

Silent Night

A Christmas Prayer Journey

A Time for Reflection and Prayer

Welcome to Silent Night: A Christmas Prayer Journey. Our journey today is a journey of the heart. Although we will be moving physically from station to station, this is simply a reflection of the inner journey we are embarking on. There is no time frame for this journey. The most important thing is to take however much time you need. The journey is divided into four stages, each of which has several thoughts and questions for reflection and prayer. Take your time reading through these prompts, and only move on when you feel ready. There is no rush. Take the time you need to slow down, calm your heart, and meet with God.

This journey is a personal one. If you have come with other members of your household, you do not need to advance at the same time as them. Each of you can move on to the next thought or station when you are ready. If you feel the need to sit and think, sit and think. If you feel the need to journal, then journal. Feel free to respond in whatever way God is prompting you.

You don't need anything other than this booklet to embark on this journey, but a pencil, journal, and Bible could also be helpful.

For those who are participating at home, the four stages of this journey mirror the four candles of advent: hope, love, peace, and joy. Find or make yourself an advent wreath with four candles. Create a quiet, peaceful space, and light the first candle. You can create a physical journey for yourself if you wish, but that is not necessary. Read, reflect, pray, and journal as you wish, and when you are ready for the next stage in the journey, light the next candle.

Anticipating

Christmas

I knew that it was coming,
I knew that it was time.
That Christmas brought both joy and pain,
Is yours a bit like mine?

----- *Hope* -----

Christmas Reflections

What words or feelings or thoughts come to mind when you think about Christmas? What do you look forward to? What do you dread?

O Come O Come Emmanuel

The people of Israel were eagerly awaiting their Saviour. They had been under Roman oppression for years. Any attempt to throw off their Roman overlords resulted in bloodshed and misery. They knew that their only hope was the Messiah that God had promised, the one who was going to come and save his people.

His arrival was completely different than they expected.

They were looking for a king, a conquering hero, a charismatic leader. What they got was a baby, born to a poor, working class family from an insignificant, backwater town. It was so unexpected that most people missed it.

How do you respond when things turn out different than you expected?

Is it hard?

What are some gifts or blessings you may be missing this Christmas, because they are different than you expected?

The Bondservant of the Lord

Mary's life was turned upside down. The good news that she would be the mother of the Messiah came with a terrible personal cost. Legally, she was as good as married to Joseph, but now she was to become pregnant, before the marriage was consummated, and not by Joseph. What would everyone think of this good Jewish girl? She could have protested and rejected this news that derailed her plans for the future. But she didn't.

“Behold, I am the bondservant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

She stepped into the new life that God had set before her. Maybe she was afraid, maybe she was excited, maybe her emotions were a complicated jumble. We don't know because the Bible doesn't say. However she was feeling, she accepted the call, and her life changed forever.

What are some moments in your life when things changed forever? Were they anticipated or unexpected?

What kinds of feelings are you carrying as you approach this Christmas?

Grieving

Christmas

Let me stand beside you
Place your hand in mine
The ache of grief can find its voice
Within this love divine

----- *Love* -----

Christmas Reflections

This is a season of loss for many people. Some have loved ones who have died, or who live far away. Many treasured traditions are not going to be able to happen this year. What have you lost this Christmas?

Because They Are No More

For the people of Bethlehem, Jesus' birth did not lead to peace on earth. When the local ruler, Herod, heard that a baby king had been born, he ordered all the babies in Bethlehem to be slaughtered. An angel's warning allowed Jesus' family to escape in time, but many innocent children were killed. The grief that those families went through is hard to imagine. I wonder if they asked God why—why did those babies have to die, when they had done nothing wrong? The Bible does not give us a reason why, just that it was the tragic fallout of Jesus' birth into a broken, sinful world.

Sometimes we feel pressure (both from outside and inside ourselves) to find a reason why something heartbreaking happened. We try to find a reason that this is for the best, that we deserved it somehow, or that there was an important lesson for us to learn. But for now, just allow yourself to feel your sadness, your anger, your disappointment, your grief. Let yourself remain there for a moment.

Those feelings are precious, even though they hurt.

For God so Loved the World

...that he gave his only Son. What an incredible gain for us! But an unimaginable loss for him. God, who had existed in eternal harmony as the Trinity, was now separated. He knew the price that had to be paid to achieve his objective and bring his people back to himself. He did it because he loved us.

Jesus gave up his glory. The one who was before all things and spoke the world into being came to live among us, born as a helpless little baby. He was nursed, and burped, and rocked to sleep. He grew and learned like any other child. When he entered his ministry he walked among the poor and the outcasts. He ate with sinners and touched the unclean. He had no home to call his own, and ultimately he died a painful, humiliating death to save his people. He did it because he loved us.

To love means to open ourselves to grief and pain. That is the kind of love that God showed to us: Love to come down from perfect harmony in heaven to live among his broken, sinful creation. Love to die on a cross, taking the punishment for our sins. That is the kind of love that we are called to.

Love hurts. He loved anyway.

Resting

in Christmas

You look so tired and troubled—
Life's storm is raging wild;
But for this moment sit and rest.
Simply be my child.

----- *Peace* -----

A Long Road Ahead

Jesus came to earth on a very important mission, and the first thing he did was sleep. It's quite incredible when you think about it. He could have come as an adult, ready to start immediately on the most important task in all of history. Instead he came as a baby. He came and he slept. He cried and he ate. He grew. Eventually it was time to begin. Jesus was not in a rush. He wasn't operating on a tight schedule. He could spare 33 years for growing up.

Are you rushing? Do you feel like there is so much to be done and so little time? Do you feel pressure to try harder, to run faster, to be better? Is it hard to slow down? It can feel like everything will come crashing to a stop if we ever tried. But will it? Jesus' mission was of vital importance. He was saving the world! And he slept. There were times in his life for intense action, it is true, but there were also times for rest. It is the same for us. Perhaps our challenge is knowing which time is which.

Come to Him

Many years later, Jesus looked at the anxious faces of his disciples. He knew them well. Many of them were from poor families, barely scraping by. Others had families they were trying to care for. Political unrest and an oppressive government divided the people and made the future uncertain. He could see the worry in their eyes. Crouching down on the dusty ground, he held out his hand. Their gazes followed his gesture toward the little brown sparrow, pecking among the rocks. “Do not be anxious,” Jesus said in a soft voice. “Don’t worry about tomorrow and what might happen, whether you’ll have food to eat or clothes to wear. These little birds don’t have any way of saving up their food for the winter, but your Heavenly Father still feeds them. Being anxious doesn’t change anything.” A sudden movement startled the bird, and it flew up in a flurry of wings. Jesus watched it go. A gentle smile creased his face. “Don’t worry. You are worth more than many sparrows.”

Today we too carry many worries and fears. We try so hard to be good enough, but deep down we feel like we never are. We run ourselves ragged chasing after so many things, but in the end we feel empty, burned out, fearful, and lonely. But that isn’t the way it has to be. Jesus speaks across the ages, into every heart:

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

[Matthew 11:28-30, The Message]

Christmas Reflections

Jesus was born into the world that he came to save, and he slept. Like him, there is much before us that we will have to do, but for this moment our Saviour invites us to rest. What can we leave in his care today?

Celebrating

Christmas

These tears are not forever,
In me your fears are gone.
Behold, I'm making all things new,
And joy shall be your song.

----- *Joy* -----

The Best is yet to Come

The child grew up. He healed the sick, ate with sinners, touched the unclean, rebuked the religious elite, washed his disciples' feet. When the time came, he died on a cross to break the power of sin and death and bring us back to God. Three days later, he came to life again, and promises new life to everyone who chooses to follow him. No matter what happens, we know that he is with us and has promised to never leave us. One day God's Kingdom will come, and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. All pain and sadness and sin will be washed away, and all things will be made new. We have this glorious hope in Jesus—that the best is yet to come.

God himself will be with them and be their God.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

*There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,
for the old order of things has passed away.*

He who testifies to these things says,

“Surely I am coming soon.”

[Revelation 21:3-4, 22:20]

A Joyful People

We have so much to celebrate. In Jesus we have victory over sin. We have the Holy Spirit living within us, and we have been adopted as children of God. We do not need to fear condemnation, because Jesus paid the penalty for our sin, and nothing can separate us from the love of God. We have a Saviour who understands us deeply and who has promised to finish the work that he has begun in us. We can have hope in the midst of suffering, reconciliation in broken relationships, and God's strength when we are weak. We have a glorious future to look forward to, and it is all because of Jesus.

That doesn't mean we should ignore the hard things in life or pretend that everything is great. We can be real and honest about our fears and our disappointments, our grief and our loneliness. Those feelings matter. But as much as it might feel like it sometimes, they are not the end of our story, and they are not the whole of our story. We have so much to be thankful for. Our God is with us, and Jesus is coming soon!

Christmas Reflections

Jesus was born, and the course of history changed forever. No wonder the angels sang for joy! What has changed for you because of Jesus? How can you celebrate that this Christmas season?

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