

***Muddiford United Reformed***



***Church***



***Christmas Magazine***

***2025***



***The love of God is shown through  
Christmas.***

## **A Letter from our Minister**

*Dear Friends,*

*As we enter the season of Advent and draw nearer to Christmas, I'm always struck by how the light changes here in Devon. The days may be shorter and the winds a little sharper, yet there is a quiet beauty in the early sunsets over the hills, the sparkling frost on the lanes, and the sense of anticipation shared by our communities. In many ways, this is what Advent is all about: noticing the light, however small, and recognising that God is near.*



*This time of year often invites mixed emotions. For some, it is a season of joy, family gatherings, and long-held traditions. For others, it may bring memories of loved ones missed, or worries about the pressures and expectations that December can carry. The good news of Christmas meets us wherever we are. In Jesus, God comes not to the perfect or the prepared, but to ordinary people in ordinary places— a stable, a village, a world longing for hope.*

*At the centre of the story is Emmanuel: **God with us**. Not God above us, or beyond us, or against us — but **God with us**. With us in our celebrations, with us in our concerns, with us in our communities, and with us in our hopes for the year ahead. This is the gift we receive afresh each Christmas: the assurance that we are never alone.*



*Throughout December, there will be moments of stillness as well as moments of celebration. Our Advent services allow us to share the Christmas story once again and our Evening Carol service will be as special as ever. I encourage you to take time to pause amid the busyness, to notice the gentle ways God's light is appearing in your life, and to share that light with others who might need it.*

*Thank you to everyone in our small church who enables the light of Jesus to continue shining brightly in this part of North Devon, never underestimate the huge difference that can be made by a small number of devoted people.*



*May the Christ child bring you peace, may the Holy Spirit kindle hope in your heart, and may the love of God be known anew in our homes, our church, and our wider community this Christmas.*

*Wishing you every blessing for Advent, Christmas and the New Year,*

*Rob*

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*Even as the water falls on dry tea leaves and brings out their flavour, so may Your Spirit fall on us too, so that we may bring refreshment and joy to others.*

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*What I am is God's gift to me.  
What I become is my gift to God.*



Many songs we sing at Christmas are reminders that Christmastime is supposed to be happy. Songs like "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year," "Have a Holly Jolly Christmas," "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire," "Jingle Bells," and "Walking in a Winter Wonderland" all communicate that Christmas time is to be a joyous, trouble-free season.

But let me ask you honestly: Is that what you are experiencing this season? Probably not. For some of you, personal problems are keeping you from experiencing the joy of the season. For others, you feel like one crisis after another has run you over. With such an avalanche of problems it is hard to have a holly-jolly Christmas.

Some of you are so busy and working so hard that there is no time for sitting around a fire roasting chestnuts. Or, maybe there is not anything really wrong, but for some reason you are just not enjoying Christmas. It is not providing the emotional lift that you expected. In fact, it is almost depressing. The world does not look like a winter wonderland. It just looks like winter.

Disillusionment at Christmas is not an unusual thing. We get so hyped up with expectations about what Christmas is supposed to be that often the real thing doesn't measure up, and we are disappointed.

What can you do this Christmas to avoid disillusionment? How can you improve your level of joy this Christmas? The answer is found in the story of the magi in Matthew 2. Magi, wise men from the East, saw a star that indicated the birth of a new king in Israel. Wanting to honour Him with gifts, they set out on a journey following the star to find this newborn King. From the attitudes of these wise men and the events that surrounded their journey, we see how we can raise our level of joy at Christmas.

There are three lessons we learn from this story.

## I. What do you seek?

Your level of joy at Christmas is directly related to what it is you seek.

Ask the question: What is it I want to get out of Christmas? What is it that would make your Christmas wonderful and satisfying? Snow? All the family together and happy? A feeling you define as the holiday spirit? Finding the right present to give? Getting the present you have been hoping for? The problem with all these is that they can leave us disappointed.



Have you ever had that kind of experience - when you were disappointed by Christmas because it did not deliver what you thought it would? The problem is not Christmas. It is in our expectations. We are looking for the wrong thing.

The magi show us how to increase our level of joy at Christmas by looking for the right thing. What was it they were looking for? Verse 2 tells us. They came to Jerusalem and said, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." They were looking for Jesus. Christmas for them was an opportunity to worship Jesus.

That is what we need to be looking for and expecting this Christmas - an experience of worship, a fresh glimpse of He who was born King of the Jews. If our goal this Christmas is to worship Jesus, then I doubt very seriously we will be dissatisfied with our experience.

## II. Where do you look?

Your level of joy at Christmas is directly related to where you look.

We learn from the magi that there are wrong and right places to look for Christmas. They started by looking in the wrong place. They looked where their own human reasoning said they should look.



The star indicated the birth of a new king in Israel. The magi went where kings should be born - to the palace of Herod the Great in the capital city of Jerusalem.

But what a mistake that was! When Herod heard of the birth of a new king, he jealousy sought to destroy him.

We, too, are tempted to look for joy at Christmas in the wrong places. We think by getting or giving the right gift we will be satisfied. We imagine that being with family will be joyful. All these can easily disappoint us. You may not be able to afford the right gift for a loved one. Family members may be missing from your holiday celebration. If you are looking to these things for joy, you may be left with a feeling of disillusionment.

The magi looked in the right place when they looked to God. The trip to Jerusalem was not a total loss. While there they discovered where they should have looked in the first place: the Bible. The scribes in Jerusalem said that, according to the prophet Micah, the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. With this new information, they looked again at the star and followed it to Bethlehem until it stood over the house where the child Jesus lived.



### **III. What do you give?**

Your level of joy at Christmas is directly related to what you give.

The magi came to Jesus' house bearing gifts. The gifts they gave were entirely appropriate. They gave gold, gift for a king. By giving it they acknowledged that Jesus was and is the King. They gave frankincense, a gift for a priest. This was the incense the priests used in the Temple. By giving it they acknowledged that Jesus was a priest - the One who would bring us to God. They gave myrrh, gift for the dead. This was a fragrant ointment used to anoint a body before burial. By giving it they acknowledged that Jesus had come to die for the sins of the world.



We ought to give appropriate gifts this Christmas as well. Don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about material gifts. I am talking about more important things. We ought to give the gift of our love and kindness to our friends and family. We ought to give the gift of our help to those who are hurting. We ought to give the gift of forgiveness to those who have hurt us. Giving these kinds of gifts will result in a joyous and meaningful Christmas.

## Conclusion

What are you giving for Christmas this year? Why not consider giving yourself? Give your time to your family. Give your compassion to the hurting. Give your forgiveness to the isolated. And give your heart to Jesus? I promise you, when you look for the right thing, look in the right places, and give the right gift, you will have joy at Christmas.

*Jeff Griffis is pastor of Faith Baptist Church, Decatur, Alabama. He holds the M.Div. degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and a B.A. in Religion and Music from Samford University.*

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## A Christmas prayer of blessing

*Heavenly Father, bless us this Christmas, be with all who have had a busy year and have been looking forward to this time of rest, of family and friends and of celebration. We ask that you bless every home and every family and every meal. Lord, we thank you that we are able to gather with the ones we hold so dear to enjoy this special occasion. We pray that all the beautiful memories that we will create this year will give you glory and fill us all with awe of how kind you have been to us over the years. Amen*

## *The Journey*



Mary and Joseph likely travelled about 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This journey would have taken them through Judea, likely along a longer, safer route through the Jordan River Valley, and could have taken a week or more, especially with Mary being heavily pregnant.



- **Distance:**

The journey was approximately 90 miles (about 145 km). While the "as the crow flies" distance is shorter, they would have taken a longer route to avoid dangerous areas.

- **Route:**

They likely travelled south from Nazareth to the Jordan River Valley, then moved west to Jerusalem and south to Bethlehem.

- **Duration:**

The trip would have taken about a week to a week and a half, due to the difficulty of the journey and Mary's condition. This allowed time for rest stops and to find places to stay overnight.

- **Transportation:**

It is not specified how they travelled, but it is likely they used a donkey to carry belongings, with Mary possibly riding it at times.

# He's on His way

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**Christmas  
starts  
with  
Christ**

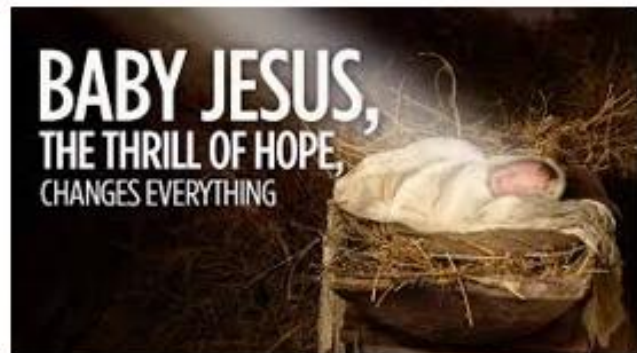
## A MAGICAL CHRISTMAS



They say that Christmas only comes  
One day in every year  
They tell the children of Santa Clause  
And fill them with Christmas gifts and cheer  
But only if they are very good  
Will Santa Clause appear.

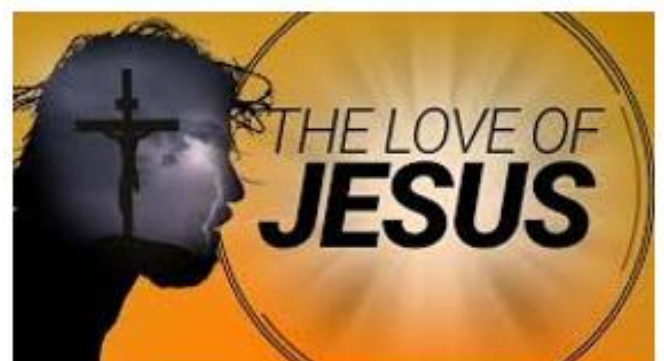
Our children are told that Santa  
Who brings sweets and chocolate and toys  
Is the reason that we celebrate  
So that all children, girls and boys  
Have a Christmas time  
For them to enjoy.

But not a mention of Jesus  
The child born in a cattle stall  
Who gave up His life in Heaven  
To answer mankind's call  
A Saviour born to save the world  
And take on the sin of all.



So shouldn't we tell our children  
The true meaning of Christmas time?  
Tell them that Jesus loves them  
Would that be a terrible crime?  
To tell them the stories of Jesus  
Instead of a nursery rhyme.

Jesus came into the world for us all  
We all need to be aware  
He came because He loves us  
To show us His love and care  
A story of love, compassionate love  
A love for us all to share.





So let us tell of a magical Christmas  
When a star appeared, leading wise  
men  
And Shepherds left their sheep in a  
field  
When an Angel appeared to them  
They travelled to worship King Jesus  
In a stable in Bethlehem.

But that's not the end of the story  
Because Jesus still lives today  
He will come into your heart if you ask Him  
All you have to do is pray.  
Pray that the magic of Christmas will come  
And enter into your heart to stay.

SHEILA A JENNINGS



# A New Year's Plan

I tried to think of a clever new phrase—  
A slogan to inspire the next 365 days,  
A motto to live by this coming New Year,  
But the catchy words fell flat to my ear.

And then I heard His still small voice  
Saying, "Consider this simple, daily choice:  
With each new dawn and close of day  
Make new your resolve to trust and [obey](#)."

"Don't look back, caught in regret  
Or dwell on the sorrow of dreams unmet;  
Don't stare forward [anchored by fear](#),  
No, live in this moment, for I Am here."

"I am all you need. Everything. I Am.  
You are held secure by my strong hand.  
Give me this one thing—your all in all;  
Into my [grace](#), let yourself fall."

So, at last, I'm ready; I see the way.  
It's to daily follow, trust, and obey.  
I enter the New Year armed with a plan,  
To give Him my everything—all that I am.

--[Mary Fairchild](#)

A graphic with the text "Happy New Year 2026" in a golden, cursive font. The text is surrounded by small, golden stars and a decorative border.

Wise men came;

Men of fame:

Gifts to bring,

Praise to sing.



1. “Gold” said one, “is what I bring,  
Gold to honour heaven’s King  
Wise men came;  
Men of fame:  
Gifts to bring,  
Praise to sing.  
We will honour heaven’s King.
2. “Frankincense is mine to share;  
Frankincense, the sign of prayer.”  
Wise men came;  
Men of fame:  
Gifts to bring,  
Praise to sing.  
God in Christ has met our prayer.
3. “Myrrh I bring, to show my care;  
Myrrh to heal the wounds He’ll bear.”  
Wise men came;  
Men of fame:  
Gifts to bring,  
Praise to sing.  
Men will make the cross He’ll bear.
4. “Joy we’ll bring, from all on earth;  
Joy to welcome Jesus’ birth.”  
We must sing!  
Let bells ring!  
Every voice  
Now rejoice!  
Season of our own new birth.

(Donald Hilton)

It was Christmas Eve. Harry and Shirley had returned from an enjoyable midnight mass at their local church. They arrived home and spent a short while relaxing by an open fire before retiring to bed. Some time in the middle of the night they were awoken by heavy knocking on their front door. Harry was very unhappy about this. He went down stairs and noisily unlocked the door to be confronted by disheveled man who was obviously the worse for drink.

'Th'cuse me thur. Will you helpth me with a puth."

"Help you with a push!" said Harry. "You drunken idiot! Get away from my house before I call the police! Irresponsible people like you should be banned from driving!" And slammed the door into the man's face.



He went back to bed and was astonished to find himself being reprimanded by his wife.

"How could you be so mean and uncharitable." she said. "Surely this evening's sermon must still be ringing in your ears. How the innkeeper turned Joseph and Mary away on Christmas Eve. Here you are presented with the same situation and you show yourself to be no better than that uncaring man. Shame on you."

Harry was shocked by the relevance of what he had done and was full of remorse. He ran down the stairs and opened the front door, but the man was no longer there. So, he ran down the path to his front gate to see if the man or his car was along the road; but there was no traffic or people at all.

On the off-chance that the man might still be around somewhere he shouted loudly. "Hey mister, needing a push, where are you?"

The unmistakable drunken voice replied immediately. "Over here thur, on the thwing."

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**Do not withhold good from the deserving when it is within your power to act.**

**Proverbs 3:27**

# Come Unto Jesus

Come unto Jesus, all you who are weary  
Come to the mercy seat, fervently kneel  
Here bring your wounded heart, broken and needy  
Come unto Jesus, mighty to heal  
Joy of the comfortless, light for the straying  
Hope of the penitent, peace in our strife  
Here speaks the Comforter, tenderly saying  
"My yoke is easy, My burden is light"  
Come unto Jesus, come unto Jesus  
Lay down your burdens, He is enough  
Come unto Jesus, rest in His love  
Come, taste the Bread of Life broken for sinners  
Drink from the cup of His promise made sure  
Feast at His table as sons and as daughters  
Grace overflowing is yours evermore  
Come unto Jesus, come unto Jesus  
Lay down your burdens, He is enough  
Come unto Jesus, rest in His love  
Come now and follow Him, this life forsaking  
All that was gained count as nothing but loss  
Trade all this world for His kingdom unfading  
Come unto Jesus, and take up your cross  
Come unto Jesus, and take up your cross  
Life everlasting He offers to us  
Come unto Jesus, come unto Jesus  
Lay down your burdens, He is enough  
And come unto Jesus, come unto Jesus  
Lay down your burdens, He is enough  
Come unto Jesus, rest in His love  
Come unto Jesus, rest in His love.

*The original hymn written by **Orson Pratt Huish** (1851-1932) for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints hymnal, this is the modern worship song written by **Laura Story, Jordan Kauflin, and Matt Merker**.*



*There will be no Muddiford Craft & Chatter Meeting in December.*

*Please join us for the next meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2026 in Muddiford Church Hall @ 2.00 p.m.*

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*You are invited to an evening at Paul & Daphne's, on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2026 at 6.00 p.m. for 6.30 p.m. when we will have a Communion service led by Rev. Rob Weston, followed by festive music and seasonal refreshments.*

*Please let Daphne or Paul know if you are able to come. Transport can be arranged if needed.*

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*Any items to be included in either the monthly Stepping Stones or the Muddiford URC Magazine can be e-mailed to Paul.*

### *Christmas Post*

*'A woman went into a post office to buy some stamps for her Christmas cards. What denomination do you want?' asked the lady at the counter. 'Good God!' she replied, 'Has it come to this? I suppose you'd better give me twenty Catholic and twenty Presbyterian.'*

## Can you work through the Christmas Bauble Maze?



Danny had recently passed his driving test and decided to ask his clergyman father if there was any chance of him getting a car for Christmas, which was yet some months away. 'Okay.' said his father 'I tell you what I'll do. If you can get your 'A' level grades up to 'A's and 'B's, study your bible and get your hair cut, I'll consider the matter very seriously.

A couple of months later Danny went back to his father who said 'I'm really impressed by your commitment to your studies. Your grades are excellent and the work you have put into your bible studies is very encouraging. However, I have to say I'm very disappointed that you haven't had your hair cut yet.

Danny was a smart young man who was never lost for an answer. 'Look dad. In the course of my bible studies, I've noticed in the illustrations that Moses, John the Baptist, Samson and even Jesus had long hair.' 'Yes. I'm aware of that...' replied his father '... but did you also notice they walked wherever they went?

## A Pastors Message

A pastor who had parked his car at a no parking zone, in a large city, because he was short of time, just couldn't find a space with a meter. So, he put a note under the windshield wiper that read, I have circled the block 100 times & if I don't park here I am going to miss my appointment.

Underneath he wrote, "FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES"



When he returned to his car he found a citation from a police officer along with this note which read,

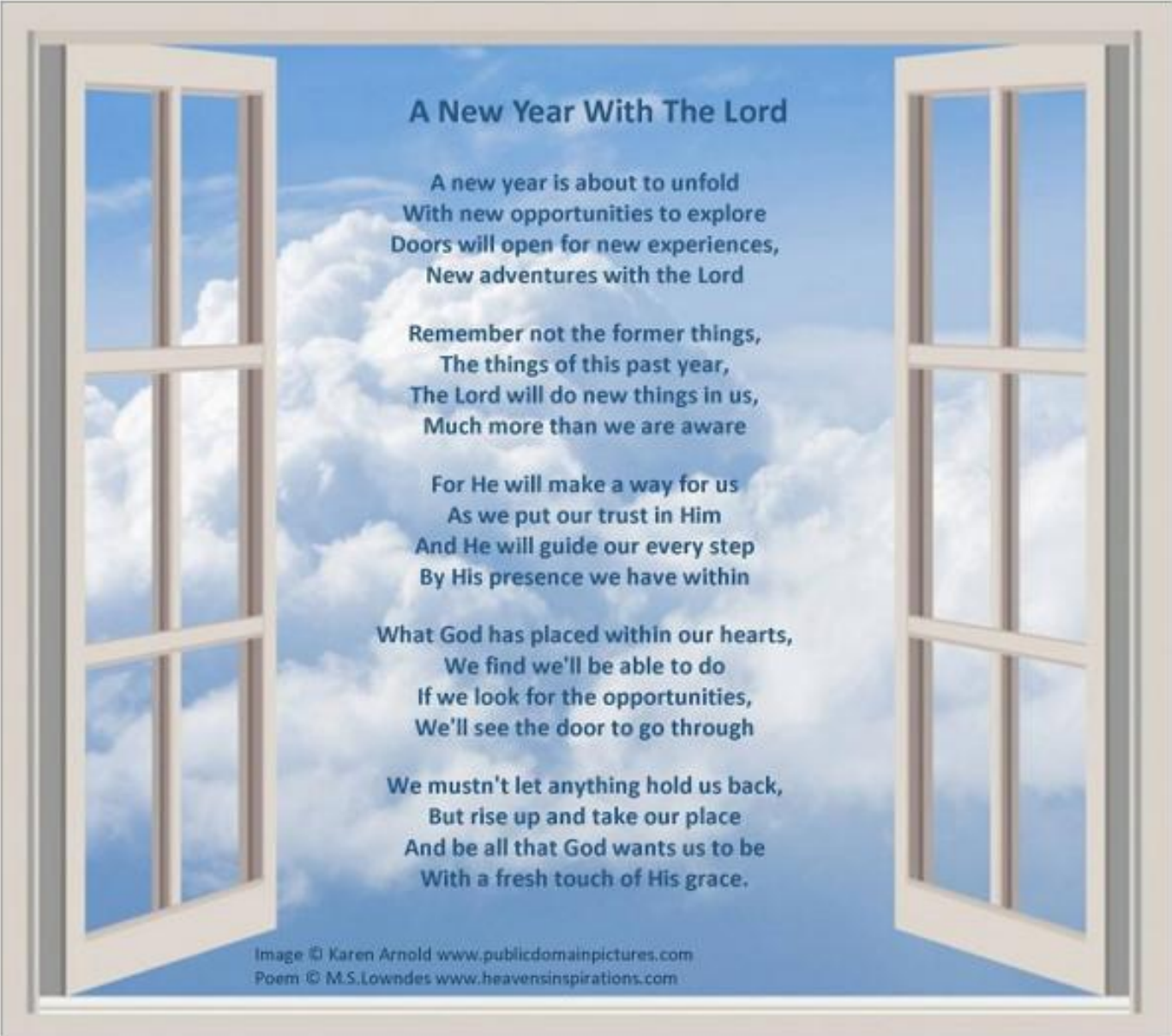
I have circled this block for 10 years & if I don't give you a ticket, I'll lose my job.

Underneath it read, "LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION"



*A Pastor was trying to cheer up his gloomy congregation.*

*"In these days of escalating inflation, isn't it good to know that the wages of sin remain just the same?"*



## A New Year With The Lord

A new year is about to unfold  
With new opportunities to explore  
Doors will open for new experiences,  
New adventures with the Lord

Remember not the former things,  
The things of this past year,  
The Lord will do new things in us,  
Much more than we are aware

For He will make a way for us  
As we put our trust in Him  
And He will guide our every step  
By His presence we have within

What God has placed within our hearts,  
We find we'll be able to do  
If we look for the opportunities,  
We'll see the door to go through

We mustn't let anything hold us back,  
But rise up and take our place  
And be all that God wants us to be  
With a fresh touch of His grace.

Image © Karen Arnold [www.publicdomainpictures.com](http://www.publicdomainpictures.com)  
Poem © M.S.Lowndes [www.heavensinspirations.com](http://www.heavensinspirations.com)



CHRISTMAS DIDN'T  
*stop at the manger.*  
THAT BABY GREW  
*and became our*  
SAVIOR.



Christmas is a story of **smallness** and the **unexpected**.

We look for God in grand cathedrals and powerful leaders, but the Christmas message tells us to look in a tiny stable, in the arms of a young, likely scared, teenage mother. God did not arrive with fanfare and glory, but as a vulnerable baby, the smallest of all human beings, in a town overlooked by many.

This reminds us that God often works in ways we cannot immediately see or understand, in the most ordinary places of our lives: our homes, our workplaces, our relationships. True fulfillment isn't found in seeking status or power, but in service to others, in quiet acts of kindness, and in finding humility.

This Christmas, don't let the commercial noise or personal struggles distract you. Instead, look for the miracle in the mundane. Look for the divine in the face of the stranger, the marginalized, the person who doesn't have it all together.

When we open our hearts to the small, unexpected ways God appears, we find that the light of divine love shines even in our world's darkest corners.