



The Impossible Dream

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

Christmas can be impossible! Greeting cards and catalogs portray Christmas celebrations in idyllic small towns buried in snow, with prosperous, healthy people strolling through a winter wonderland without a care in the world. This picture of a Disneyland-like Christmas is completed by scenes of model families gathering around roaring fireplaces, feasting at dining tables laden with mouth-watering foods and opening mountains of beautifully wrapped presents scattered under sparkling Christmas trees.

This mythical Christmas is a place where there is no last minute shopping, no fights for parking places, no stress, no mess, no lack of money, no illness—nor any harsh words. Cheerful and happy words festoon Christmas cards—words like cheer, peace, warmth, love and happiness. Our expectations of a perfect Christmas are raised to the unreachable stars as we see illustrations of unruffled, serene and well-dressed people showing us how to have a happy Christmas. All is calm in fa-la-la-la land.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch (the world that the alien artists who depict such scenes must never visit) real live people are frantically trying to create a peace-on-earth good-will-to-men picture postcard Christmas in their own homes and families.

But it never really happens does it? Someone gets sick. Christmas cards arrive late. Fuses blow when the lights and decorations outside the house are turned on. Someone in the family blows their fuse at another family member and glares at them across the Christmas table. Little children pick this special time to throw some of their biggest temper tantrums of the year, while some adults choose this time to behave as spoiled children.

December 26th finally arrives, with the memory of another flawed and imperfect

Christmas once again reminding us that our efforts to produce peace, love, warmth, happiness and perfect families just aren't good enough—no matter how much money we throw at this impossible dream.

How was it at the beginning? Did Joseph and Mary arrive at the Bethlehem Four Seasons in their Range Rover, packed with presents from Nieman and Marcus? The real story is that an angel appeared to a teenage girl who then got pregnant without ever having sex. The young very pregnant teenager then endured an arduous journey on horseback to Bethlehem with her fiancé, spent the night in a barn and gave birth to her baby who was the Savior of the world.

The Christmas story reveals how unlike us God really is. If any human had written the script for the first Christmas it would have been a completely different story. Who would have dreamed that the Creator of all things would descend from his greatness to this sin-sick world in order to serve us and begin his physical life as a fertilized egg in the womb of an as yet unmarried teenage girl?

Who would have imagined that the almighty, omniscient, sovereign and great God, in the incarnation of Jesus, would become, at least in human estimation, small and insignificant?

Would anyone, in a million years, have dared to conceive that the one true God who created all that we see and all that we cannot would himself be conceived and then enter his own creation from the loins of a teenager? What human could have foreseen God in the flesh, unable to speak or control his bodily functions, humanly depending on his teenage mother for food, shelter and love? No human would have written God into the script the way the Divine Author wrote himself into the Christmas story.

Were Joseph and Mary expecting a perfect Currier and Ives Christmas when they arrived

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He Left His Footprints

Christmas is all about Christ, but a Christ-centered Christmas doesn't just happen. At this time of the year, God invites us to stop, slow down and ponder the fact that God, in the person of Jesus, became one of us.

This booklet can help you have a Christ-centered Christmas, by giving you deeper insights into the wonder and majesty of the birth of Jesus—as well as his life. It's filled with helpful, encouraging teaching about what Jesus' birth means for you. And, we include a special section with frequently asked questions about the significance and meaning of Jesus' birth—questions that you or a family member may have had.

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commentary

in Bethlehem, exhausted and hungry, only to find the only lodging available to be filled with animal deposits, smells and sounds?

They had no way of knowing it, but they found out that God often hides the greatest of gifts in the most unexpected places and packages. God gave us his Son in a way that we would have never expected or anticipated, as a baby wrapped in poverty and humility.

Jesus descended from greatness so that he might be our servant. He was born to one of his own created humans so that all humans might experience a new, spiritual birth. He became poor that we might be rich. Jesus “became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14, *The Message*).

He pitched his tent in our backyard, so that he could be close to us. He didn’t arrive in regal glory, move into a mansion and surround himself with walls, expecting us to serve him, but instead he came in humility and poverty in order to more effectively serve us.

Jesus came to serve us, to give his life as a ransom for many. Christmas is about the radical self-sacrifice of Jesus, who brings us good news. *The good news is that we cannot earn his approval by serving him. The good news is that we don’t have to create a perfect Christmas on the basis of our efforts—or a perfect anything for that matter.*

The good news is that the perfect holy God loves us in spite of who we really are, in spite of the fact that we are incapable of producing a perfect Christmas.

The good news is that a perfect Christmas is an impossible human dream, but the flip side of that good news is that “nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37) and that he, by his grace, has already given us the perfect Christmas.

The good news is that grace arrives in the person of Jesus. Trust in him. Receive him. Accept him, for he is the greatest gift you can ever receive. □

—Greg Albrecht

THE PLAIN TRUTH