



Christmas

All Things Bright and Beautiful



Written and compiled

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&

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Introduction



I love the fact that Christmas isn't just a set of remembrances or dead rituals, but a holiday alive with supernatural wonder. The virgin birth, a guiding star, the sky resplendent with celestial beings heralding the Messiah, the Prince of Peace.

Two-thousand years later, the voice of the Savior can still be heard, His touch can still be felt, and all of humanity can still find His saving grace.

That is what this little Christmas book is all about—
this living holiday of miracles!

So, pour yourself a steaming cup of cocoa,
add a dollop of marshmallow cream, and sit with us
awhile. We'll talk of Christmas—of all things bright
and beautiful.





Every Christmas there is that moment when our family tree has been adorned to the fullest, when the lights flicker on like a thousand twinkling stars, and the beauty of it makes my spirit gasp. There's such a feeling of wonderment surrounding that tree—but most importantly, it is knowing that the greatest gift rests not under the tree, but in the very heart of Christmas.

~Anita Higman





The Lord is my strength and song.

Exodus 15:2a (KJV)

My fondest memories of Christmas involve singing carols at home, and with friends as we traveled to our neighbors' homes. Even now, when I hear Christmas music, it seems to set the tone for the season. Caroling is a tradition that goes back for many generations. Doesn't it make the world seem brighter when we hear these well-known words written long ago? "I heard the bells on Christmas day their old familiar carols play?"

~Irene Brand



When friends come over for Christmas meals,
I put out my finest decoration, my best china, and
my sincerest smile. These are my guests, and I want
the evening to be grand. I want them to feel like
royalty! When Christ arrived in Bethlehem, I wish
He could have had a more splendid welcoming, a
more regal place to sleep than a wooden trough
where animals were fed. Even though His birth was
without majestic lodgings or kingly adornments, I'm
so glad He overlooked our foolish blunders, our lack
of hospitality, and chose to live amongst us anyway.

~Anita Higman



*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is
given: and the government shall be upon his
shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful,
Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting
Father, The Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah 9:6 (KJV)



Although, we've always celebrated Christmas, most of our traditions have revolved around our church family. For several years I directed a Christmas cantata. After the final practice, we invited the cast to come to our home for an appreciation dinner for the many hours spent to present the program. After we ate, we congregated in the living room, often wall-to-wall people, where we enjoyed a "gag" gift exchange. We truly are a family, and my church association ranks high among my blessings at Christmas. I pray that they will be a blessing to you during this season of the year.

~ Irene Brand



When it comes to Christmas, God deserves a standing ovation. After all, Christmas holds the true secrets we've all been searching for—meaning to our lives on earth, victory over death, and life eternal. Christmas gives us a reason to work, to laugh, to dream, to love. Christmas is a holiday of the heart and earth's finest celebration. We should rise up with applause and song and praise—just like the heavenly host—and remind the world why we love to say, “Merry Christmas!”

~Anita Higman



*Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign;
Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and
shall call his name Immanuel.*

Isaiah 7:14 (KJV)





I feel great joy in preparing my home for the holiday season. I love to drape boughs of greenery along the staircase, swirl spices into the apple cider, and sing along with all my favorite carols. But this Christmas I hope to take as much time preparing my heart as I do my home. I choose to reflect on the real meaning behind the planning and the parties, the wonderful meals, and the brightly colored presents—it was the extravagant love of a Creator who wanted more than anything to look beyond all our shortcomings and rescue His children, so that He could be with us for all time.

~Anita Higman



After summer starts to fade, and I begin to think of Christmas, my excitement will invariably take me to my favorite craft stores. I love creating all things beautiful at Christmas. What is that desire in me? In all of humanity? Even those who have never met Christ seek loveliness in the midst of chaos, atonement for transgression, and reconciliation over revenge. These heavenly imprints are on every human heart. Christmas celebrates our longing to reconnect—to seek out the One who left His mark on us.

~Anita Higman



*Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring
forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel,
which being interpreted is, God with us.*

Matthew 1:23 (KJV)



Mama's Christmas Fudge

1 cup chopped candied cherries

1 cup chopped candied pineapple

3 cups of nuts (a mixture of pecans and English walnuts is good)

3 cups white sugar

1 cup white syrup

8 oz. cool whip (or 1 ½ cups whipping cream)

1 teaspoon salt

2 teaspoons vanilla

Method: In a large pan put sugar, syrup, salt and Cool Whip or cream. Bring to a boil and cook (continually stirring) until mixture reaches the soft ball stage. Add vanilla. Beat until thickened. Add nuts and candied fruit mix. Pour into greased pans to cool. Cut into squares. Store in tight containers. Refrigerate.

~Irene Brand

My grandmother had the most wonderful imagination when it came to traditions, especially at Christmastime. She made certain that Christmas Eve was the most exciting night of the year for her grandchildren. She would even go outside in the cold night on Christmas Eve just to jingle some bells that were supposed to sound like sleigh bells. The purpose was to assure my brother and I that Santa was on his way. My grandparents had no fireplace for the man in red, but that didn't matter. My brother and I had more than enough imagination to fill in the gaps. I'm sure we fell asleep dreaming of all our favorite things—that is if we ever slept at all.

~Anita Higman



Long before video cameras were popular my father would record our Christmas mornings on cassette tapes. The tearing of paper, the squeals of delight, and hopefully the thank yous, were all recorded there. Decades later I still have those tapes tucked away in a box. This holiday season I think I'll dig them out of the closet and share a few childhood Christmas memories with my own children.

~Anita Higman



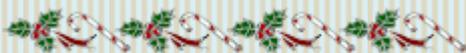


*Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we
have seen his star in the east, and are come to
worship him.* Matthew 2:2 (KJV)



I live in the Houston area, and in this muggy climate it takes some sincere effort to get into a Christmassy mood. But we try. I start the process by revving up for the holidays in September. I listen to holiday CDs in October, and I start decorating with boughs of greenery the moment we say goodbye to Thanksgiving. Even in December when the weather is warm and people are out playing tennis in their shorts, I try my best to rejoice in all things bright and beautiful—all things Christmas.

~Anita Higman





My father was a school bus driver, and he had this wonderful tradition of giving each child a silver dollar or a giant peppermint stick at Christmas. Sometimes my father would take me with him to buy the bundles of pretty striped candy. Looking back on this and other pleasant memories, I'm happy to say that my father kept Christmas well. How do you keep Christmas?

~Anita Higman





And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. Luke 2:13-14 (KJV)



Rarely does Houston get snow, and it's even rarer for us to be gifted with a white Christmas. But several years ago flakes began to fall all around our city on Christmas Eve. In nearby towns even more of the white fluffy stuff was reported. So, the next morning after our family had opened our presents and eaten our big meal we drove to the deepest snow we could find. And we laughed and played until we'd had our fill. It was one of those serendipity Christmas days that will never be forgotten.

~Anita Higman





It was the winter wild
While the Heaven-born child
All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies.

~John Milton



My family heritage is German, and some of my mother specialties were goulash, einlauf soup, and creamed cucumbers. Now years later with my own family I've added one of those delicacies—creamed cucumbers—to our holiday meal. In fact, my kids would think there was something terribly amiss if we didn't include that side dish on our holiday menu. What specialty item do you serve on Christmas that reflects your family's heritage?

~Anita Higman





I think a fun Christmas tradition would be to write about a few of your favorite family memories, print them out on parchment paper, roll them up, and then tie each of them with a ribbon. On Christmas Day you could set one of these little memory scrolls next to each plate at dinnertime. Then set back and watch the smiles as they light up the table.

~Anita Higman



Holiday Fruit Drops

1 cup of raisins
1/2 cup of water
1/2 tsp soda
1 cup of sugar
1 stick of margarine
1 tsp of vanilla
1 egg
2 cups flour
1 tsp baking powder
1/2 tsp salt
1/2 tsp cinnamon
1 cup of chopped walnuts
1/2 cup of candied cherries
1/2 cup of candied pineapple

Method:

Cook raisins in 1/2 c. water for 5 minutes. Add 1/2 tsp soda and cool. Mix shortening, sugar, egg, vanilla, and add fruit, nuts, and raisins. Combine the dry ingredients with the fruit mixture.

Refrigerate for one hour. Drop by teaspoon on a greased cookie sheet. Depending on the size of cookie desired, use a larger amount of dough. Bake 15 to 20 minutes at 350 deg. This is a tasty cookie, and it's also "Christmassy."

~Irene Brand



Bringing home the Christmas tree is among my most cherished memories of Holiday observance. There were hundreds of evergreens on our property, but we always cut a Virginia cedar. We lived on a 200-acre farm, and my brother and I chose the tree. It usually took a half-day to find the special one. After we brought it home, my mother and sister helped with the decorations. We didn't have much money, so we used the same ornaments and tinsel year after year. No lights, of course, because our "neck of the woods" didn't get electricity until after World War II. It was a special time for our family.

~Irene Brand



I love all things Christmas—the beauty, the merriment, the promise. Even Santa Claus holds a place in my heart. He really lived, and he really was a man who came bearing gifts—spending his life giving away all his fortune to help the poor. But mostly what I love is the fact that he understood the need for redemption. Even St. Nicholas chose to call Christ His Savior.

~Anita Higman





Gifts for the Magi. What treasures can I give Him? He has created all things, so all things belong to Him. But the one present Christ truly wants from me is a gift only I possess and only I can freely give—my love at Christmas. And always.

~Anita Higman



And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her. Luke 1:38 (KJV)

Mary was blessed in an exceptional way when she was chosen to be the mother of our Lord. This blessing wasn't without sacrifice. When we submit our will to God and give sacrificially, we follow Mary's example. During the Christmas season, most people are more likely to help others than at other times in the year. We don't always receive recognition when we "do unto others as we would have them do unto us," but our Lord is aware of every service done for Him. God will bless us as we bless others. Let's commemorate His birth by being a blessing to those who are in need.

~Irene Brand



When people say Christmas is for children they think only of the superficial layer of magic surrounding the holiday. They miss the wonder, the radiant light of what is just beyond the gifts—a starry night. A man. A God. A miracle so profound that angels couldn't remain silent, shepherds fell on their knees in worship, and men of wisdom would never be the same again.

~Anita Higman





Jesus' earthly life epitomized humility. He was born in a lowly place. In spite of public opinion his parents condescended to do God's bidding. Jesus submitted to a painful death on the cross. As I celebrate Christmas, I pray for a humble heart. All that I am or have or hope to be, I owe to you, Jesus.
Amen

~Irene Brand



The First Noel

The first Noel the angels did say
Was to certain poor shepherds
in fields as they lay;
In fields where they
lay keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night
that was so deep.





*But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them
in her heart.* Luke 2:19 (KJV)

God's words and deeds are so wonderful that we will never understand their greatness. We can appreciate them more deeply when we spend time meditating on them. All of us have had the experience of reading a familiar passage of Scripture and discerning something we've never seen before. The more we meditate on God's deeds and His Word the more we will understand the impact that Christmas has in our lives. This season of the year is the perfect time to recall God's working in our world and thank Him for His love toward all mankind.

~Irene Brand

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. Matthew 2:11 (KJV)

Why do we give Christmas gifts? The offerings presented to the baby Jesus led to our present-day gift exchange. Do we give to others because we care, or do we give because we're expecting a return gift? When we love family and friends we want to give gifts to them. Love also motivates us to give to the needy – perhaps more at Christmas than any other time of the year. As we purchase, wrap and deliver gifts this year, may we remember that the “reason for the season” is because God so loved the world that He gave His Son.

~Irene Brand



Christmas is so much more than the human heart could have ever dreamed of—ever hoped for. And yet the living miracle walked among us. Ate our soup and bread. Slept in our simple beds. And wept in our brokenness. But Christmas celebrates not merely that Jesus came to walk among us—but that He came to redeem us. Christmastime began with that one Divine miracle.

~Anita Higman





Christmas is for the weary earth-travelers who have lost their way. It's for every person, every culture, every human heart. Christmas is the road back home.

~Anita Higman



And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:7 (KJV)

How often does Jesus find a “No Vacancy” sign on our heart’s door? Jesus isn’t turned away because we are mean or inhospitable. The problem is—we tend to fill our lives with so many other things that there isn’t any room left for Him. Perhaps during this special season, we should ask, “Have I reserved the best room in my house for Jesus, or do I offer him a cot in the attic?” If Christ is going to find the place in our lives that He desires, we’ll have to exclude some of the activities that are unimportant. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus – come into my heart to stay.

~Irene Brand



When Julie Andrews sings *My Favorite Things* in the musical, *The Sound of Music*, I'm always inspired. And I absolutely loved singing that song to my children when they were young.

What are a few of *your* favorite things during the Christmas season? Mine are blue spruce trees and mugs of cocoa—one for you and one for me. A candle's glow, cards and carols, and the quiet fall of Christmas snow.

~Anita Higman



Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Revelation 3:20 (KJV)

In many Christmas dramas, the innkeeper is often considered the villain of the Christmas story. No doubt the inn really was full. Why should he dislodge guests who'd already rented a space in his small hostel? How would we have reacted in similar circumstances? If our bedrooms were full, would we turn away our own families and friends to give shelter to strangers? Probably not. Still, while commemorating the birth of God's son, it would be well for us to examine our hearts. How often have we turned Jesus away when He's been knocking at our heart's door?

~Irene Brand



Joy to the World

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;

Let earth receive her King.

Let every heart prepare Him room,

And heaven and nature sing,

~Isaac Watts





We praise you, God, for the faithfulness of
Your Word. You've promised that whoever seeks
you will not be turned away. This Christmas, I bring
the gift of myself and lay it at your feet.

~Irene Brand





*And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold,
I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be
to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city
of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And
this shall be a sign unto you;*

*Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes,
lying in a manger. Luke 2:10-12 (KJV)*



But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.

Luke 22:32a (KJV)

In an earthly sense, what is the most memorable Christmas gift you've ever received? I recently remembered receiving a gift that made me seem unworthy. The gift was from a ninth grade student. The girl was shy, and I had no idea that she considered me a special teacher. She gave me a blue ceramic cat with two kittens attached by a chain. The most humbling thing about the gift was that she made an F in my class. When I see that gift, I'm reminded that when I was failing my spiritual tests, God loved me enough to save me.

~Irene Brand

When I hike on mountain trails I tend to stare downward at the ground. Sometimes I concentrate on my footsteps so intensely that I forget to gaze up at the breath-taking grandeur all around me—which is the entire reason for me being there, walking those trails! This Christmas, Lord, please help me not to get so focused on the holiday that I forget to look up at your splendor.

~Anita Higman





*But while he thought on these things, behold, the
angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream,
saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take
unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived
in her is of the Holy Ghost.*

Matthew 1:20 (KJV)



It is impossible not to wonder how Handel felt as he composed, *Messiah*. Did he fall so deeply in worship that the notes began to write themselves on the page as if from the finger of the Almighty? Handel's majestic masterpiece is still as powerful as ever—it can still crumble hearts of stone, and it can still stir the multitudes to rise from their seats in reverent awe.

~Anita Higman





Silent Night!

Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and Child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

~Joseph Mohr





Christmas is an invitation to heaven.

It is engraved with His sacrifice,

sealed with His promise,

and delivered with His love.

Will you respond to the greatest invitation
of all time?

~Anita Higman

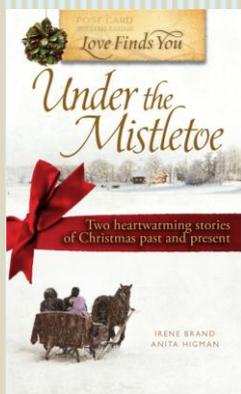




We wish you and your family the merriest
of Christmases, and we pray you find the peace
that passes all understanding through the One
who came in love and grace—Christ the Lord!

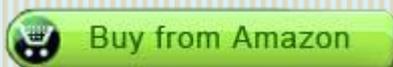


If you enjoyed Christmas—All Things
Bright and Beautiful we hope you'll
consider our 2-in-1 novella collection,
Love Finds You under the Mistletoe.



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Thank you and Merry Christmas!