

Experiencing Christmas

My Dear Friends,

Christmas can be one of the greatest times of the year, full of wonders and miracles, or it can be a time of distress and depression. When we respond like Mary did in Luke 1:38, “let it be to me according to your word” we give God permission to let the supernatural unfold in our lives. The reason we often miss the supernatural Christ of Christmas is because misguided materialism drives us into a frenzied pace that turns the wonders of Christmas into a time of distress, depression and frustration.

Christmas is the celebration of Christ, which reveals to us the love of the supernatural God who visits His people with signs and wonders. Christmas reminds us that we can expect the Lord to move in our lives in a supernatural way at exactly the right time. Paul speaks of this fullness of time in Gal.4:4, “in the fullness of time.”

In the Christmas Story we see this fullness of time as Jesus Christ was born at a time when the transportation system of the Roman Empire paved the way for the gospel to be spread throughout the then-known world. The Greek culture had provided a universal language of Greek for communicating the gospel. As we reflect on God’s perfect timing for the miracle of Christmas, we are reminded that He has a plan, a timing and a miracle for allowing everything to work out for good in our lives (Romans 8:28).

In Matthew 1:21 we see that the real reason we celebrate Christmas is because Jesus was born and He will “*save His people from their sins.*” The reality of this fact offers hope to those of us who realize we have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Yet even though we were sinners destined to hell, God loved us and came among us. That is why we celebrate Christmas.

The symbols of Christ’s gift of forgiveness and eternal life are everywhere during the Christmas season. There are Christmas trees, brightly decorated to remind us of the fact Jesus is the light of hope in a dark world. The evergreen Christmas tree itself reflects life even as all the other trees have lost their leaves.

Then there is the candy cane. It is said there was a candy maker who wanted to invent a candy that was a witness of Christ. First of all, he used a hard candy because Christ is the rock of ages. This hard candy was shaped so that it would resemble a “J” for Jesus or, if turned upside down, a shepherd’s staff. He made it white to represent the purity of Christ. Finally a red stripe was added to represent the blood of Christ shed for the sins of the world, and three thinner red stripes for the stripes He received on our behalf from the Roman soldiers. The flavor of the cane is peppermint, which is similar to hyssop. Hyssop is in the mint family and was used in the Old Testament for purification and sacrifice.



God's plan for our lives involves supernatural seasons. We are reminded of this with the evergreen Christmas tree that continues to remain green in the cold winter months when most of the other trees have lost their leaves. In spite of the circumstances, we can also remain alive as we move forward with a certain rhythm of heavenly timing. We learn that as we pass through winter, spring, summer and fall that God has everything under control; for we learn that to "*everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven*" (Eccl. 3:1).

The passages of Christmas teach us that we need to look for God's perfect timing and recognize it when it comes. Jesus corrected those who noticed only the seasons but ignored the signs of the times of what God was doing in the world and in their personal lives (Matt. 16:3). How we need to seek Jesus during this Christmas season to discover His power of supernatural seasons in our lives!

Christmas not only shows us God's supernatural timing, but also how He weaves signs, wonders, and miracles into everyday life as He fulfills His promises. The birth of Jesus Christ is a fulfillment of God's promise to His people to send a Savior. "*The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son*" (Isaiah 7:14).

The Christmas Story is full of signs, which communicate heavenly information. For example, the shepherds were told that the Christ child would be a sign to them, (Luke 2:12) and the wise men were directed by the sign of a star (Matt. 2:9-10). The fulfillment of the prophecies through the birth of Jesus Christ remains a sign to believers of all ages. In the scriptures we see that over 300 prophecies were fulfilled when Jesus was born.

Isaiah, in one of his many prophecies that Jesus fulfilled, declared, "*Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful*" (Is. 9:6).

All over in the Christmas Story we see the wonderful work of God displayed. It is shown in each of the appearances of the angels. Just as the announcement of Christ's birth woke Mary, Joseph and the shepherds to the wonders of this historical event, even so we can be awakened. How we need God to deliver us from the superficial aspects of Christmas and awaken us to the wonders of His love revealed through the sending of His Son and the beauty of His creation.

"When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and matures in us, so that we are free of worry on Judgement Day - our standing in the world is identical with Christ's. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life - fear of death, fear of judgement - is one not yet fully formed in love. We, though, are going to love - love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first" (I John 4:17-19 The Message Bible).

Christmas is a time of love, when God desires to work miracles in our lives. Reflecting on the miracle of Christmas causes us to realize that “*all things are possible to him who believes*” (Mark 9:23). The miracle of Christmas involves the miracle of the incarnation where Jesus was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit without the involvement of a human father (Luke 1:35). This made it possible for God the Son to become a human being without giving up His deity.

When we accept the reality of this miracle, we are then able to realize that the celebration of Christmas is the celebration of God’s miraculous power of love. This means that when things look impossible, we are reminded that Jesus is the living miracle who causes us to confess that “*all things are possible for those who believe*” (Mark 9:23).

The fact is that as we try to believe, we find ourselves frequently facing opposition, doubt and fear. God’s response throughout the Christmas Story is “*fear not*”. The angel said to Mary, “*Fear not, Mary..... The Holy Ghost will come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you... For with God nothing shall be impossible*” (Luke 1:30, 35, 37).

As we struggle with God’s promise and plans for us, we need to let His “*fear not*” reassure us that His power and provision are sufficient to meet every need. In Luke 2:10-11 we see the angel telling shepherds to, “*fear not: for, behold, I bring to 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 Savior, which is Christ the Lord.*”

Just as the shepherds were told, even so we must also be reminded that in spite of the circumstances, miracles are often born in the least expected times and places! Joseph was reminded of this when the angel told him, “*Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife*” (Matt. 1:20). Just like Joseph, we must be reminded that faith means loving someone enough to not cast them aside, but instead trust that God is at work in their life. Joseph, instead of walking out on the relationship, believed God’s promise and stuck with it in spite of the circumstances.

As God releases His signs, wonders, and miracles in our lives, we must accept them with believing hearts. If we let unbelief, cynicism, greed, or double-mindedness creep in, we will find ourselves missing out on the miracle of Christmas.

We must let every Christmas light that we see remind us that, “*God is light, pure light; there’s not a trace of darkness in Him. If we claim that we experience a shared life with Him and continue to stumble around in the dark, we’re obviously lying through our teeth - we’re not living what we claim. But if we walk in the light, God Himself being the light, we also experience a shared life with one another, as the sacrificed blood of Jesus, God’s Son, purges all our sins*” (I John 1:5-7 The Message Bible).

At first Zacharias did not accept the promise the angel was sharing with him. As a result of his doubting, he was not able to speak until the angel’s words were fulfilled “*in their own time*” (Luke 1:20). Even though his faith was slow, he remained faithful until the moment of his son, John’s birth arrived. As he held this miracle in his own two hands, he was able to speak and he offered up a song of praise to the God of miracles (see Luke 1:57-80).

The last part of this song of praise goes like this, *“Through the heartfelt mercies of our God, God’s Sunrise will break in upon us, shining on those in the darkness, those sitting in the shadow of death. Then showing us the way, one foot at a time, down the path of peace”* (Luke 1:78, 79 The Message Bible).

Just as Mary celebrated the miracle of Christmas and declared, *“I am the Lord’s servant, may it be to me as you have said”* (Luke 1:38), we are also invited to receive this Christmas miracle and let Christ be born within us. In Mary’s case, it was in the incarnation. In our case, it is the re-creation. *“If anyone be in Christ they are a new creation. The old has passed away the new has come”* (2 Cor. 5:17). When this re-creation has taken place in our lives we shall join Mary in the celebration and declare, *“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me - holy is His name”* (Luke 1:46-49).

This Christmas let’s truly celebrate the miracle for, *“He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty”* (Luke 1:52, 53). Instead of fearing the uncertainty of the future let’s experience the miracle of Christmas knowing that God has promised *“to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve Him without fear”* (Luke 1:73, 74).

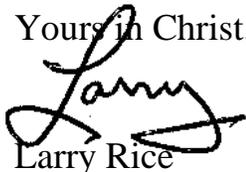
Jesus Christ was born a homeless child and placed in a manger, *“because there was no room for them in the inn”* (Luke 2:7). We will never truly feel the spirit of Christmas or be at home in any place until we have made room in our heart for Jesus by reaching out and helping those in need.

The miracle of Christmas is reserved for those of us who realize that we are sinners in need of a Savior. This realization causes us to be stripped of our self-righteousness. We see our helplessness and the fact that unless a Savior arrives on the scene we are eternally damned.

In the midst of the darkness, despair and hopelessness, an angel of the Lord appears and tells us he has got good news of great joy. A Savior has been born. Eyes and ears are opened and *“suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men (that includes the women) on whom His favor rests’”* (Luke 2:14).

Yes, let’s celebrate Christmas. There is hope. A Savior has been born. This realization touches every area of our lives. We are able to say, *“Thank you Father that I have your favor through Jesus Christ. I am no longer a victim because you have made me a victor. Your favor is opening for me doors of opportunity both now and throughout all eternity.”*

Yours in Christ,



Larry Rice