

HomeWord Center for Youth and Family

HomeWord's Family Christmas Devotional Series

A series of 16 family Christmas devotionals to help make the most of your family's Christmas season.

Titles in the series:

1. A Look at Angels
2. Being Part of God's Plan
3. A Look at the Shepherds
4. Christmas Can Change Your Life
5. Christmas Food for the Soul
6. Do Not Be Afraid
7. Away in a Palace?
8. A Light in the Darkness
9. For Unto Us a Child is Born
10. Christmas: When Your Heart Grows Three Sizes
11. Christmas: Just in Time!
12. What Christmas Is All About
13. The First Christmas Gifts
14. The Real St. Nicholas
15. The Rest of the Story
16. God With Us

A Look at Angels

This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. —Luke 2:10-14 (KJV)

*Angels from the realms of glory
Wing your flight over all the earth
Ye, who sang creations story
Now proclaim Messiah's birth
Come and worship, come and worship
Worship Christ the newborn King
(from Angels from the Realms of Glory)*

To the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks, angels appeared to announce the birth of Jesus. Today, we don't need angels to appear in the sky in order to hear the great news of Jesus. We have the Bible, churches, fellow-believers, music, and so much more to know that God became man. In the celebration of Christmas that many primarily see as a time of family gatherings and gift giving, we are blessed to know the real reason for the season!

Today, it's common to see angels displayed on our Christmas trees. Yet, I'm guessing many people don't think much about the "why". Like the other ornaments on the tree, angels look pretty. But, there's so much more to the story!

So, it's worth remembering 2,000 years after the event, that the celebration of Jesus' birth began in a lonely field, to lowly shepherds, who received the news from angels in what must have been one of the most spectacular displays ever seen by human eyes.

GOING DEEPER:

1. Why do you think God used angels to announce the birth of Jesus?
2. Why do you think the angels appeared specifically to the shepherds? Why not to people who might seem more important?
3. If Jesus had been born in our time, to whom do you think the angels would choose to make their announcement?

FAMILY TIME:

Use the content above as your family decorates your Christmas tree this year. Put an angel on the tree and take time to remind everyone of the role the angels played in proclaiming the birth of Jesus.

Being Part of God's Plan

This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. —Luke 1:35-38

Mary has an honored place as being the mother of Jesus. In our Christian circles, we celebrate Mary as a virtuous young woman willfully taking on the responsibility of becoming mother of the Son of God. Still, it's easy to overlook the difficulties Mary faced in accepting this role. She was likely in her mid-teens at the time of the angel's announcement. An unmarried teen pregnancy in Jewish culture at the time would have been quite scandalous. She faced the prospect of being an outcast in her hometown. Further, imagine Mary attempting to explain the circumstances of her pregnancy to her parents and to Joseph, her fiancé. Being part of God's plan was no doubt very difficult for Mary.

One of the characteristics that set Mary apart for her role was her willing obedience. "May it be to me as you have said," was Mary's reply to the angel. This is simply amazing.

We, just like Mary, are part of God's plan to carry His light and love to a needy world. Each of us have been given different roles in His plan, but none are unimportant. It might be difficult to see ourselves as being active participants in what God is doing in the world. It's not always easy to say yes to God. Saying yes can mean facing difficulties and even persecution. But, God always provides the means of sustaining us when we choose obedience to His desires for our lives.

As we celebrate Christmas this year, remember Mary as an example of the obedience God desires of us.

GOING DEEPER:

1. Put yourself in Mary's position. How do you think you would have responded to the angel's message?
2. What makes it hard to believe that you are part of God's plan for the world?
3. What can you do to become more obedient to God?

FAMILY TIME:

Watch the movie, *The Nativity Story* with your family. Afterward, use the content above to debrief, noting Mary's obedience and bringing home the concept that God calls us to similar obedience as well.

A Look at the Shepherds

This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt

When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. —Luke 2:17-20

Having heard the angel's pronouncement concerning Jesus' birth, and the heavenly army praising God, the shepherds left their fields and flocks to find Jesus. They wanted to see for themselves.

After they had seen Jesus, they didn't keep the amazing circumstances to themselves. As the Gospel of Luke records, "they spread the word." Then, they returned to their fields and flocks, glorifying and praising God.

No further description is provided about these shepherds in the Scriptures regarding how their lives were impacted by what they had heard and seen. But, it's easy to imagine that they were never quite the same. It's not difficult to believe that they kept telling the story to anyone willing to listen.

Today, we're not much different than the shepherds were. We, like them, have the opportunity to encounter Jesus. We, like them, can be changed by the encounter. We, like them, can share the Good News about Jesus wherever our journeys take us. We, like them, can praise and glorify God. And we, like them, can return to our responsibilities and stations in life and keep telling others about the King of Kings.

As we celebrate Christmas, may we choose not to keep the Good News of Jesus a secret. Out of thanksgiving for what God has done for us and in us, let's praise and glorify Him, and share the Good News with whomever is willing to listen.

GOING DEEPER:

1. Can you imagine it possible that your belief in Jesus might be traced back to a shepherd who went to Bethlehem, saw Jesus and told others about the experience? Why or why not?
2. What do you find hardest about telling others the Good News of Jesus?
3. How would you choose to live differently today if you were convinced that your belief in Jesus might influence someone who will live two thousand years from now to also believe?

FAMILY TIME:

On a clear and starry night before Christmas, rally the troops for a little field trip. Find a safe, outdoor spot where you can clearly enjoy seeing the stars. Ask everyone to imagine a night like this 2,000 years ago. Then, ask everyone what they think it might have been like to have the quiet shattered by light and angels pronouncing the birth of Jesus. Then, use the content above to have a discussion about the shepherds.

Christmas Can Change Your Life

This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt

*Jesus said, "Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God."
Matthew 3: 8 (NLT)*

One of my all-time favorite Christmas movies is *The Muppet Christmas Carol*. It retains the same story as the classic, but it's much funnier. The message that it's not too late to change your life rings loud and clear. So, why not watch the movie and do some reflection on your life? There's no better time than Christmastime, as we celebrate God's greatest gift to us, to make a decision to change! Know that the power of Christ is present to help you!

We celebrate Christmas because God sent Jesus into the world to show us our need to change our lives and to follow the example of His life.

GOING DEEPER:

1. What lessons can we learn from the things that Scrooge experienced?
2. Is it ever too late to change your mind about how you live your life? Why or why not?
3. If you were to choose one thing that you would change about how your life, what would it be?

FAMILY TIME: Watch *The Muppet Christmas Carol* with your family and use the questions above to debrief after the movie is over.

Christmas Food for the Soul

This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again." John 6:35

With Christmastime comes lots of good food. Christmas candy, cookies, cakes, pies, and Christmas dinner are all part of the special nature of our Christmas celebrations. It's commonly noted that on average, people gain between five and ten pounds during the holiday season. Yikes! But, while we're enjoying stuffing ourselves with Christmas goodies, how about doing some thinking on our spiritual nourishment?

Christmas is a wonderful time to remember that Jesus is the "bread of life." It's a powerful illustration of what Jesus is meant to be to our lives. He's the source of life. He's the food our souls need!

This Christmas, make sure your feeding your soul a healthy diet of Jesus.

GOING DEEPER:

1. What can you do this Christmas to make sure you are filling your soul with Jesus?
2. Can we ever have too much of Jesus? Why or why not?

FAMILY TIME:

Bake and decorate homemade Christmas cookies. Allow everyone in the family to participate in some way. Let everyone in the family request their favorite kind of cookie. As you make cookies, use the content above to remind your family that Jesus is the "bread of life."

Do Not Be Afraid!

This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:8-11

There are a lot of scary things in our world these days like wars, natural disasters, violence, and economic difficulties. If we don't keep a close eye on our attitudes and perspectives, fear can creep into our lives. Unchecked fear can paralyze and damage our souls, making it difficult to live life to the fullest, as God intends.

In another, long ago dark time of human history, it should not go without notice that when God breaks onto the scene to announce the birth of Jesus, the first thing the angel said to the shepherds was, "Do not be afraid!"

We celebrate Christmas as God loved us so much to give us the gift of Jesus who is able to conquer the fear in our lives as we trust in Him.

"Perfect love drives out fear." 1 John 4:18

"Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." 1 Peter 5:17

*"Fear not," then said the Angel,
"let nothing you affright,
This day is born a Savior
Of pure Virgin bright,
To free all those who trust in Him
From Satan's power and might."
O tidings of comfort and joy,
comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.
(from God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen)*

GOING DEEPER:

1. What makes you afraid?
2. How has fear been an obstacle to experiencing joy in your life?
3. In what ways can celebrating Christmas serve to drive fear out of your life?

FAMILY TIME:

Seal an empty box, and wrap it with Christmas wrapping to make it look like a Christmas present. On the side of the box, cut a slit in it, large enough to slip a piece of paper into the

box. Set the box under the Christmas tree. Use the content above to have a family discussion about how Jesus came to free us from fear. After the discussion, give each family a piece of paper and a pen. Have everyone make a list of what makes them afraid. When everyone is done, have them place their list in the empty box under the Christmas tree, explaining that as a family, you are symbolically choosing to give your fears to Jesus. Keep the box under the tree until just before Christmas as a reminder that with Jesus in our lives, there is no reason to fear. Remove the box and dispose of it before the family opens their Christmas gifts.

Away in a Palace?

This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:6-7

Wouldn't you expect the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords to be born in a palace with luxuries all around? That makes sense, but wasn't the way the birth of Jesus took place.

*Why lies He in such mean estate
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here,
The silent Word is pleading.
This, this is Christ the King
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing.
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.
(from *What Child is This?*)*

Jesus, the Savior of the world, entered this world under the most humble circumstances. No pomp, no palace, just a barn. I'm confident that the God of the Universe could have arranged for at least one available room in the inn. But, He didn't. Have you ever wondered why? I have to believe it was done in keeping with the humility and gentleness that Jesus would demonstrate His entire life.

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30 In the Scriptures we never see Jesus forcing Himself upon others. Rather, we find a loving invitation to come and follow. The invitation is still open. We celebrate Christmas, recognizing the gentle and humble nature of the Savior.

GOING DEEPER:

1. What do the circumstances of Jesus' humble birth teach you about God?
2. What other reasons might God have had in Jesus' humble birth?
3. If Jesus had been born in a palace, would have made any difference to you? Why or why not?

FAMILY TIME:

In most areas, sometime around Christmas, you can find a church or other organization that hosts a "live" nativity scene. Take your family on an outing if such an opportunity exists. Alternatively, there are bound to be some nativity displays to be found in your area, even if they aren't "live." Visit one of these. Another alternative would be to gather around a crèche in your home. Once gathered, use the above content for a family discussion about the humble circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth.

A Light in the Darkness

This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. Isaiah 9:2

This prophecy of the coming Messiah brought a sense of hope to people living in dark, difficult times. At times, we've all sensed the reality of living in a dark world. The hope of the prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus, who said, *"I am the light of the world."* (See also Matthew 4:12-16.) Through Jesus, we can live our lives in the light of His love, peace, and truth.

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of men...The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." John 1:4, 8

*O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie.
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.
(from O Little Town of Bethlehem)*

We celebrate Christmas because God gave Jesus to us to shine light upon any darkness in our lives.

GOING DEEPER:

1. How has Jesus brought light to your life?
2. What are some actions you can take today to demonstrate the light of Jesus to someone else?

FAMILY TIME:

Today, light a candle in your home as a reminder of the light Jesus gives us. Use the content above to engage your family in a discussion about Jesus as the "light of life." Encourage family members to be a source of light in the lives of others. Continue lighting the candle throughout the Christmas season as an ongoing reminder.

For Unto Us a Child is Born

This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. — Isaiah 9:6

Who would come to save the world? A powerful ruler? A mighty warrior? A skilled politician? Any of these expectations would make sense. But, God decided that Jesus would enter the world scene, just as we all have done, as a baby. As an adult, Jesus did not seek a political office. He did not come to overthrow governments. He came in obedience to do the will of His Heavenly Father. Through his obedience, and by His death and resurrection, He was proved to be the Son of God.

*So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh;
Come peasant, king to own Him.
The King of Kings salvation brings;
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
This, this is Christ the King
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing.
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.
(from What Child is This?)*

The angel Gabriel told Mary, “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” Luke 1:31-33

We celebrate Christmas as the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, whom the Scriptures say will reign forever and ever.

GOING DEEPER:

1. In what ways has Jesus been a Wonderful Counselor to you?
2. How has He been the Prince of Peace in your life?
3. What examples from Jesus’ life can you think of that demonstrate He was a different kind of leader than what the world was accustomed to experiencing?

FAMILY TIME:

Use the content above to have a family discussion. On a plain sheet of paper (maybe one in typical Christmas colors) use a marker to write the words, “Welcome Jesus!” at the top. Then, as a family, make a list of all of the things that made Jesus special. For example, one item on the list might be “He healed the sick.” Another might be, “He was humble and gentle.” When completed, post the list in a place where the entire family can be easily reminded of Jesus, the Son of God, whose coming we celebrate at Christmas.

Christmas: When Your Heart Grows Three Sizes*This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt**I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. —Ezekiel 36:26*

In Dr. Seuss' classic Christmas tale, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, the Grinch suffers from having a small heart. The source of his heart problem is his lack of understanding the meaning of Christmas. As the story goes, the Grinch tries to put a stop to Christmas, but in the end, he comes to understand what Christmas is all about and his heart grows three sizes! This heart change makes a big difference in his life.

I'm not sure what Dr. Seuss' intentions were when he wrote the story back in 1957, but it certainly comes across as a Christian parable to me that parallels the change that takes place in a person's life when he or she comes to understand the true meaning of Christmas: the birth of Jesus, God's Son, who was born to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). When the light of the Good News of Jesus dawns upon the heart of a person, God replaces the old heart of stone, with a new, fleshy heart – and a new person emerges. As the Apostle Paul wrote, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come!"* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

*"Welcome Christmas – While we stand – Heart to heart – And hand in hand."*¹ It might just make all the difference in the world.

*O Holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in;
Be born in us today!
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel!
(from O Little Town of Bethlehem)*

We celebrate Christmas because of the power Jesus brought to change our hearts.

GOING DEEPER:

1. Give an example of a time when you changed your mind about something.
2. How did the words or action of others influence your change of heart?
3. Towards the end of the story, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, what happened that caused the Grinch to change his mind about Christmas?
4. How has understanding the true meaning of Christmas made a difference in your life?

¹ *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, Copyright © 1957, Dr. Seuss.

FAMILY TIME:

Gather your family together and watch the classic half-hour Christmas cartoon, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Then, using the content above, lead your family in a discussion about how Jesus has the power to change our hearts.

Christmas: Just in Time!

This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt

But when the right time came, God sent his son, born of a woman, subject to the Law. Galatians 4:4 (NLT)

Most of us have our traditions when it comes to Christmas gift opening. Some families open their gifts on Christmas Eve. Some families open their gifts on Christmas morning. Some spread out their gift opening over several days to extend the enjoyment. Regardless of when you open your Christmas presents, you likely feel that you have the “right moment”.

It’s fascinating to me that God’s gift to us, the birth of His son Jesus; when God became human, was just at the right moment. Not a moment too early; not a moment too late. “*But when the right time came,*” the Scripture reveals.

Thankfully, we have the certainty of Scriptures, that Jesus did come; that He lived among us; that He died for our sins; that He conquered death and rose again. We have the benefit of those Christ-followers who have gone before us, passing down to us the assurance of Jesus’ life and ministry among us. We share in the legacy of what God has done in human history and continues to do in during our time. We are a part of His ongoing story in the world.

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel
(from O come, O come, Emmanuel)*

We celebrate Christmas as the time to remember and give thanks for Jesus, who came “just in time!”

GOING DEEPER:

1. If Jesus had not come when He did, but was born during our time, do you think you would recognize Him? Why or why not?
2. What part have other people had in helping you to connect (and/or keep you connected) to Jesus?
3. Thank one of these people this week.

FAMILY TIME:

Use the above content to engage your family in a discussion about Jesus birth as being “just in time.” Then together, plan a family “just in time” project. Think of people in your world (relatives, friends, neighbors) who have specific needs. Discuss these and decide on one person whose need you believe you can meet. Then, devise a plan for your family to meet that need. For example, there might be an elderly neighbor who can’t do fall clean up on their yard. Your family can set a date and go over to the home and do some leaf raking.

When you meet the need, be sure to tell the person that you are helping out as a way to celebrate Jesus, whose birth was “just in time.”

What Christmas Is All About

This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." —Luke 2:8-11

One of my favorite Christmas television specials of all-time is *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. In the cartoon, Charlie Brown wrestles with the true meaning of Christmas in the midst of a world that seems overloaded with commercialism. First appearing in 1965, the issues Charlie Brown grapples with ring just as true today as they did over 40 years ago.

In one scene, Charlie Brown is so frustrated, he yells, *"Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?"* To answer, Charlie's friend Linus steps out onto the auditorium stage and recites the Christmas story straight from the Gospel of Luke. It seems so simple. Yet today, many people celebrate the holiday for a lot of reasons, and some have nothing to do with the birth of Christ, like family traditions, a day off from work, a time of gift-giving, Santa Claus, parties, and so on. Commercialism and materialism is a part of the fabric of Christmas celebrations in our society. It's easy to forget that "Jesus is the reason for the season."

*Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,
Born this happy morning,
Jesus, to Thee be
all glory given;
Son of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing;
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ, the Lord. —(from O Come, All Ye Faithful)*

Make this one of your best Christmases by choosing to make the birth of Jesus the primary motivation for your celebrations.

GOING DEEPER:

1. What problems did Charlie Brown face in trying to understand the real meaning of Christmas?
2. How does commercialism and materialism detract from the real meaning of Christmas?
3. What can you do this Christmastime to remind yourself of the real meaning of Christmas?

FAMILY TIME:

Watch *A Charlie Brown Christmas* with your family and use the content above to debrief after the program is over.

The First Christmas Gifts

This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 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 and of incense and of myrrh. —Matthew 2:9-11

The magi went to great lengths to find Jesus, the newborn king, traveling a great distance to find him. Following the star, they eventually found Jesus. When they did, they worshipped Him, and gave him the first Christmas gifts: gold, incense and myrrh.

*We three kings of orient are;
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain,
Moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.
(from We Three Kings of Orient Are)*

Two things stand out in this encounter. First, the magi were pagan astrologers, but they were moved to find the king of the Jews. And when they did, these astrologers bowed down and worshiped Jesus. It's amazing that even at Jesus' birth, we have an important picture painted for us that He would be the redeemer sent to everyone, not just a select few, and that our response to Jesus is that of worship. Secondly, we see the magi presenting Jesus with precious gifts. Giving and receiving gifts are a favorite part of our Christmas celebrations today. Yet typically, we celebrate Christmas more for God's gift of Jesus to us than as a time when we give gifts to Jesus. Maybe it's time to change our priorities. We can give gifts to Jesus through our worship and through our commitment to follow Him. As we celebrate Christmas this year, choose to give Jesus your life as a gift to Him.

GOING DEEPER:

1. Why do you feel the magi wanted to find Jesus?
2. Does the magi's response to finding Jesus (worshipping and giving gifts) seem odd to you? Why or why not?
3. What is something specific you can do to give Jesus a Christmas gift this year?

FAMILY TIME:

Before Christmas, find an empty box and put a mirror in it. With a dry-erase marker write the words, "To: Jesus" on the mirror. Then close the box and wrap it with Christmas gift-wrapping. Put a tag on it that reads "To: Jesus." When your family is opening Christmas gifts, use the content above to have a discussion about the Magi, who brought gifts to Jesus. Then, have a family member open the box and look inside. Pass the box with the mirror in it (or just pass around the mirror) to everyone in the family as a reminder that we can give ourselves to Jesus as His Christmas gift.

The Real St. Nicholas

This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. —1 Corinthians 11:1

Many families choose not to include Santa Claus as a part of their Christmas celebrations. The legend of Santa, the North Pole, flying reindeer, keeping naughty and nice lists, and coming down the chimney can seem as just too much distraction from the true meaning of Christmas for many Christian families. But, whatever your family chooses to do with Santa Claus, it may be worthwhile to consider the historical St. Nicholas.

“Nicholas lived long ago, in the third century, in a place called Asia Minor, what is now the country of Turkey. His parents died from an illness while Nicholas was a teenager and left him a large inheritance of money. Nicholas’ parents taught him about Jesus. As he grew older, he followed the teachings of Jesus and sold all his possessions, secretly giving money to those in need.

“Nicholas became well-loved by the people and later became the Bishop of Myra. He died on December 6, 343 A.D. The anniversary of his death became a day of celebration in his honor, called *St. Nicholas Day*. On this day, children would give and receive small gifts of candy, chocolate initial letters, or riddles hidden in baked goods or in elaborate packaging. Children also hung stockings by the fire or placed shoes filled with carrots and hay for the horse, eagerly awaiting gifts from St. Nicholas. Gold balls or oranges were given to represent the gifts of gold once given by St. Nicholas.”¹

Influenced by St. Nicholas’ popularity in Europe, immigrants brought his story and tradition to America. Over the years, legend was wedded to historical elements and developed into our modern day Santa Claus.

While we celebrate Christmas as the birth of Jesus, we can have an appropriate appreciation for the lives He has touched. This includes those whose lives demonstrated compassion and selflessness out of their love for Jesus. St. Nicholas was such a person.

GOING DEEPER:

1. What is your family’s approach on Santa Claus as part of your Christmas celebrations? Why?
2. How might considering the historical St. Nicholas actually add to your family’s Christmas celebration rather than distract from it?

FAMILY TIME:

Even if Santa Claus isn’t part of your family’s Christmas celebrations, it’s certain that they will be exposed to images and messages of Santa (television, movies, stores, decorations, family traditions) during the holiday season. At an appropriate point, use the content above to engage your family in a discussion about the historical St. Nicholas and the wonderful

example he set as a follower of Jesus. As a family, show some compassion and selflessness by choosing someone (perhaps someone needy) and decide on a meaningful gift you can give this person for Christmas. Together, deliver the gift to this person.

1The Real Santa Claus: The Wonderful Story of St. Nicholas by Jim Burns and Leslie Snyder.

The Rest of the Story

This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. —Matthew 1:21

Each December we celebrate Christmas for the birth of Jesus. Then, in the spring, we celebrate Easter for Jesus' death and resurrection. But really, these two parts of the story of Jesus' life cannot be separated. Christmas would lose its meaning without remembering what Jesus *did* during His life.

Jesus lived to reveal God to us. He was crucified and rose again to pay the penalty for our sins, to invite us into relationship with God, and to offer us eternal life.

Hail! the heaven-born Prince of Peace!

Hail! the Son of Righteousness!

Light and life to all He brings,

Risen with healing in His wings.

Mild He lays His glory by,

Born that man no more may die;

Born to raise the sons of earth,

Born to give them second birth

Hark! the herald angels sing,

"Glory to the newborn King"

(from Hark! The Herald Angels Sing)

We celebrate Christmas not only for Jesus' birth, but also for His life, death and resurrection. Through Him, we have a real reason to celebrate. We have our sins forgiven!

GOING DEEPER:

1. How do you feel our Christmas celebrations would be different if Jesus had not have been crucified or raised from the dead?
2. Make a list of all the reasons you are thankful for Jesus.

FAMILY TIME:

First, make a Christmas ornament out of a large nail. If you don't have a large nail at home, visit a local home improvement or hardware store and purchase the largest nail you can find. At home, use some Christmas ribbon and glue to secure the ribbon to the nail. Tie the ribbon at the ends to make a loop. Then, use the above content to have a family discussion about Jesus and "the rest of the story". Together, hang the nail ornament on your Christmas tree as a reminder that even as your family celebrates Christmas, you will remember all that Jesus has done.

God With Us

This devotional was written by Jim Liebelt

The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel — which means, "God with us." —Matthew 1:23

None of us living today have actually seen God. This doesn't cause me any concern, because we have the Scriptures, fellow-believers, and the Holy Spirit living within us to demonstrate God's ongoing presence in our world.

But, can you imagine the opportunity those who lived when Jesus lived on earth had? Those who saw Jesus saw God. Can you imagine the disciples? They walked, talked, and shared meals with God. Can you imagine the Apostle John? He laid his head on God. (John 13:23 – New American Standard – reads, *"There was reclining on Jesus' bosom, one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved."*)

In Jesus, God became man, and lived among us (See John 1). Through His life, He revealed God to us. And, the impact of His presence with us still shapes and transforms lives. He is still present through His Holy Spirit to transform yours.

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.
(from Joy to the World)*

We celebrate Christmas for the miracle that in Jesus, God is with us.

GOING DEEPER:

1. How has your life changed because God is with us?
2. How does knowing that God is with us bring hope to your life?

FAMILY TIME:

Go online to search for a copy of Louis Cassels story, *The Parable of the Birds*. Print off a copy. Gather your family together and read the parable, and then use the content above to engage in discussion about the miracle that in Jesus, God is with us.