

FEATURE

GOD'S GREATEST *Gift*



It's time to tell the Christmas story.

by MARC SIKMA

CHRISTMAS IS A cultural phenomenon. There is no other seasonal holiday that evokes so much emotion, forethought, and nostalgia.

Think about it. The movies we watch, the decorations we invest in, and the yuletide songs we've been singing since our youth are all revolved around one day — December 25.

A tree, a jingle, and yes, a manger — all have a unique way of connecting our diversities for a few moments each year. Though many do not believe in the saving work of the Christ of Christmas, even they might be heard singing about a holy night for a note or two.

If this is true, followers of Jesus have a timely opportunity. We are called ambassadors, not busy bodies. We are called the light of the world, not conformers. We are commissioned to be carriers of the good news, not bench sitters. So what if this Christmas we met the culture where maybe they'll be found — at least slightly softened to the truths surrounding the gospel?

Several years ago, near Christmas, our family had just moved into a new neighborhood. Our home still in boxes, we began to prayerwalk our street, building intentional relationships while asking God to use us as ambassadors. Though our kids were young and our move merely across town, the transition had a deep sense of purpose and mission. We wanted nothing more than our home to show the welcome and invitation of God through our hospitality and love.

We started to see the brick and mortar as an epicenter of the gospel in our neighborhood. Not because there was anything special about us or our effort, but simply because

the Holy Spirit was within us. We, as a family, grew in our belief that it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us. We often challenge one another with this question: What would those around us say about the Lord based on our life? Would they say God is loving? Gracious? Merciful? Faithful? Or would they say something else?

What a joy and privilege it is for the body of Christ to show the world who has saved and redeemed us! Just imagine what would happen if our church gatherings became consistent places of worship, training in the character of God, and deployment? Week in and week out, we would unify, only to be sent back into our workplaces, schools, neighborhoods, and communities as beacons of light in a world that is searching for truth and love.

Though December seems to be packed with parties, travel, expectations, and recitals, there is also a unique moment for us to pause. Right now. Literally, now as you read. Instead of being burdened with a calendar that seems unattainable from the start, we can view this month through entirely different lens. That is what happened in our family.



My heart is filled with wonder and worship as I reflect on what I deserve and, instead, what I've received through Christ.

I started to notice that no matter what the upbringing or background, people generally seemed more compassionate, generous, and interested in meaningful conversation around Christmas. This realization led to gospel action.

A few years back, our family hosted several streets close to our home in what we called Neighborhood Nativity. This party featured a 26-animal petting zoo in our cul-de-sac, a live manger scene on our front yard, cookies, hot chocolate, age-appropriate Bibles, and a time to read the Christmas story and share about God's gift of His Son and the saving power of Christ.



The world has no need for a seasonal religious jolt. The world needs a Savior.

The first year we hosted the gathering, hundreds came. It was beyond beautiful. Kids, parents, grandparents — those who believe in Christ and those who don't — all hearing that He isn't just the reason for the season: Jesus is the reason for all of life. With this truth as the foundation, the story of *The Christ of Christmas* was written.

Though getting Bibles into homes was a tremendous avenue of sharing God's love, I wanted to provide a clear and relevant portrayal of how the gospel can transform a family from the inside out. As my neighbors gathered, they were sent home with two gifts: a Bible and the story of a mom who faithfully shares the power of Jesus with her family.

We can imagine this mom to be someone who is intentional with her neighbors, but she also believes that her first mission is within her home. So each year at Christmas, she creates a tradition. Sitting with her family on the morning of December 25, she takes a wooden manger and a small wooden cross and shares why Jesus had to be born and why Jesus had to die.

I've heard the story about the birth and death of Jesus more times than I can count. Having grown up in the church, my ears have been privy to thousands of references to these two epic events. Though there is a temptation for the story to be redundant, the reality is that it never

gets old. Even now as I write, my eyes are filled with tears, and my heart is filled with wonder and worship as I reflect on what I deserve and, instead, what I've received through Christ.

As this story has been passed throughout my neighborhood and now to thousands of homes, there will be new traditions started. Parents will be reminded to shepherd the hearts of their

children by sharing with them the greatest gift imaginable: God's unending love. Grandparents will cherish moments with the next generation as they disciple with eternal words of life and hope. Children will be introduced to a King who can set them free from sin and death. Oh, the beauty of God's living and active Word!

Eventually, the carols will subside. Decorations will be put away in the attic. The Christmas spirit will seem to fade.

The turn of the calendar will prove yet again that the world has no need for a seasonal religious jolt. The world needs a Savior.

Will we share this good news? He is *the way, the truth, and the life* — the only Christ of Christmas. 🌟

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THE CHRIST OF CHRISTMAS

In 64 beautifully illustrated pages, this story tells of a family who, through the intentional persistence of one parent, is forever changed by the Christ of Christmas. Through its compelling story arc, clear communication of the gospel, and beautiful story of first-time belief, *The Christ of Christmas* shows readers that Christmas is a story of hope and healing.

