



CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

A 3-day devotional published by
Living Chronic Faith



Amid the hustle and bustle of the holidays, I wanted us to take a little time as the Living Chronic Faith community to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas together.

I pray that, in the next few pages, you will be constantly reminded of the greatest Gift we will ever receive, Jesus Christ, and that you will be encouraged to share that Gift with many others.

Blessings for a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year!



Christmas Presence

“On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.” –Matthew 2:11, NIV

I remember when Black Friday lasted only one day, but every year, it seems to get longer and longer. There's more time to get better “deals”. More time to buy “better” gifts. Then comes Small Business Saturday, Cyber Monday, and those sales continue until December 1st—just in time for the Christmas sales to begin. This Christmas, like every Christmas, some people will go into debt purchasing items to give to their friends and loved ones. There is a lot of pressure to give someone “just the thing” that they really wanted or needed. Often, people feel pressured to make sure they are gifting others at the same price point of the gifts they receive. Some people just enjoy the challenge of outdoing their last gift.

But in all the buying, hiding, wrapping, and exchanging, a simple truth can be easily overlooked. It is not the price tag or designer label that makes a gift valuable. The Magi brought lavish, expensive gifts to the Baby Jesus, but while Scripture only mentions the gifts, it goes into detail about the great effort the wise men made to get to where Jesus was. The same goes for you and me. The joy doesn't come from the amount someone spends on an object. It is the person who thought enough to give the gift that makes it truly special. It's *you*—you have always been the gift.

During the pandemic, we've all had to socially distance, lockdown, and even quarantine. There has been a lot of time spent apart. I think it gave us all time to get a little perspective on what really matters. I've heard many people say that when this is all over, they will attend all the family gatherings and reunions



that they once took for granted. It is often said that absence makes the heart grow fonder, and considering all the losses of loved ones in the last two years, these words ring truer than ever. We seem to linger on the phone a little longer and participate in more group text threads. (Some of us have even started listening to our voice mail messages!) But the beautiful thing is that when we are motivated, we can find the most creative ways to be together. It is that human connection that fuels us. It is when we spend time with those who fill our spiritual and emotional stockings that we find ourselves being sharpened like iron (Proverbs 27:17). It's called the "ministry of presence" and it simply means that when we show up, we bring the peace of God and His Holy Spirit. Even when we don't know what to say or do, He does—and He will.

This holiday season is the perfect time to fill someone's "stocking". Someone in your circle needs you. They need a little extra time and attention. Think of those who might need an encouraging word or listening ear. Don't underestimate how much your friends and family want you around. For them, a gift to unwrap might be just another "thing". But your presence in their life is the true gift. So, my challenge to you this Christmas is to be present for those you love. Make the memories that last forever. Now, this doesn't mean that we have to stop exchanging gifts—it's just a reminder that, as we enjoy giving Christmas presents, there is no substitute for Christmas "presence".



*Father, as I celebrate You and the life-changing
Gift You gave me in Jesus, please help me to
consider how I can be present for others. Help me
to remember that I carry Your Spirit everywhere
I go, even long distance or virtually, and that
Your presence can make all the difference.
In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Advent

“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means “God with us”).”

—Matthew 1:22-23, NIV

Did you ever have an Advent calendar when you were a kid? I had them for several years, but I’m not sure I really understood the significance then. To me, it was a way to count down to one of the most exciting days of the year, and a really good excuse to eat chocolate every day. (I thought that should have been a year-round thing!) Advent is the period beginning with the fourth Sunday before Christmas (always falling between November 27th and December 3rd) and ends on December 24th. Advent (from the Latin *adventus*, meaning “coming”) is a time for believers to anticipate the celebration of Christ’s birth, just as the people of God had long awaited the coming of the Messiah. Now, we all count down in our own ways, love it or dread it. From the time the days start getting shorter and the nights start getting chillier, we start saying, “Can you believe Christmas is right around the corner?” Even the stores get in on it—earlier and earlier every year. The anticipation of Christmas is undeniable, exciting, even contagious.

Some people mistakenly think that the excitement that they feel is because of the upcoming social events, decorations, family gatherings, cookie recipes, and holiday entertainment. But I believe that the joy that they feel, whether they acknowledge it or not, is because it is the celebration of Jesus’ coming. No matter how commercial it becomes or how it is abbreviated, Christ can never be taken out of Christmas! And the celebration of His decision to take off His glory and come to Earth clothed in flesh to save His people from their sins will always be cause for great celebration.



There is another meaning of Advent, and we all participate in that one, too. Christ promised that He would come again, and all of those who know Him await His return. “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:28). We may not be in exile or under great oppression like the children of Israel, but we’ve had our share of challenging moments. Isn’t it encouraging to reflect on the fact that God always remembers His people and keeps His promises? May Christmas be a reminder to each of us that the same Jesus Who fulfilled this promise before is faithful to fulfill it again, and may we embrace this blessed hope and share it with others at Christmas and all year long!

Jesus, thank You for coming to save me from my sins. Thank You for fulfilling all of the prophecies about God’s redemption. In the midst of whatever challenges I face, please help me to remember Your great love and compassion for me and that You are coming again for all who believe. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



Creating Space in an Unlikely Place

“...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 2:7, NIV

The Bible’s narrative of the first Christmas is so relatable, with all of its twists and turns. Life is like that—unpredictable—and it requires us to be flexible and willing to adapt. This is especially true when it comes to responding to God’s calling on our lives. Abraham was old by the time God gave him a son, Moses had a speech impediment when God sent him to negotiate with a king, Joshua was very young when he was called to lead a nation, Gideon was terrified when he was called to valiantly lead an army, David was a shepherd when he was anointed king, and Mary was just a teenager, engaged to be married when she was called to be the mother of the Christ-Child. What a curve ball!

After Joseph came to terms with this incredible reality, he had to adapt, too. When the decree was announced that he must return to the town of their birth to be counted in the census, they had to adapt once more. When they finally arrived in Bethlehem, exhausted and road weary and found that there were no vacancies in any of the inns, they had to adapt again. But they weren’t the only ones.

Imagine that you are a humble innkeeper. You see a few travelers or more each week, unfamiliar faces coming from somewhere and guaranteed to leave as sure as they came. These people, however, are your bread and butter, and while they are under your roof, they are under your care. This particular night, every inn in the area was doing big business because of the census, and all of the preparations and tidying the innkeepers had done were worth it because every room was occupied. While making sure the guests were accommodated, or perhaps tying up the loose ends that seem to await business owners at the end of the day, the innkeeper would receive one last customer. Make that two... and a half. Joseph and his very pregnant wife were

desperate for a place to stay after their long journey and the innkeeper couldn't turn them away. Offering the only space left, the innkeeper adapted and showed the grateful couple to the stable where a miracle that would change the world took place.

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Jesus has something for each of us to do, and every one of us could probably find a list of reasons that we cannot accomplish it or why it's just not a good time. But we can adapt. I know it seems like there is someone more qualified or more "ready", but God has a track record for choosing unlikely places, and all He asks of us is to make a little space. Mary created space for Jesus in her womb by agreeing with the messenger from God. Joseph made space in his family for a Child that he did not father. The innkeeper made space in the stable for a Baby Who would spend His first night in a manger.

I know our lives are full. Between work, medical treatments, families, school, maintaining a household, doctor's appointments, paying bills, and (hopefully) resting, there just doesn't seem to be any room. But Jesus has chosen you for a special assignment. Yes, you! And you don't have to be able to do anything special except obey. Today, would you take a moment to think about where you can make room for Jesus? Do you have some things you can move out of the way? Do you have a "manger" to offer the Christ? It doesn't matter if no one else values the structure or considers it worthy of the presence of the King. Your life, with all of its moving parts, might seem like an unlikely place right now, but I guarantee that if you create just a little space, Jesus will occupy it and will accomplish His purpose through you as you come into agreement with His will.

Lord, thank You for choosing me long before I was formed in my mother's womb, and for calling me again to the great work You have created me to do. Please help me to assess my life and identify those places where I can create space for You to do the work You dream of doing in and through my life. In Jesus' name. Amen.





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