



# *Abiding Joy*

*Pondering the Birth of Jesus*

*Ellen Chauvin*

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*Introduction*  
*Abiding Joy*

What does your heart long for this season?

This year (and every year it seems) I hope for a slower pace. The busyness of the season always seems to do me in. Usually the end of November and the beginning of December find me already rush, rush, rushing around with a to do list a mile long. There is no extra time, and the weekends are booking up fast. There are a lot of fun things on the calendar, times for fellowship with friends and family.

But I find that I don't leave enough margin in my schedule to slow down. To ponder the miracle of Christ's birth; the babe in the manger; Immanuel, God with us. I long to be filled with childlike awe and wonder. How about you?

Do you want to treasure the truth of Christ this year, pondering in your heart who He is? Do you want to see Jesus with the eyes of a child, beholding Him as if for the first time? This season let's behold Jesus, not looking at all we have to do, but remembering all He has done.

Join me over the next four weeks as we linger over the Christmas story, and abide with joy in His Word.

There are five weekly readings, giving you a grace break on the weekends. Because who needs to add more to their weekend to-do during this busy season?

As we remain with Christ, my prayer is that joy and peace will fill our souls!

*Week 1*



Day 1

*Abide*

*Today's Reading: John 15:1-11*

A perfect scenario of the days and weeks leading to Christmas would be this: A slower pace, making time to be with loved ones. Time to sit and listen to them spin tales of days gone by; time spent dreaming of days yet to come. Time listening to their stories. Time to BE, and not DO. Abiding with those we love.

To abide is to remain with, stay, or dwell. This takes time - time that we never seem to have during the rush of the Christmas season.

Dwelling conjures images of lingering by a warm fire, embers glowing orange, sipping hot chocolate with white, fluffy marshmallows. Of *being* together with those you love. Talking, spending quality time. Not in a hurry to leave. Not in a hurry to move on to the next thing.

Yet it happens every year. Time gets away from me. The frenzy of shopping for just the right gift; rushing here and there searching for ingredients for that perfect Christmas dessert; seeing white space on the calendar today, that's gone tomorrow.

Oh, don't get me wrong. Everything is fun. Great food, great friends and family visits. But before you know it, Christmas has come and gone and I feel like I've missed the most important parts of it:

Time abiding with Jesus.

Time listening to His story.

Just being.

With Jesus.

And Him with me.

Now, that's Christmas!

*"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full." John 15:9-11 (NASB)*

Abiding in the love of Jesus brings full, complete and perfect joy. Together, let's purpose to make this year the year we slow down and abide with Jesus in joy.

**Points to Ponder:**

\*Spend time each day being with Jesus in His word. Don't rush. Enjoy the story of His birth. See it through fresh eyes. Let it remain in you all day.

\*Is there someone you could spend time with this week? A nursing home resident? A veteran? Your grandchild? Someone who needs a listening ear. Give them the gift of time this Christmas.

Day 2

*Joy*

*Today's reading Isaiah 55:1-15*

I love all things Christmas: love, **Love, LOVE** it! Decorating the house and putting up the tree make me clap my hands in joy. I love the lights, the holly and the red berries.

But there was one Christmas when this wasn't so - the one after my mom passed away.

I was grieving that first Christmas without her. My heart was heavy. I thought "Maybe if I go shopping and "refresh" some of my decorations, I'll perk up. Maybe my mood will lighten." Off I went, ready for new stuff!

*{Sigh.}*

I left the store that day with a car full of holly and red berries, and a heart empty and sorrowful. I cried all the way home.

The hole in my heart couldn't be filled with things. Even things that normally make me happy.

I was sad and empty. My soul was parched with grief. I needed a fresh filling. Not from the stores, but from God Himself. I needed to drink deeply from His Word.

Jesus tells us that by abiding in Him, we will also have His joy in us, making our joy complete or full (John 15:11)

The joy spoken of here is joy because of His salvation. No matter our circumstance, no matter if we are happy or sad, we can have the deep joy of Christ in us. Simply because of what He has done for us.

Circumstances and things won't bring lasting joy. Only dwelling in the love of God. A love that says "I sent My Son to die for you. Jesus was born to die. For you. I love you that much. Rejoice in Me!"

Joy to the world! Let heaven and nature sing!

*"You will live in joy and peace. The mountains and hills will burst into song, and the trees of the field will clap their hands! Where once there were thorns, cypress trees will grow. Where nettles grew, myrtles will sprout up. These events will bring great honor to the Lord's name; they will be an everlasting sign of his power and love." Isaiah 55:12 NLT*

Keep your eyes on Jesus and His birth this Christmas season. Let the love of God replace thorns in your heart with cypress trees. Ponder Jesus, not your circumstances and watch as your heart flourishes with joy!

**Points to ponder:**

\*For further reading: Habakkuk 3:17-19.

\*What brings joy to your soul? Long walks in the crisp winter air? Christmas caroling? Set aside time for these activities, rejoicing in the God of your salvation.

## Day 3

### *Promises*

*Today's reading: Isaiah 9:6-7*

Has anyone ever made a promise to you that they didn't keep? It hurts, doesn't it? It's frustrating because you've counted on that person, and now they've let you down.

But God.

He never lets us down.

The prophet Isaiah gives us these promises about the coming Messiah:

1. A child will be given, born of a virgin (Is 7:14).
2. He will rule God's people.
3. He will be Wonderful; our Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace.
4. He will have an eternal rule of peace and justice.
5. This will be accomplished by the zeal of the Lord of Hosts.

The Messiah will rule because God **promised** it and will zealously accomplish it.

*For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6 ESV*

The people of Israel were clinging to these promises, as they awaited Messiah. The promises are ours, too. We know the child Jesus was born of a virgin. We know He will come again and have an eternal rule.

***We don't have to wait to experience the promise of a Savior who is Wonderful.***

We have His Holy Spirit as Counselor, who reminds us of how mighty our God, the Eternal Father is. He reminds us that Jesus is Peace.

Are you troubled by anxiety this Christmas season? Remember the promise: Jesus is your Prince of Peace. He will fill you with a peace that surpasses all understanding. That's God's promise to you.

Are your days filled with so many Christmas to do's and Christmas places to be that there is no peace in your heart? Are there family conflicts that take your peace away? Remember the promise: Jesus is your Prince of Peace. Don't let your heart be troubled.

#### **Points to Ponder:**

\*Find a promise in God's word that speaks to your soul. Claim it. Pray it. Cling to it.

\*For further reading: Matthew 11:28-29



Day 4

## *Waiting*

*Today's Reading: Isaiah 40:26-31*

I'm not a good wait-er. It's the lack of patience in me. It's especially hard when I know something good is coming! Yikes! Why can't I open one gift NOW!? I promise, I'll re-wrap it and put it back under the tree.

The prophets of the Old Testament promised a Messiah. I'm pretty sure the people of Israel were expecting great things to come.

But nothing happens. The interval between the Old Testament promises and the New Testament fulfillment was quiet. Matter of fact, there were four centuries of silence. There were no prophets or inspired writers in Israel to encourage the people with a word from God or build anticipation of the Messiah.

This is known as the Intertestamental Period, those years from the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. It was known as the Silent Years. The "Yes, but not yet" time.

And so the waiting begins....

*Yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary. Isaiah 40:31 (NASB)*

Wait. Rest, remain, stop, pause, linger.

As we anticipate the birth of Jesus Christ, how do we wait? Do we linger over the miracle of Immanuel, God with us?

Do we pause long enough to watch for His bright shining star?

Can we stop long enough to sing "O, Holy Night?"

Can we rest in the miracle of His birth, and remain in His Word, instead of filling all the white space of our calendar?

***The world waited, pregnant with hope, for the promised Messiah.***

And still we wait.

### **Points to Ponder:**

\*Linger over the dinner table with your family. Enjoy the conversation. Wait before clearing the dishes and putting away the food.

\*Read a favorite passage of scripture, one that brings Jesus alive to you. Read it slowly, several times. Sit with His Word, waiting on Him. Know He is present with You.

## Day 5

### *Nostalgia: A Story of Christmas Longing*

There it is again - the twinge in my gut, the tightness in my chest. The dull ache that can't be soothed, a gentle sadness during this most joyous time of year.

It's a sense of longing, whose source I cannot identify. A yearning deep within for...what? There's an empty hole in my soul, seeking to be filled. What is it that will still the turmoil? The simpler times of childhood Christmases? I reach into the foggy mist of Christmases past, grasping for a long ago memory to settle the upheaval.

My heart wants to be filled with the awe and wonder that would come each Christmas morning as we peeked under the tree...with each Christmas service singing Silent Night, Holy Night. My heart wants to be filled with traditions past, that are passed no more. The wooden bowl full of nuts; the smell of fresh tangerines; the huge peppermint stick, broken into pieces and meted out one small chunk at a time.

Is this hole in my soul, this hurt - is it for the Christmas traditions long forgotten? Or for the memories so precious? This nostalgia always brings an ache. And rightly so. The word is from Greek "nostos" or homecoming, and "algos" or pain.

#### ***The pain of homecoming.***

Only to find the house vacant. Life changes. Divorce leaves holes, death leaves empty spaces. Life's circumstances leave ragged edges like wrapping paper torn and tossed. This longing that pierces me: is it a longing for all the "should haves?" I should have tried harder; I should have visited more often. Is my soul subconsciously grieving for opportunities lost?

"...they meant to reassure themselves that nothing now was really changed, that things were as they always had been, and as they always would be, forever and ever, amen. But they were wrong. They did not know that you can't go home again." Thomas Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again*.

It's good to remember the past, to learn from it, to have fond memories. But to camp there, pining away for what is no more, is to waste precious time of the here and now - the time to make new memories and begin new traditions. At some point, it's time to turn and move forward.

*But the Lord says, "Do not cling to events of the past or dwell on what happened long ago. Watch for the new thing I am going to do. It is happening already, you can see it now! I will make a road through the wilderness and give you streams of water there."*  
*Isaiah 43:18-19 (GNT)*

And so this year, I will remember Christmas Past with great fondness. But I will live in Christmas Present, the here and now, looking up in anticipation of Christ's birth. Waiting. For. Him.

Won't you join me?

# *Week 2*



Day 6

*Gabriel*

*Today's reading: Luke 1:18-19, 26-30*

In the story of Jesus' birth, the angel Gabriel bursts into the lives of two ordinary people: Zechariah and Mary. He had earth-shattering news for both of them:

Zechariah would become a father in his old age. His son John would prepare the way for the Lord.

Mary would become mother to the Messiah, even though she was a virgin.

This news was enough to change the course of Zechariah and Mary's lives. But how can the things Gabriel said change the way *we* anticipate Christ's birth? It's simple, really.

Gabriel tells both Zechariah and Mary "Do not be afraid" (vv 13, 30). Fear may grip you during this season. Perhaps this is your first Christmas without a loved one. Maybe you can't imagine how you will purchase simple gifts for your children or family. Maybe, you just can't muster up the joy that should envelope you at Christmas. Don't be afraid. Have no fear. Fear not.

How?

Stand in the presence of God.

*"Then the angel said, 'I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was He who sent me to bring you this good news!'"  
Luke 1:19 (NLT)*

Gabriel stands in the presence of God. As we approach the birth of our Savior, finding time to stand in His presence may seem impossible. But spending time with God is the only way to find joy and peace during this busy season.

Our time with Jesus doesn't have to be only first in the morning, as we begin our day.

***We can take God's presence with us throughout the day.***

When God's presence goes with us, we will find rest (Exodus 33:14). And everybody can use a little rest during Christmas, amen?

**Points to ponder:**

\*Take God's Word (and his presence) with you during the day. Memorize a favorite verse. Repeat it often during the day.

\*Give the gift of God's Word. Buy a small gift Bible and give it anonymously.

Day 7

*Zachariah*

*Today's reading: Luke 1:5-20*

Zachariah was a righteous man, who was careful to obey all the Lord's commandments and regulations. He was a GOOD man.

And yet one tiny speck of unbelief cost him his voice for nine months. He was stunned when the angel Gabriel told him his wife Elizabeth was going to have a baby. After all, they were both older than dirt. Zach couldn't believe something so preposterous!

Zachariah had nine months to prepare his heart for everything the angel had told him.

God heard your prayer...

You're going to be a daddy!

You will name him John...

He will be great in the eyes of the Lord...

He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth!

He will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God...

He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord...

I wonder what Zachariah thought about during those long, quiet months? Did he watch Elizabeth's belly grow, and think "Unbelievable!"? Did he replay all the promises in his mind, and ask "How, God?"

When the baby was born, everyone was surprised that the parents named him John. At the exact moment Zachariah was obedient by naming the baby, he could speak again.

Nine months of silence. Zachariah was forced to ponder the miracle of it all. His son, John. Full of the Holy Spirit! Preparing the people for the coming of the Lord!

*"He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly." Luke 1:17 (NLT)*

***Perhaps Zachariah spent those months pleading with God to prepare him.***

*Lord God, I believe! Help me be a good father. Help me prepare my son to do the work You have prepared for him to do.*

We prepare our homes for Christmas, but do we prepare our hearts? Pray and ask God to prepare your heart for Jesus.

**Points to Ponder:**

\*Prepare a meal for a needy family. Deliver it Christmas Eve.

\*For further reading: Mark 1:1-8

Day 8

*Joseph*

*Today's reading: Matthew 1:18-24*

Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, seemed to be a quiet man. A upright man, who listened and obeyed.

For a righteous man of his day, Joseph's circumstances should have thrown him into upheaval. But instead of wailing about the injustice of his situation, complaining to all who would listen, Joseph remained calm and quiet. He considered his problem, meditated on it, pondered it.

And then? He listened to God's counsel given through the angel, and acted on it.

He didn't argue, talk back or say "That's a great plan, BUT..."

Instead, he got up and obeyed immediately. No questions asked.

*"When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife." Matthew 1:24 (NLT)*

Oh, that I was a bit more like Joseph! Ok, a LOT more like Joseph. To be obedient to the Lord NOW, and not give myself time to make excuses. To listen to God and hear what His will is. And then to do it, not altering it to match my own whims or wishes.

***Joseph's quiet contemplation turned into immediate obedience.***

And look at the blessings! Joseph became step-dad to the Savior of the world!

Scripture repeatedly reminds us that we will be blessed when we obey the Lord. Think of it this way: if you don't obey, God's gonna find someone else to do His will. That "someone else" will receive His blessings.

Don't miss out on the blessings. Be obedient!

**Points to Ponder:**

\* Read through a portion of God's Word. Pull out the spiritual principals. Is there a command to obey? Put it on your calendar. Plan to OBEY!

\*For further reading: Deuteronomy 28:1-14 (PS - it's really good!)

Day 9

*Mary*

*Today's reading: Luke 1:26-38*

Oftentimes, I bring turmoil and angst on myself. No one's fault but my own. I have so much on my to do list, so many things to tend to, that I become overwhelmed. My brain starts racing and trying to figure out all that needs to be done, and when I can find time to do it.

Think about Mary. A young teenager, a virgin. An angel appears to her and tells her she will conceive a child by the Holy Spirit! Good grief!

Not only that, this child would be called the Son of the Most High God. Whaaaaat?

Mary didn't rush around like a chicken with her head cut off, wondering how on earth she was going to handle being pregnant and unmarried. She didn't wring her hands over whether she would be able to care for this child of God. Before Gabriel even told Mary about Jesus, she was pondering his greeting.

*"And coming in, he said to her, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was." Luke 1:28-29 (NASB)*

Mary quieted her thoughts and contemplated deeply what the angel told her. Because of this, her heart was ready to hear his news.

Are your thoughts and to-do's racing to and fro in your brain this Christmas season? Can you quiet them and ponder the birth of our Savior?

**Points to ponder:**

- \*Brain Dump all your thoughts and to-do's. Prioritize them and make a list of what is most important.
- \*Spend a few minutes at the beginning and end of each day. Quiet your thoughts. Focus on the birth of our Savior.

Day 10

*One Man's Trash: A Christmas Gift of Love*

Eyes wide, I tiptoed toward the Christmas tree. Slowly I moved closer. That's when I saw it - the most beautiful doll cradle I had ever seen. I could hardly believe it was mine. Santa must have left it at the wrong house!

Reaching out my hand, I touched the cradle and gave it a gentle push. It rocked slowly, causing the white-as-snow fabric that skirted it, to sway slightly. I peeked inside and saw a miniature pillow, covered in matching white eyelet fabric. My eyes sparkled at the thought of my sweet baby doll's head sleeping on this pillow.

Lifting the fabric skirt, I took a look underneath at the cradle. The smell of fresh paint wafted up. Ah, fresh paint! The white cradle and rockers had to be brand new, with that smell. I hardly noticed the patched holes in the wicker. This doll cradle was so much newer and nicer than the one my Mama had picked up off a trash pile a few weeks ago!

Years later, Mama told me the story of that cradle. One of our neighbors had evidently cleaned out all their closets. There was a large trash pile in front of their house. Driving past, something caught Mama's eye. She pulled to the side of the road, and I watched as she plucked something from the top of the mound. It was an old battered doll cradle. The once-white wicker had turned a weathered gray, with many holes in the sides. The rocking cradles were broken. What I saw was just a piece of junk on the top of the heap. But Mama saw the beauty in it.

In the evenings, after my brother and I had gone to bed, Mama and Daddy became Santa's elves. Daddy cut and sanded two new rockers and put a fresh coat of paint, while Mama covered the torn wicker with an eyelet skirt she sewed. She even made a matching eyelet pillow. Mama and Daddy worked and worked until the doll cradle looked brand new.

***It was the most beautiful gift - so full of love. And isn't that what Christmas is all about?***

Doesn't Jesus do the same for us? He picks us up off the trash pile of life. He pours His love over us, like a fresh coat of paint. He puts a new heart and a new spirit in us. He patches the holes of our hurts, and gives us renewed strength for this rocky life. He cradles us. Jesus doesn't see us as the broken and torn people that we are - He sees the beauty of who we can be in Him. And He works and works on us until we are brand new.

What a beautiful gift of love.

And isn't that what Christmas is all about?



*Week 3*



Day 11

*The Manger*

*Today's reading: Luke 2:1-7*

When Jesus, the savior of the world, made His debut here on earth, there was not a lot of fanfare. No crowds to welcome Him, no pristine hospital, not even a hotel room. Mary and Joseph had to stay in the stables, and this is where she gave birth to Jesus. His first bed wasn't one with soft, flannel sheets. It was a feeding trough, a place the cows hung out to chew their cud.

*"And she gave birth to her Son, her Firstborn; and she wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room or place for them in the inn." Luke 2:7 AMP*

***Isn't it amazing that the One who would feed the five thousand  
was first laid in a trough for feeding?***

Nothing elaborate, just a rough, wooden feed box. Simple.

Several years ago, I happened to have bronchitis about the same time I would normally decorate the house for Christmas. I love, love, love pulling all the boxes out of the attic and seeing the decorations purchased through the years. But that year, the attic dust would have done me in. I threw a few Christmas pillows out, and that's all we had.

Simple.

Easy.

You know what? It was nice. We didn't have to struggle and strain to take boxes down or push and pull to get them back up. We were free to enjoy the simplicity of Christ's birth. Like the simplicity of the manger, there was not a lot of bling to bedazzle us. We focused on Jesus. Our Christmas stress level went down a notch or two.

**Points to ponder:**

\*What can you simplify this Christmas?

\*Too many decorations? Clear out the excess and give to someone (a young family, perhaps?) who may be in need of Christmas decor.

## Day 12

### *Shepherds*

*Today's reading: Luke 2:8-20*

For the most part, my days are just plain ol' ordinary. I usually tend to float through them. Sometimes, at the end of the week, I look back and think "What happened this week?" I get wrapped up in the tedious day to day routine. I don't notice things.

And then, something will strike me with such wonder, that I go through the day filled with awe.

Perhaps it's the way the sun's morning rays break through the clouds. Maybe it's the way ice or dew sparkles on the tree limbs, like diamonds.

It could be a song on the radio that causes me to burst into worship and praise, and changes the whole outlook of my day.

Suddenly, my ordinary day is filled with a new outlook, and I'm seeing life with fresh eyes.

And so it was with the shepherds. They were doing their ordinary job, keeping watch over the sheep. Suddenly, one of God's angels stood before them, and God's glory was blinding them. Not only that, a whole host of heaven's angels joined the first one! What a heavenly choir that must have been!

After hearing the good news of a Savior born, they *had* to go and see.

***It was life changing, as meeting Jesus always is.***

Afterward, the shepherds went back to their ordinary jobs, caring for their ordinary flocks. But there was a difference. They had seen Jesus!

*"The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them." Luke 2:20 NLT*

I imagine they were filled with such awestruck wonder, they could hardly contain themselves. I imagine they begin to see everything a little differently - with a new perspective. A brighter one.

#### **Points to ponder:**

\*Does Jesus fill you with awestruck wonder?

\*Change your ordinary, everyday routine. Take a different route to work, or sit on a different side of the church. What new people or things do you see?

Day 15

*Wise Men*

*Today's reading: Matthew 2:1-12*

I can't fib here, or skirt around the truth: I struggle with worship. Oh, I can praise God for Who He is: God of love, faithful, healer, jealous, provider. I can thank Him for all He does: answers prayer, protects.

But worship? If I praise God for who He is, how then do I worship Him? Because we all know it's more than just singing songs.

So, I looked to the Magi.

They were foreigners from the East. Although the Magi were Gentiles, they knew what was written by the prophets about Messiah. They followed the star that led to Jesus.

*"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." Matthew 2:2 (NASB)*

And then?

They *rejoiced* with great joy.

They fell to the ground in *worship*.

Finally, they presented Him with the *treasures* they had brought.

The Magi found great joy in Jesus. We can too, during this season. At times it may be stressful, but we can choose to rejoice that our Savior lives, and that He will one day return for us.

They gave Him their treasures. What treasure do you hold dear? For me, it is control. As I worship Jesus, I can honor Him with my love, and submit control of my life to Him.

The Wise Men worshipped Him. In a literal sense, this means to fall to the ground, to prostrate oneself. But I've also found a definition that is befitting worship of the King of Kings:

*Worship is to honor with extravagant love and extreme submission.*

True worship, in other words, is the priority we place on who God is in our lives and where God is on our list of preferences. True worship is a matter of the heart expressed through a lifestyle of holiness and submission.

***We can worship by honoring God with God honoring behavior.***

To worship Jesus, we can surrender our treasures to Him in love and honor; we can humble ourselves and bow low before Him; we can recognize His worth, and keep Him top priority during this Holy season - and always!

**Points to Ponder:**

\*What are different ways you can express your worship of Jesus this Christmas? Caroling, giving, obedience

\*For further reading: John 12:1-8. Mary pours expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. What treasure can you lay at the feet of Jesus?

*Day 14*

*Simeon*

*Today's reading: Luke 2:25-35*

We looked forward to the birth of our third grandchild - a grandson! While we adored our first two grandchildren (a granddaughter and grandson born of our daughter) with all our hearts, there is something about a grandson born of your son. A little, tiny man to carry on the family name. Hope for future generations of our family.

As his mom's belly grew, so did our joy. We were filled with pregnant anticipation. Toward the end of her term, we looked each day for signs that he would soon be born. And then, there he was! We held him close in our arms, our hearts swollen with love for this precious gift from God.

Simeon, also, was ever watchful, looking for the consolation of Israel. He knew the baby brought into the temple by Mary and Joseph was THE ONE he had been looking for and waiting on. Hope, comfort and salvation. Just the right gifts for the world.

*"Simeon took the child in his arms and gave thanks to God" Luke 2:28 GNT*

Simeon took the baby Jesus into his arms and praised God. I imagine he held Jesus close, delighting in the softness of the newborn's skin. Marveling at the miracle of His ten little fingers and toes. Knowing He was a Light to the world. A needed Savior.

***Are you looking for Jesus this Christmas?***

Are you waiting with expectation to see Him? As you read through the story of His birth, will you hold Him close to your heart and praise God for His gift to you?

**Points to Ponder:**

\*Look around each day. Do you see evidence of Jesus in the world? In others around you?

\*Think back to times you've seen Jesus in your own life. Hold those memories close to your heart. Praise God for His faithfulness.

Day 15

*My Debt is Paid - A Christmas Story of Love*

My last Christmas at home with my parents. I wasn't sad or bittersweet...I was over the top excited! I would be getting married in six months, and would spend the following Christmases with my new husband. Who could ask for anything more?

I loved Christmas mornings at Mama and Daddy's. It was always a free-for-all. Everyone opened their gifts at the same time. Shouts of "Aw, thanks! Just what I wanted" or "What IS it?" filled the room. It was no different that Christmas morning. Wild and crazy excitement filled the air. Except when I got to one particular gift. Everything and everyone quieted down.

I ripped into the wrapping paper, and found - a cereal box! Mama was always like that. Wrapping our gifts in whatever box she found. I couldn't imagine what was inside that plain ole box. For all I knew, it could have been cereal!

But it wasn't. It was an envelope, with a piece of paper folded up inside. I carefully opened the paper, to find the title to my car. Mama and Daddy had not wanted me to go into this marriage with an outstanding loan. They had paid off the remaining few months of my car note. They had paid my debt.

Tears of gratitude streamed down my face. I tried to say thank you, but the lump in my throat kept the words inside. They loved me so much, they paid my debt. It was the greatest gift they could have given me.

There was another gift given long, long ago. No fanfare or fancy wrapping. Just a baby in a stable, wrapped in dirty cloths. God's Son. The Messiah. Immanuel, God with us. Jesus.

\*How often do we squeal with delight at the gifts under the tree, but forget the tree at Calvary?

\*How often do we see the red of the Christmas season, but forget His blood that was shed?

\*How often are we brought to tears of thankfulness for the greatest gift God gave...His Son Jesus, paying our debt of sin?

My prayer this Christmas, and every day, is that we would be like the shepherds, after seeing Jesus:

*"The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them." **Luke 2:20 (NASB)***

# *Week 4*



Day 16

*Jesus*

*Today's reading: Luke 2:41-46*

Every year I wait for it.

The family down the road decorates their yard for Christmas. Every year, they display the larger-than-life wise men, camels, shepherd boy, and lambs, all outlined in bright lights.

But they don't have THE lamb.

Every year I wait for them to place baby Jesus in the scene. To complete the picture with the One who completes us.

Maybe they are waiting until Christmas Day?

But no.

They have forgotten Jesus.

***Don't forget Jesus.***

Mary and Joseph forgot Him. Oh, it wasn't on purpose. They were traveling home with a caravan of relatives, after celebrating the Passover in Jerusalem. They thought Jesus was with them, assuming He was probably with a cousin or an uncle. After all, it was a large extended family. Surely someone was watching out for Him, weren't they?

They thought they had Jesus.

But they didn't.

He got lost in the shuffle. Left behind in the hustle and bustle of packing a crowd of people to go home.

*"And when they failed to find Him, they went back to Jerusalem, looking for Him [up and down] all the way." Luke 2:45 (AMP)*

This year, don't let Jesus get lost in the shuffle.

Don't leave Him behind, because of a busy schedule.

After all, He is the One we are waiting for, longing for, hoping for. Jesus is the fulfillment of all our hopes.

Even though the place and the circumstance in which Jesus was born was not ideal, his mother Mary found clothes and wrapped Him tightly. She didn't forget to care for Him.

The shepherds didn't forget to tell others about the One they had seen.

The wise men didn't forget to worship the One they found.

Joseph didn't forget all the angel had told him to do, in anticipation of this Special Child.



Simeon didn't forget to look. He knew he could depart this earth and go home, because he had seen the Consolation of Israel.

Don't forget Jesus. He is Christmas.

**Points to Ponder:**

\*Don't forget Jesus. Before the hustle and bustle of gift opening, unwrap the gift of Jesus. While your family is gathered to celebrate Christmas, read the story of His birth in the gospel of Luke.

Day 17

*Home*

*Today's Reading: Psalm 27*

I'm a home body. My home, my dwelling place, the place I live, is where I look forward to being, even after the best vacation a gal can ask for. There's just something about being home.

What does "home" mean to you?

\*Home is where your heart is, a place you want to be, especially during Christmas.

\*Home is a place of safety and security.

\*Home is where you feel comfortable, where you can be yourself.

\*Home is where the people and things we love the most are found.

\*Home is where the lights shine brightest.

Isn't this what Jesus should be for us? Shouldn't He be where our heart is? Our place of comfort, safety and security. A place we can just be ourselves. That's what He wants for us. He wants us to make our home in Him, just as He makes His home in us. (John 15:4)

***Shouldn't Jesus be what we love most? Shouldn't He be the brightest Light in our heart?***

Home is a place of belonging. Jesus gives us that warm, safe, light-filled place.

Come home for Christmas this year! He has left the light on for you.

*"I have asked one thing of the Lord; it is what I desire: to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, gazing on the beauty of the Lord and seeking Him in His temple." Psalm 27:4 (HCSB)*

**Points to Ponder:**

\*Open your home for a Christmas meal. Invite those who may live far from their families. Be home to them.

\*For further reading: John 14:1-3

Day 18  
*The Lights and The Light*

It was a Christmas Eve tradition: Mama would dress my brother and I in our candy cane striped pajamas (my brother denies the pj's, but I'm 95% certain we had them. I think we had matching caps too!). Daddy would pack us in the car, and we'd drive through beautiful neighborhoods and look at Christmas lights. Back then, the lights were the real deal - no multi-colored string of lights flashing to the beat of some hip-hop Christmas song.

These lights were luminaries: a layer of sand in the bottom of a white or brown lunch sized paper bag, with a candle placed in the sand. Many of the bags had Christmas designs cut into them - Christmas trees, Santa Claus or stars. The bags were placed along walkways and the candles were lit.

As we drove, I would peek out the car window, watching people walk from one circle of light to the next. Just when I thought they would have to walk in darkness, we'd slowly round a corner, and another luminary would be there to brighten the path. The warm, golden glow from the candles radiated out a few feet, lighting the way.

Those were REAL luminaries. But, if you want to read about a TRUE luminary, you must begin in story of creation.

*"God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth."* **Genesis 1:16-17 (NASB)**

These lights and stars God placed in the sky are luminaries, or light-bearers. Their purpose is to provide light to the earth. And so it has been throughout scripture.

*"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."* **Matthew 2:2 (NASB)**

The Wise Men were guided by the eastern star to the baby Jesus. The light of the star led them to The Light.

*"Then Jesus spoke to them saying 'I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life.'" John 8:12 (NASB)*

Jesus is The Light who illumines the earth.

*"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star."* **Revelation 22:16 (NIV)**

The morning star (generally Venus) is the first star to appear in the east before sunrise. You've perhaps heard the phrase "It's always darkest before dawn." That's when the Morning Star really shines - when the world is dark. Jesus provides light when we need it most.

***It's simply beautiful, isn't it? And beautifully simple. Jesus IS our true Christmas light.***

God placed the stars in the sky to light our way. He gave us Jesus, the bright Morning Star, the Light of the world, to do the same. Jesus illuminates our path and guides us, even through our darkest days.

Son of God, love's pure light...

## Day 19

### *Christmas Traditions: Cornbread Dressing*

Christmas dinner growing up always meant Mama's cornbread dressing. It was perfectly moist - not too dry, not too watery. Because I loathe watery cornbread dressing, don't you? Mama's dressing had big chunks of chicken from a hen she cooked herself. The homemade stock was added to just-right yellow cornbread and stale white bread crumbs. The amount of celery she added was never overpowering, and there were onions galore. The piece de resistance was a touch of sage, which my Granny taught us to use.

A year or so after Mama died, I tried to replicate her dressing. I looked online and found just the right recipe. Yep, I'm a 58 year old, process-driven rule follower, and I needed a recipe to guide me. No matter how many times I watched and helped Mama chop, mix and cook, she never measured. I wanted my dressing to be heavenly, just like hers. I searched high and low and found a traditional cornbread dressing recipe from Southern Living, complete with sage!

I needed to double the mixture so we would have enough for everyone. No problem for this accountant, right? Why no, not at all! I multiplied everything by two...except the broth. I forgot to double the broth. {Sigh}

It was dry. Dry-As-A-Bone dry, let me tell you! A choking hazard. But it had good flavor. How do I know? I ate some. Choked it down, because, ya know, it's the principle of the thing!

How thankful I am that we serve a God who doubles, triples and quadruples His grace and mercy to us each and every day!

*For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. **John 1:16 (ESV)***

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. **Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)***

And how thankful I am for His son Jesus, the true bread of life!

*Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. **John 6:35 (NLT)***

Through Him, in Him and with Him, we will never hunger or thirst again - no matter how dry the cornbread dressing!

Here is a copy of this special recipe. I hope you enjoy it. And don't forget to double ALL ingredients if you are making twice the recipe!

### *Sage Cornbread Dressing*

2 - 6 oz. pkgs cornbread mix 1/3 cup butter  
1 cup chopped celery  
1/2 cup chopped onion  
1 Tbsp chopped fresh sage or 1 1/2 tsp dried sage  
1/2 tsp pepper  
1/4 tsp salt  
4 white bread slices, cubed  
  
2 1/2 to 3 cups chicken broth  
2 large eggs, beaten

1. Prepare cornbread according to package directions for a double recipe. Let cool; crumble into a large bowl.
2. Melt butter in large skillet over medium heat; add chopped celery and onion; saute until tender. Stir in sage, pepper and salt. Stir celery mixture and bread cubs into crumbled cornbread. Add chicken broth and eggs; gently stir until moistened. Spoon into a lightly greased 11x7 inch baking dish.
3. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 to 50 minutes or until golden brown. Garnish with fresh sage if desired.

*Enjoy!*

## Day 20

### *Home for Christmas: Gathering at the Table*

Oh, how I loved the conversations around Mama and Daddy's table at Christmas. The ladder back chairs were hard and uncomfortable, but the conversations were easy and relaxed. We laughed and joked, and ate our fill of all the homemade goodies.

The chairs are gone now, and the table has relocated to my brother's home. We don't get together as often as we used to, but when we do, you can bet we'll have the best food around, and laughter that abounds! We'll be talking so much, we forget to include a key ingredient, or maybe we put two times the amount? Oh, well, more is always better, especially when it comes to family, food and fun!

Since many of us have guests for Christmas, I thought I'd share a quick, easy side dish with you. It's sure to be a hit at your family gathering!

#### *Roasted Corn Grits*

- 1 cup butter
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup heavy cream (or half-n-half)
- 1 cup grilled corn
- 1 cup yellow corn grits (not instant)

1. Roast or grill one cup of frozen corn niblets with about 1/4 to 1/2 stick of butter. Yes, real butter. They won't taste the same if you use the fake stuff. It's not good for you anyway. Haven't you heard that margarine is one molecule away from plastic? No, use real butter. If you have to, take a few laps around the block after dinner to work off the calories. You'll feel better. For the best flavor (other than the butter), grill the corn. If your hubby doesn't have the pit lit and ready for cooking, add a bit of liquid smoke to the corn. Heat on stove top or in the microwave.

2. In a 2 quart pot, add 2 cups chicken broth, 1 cup heavy cream (I use half-n-half. I mean really, we have to cut calories somewhere, amen?), 1 cup yellow corn grits (not instant, use Polenta) and another 1/2 stick or more of butter. Add seasoning to taste. I use salt, fresh ground black pepper, Tony Chachere's Creole Seasoning and garlic. I suppose while you're adding seasoning, you could snazz it up with a bit of finely diced onion, but why mess with simplicity and perfection?

3. Bring mixture to a boil. Read the back of the Polenta bag carefully. Mine says "Stir frequently. Use a long handled spoon, because mixture pops and bubbles, and can burn." OH YEAH it can burn when it pops out on you! OUCH!

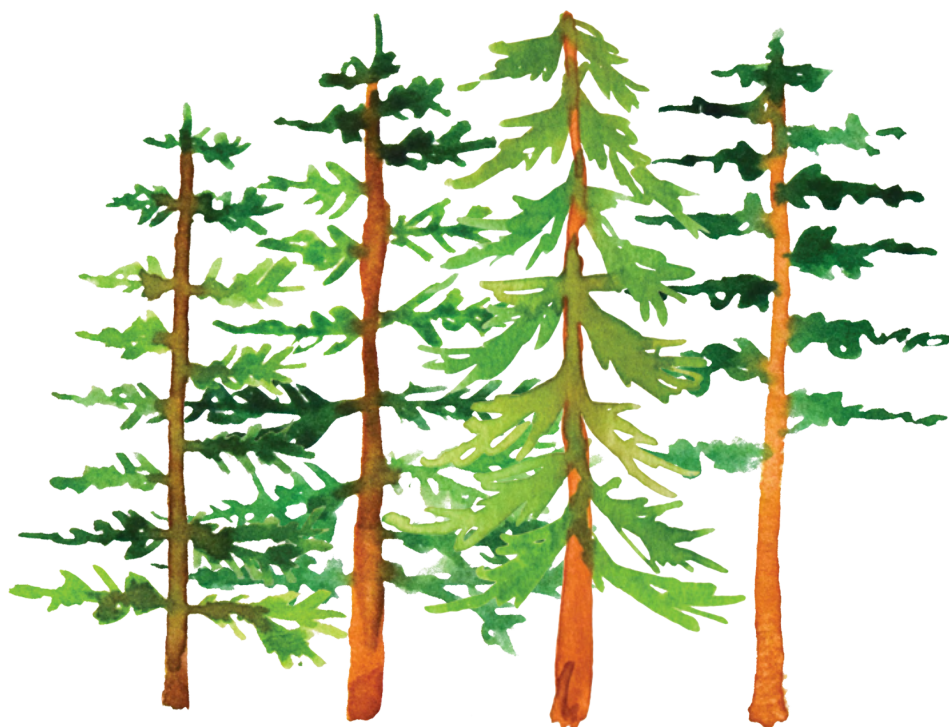
I use my roux "spoon" to stir. Down here in south Louisiana, roux spoons are used when making a gumbo or soup roux (oil and flour burned to a pretty copper color) from scratch. But we don't make roux from scratch any more. We buy Savoie's already mixed roux. You can't use that in a gumbo cooking contest, though. But I digress {SQUIRREL!}.

4. Don't be concerned if you see little black buggy-looking things in the grits. They are NOT corn meal weevils. Black specks are normal in whole/coarse ground corn grits.

5. Stir continually for 3 - 4 minutes. Turn off stove, continue stirring until thickened. Cover. Let stand for 15 minutes.

6. Sprinkle chopped green onion tops over the corn grits, serve and enjoy your family time around the table!

*They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity. Acts 2:46 (NLT)*



## About The Author

Ellen pens her stories from the Bayou Country of South Louisiana, where gumbo and crawfish reign and majestic oaks provide shade for weary sojourners. When not writing and mining the depths of God's Word, you can find Ellen digging in her flower beds, relaxing on the back porch, hanging out with her grandkids, or traveling with her husband John.

Ellen has loved writing since high school, but this passion lay dormant for many decades. When her mom passed away in 2011, Ellen felt the Lord urging her to write her stories. She shares these deep truths from God's Word in teachable, relatable and often funny tales that help women see God's faithfulness in their own lives.

Ellen is passionate about scripture and her desire is to see women dig into God's Word and thirst after Him with all their hearts. A truth dweller and story teller, Ellen writes at Ellen Chauvin (dot) com, where she encourages her readers to soak in God's Word and sprout seeds of faith.

She has contributed to Deeper Waters, Word Nerd Wednesday, The Laundry Moms, Sweet to the Soul, The Consilium and The Message, a study magazine published annually by the women's department of WEGOM, a non denominational evangelistic organization in Nigeria.

*The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher,  
that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word  
Morning by morning He awakens —  
awakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. **Isaiah 50:4 NRSV***



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