

Soul Sisters

**“Where two or three are gathered together in my name,
there am I in the midst of them.”**

Matthew 18:20

The Purpose of Christmas by Rick Warren

The night Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, a small group of poor shepherds was quietly tending their flocks of sheep in a nearby field. Looking up at the stars, nothing seemed any different from a thousand other nights. But what was about to happen would transform not only the shepherds' lives but billions of other lives as well. The world would never be the same. Suddenly a bright light lit up the sky, and an angel from God appeared above them and began speaking to them. It seemed unbelievable and scared them. The Bible gives us the original Christmas story:

Jesus Is Born in Bethlehem In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. The Journey to Bethlehem So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 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 guest room available for them. 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 that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 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 2:1-20

The angel said that Christmas would bring “great joy... for all the people.” Really? For many people, getting ready for Christmas seems more of a hassle than a source of happiness. It is a source of stress. They feel pressure, not pleasure, when it comes to Christmas. It’s a duty, not a delight. They endure Christmas rather than enjoy it. There are many possible reasons you might feel uneasy or lonely or even depressed during the Christmas season. You may dread spending time with oddball relatives. Maybe relationships are strained and

1. Christmas is a time for celebration!

I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all people. LUKE 2:10

“A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord!” LUKE 2: 11

Three reasons to celebrate:

1) God loves you!

“God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

2) God is with you!

One of God’s great promises in the Bible is this: “When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.” 1 John 1:8-10

3) God is for you!

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ says the Lord. ‘They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

One potential problem of our annual Christmas celebrations is that many people only think of Jesus as a baby! Their conception of him is only as a helpless newborn in his mother’s arms. If Jesus had never grown up to do what he did, he’d have no power to transform our lives. But the baby born in Bethlehem did not stay a baby. Jesus grew to manhood, modeled for us the kind of life that pleases God, taught us the truth, paid for every sin we commit by dying on a cross, then proved that he was God and could save us by coming back to life. This is the Good News. When the Romans nailed Jesus to a cross, they stretched his arms as wide as they could. With his arms wide open, Jesus was physically demonstrating, “I love you this much! I love you so much it hurts! I’d rather die than live without you!” The next time you see a picture or statue of Jesus with outstretched arms on the cross, remember, he is saying, “I love you this much!”

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2. Christmas is a time for salvation!

**“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith— and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”
Ephesians 2:8-9**

Notice that your Christmas gift from God comes by *grace* and through *faith*.

- 1) Jesus saves you from something.
- 2) Jesus saves you for something.
- 3) Jesus saves you by something.

You were made for far more than success. You were created for significance. But you'll never find significance in possessions, pleasures, or positions. Significance comes from service— giving your life away for a purpose greater than yourself. Jesus said, “If you insist on saving your life, you will lose it. Only those who throw away their lives for my sake and for the sake of the Good News will ever know what it means to really live.” Mark 8:35

The idea of grace is so foreign and antithetical to the popular misconceptions about God and even other religions that when the Bible talks about salvation as a free gift of God's grace, many people respond with a blank stare. There is a mental and emotional disconnect. We are so used to receiving conditional love (“I will love you if...” or “I love you because...”) that unconditional grace is an unfamiliar and even uncomfortable concept. Religion is man's attempt to please God. Grace is God reaching down to man. Every religion boils down to one word: “do!” Do our list of things, and you will earn God's love. Each religion has its own unique list of rules, and if you compare the lists, you discover they are often contradictory. But the big idea behind all religions is that you must work, strive, and put forth great effort in order to get God to like you. So God came to earth as Jesus essentially to say: “You guys have got it all wrong! Of course doing good things matters, but it doesn't make me love you any more or any less. My love for you is unlimited, unconditional, unchanging, and undeserved. So let me teach you a new concept called grace. You can't purchase it, work for it, or be good enough to merit it. It's a gift that will cost me a lot, but it is free to you. Everything I do for you, to you, in you, and through you— every single blessing you have in life— is a gift of my grace. I've done it all for you.” While religions are based on the word “do,” salvation is based on the word “done.” When Jesus died for you on the cross, he exclaimed, “It is finished!”⁴¹ It's extremely important to note that Jesus didn't say, “I am finished,” because he wasn't! He had more to do. Three days later, he came back to life, resurrected from death, and walked around Jerusalem for forty days. He met with individuals and groups of up to five hundred people before ascending back to heaven

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3. Christmas is a time for reconciliation!

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” LUKE 2: 14

- 1) Peace with God
- 2) The peace of God
- 3) Peace with others

You’ve probably heard of the Serenity Prayer, which was made famous by Reinhold Niebuhr, but you may have not read the entire prayer. The first third of the prayer is often quoted and written on posters. But to experience the serenity mentioned in the first third of the prayer, you need to follow the steps laid out in the rest of the prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. ☐☐

The path to the peace of God comes through living and enjoying one day at a time, accepting what cannot be changed instead of worrying about it, trusting in God’s loving care and wisdom, and surrendering to his purpose and plan for your life. Jesus makes this promise: “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” ☐Matthew 11;28-29

Christmas, the season of “peace on earth, good will toward men, ” is the perfect time to offer the gift of grace to others, while celebrating the grace God has shown you. Who do you need to make peace with this Christmas? You may be thinking, I could never forgive that person. The memories are too painful and the hurt too deep. I can’t just let it go. That’s why you need Jesus as your savior.☐☐ Only when you feel fully forgiven yourself will you be able to forgive those who’ve hurt you most. Only as you are filled with the love of Jesus will you be able to let your hurts go and get on with your life.☐☐*Rick Warren The Purpose of Christmas*