

# Christmas Miracles

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When I was a kid, Christmas was a magical and miraculous time of year. Things happened at Christmas that didn't happen any other time. My mom made cookies that were shaped like Christmas trees and sang along to Christmas carols. Something got into her at Christmastime!

But of course, the main event was the presents. When we went to bed on Christmas Eve, the stockings were empty and there was nothing under the tree. But then, miraculously, on Christmas morning, the stockings were full and there were presents spilling out from under Christmas tree! I had no idea how that happened! That was amazing! It was mysterious. It was like a miracle!

Kids are comfortable with miracles because they are comfortable with mystery. **Miracles involve mystery.** If you experience a miracle, you have to live with some mystery, because a miracle is something that can't be explained. That is OK with kids because they know there is a lot they can't explain! There are lots of questions kids can't answer at Christmastime, like: Why does the kid next door have so many more toys than I do? How does Santa Claus deliver presents to kids who don't have a chimney? Why do grown-ups sometimes cry when they're happy?

We can't answer these questions when we are kids, so we live with the mystery. Then we grow up and discover some answers. As adults we live with fewer mysteries, and fewer miracles. We learn that some people have more money than others and why. We realize that there are a variety of emotional responses and, as adults, we can be tempted to think there is no such thing as mystery; that everything has an explanation. But is that really true?

There are actually quite a few mysteries that even adults can't explain. Nobody understands what human consciousness is or how it works. It is a mystery. Or take Quantum physics which studies how energy and particles work at their smallest, subatomic scale. Physicists have discovered that light and matter are both wave and a particle at the same time - how is that possible? It tells us that an electron can be more than one place at the same time. How is that possible? Mystery.

The more we learn about our universe, the more we realize mysteries remain. Astronomers used to think they knew how black holes are formed. We know that a black hole accumulates so much mass in such a small space that it actually warps time and space. Just recently, astronomers discovered a black hole that is so old that it was formed near the time the universe was created. That blew their theory on how black holes are formed because this one would not

have had enough time to gather the matter needed to form a black hole. It's a mystery. Then there is the big question, where did the matter to create the universe come from in the first place? It's a mystery.

There is a lot we have learned about the universe, but there is still an element of mystery to it. Science might be able to tell us something about *how* the universe works, but it can't tell us *why* the universe exists. If there is some mystery about our universe, should it really be a surprise that there is some mystery about the God who created the universe? We shouldn't be surprised that we can't sketch the eternal and infinite God on a chalkboard!

**Isaiah 55:8** - *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.* So it shouldn't surprise us that God might do some things that are beyond our comprehension - things like miracles.

The Christmas story is full of miracles. All kinds of supernatural things happened around the birth of Jesus. An angel appeared to a young woman named Mary. He told her she was going to have a baby, even though she has never been with a man. That's miraculous. A choir of angels showed up and surprised some shepherds who were working the night shift out in the fields. That doesn't happen every day. That's unexplainable. A mysterious star appeared and guided some Eastern mystics as they traveled for hundreds of miles to the birthplace of Jesus.

Of course, there is the greatest miracle of all - the baby Jesus. You could say that every baby is a miracle, but Jesus certainly was a miracle baby, because he was the Son of God. Right there in a stable, God became a human being. How can Jesus be both God and human at the same time? These are miraculous events for sure. But they are not the most important aspect of the Christmas story. They describe HOW Jesus came into the world, but not WHY. It's good to know how Jesus came, but it is more important to know WHY.

After Jesus grew up, he told us why he came. One day he went into a synagogue. He read from **Isaiah 61:1-3** and said it described why he had come. This is what it says: *The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, <sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, <sup>3</sup> and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.*

This tells us Jesus came to bind up the broken hearted, release the prisoners and to lead those who mourn to rejoice. That's change. This tells us

that **Jesus came to change lives**. Christmas is about God coming to earth to change lives.

It's no coincidence that many of our Christmas movie classics make "life change" their theme. For example, the Grinch had such a small, hard heart that he stole all the Christmas presents from the people of Whoville. Then he heard the whole town singing a Christmas carol anyway and what happened then? "Well, in Whoville they say that the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day! And then the true meaning of Christmas came through, and the Grinch found the strength of ten Grinches, plus two!

Scrooge turned from being a miserable, greedy tyrant who said, "Bah, humbug" to anything related to Christmas, into a generous, joyful man who blessed other people.

In the old movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey changes from wanting to kill himself to appreciating life. Christmas is about life change!

Yes, there are a lot of miracles in the story of Christmas, but today **the greatest miracle is a changed life**. I can't explain exactly how Jesus changes lives, but it has happened all throughout history. When people encounter Jesus, they do not stay the same.

In the New Testament, we read about a guy named Zaccheus. He was a greedy and ruthless tax-collector. Scrooge probably had a picture of him hanging on his wall! But Zaccheus heard that Jesus was passing through town and he was curious enough to climb a tree in order to see him. Zaccheus ended up having lunch with Jesus and he was never the same. He quit extorting money from people and gave back what he had taken, with interest! Life change.

In the twelfth century, the son of a wealthy Italian businessman started to follow Jesus. He started telling others about Jesus and modeling a sold-out life. He changed so much that today we know him as St. Francis of Assisi.

Today you could talk to Brian "Head" Welch. Brian was a founding member of the highly successful metal band, Korn. In the process, he became addicted to drugs that were destroying his life. Then he chose to follow Jesus, and his life changed profoundly. Today he is a joy-filled husband and father, loving his life and family. He still plays with the band and, after shows, he holds meetings with fans and prays them to be healed and come to Christ. Life change.

Actually, there are hundreds of people seated all around you right now whose lives are changing because of knowing Jesus. Even if their stories are not as dramatic as those I just mentioned, they are just as real. **We need to know that Jesus didn't come to earth in order to tell us to change, he came to give us his power to change!**

There is no shortage of books and videos that tell us how to change in some way. They tell me how to lose weight, get along better with difficult people, or be happier and more confident. They can tell me how to have a better marriage or be a highly effective person.

Here's the problem with all of them: they rely on my power to change myself. They tell me what to do, but don't give me the power to do it. Even if I knew what I needed to change, I can't really change my heart on my own. On my own, I just don't have the power to kick a habit or to change my thinking.

Jesus came because **we don't need information, we need a Savior!** The Old Testament gave us information about what God expects, but Jesus came to save us from the power of sin that drives us inwardly. The great news of Christmas is that our Savior arrived! **Luke 2:11** *Today in the town of David a **Savior** has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*

A Savior born is great news for the broken hearted. **Isaiah 61:1** says a Savior is born who came to *bind up the brokenhearted*. If you have been wounded, rejected by someone you loved or your dream dashed, draw near to Jesus and let him bind up your broken heart. If you lost someone this year and the memory of them is painful at Christmas, move toward Jesus and let him make you whole.

A Savior born is great news for those captive by habits, addictions and hang-ups. **Isaiah 61:1** says a Savior is born who *will set you free!* You may not have the power to overcome what is eating you alive, but Jesus has that power. Trust him, lean into him, get close to him, and he will set you free.

A Savior is great news for those far from God. **Isaiah 61:3** says a Savior is born who will free you from sin and make you right with God. You *will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD*. This is the greatest miracle of all. Jesus did not come to make bad people good. He came to make dead people live. Jesus came to give you a new life that will never end. When you put your faith in Christ, he will forgive you so you never have to worry about his judgment. He will give you a new purpose and joy. Jesus will change your life!

Jesus changes so much that we divide our calendar in to "BC" and "AD" - before Christ and after Christ. Many of us here today can mark our lives as BC and AD because his coming into our lives has changed us.

The worship team is going to sing a song that reflects this change. In the middle of the song, you are going to see some members of our church sharing how Jesus has changed their lives. Has Jesus changed your life? If not, there is great news: He can!