

# Reflections

Jesus -  
God's glorious plan to save the world.

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## Prayer - A Conversation

By: Pastor Norm

Have you ever wondered how prayer works? Can God hear our silent prayers or do we need to speak them aloud? Does God hear our prayers instantly or do they go into a holding cell and He gets to them when he has time? How long does it take a prayer to get to heaven? These are questions I had a long time ago; fortunately, I think I've answered most of them.

I suppose there is one I still have. The one question that keeps me up at night, sometimes, is this: if God knows what I need and He knows what I'm going to ask, and if He has it all worked out in advance, then why go through the exercise? The answer I have come up with is this: prayer is not an exercise. Prayer is more than a

spiritual discipline, although prayer does require discipline. Prayer is communication, not for the sake of exchanging information but to enter into communion with the one who made us, the one who saves us, the one who loves us.

When we pray we enter into the presence of God, we come before the Throne of Grace. We would do well to consider the import of coming into the presence of our Heavenly Father. In Esther we read of the process by which someone might enter into the presence of the King (Esther 4.11). Yet we have direct access to God, through Christ.

It's hard to pray when you're in a hurry. The great danger is that we start to see prayer

as a duty, a job, a task that needs to get done. At that point prayer becomes utilitarian, pragmatic, perfunctory. Jesus prayed all night. I doubt his prayers were any of those things.

I don't pretend to know how prayer works, but I believe that God hears all prayers, silent or spoken, He hears them instantly because He is as near to us as we can possibly imagine. When we pray, it isn't a mere exercise. When we come to God in prayer it is an expression of three things: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.



## Christmas in Cameroon

Sun sets between 6 and 6:30 year round at four degrees longitude in Cameroon, Africa. On Christmas Eve the church gathers after dark and begins the celebration of Christ's birth. Decorations are limited and most-

ly hand made. Single incandescent lights donated by a dear saint from one of our former congregations in Canada are strung among the rafters. The faces are black, except for our family. Christmas carols are sung,

and a talent show begins. Individuals and small groups make their way forward to present their song, sketch or speech. We wonder how long this will last. The presentations are not pol-

*(Continued on page 3)*

By: Dale Hufnagel





## Two Christmas Misconceptions

By: Kurt Redschlag

*The following is an interaction between myself and Kurt, it had me totally flummoxed and confused. I was peeved, until I realized that this was Kurt, being Kurt.*

Hi Kurt,

*I am organizing the December edition of Reflections. The focus will be Jesus and Christmas. I am wondering if you would be interested in writing a story about the mis-conceptions that have become ingrained into our view of Christmas. For example, I have heard that there were not three wise men but more likely a huge entourage. Also, that Jesus was not born on December 25th. Perhaps you could provide some insights. Help set the record straight. Please let me know if you would do this, because if you cannot I need to find an alternative item.*

**H**i Bill,  
Thanks for inviting me to write a Christmas-themed article for the December Newsletter. However, I must graciously decline. But please allow me to briefly explain why I need to pass on this one.

I guess I just don't feel I can honestly defend Dec. 25 as being the actual date of Christ's birth. Perhaps it is, but there is no indisputable evidence. Likewise, I can't find any credible evidence that the three wise men (Magi) either came alone or were accompanied by others. Let me explain. The simple fact is, neither Scripture nor history nor archaeology have revealed to us what the exact date of Jesus' birth was. The early Christians had no fixed date for observing his birth, and it wasn't until the era of emperor Constantine in the fourth century, that Dec. 25 was chosen. And even this was not based on historical evidence, but because they wanted to encourage Christians to celebrate this significant event on a regular and consistent basis. And even to this day, various branches of Christendom celebrate Christmas on different days. For example, for Protestants and Catholics it's Dec. 25, for the Eastern Orthodox it's Jan. 6, and for Armenians it's Jan. 19. With no conclusive evidence for or against Dec. 25 being the actual date of Christ's birth, I'd be uncomfortable trying to state dogmatically that Dec. 25 is in fact the true date of our Lord's birth.

As far as the visit of the wise men (Magi) is concerned, again, we have very limited information - biblically or otherwise. In fact, Scripture doesn't even tell us that there were three of them. We are simply assuming there were three because three gifts were presented to the Christ-child, and, to be sure, that may well be a valid assumption. Did others accompany them? We simply don't know. However, it seems these were important and respected and wealthy men, and thus given their status, it is not unreasonable to assume they may have had others accompany

*... neither Scripture  
nor history nor  
archaeology have  
revealed to us ...*

them, such as servants (to care for and feed the camels, make meals, and provide protection). Admittedly, this is conjecture, but not unreasonable conjecture.

Thus again, I am not comfortable insisting that they came alone - because yes, while they might very well have come alone, it is equally possible that they had others come along with them, especially given it was such a long and arduous journey. And yes, when it comes to who actually met with King Herod and who actually appeared before and worshiped the infant Christ, I'm certain it was only the three Magi.

I'm sorry, Bill, if we differ on these issues, but far more important, I trust we can agree on the fact that Christ *was indeed* born in Bethlehem, and that Joseph was instructed by an angel of the Lord to call him Jesus, "because he will save his people from their sins." That's the true joy of Christmas!

And yes, I would be open to writing an article on the significance of the gifts the Magi presented to the infant Christ if you still wish. Perhaps something along the line of "Gifts Fit for a King . . . don't come from Walmart." Just kidding, just kidding about the last phrase. We all need a smile by now.

Kurt,  
*I totally understand your decision not to write the story. Your arguments were clear and concise and thought-provoking. As for the "Gifts Fit for a King" story, it is too late for 2022, how about we plan it for the December 2023 edition? Ed.*



## Christmas in Cameroon (cont.)

*(Continued from page 1)*

ished and often reflect little skill or aptitude, but it is family – Christ’s family – celebrating His birthday. As midnight arrives, things wind down, everyone is satisfied that we have once again “seen Christ born” and we are beginning another year with a wonderful, personal family celebration. Christ is pleased. All head home to return for the Christmas Day service in the morning. That is what Christmas Eve was like when we attended



our first celebration in Bafoussam, Cameroon. As the years unfolded, we had the responsibility of guiding our own congregation into meaningful traditions. Our hope was that their celebrations would develop into culturally relevant traditions that would stimulate the church’s unity and sense of identity. Our daughter Joanna wrote at least two Christmas plays and since hymns are so important, we formed a Christmas choir and struggled through learning French carols. What fun and

amusement for all - especially singing GLORIA in harmony!

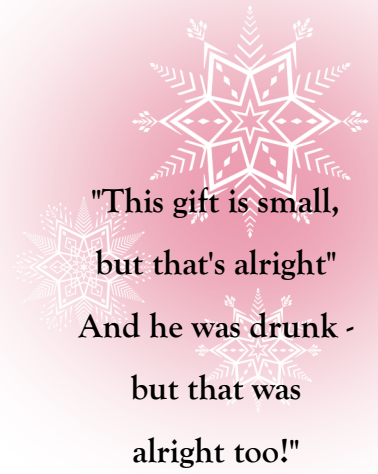
One year, we presented our programme in the church yard for the entire community. I tried to drill it into the actors that they must never present their backs to the audience. What hilarity when Pascal used his shepherd’s staff to “beat” fellow actor Genesis on the behind to get him to face the audience. Another year, as the evening progressed, we all wondered if the third wise-

man would show up so the play could begin. He was a struggling, young believer learning how to yield his life to the control of the Spirit. When Fotsing finally arrived, he was rather drunk. However, the “show must go on”, and so we launched ourselves into the play. When the wisemen stepped forward to present their gifts, Fotsing did a humorous but poignant ad lib. He said, “This gift is small, but that’s alright.” And he was drunk—but that was alright too! Jesus embraced Him

just as much as He did me that night. Fotsing showed up for Christ’s birthday.

As our church formed its identity, and we began to consider how we approach Christmas as a church family, our 2 elders did not want to celebrate Christmas. They saw that it was not a biblically prescribed celebration and was merely a commercial and meaningless holiday. We had to seriously examine what celebrating Christmas could and would mean for us as a church family and how to distinguish our celebration from the world’s. I assured the elders that we could focus the celebration on announcing Christ’s coming to earth for the salvation of mankind, and that it could be a powerful moment to share Christ in our community.

As a family, we had to establish our own traditions as well. We pared down our gift giving to simple, low cost gifts of things that were mostly novelties to us. I remember when I opened up my gift. It was a bottle of pickles. One of the kids opened up a tube of Pringles potato chips—both were items we rarely splurged on during the year. We had our little Christmas tree with a few decorations to remind us of home and listened to lots of Christmas music, especially “I’m Dreaming of a White Christmas.”



"This gift is small,  
but that's alright"  
And he was drunk -  
but that was  
alright too!"

This is a tiny glimpse into Christmases past of the missionary Hufnagel family.

It is too easy to simply treat Christmas as a family party time with a brief pause to do our Church “thing”. Let’s seek to restore the true meaning of Christmas in both our family and Church celebrations. Let us ask the Lord to guide our conversations at work and in our friendships to testify of Christ’s birth some 2,000 years ago.

**Joyeuse Noel a  
vous tous!**



Joanna (age 8), Benjamin (age 3), and Sherri (age 6) - Hufnagels



## A Shoebox Christmas -

By: Donald Nelson



Lillian Snook, Mona Salumu, Jared Snook

Jared, Lilly and Mona with 79 Operation Christmas Child shoebox gifts to be delivered by Samaritans Purse to needy children around the world.

### MANY THANKS:

- To those who organized "packing parties".
- To those who contributed money for delivery.
- To those who "packed boxes" on line
- To those who pray for the children and their families.

## White Christmas Ministry

By: Rick deLeeuw

Wow, can't believe we are turning the corner and heading into December. It is time to launch our White Christmas Ministry, a program that has been a part of Hillview Baptist Church outreach for a number of years.

In my article on the Food Bank last month, we were asked what is the difference between the Food Bank Ministry and our White Christmas Ministry. As I mentioned, the Food Bank is a non-profit organization that collects safe, nutritious

and culturally appropriate food, and redistributes it to individuals and families experiencing food insecurity. Folks have also asked me how do you define food insecurity? Simply put, it means people who have to choose between buying groceries or paying their other bills on time. It is people who do not know where their next meal is coming from. Anyone who meets the definition can apply to the Food Bank.

The White Christmas Ministry is in partnership with Hillview School. The focus is

reaching out to families within the school that are having financial difficulties. As a smaller, independent church we are somewhat limited as to how many families we can assist, however we try not to turn anyone away. Through the generous donations of our church family and special funding, we have in the past provided food hampers and assisted several families to have a happier Christmas. More recently, with the onset of Covid, Alberta Health Services placed restrictions on food handling and, instead of providing food ham-

pers, we are distributing grocery gift cards. This change follows the protocol put in place by Alberta Health and, to our surprise, has received favourable response from families as they can select the grocery items they need. Special thanks to the Woodvale Community League, who have graciously donated and supported our outreach ministry. Pray for our neighbors as we build unity. Blessings to all.



# Our First Christmas

By: Gabriele Bleick



The year is 1989. The top stories that year were the Berlin Wall came down, Brian Mulroney was Prime Minister, and the top selling toy was the Nintendo Game Boy. It is also the year yours truly and Norm were married. May 6th to be exact. We were renting a small one-bedroom apartment in the heart of Coquitlam, British Columbia. Norm was working at Greyhound, and I worked at Denny's as a hostess.

We were on top of the world, we had it made. Fast forward to Christmas Eve and it hit me, we did not have a Christmas tree (how I could have forgotten that I'm not sure, but we were

young and easily distracted). I told Norm we needed a tree. We didn't really have the money so; we did what anyone would do. We decided to visit the nearest forest and get us a tree. Off we went armed with the necessary tools, the best steak knife we owned and a mission to find the best tree ever. Hopping into our 1977 red Datsun hatchback we drove until we found a nice cluster of trees.

Entering the forest with determination, it didn't take long, and I saw it. She was a beautiful pine tree, so lovely and full and about 15 feet tall... way too big but I was determined. Norm was like, "it's too tall" I was like, "but I love it" ....

Norm had a hard time saying no to me (we were newlyweds after all) so I climb on Norm's shoulders and sawed off the top of that beautiful full pine tree. We crammed it into the car and drove home. I strung the lights on and added a few baubles and

it was something to behold. We went to bed that night feeling like we succeeded in something special. Well, we succeeded in something special alright. The next morning, we got up to behold our amazing tree. When I went to turn on the lights I brushed up against the tree and the moment I touched it ALL and I mean ALL the needles came raining down. It was like something out of



"Don't look at me like that. He chose it!"

a cartoon. We looked at each other and laughed so hard we cried.

Our first Christmas together was simple, we were young (21), we were poor, I'm not even sure if there were pre-



Charlie Brown and Linus had a similar situation.



sents under the tree. We had each other, we had God and we had a tree. The tree for me was more than just a tree. It's a beautiful reminder of what Christmas is about. God has blessed us so much in the last 33 years.

*"Norm was like,  
"it's too tall", I was  
like, "but I love  
it" ...*

There have been many ups and downs, but He continues to be ever present in our lives. I don't suggest anyone go into the forest and chop down a tree, I suspect it's not really allowed. Rest assured we don't do that anymore. We have a lovely artificial tree that brings me much joy and honestly, I don't think I could sit on Norm's shoulders anymore.

**On behalf of  
our family to yours  
we wish you  
all a  
Blessed Christmas.**



## An Interview with Jesus

By: Dr. Jerry Shepard

*Just a couple of days after what some have referred to as his Triumphal Entry, Jesus was interviewed by a reporter for the Jerusalem Cable News. Here is just a small part their exchange. Watch for the full interview to be broadcast at a later date.*

**Reporter: Jesus, what is your idea of perfect happiness?**

Jesus: It's interesting that you ask me that. I addressed that very question in one of my first sermons. Some of the things I mentioned that characterized truly happy people were: being poor in spirit, meekness, hungering after righteousness, showing mercy, being pure in heart, peace-making, and suffering persecution in a godly manner.

**Reporter: What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?**

Jesus: There are none.

**Reporter: What is the trait you most deplore in others?**

Jesus: Faithlessness.

**Reporter: What is your greatest extravagance?**

Jesus: My entire life being poured out for the salvation of the world. Interestingly, the greatest extravagances that were ever performed for me were by foreigners who presented me with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and by a woman who took a jar of perfume worth a whole year's wages and poured it out on me. Both of those extravagances actually pointed forward to the day of my death.

**Reporter: Which words or phrases do you most overuse?**

Jesus: I have been told that I overuse the phrase: "Truly, Truly, I say to you." However, truly, truly, I say to you, no one has ever spoken those

words more truly than I have.

**Reporter: What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?**

Jesus: I am already aware that in just a couple of days, I will in fact experience that lowest depth, as I make my way up the Mount of Olives, when my soul will be overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, when I pour out sweat like drops of blood, when the very powers of darkness and evil will sweep over me, and when I will feel completely abandoned by God.

**Reporter: What do you most value in your friends?**

Jesus: Loyalty.

**Reporter: What is your greatest regret?**

Jesus: I have no regrets.

**Reporter: How would you like to die?**

Jesus: That has actually already been determined. Centuries ago, a number of prophets were given, and then passed on in their speeches and writings, detailed descriptions of my impending death. And for the past few weeks, I have been telling my closest followers how my death will take place. Indeed, that is the very reason why I entered Jerusalem, because it is impossible that I should die outside Jerusalem. Many years from now, it will be a common practice to tell about my death in productions that they will call Passion Plays. Well, in just a few days, the very first Passion Play will be performed. The script for the play has already been written. My Father is the writer, producer, and director. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.

**Reporter: What is your motto?**

Jesus: I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

**Reporter: One last question, Jesus. There are rumors that your followers believe that you are the rightful king of the Jews, that you are the Son of God, and that your birthday should be celebrated as a religious and civic holiday. I think they want to call it "Christmas" or something similar. What do you think about that?**

Jesus: They speak rightly when they call me a king and the Son of God, for so I am.

Many people, in their celebration of this holiday, will use it for no other reason than to add a little bit of religious flavor to the partying they were going to do already. But my true followers will use this day to rehearse and to recount the story of how the Son of God became man for the purpose of saving his people from their sins.

**Reporter: Thank you for granting me this interview, Jesus. It has been a pleasure talking to you.**

Jesus: I have enjoyed talking to you as well. After they turn off the microphone and the camera, I wonder if you might have some more time to talk. I would like to have a conversation with you about being born from above.



*... when my soul  
will be  
overwhelmed with  
sorrow to the point  
of death ...*



## "Light of the World"

By: Greg Belesiotis

It's that time of the year where at least some radio stations are playing Christmas songs 24/7. One song has stood the test of time and reached its bicentennial year in 2018. It's been translated in 140 different languages and referred to by a writer as the "soundtrack to Christmas". The song in its original German language is known as **Stille Nacht** but is known in North America as **Silent Night**.

The title of this song is rather ironic since Jesus' birth was anything but silent! Scripture described the Heavenly hosts appearing to shepherds announcing the Son of God's arrival in this world. For those of us who call Christ our Saviour, his arrival is the most extraordinary and pivotal moment in history! Why then would the words silent be even used in this song? Sometimes, silence is the best response to something we witness or acknowledge as Holy. In such cases, God is being given the reverence He deserves because we recognize how

inadequate our words are at describing His nature and the wonders of His works. Scripture has a number of examples where silence with complete awestruck wonder, is a form of honouring God. At least two of them include Psalm 4:4 and Habakkuk 2:20. Silence not only allows us to focus more on God, but also allows us to recognize His focus on us.

Songs such as this one reminds us of how God gave us the greatest gift of all time that extends well beyond the holiday season. He gave us the ability to have a restored relationship with Him. Jesus effectively tore down the barrier of sin which prevented the formation of such a relationship. God, knowing that we were unable to come to Him due to our fallen nature, instead comes to us. The incarnation is one of the greatest demonstrations of God's love for us. The third stanza of the song summarizes this with the line "**Son of God love's pure light**". Light is a very appropriate word because it re-

minds us that Jesus, as He proclaimed in John 8:12 is the "light of the world".

It is no coincidence that our church and many others, include this song in a candle-light Christmas Eve service where lit candles provide most of the illumination of the sanctuary. The verse from John 1:5 is often quoted to recognize Jesus' ultimate victory over sin and death. Many people are often reminded of how they, who recognize and acknowledge the "light of the world" are compelled to be a light unto others. Jesus sums this up perfectly during his sermon on the mount in Matthew 5:14-16.

As we enter Advent, take the time to silently reflect over the lyrics of this special song and how the "light of the world" has affected you personally. Perhaps read the verses referenced in this article prayerfully. At times we all need to refocus our attention from the busyness of the holiday season to the true "Reason for the Season".

*... His arrival is the most extraordinary and pivotal moment in history!*

*Carols Around the World*

*Please join us for our annual Christmas dinner  
December 11<sup>th</sup> 2022  
Woodvale Facility Clubhouse  
4540 50 Street  
Edmonton AB*

*Refreshments 5:30 pm Dinner 6:00 pm*

*Adults \$40.00 ea. Children 12 and under \$20.00 ea.*

# Merry Christmas

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*We aspire to be:  
Living, Loving,  
Reaching and  
Growing*



### In December:

- 4 - Coffees On!**
- 11 - Christmas Banquet (see page 7)**
- 18 - Coffees On!**
- 24 - Christmas Eve service at 5pm**
- 25 - Christmas Day service at 10.30am (what! no coffee)**



**If you notice the 3 large cardboard boxes in the foyer - they are for donations to Hope Mission and the Mustard Seed. Needed articles include winter clothing (e.g. socks, coats, gloves etc.), non-perishable food, and hygiene/personal care items. Donations accepted until Sunday December 11.**

One of life's mysteries is how a two-pound box of Christmas chocolates can make a person gain five pounds.

## An Agnostic Prays on Christmas Eve

By: Bill Holmes

Carrie Pilby, an intelligent young woman is alone on Christmas Eve and is attempting to make sense of the world. She is sitting in front of a stack of books decorated with a tiny string of flashing coloured lights. A single candle beside the makeshift tree provides some warmth and companionship. She turns off the Christmas lights and after a momentary pause says:

"Okay.  
God...  
I am not going to lie. I don't really believe you exist. So I don't really know what I am doing or who I'm talking to, but anyway... I just thought I

might at least let you know in the unlikely event that you did exist, what my requests would be this Christmas, it won't take long. I promise.

So firstly I'd like things to be better for the homeless, the old, the sick and anyone whose not doing so great. I'm sorry for when I judge people ... and I'm sorry for the not-so-good things I've done lately. it just seems kind of um ... hard to avoid doing



them. But I'll ... try to do better, I promise.

Oh and this might sound really petty, but could you please help everyone learn how to pronounce "In Excelsis Deo" correctly? Thanks. And um... I know... that my mom

probably isn't up there with you but if she was... I just want her to know that I really, really, really miss her. And I know that my dad does too. As for him, um... I'm just tired of fighting, I just really wish everything could be