *peace* means much more than the mere "absence of conflict" in society. It means a very real inner sense of well-being that originates with God and is given as a precious commodity to each of us who receive the "Prince of Peace," Jesus, without whom there simply is no peace. This means peace for *you* personally, both in your own personal life and in your relations with

others. The peace of God which passes all understanding is very real and practical. You can receive it today; there's no need to wait for man's fragile peace, which never lasts anyway.

Even when the world is in turmoil, you can have peace in your own heart through the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. Even though war and chaos may be on the *outside*, you can get rid of it on the *inside*.

Jesus never sleeps! He watches all the time, along with all of His angels. He knows every hair of your head. Everything is in His hands. As the old hymn goes, "He hideth my soul in the cleft of the Rock [Jesus], that shadows a dry, thirsty land; He hideth my life in the depths of His love, and covers me there with His hand."

He is your peace. Your help comes from *Him*. In *Him* is your *confidence*. You must put your confidence in *Him*—the soundest base in the world—Jesus!

This Christmastime, Jesus offers to every soul on earth true peace, unflinching comfort, and eternal life and love. All of these are wrapped up in the priceless gift of salvation. 🌲

What will you give Me?

What can you give Me, the King of kings and Lord of lords, whose throne is Heaven and whose footstool is Earth?¹ What could you possibly give Me, the One who has everything? What more could I possibly need?—Gifts from the heart. Any gift from the heart is a gift that I will treasure.

Each person is created with a unique blend of gifts, talents, and abilities. Some appear to be natural abilities—a quick or inquisitive mind, or an aptitude for a certain skill or type of work, for example. Some are gifts of the spirit that are clearly manifested in the physical, such as charisma, captivating eyes, or a beautiful smile. Others are gifts of the spirit that often go unnoticed but can actually go even further, such as the gifts of humility, optimism, compassion, and self-sacrifice. And then there is one of the greatest gifts of all: the

ability to give and receive love. This is a gift that everyone receives a measure of, and it's a big part of what makes you godlike; it's part of having been created in God's own image. Whatever your gifts, they work together to make you special to Me.

All of these precious gifts have been given to enrich your life and the lives of others, but what you do with them and how much you do with them is up to you. Nothing makes Me happier than to see you use them to benefit others and make them happy. When you do, you are giving back to Me and the most wonderful thing happens: Your gifts and talents grow, they are multiplied, and that love that was your motivation spreads from heart to heart and comes back to you.

What can you give Me this Christmas and in the coming year? Use what you have, what you've already been gifted with, to the full. That will be the perfect present for Me.

¹ 1 Timothy 6:15; Isaiah 66:1

