

# THE WAR CRY



DECEMBER  
2025



Mission Accomplished / The Light of Advent / Unchanging God



That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, *an angel of the Lord* appeared among them, and the radiance of the *Lord's glory* surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. *The Savior*—yes, *the Messiah, the Lord*—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

- Luke 2:8-14



National Publication of  
**THE SALVATION ARMY**  
DECEMBER/CHRISTMAS 2025  
Volume 145 Number 13

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**LYNDON BUCKINGHAM** **GENERAL**  
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**The Salvation Army Territorial Commanders**

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*The Savior*—yes, *the Messiah*, *the Lord*

in Bethlehem.  
And you will find  
You will find  
strips of cloth

- Luke 2:8-12



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# Celebrating Christmas

by COMMISSIONER MERLE HEATWOLE

**CHRISTMAS IS A TIME OF CELEBRATION!** WE decorate our homes and offices; we have Christmas parties with friends and families; we eat delicious food (for many of us, too much delicious food); and we give gifts to show others our love. In our household, Commissioner Dawn and I love decorating our house and listening to Christmas music as early as possible. I usually have to hold her back from decorating the house before November 1, and she has to hold me back from listening to Christmas music before September 1. We just love celebrating Christmas!

One of the most meaningful ways that we celebrate Christmas is by displaying Christmas ornaments from all the countries where we have served or visited over the years along with nativity sets from each of these countries. These are visible reminders to us of the wonderful people from each of the countries who have touched our lives and with whom we have had the privilege of serving and ministering with throughout our officership.

In Luke 2:8–14 (NIV) we read the following account of that first Christmas celebration:

*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."*

These verses remind us of why we celebrate Christmas each year: to remember and honor the birth of our Savior



**“Light is not meant to be hidden, so we should be bold in sharing the good news ...”**

and Messiah, Jesus Christ. The angel said that this good news would bring joy for everyone because Jesus came into the world to bring hope and salvation for everyone. But delivering the message of this good news depends on us. We are called to share this good news with everyone we meet so that they too can join in this celebration.

In our world today, we are confronted with reports of wars, violence and death, which can create a sense of darkness and weigh down our souls. Yet, during this season of Christmas, we are reminded in Isaiah 9:2 (NIV) that, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”

The light which came into our world was the light of Jesus Christ, who came to bring light to those living in darkness. Isaiah goes on to describe in verse 6 the full extent of this light where he says, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

As we celebrate this Christmas season, I pray that we will bring the light of Christ into our world right where God has placed us. Light is not meant to be hidden, so we should be bold in sharing the good news of the gospel with those around us that they might experience the light of God despite the darkness that surrounds them.

Chick Yuill wrote a song, “The Light Has Come,” which says,

*Wonderful Counsellor,  
mighty God among us,  
Everlasting Father,  
Prince who rules in peace;  
To us a Child is born, to us a Son is giv'n.  
To those who walked in darkness  
The Light has come.*

*Son of God, Son of Man,  
Word of God incarnate,  
Suffering Saviour, glorious risen Lord;  
For God so loved the world,  
He gave His only Son;  
No more we walk in darkness—*


FROM THE NATIONAL COMMANDER

*The Light has come.*

*King of kings, Lord of lords,  
Son of God exalted,  
Name above ev'ry name,  
Lamb upon the throne;  
This King will come again,  
the Father's only Son;  
No more a world in darkness—  
The Light will come.*

Throughout this Christmas season, join with me in proclaiming to the world that we no longer need to live in darkness because “the Light has come!” As you celebrate Christmas this year, Commissioner Dawn and I hope that you will experience the light of Christmas in your lives and share that light with those around you during your family celebrations.

However, while it's always great to spend time with family and friends during the Christmas season, let's not forget to also share our celebration with those less fortunate than us. Let's share with them the hope and joy of Christmas both with tangible gifts of assistance but also with the good news of the gospel! Let's find practical ways to demonstrate God's love to those in our communities who need to experience the light of Christmas this year. Select some angels from one of our Angel Trees and brighten the life of a child through your gift on Christmas day, volunteer to help with a toy distribution or Christmas meal, provide a financial donation to help ensure that every family has an opportunity to celebrate a Christmas meal together, or invite someone who has no family close by to join yours for Christmas dinner. These are just a few ways we can spread the light of Christmas throughout the Christmas season.

As you celebrate Christmas this year, Commissioner Dawn and I hope that you will experience the joy of Christmas in your lives, the joy that comes from knowing Jesus as your personal Savior and allowing Him to fill your lives with His love each and every day of the year. May God bless each of you as you celebrate this year. 



by GENERAL WILLIAM BOOTH

**GENERAL WILLIAM BOOTH, FOUNDER OF THE SALVATION ARMY, ENCOURAGED SALVATIONISTS TO CELEBRATE Christmas with cheerful greetings and songs of joy. "There's a time for everything, and this is the merry time," the Founder wrote. Almost 150 years after this article was published, his message is still timely as we celebrate Christmas 2025.**

This is reckoned a merry time. It is considered in this country the correct thing to wish everybody a merry Christmas and to get one yourself if you can. We pity those who have anything which makes them sad at the moment, and so it has become an annual custom to be merry and to help make other people as merry as you possibly can.

Now, we have no objection to this at all; indeed, we like the idea of special periods of rejoicing if you have anything to rejoice over, and it suits The Salvation Army, which believes in being merry all the general year-round, and at special times in particular.

We like the word "merry," and welcome it in religious contexts, although many people think it altogether out of place there. [They think that] we soldiers of the Cross must always be solemn and melancholy and awful. Our hearts must be in our shoes, and our words must be few, antiquated and learned out of a book.

No, we say, and say thanks, that we have not been taught to practice our religion in this fashion. We ought to be merry, and in fact, we should be hypocrites if we were not merry. So, bring out the music—new music, the merriest music. There's a time for everything, and this is the merry time. Now, for the song. Everybody sings—husbands, wives, children, neighbors, strangers, everybody sings—Praise the Lord.

"Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet: praise Him with the psaltery and harp. Praise Him with the timbrel and dance: praise Him with string instruments and organs. Praise Him upon the loud cymbals: praise Him upon the high-sounding cymbals." And let the very trees of the field join in the chorus by clapping their hands.

What is the good of it all? Music is to the soul what the wind is to the ship, blowing her onward in the direction in which she is steered. Do you want to go faster


and faster, to stir up prayer, and strengthen faith? Then bring in the music and raise the song. Sing of other heroes and their doings. Sing of the Victor of the cross. Sing of the blood and the fire ... and sing of everything that you have read about in your Bibles or had revealed to you by the Holy Ghost.

Oh, if you are merry, sing and sing on till you are merrier still, and till every poor, trembling, doubting, weak-kneed soul about you loses his doubts and trembling, and is merry, too.

We are not allowed to sing this tune or that tune, do you say? Secular music, you say, belongs to the Devil? Does it? Well, if it did, I would plunder him of it, for he has no right to a single note of the whole seven. Every note, every strain, and every harmony is divine and belongs to us. So, consecrate your voices and your instruments. Bring out your cornets, harps, organs, flutes, violins, pianos, drums and everything else that can make melody. Offer them to God and use them to make all the hearts about you merry before the Lord.

This Christmas, let us all get into tune, and let there be this heavenly correspondence between the inside "heart" instrument and the outside voice, or whatever other instrument the merry sounds may be produced upon.

There is a stale, old argument about forgiveness of your enemies and disregarding grudges, a peculiarly gracious duty to be practiced at Christmas time to some. But that does not apply to our ranks, surely? Your Salvation Army people don't burden themselves with the memory of grudges and enmities. They forgive as they go along. This is the very time of the year to get low—not only into the village of Bethlehem but to the stable.

And now, strike off, with hearts and instruments in harmony. Do your best, and earth, hell and heaven will gather to listen. Your music shall be welcome and gladdening to the ears and heart of the King of kings. 

A MERRY CHRISTMAS



# Mission ACCOMPLISHED

How Jesus Fulfills God's Creative Work

by **LT. COLONEL DAN JENNINGS**  
illustration by **MATT CHINWORTH**







**WHAT IS THE MISSION OF GOD IN THE WORLD? AND how has Jesus engaged in that work? This is an exciting concept to consider. If the Lord hung a sign outside His shop with “God & Son” inscribed on it, what would that shop be producing? This is one way to think about it. The mission or work of God has been understood as the formation and redemption of all creation. Some have suggested that God’s redemptive work is an extension of the creation story rather than two distinct narratives that intersect at an apex. Rather than understanding the work of God the Father and Jesus the Son as a tag-team handoff, it can be understood as a cooperative work. It should be said here that this does not negate the work of the Spirit in the story of creation and redemption. Later in this article, I will briefly mention some critical notes on the work of the Spirit. However, we are looking specifically at cooperative work in these two areas of God the Father in Jesus.**

It can be easy to read Genesis 1-2 and see the creation story as an act solely or at least primarily of God the Father. We must remember that the first two chapters of Genesis are not intended to be read in a vacuum. They are part of a larger God-inspired meta-narrative. This is even more apparent if we approach Scripture with the presupposition that Jesus is the primary character in the Bible, and all of Scripture is understood through that lens.

In some cases, reading the Bible requires careful interpretation, while in others, it is much more overt. The key to this understanding of Scripture is to read each Bible chapter in the context of the whole. Let’s return to the story of creation noted earlier. To read the first two verses of Genesis in the context of the entirety of Scripture, consider what we read in John chapter one. He, Jesus, “existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him” (John 1:2-3). As we reconcile these creation accounts, we see it was a cooperative work. In other places in the New Testament, we are given the benefit of additional commentary on the creation and work of the Father and the Son. The book of Colossians adds that God created all things through Jesus Christ.

Jesus does not merely observe what the Father is doing in the creation narrative. Jesus is actively participating in the creation. Some have interpreted this to mean that creation was conceived by the Father and carried out by the Son. Others have offered that God carefully directed the creation and that Jesus organized and formed it under the guidance of the Father. What is clear is that both the Father and the Son share in the work of creation. Remember that while this work is being accomplished, the Spirit hovers over the earth or the waters. What is the Spirit doing? Creating also appears to be the correct answer here. We can find some helpful direction in the creeds.

The Nicene Creed affirms our belief in the Spirit as the Lord and giver of life. It was Irenaeus, a theologian who lived in the second century, who wrote that “The Spirit of God brooded over the face of the deep, so also that same Spirit brooded over the virgin’s womb

## "God's mission is the redemption of all creation."

to bring about the new creation, a new beginning for humanity and indeed for all things, through Jesus Christ.” I don’t know if we could ever unwind all that each member of the Trinity is doing in creation. There is cooperation and shared work. An oversimplification of what is happening can be stated this way: the Father is speaking creation into existence, the Son is creating all things as spoken by the Father, and the Spirit is giving life to that which the Father and Son are creating.

Creation is only one-third of God’s work as described in our second doctrine, where He is described as creator, preserver, and governor, and only half of what we understand to be God’s mission—the formation and redemption of creation. Through efforts to understand this concept of God’s redemptive work, the Church began to establish more formally the role of the Spirit in this work, particularly how it relates to the work of God the Father and God the Son. If you spend more than an hour in Sunday school, you will undoubtedly be instructed that Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins. The work of the Son in the redemptive story is as rudimentary as it is profound. Our doctrine teaches us that it is by Jesus’ suffering and death that a sacrifice has been made for mankind. At the heart of missional theology is the understanding that the Father sent the Son to make an atonement for humanity. It is the sending that is critical to the concept of mission. The Father sends the Son. Missional theology takes another step to say that the Father and the Son send the Spirit together. It should also be noted that the Father did not only send the Son to die but also raised Him from death as well. This is critical because, as Michael Lodahl wrote, “Apart from faith in Jesus’ resurrection, the forlorn and confused disciples certainly would never have thought of the Cross as anything but an absurd and tragic ending to a great prophet’s life.” It is the resurrection that had an incredible transformational influence on the formation of the Church and fills us who have been redeemed with hope for eternity.

As important as humanity’s redemption is, God’s mission is the redemption of all creation. Humanity was not the only casualty of the fall and sin. The fall sent deep veins of the consequences of sin through the far reaches of creation. As the writer of Romans has stated, creation was subjected to futility. However, creation longs for redemption. “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:20-21 ESV). It is this redemption or, as Romans puts it, “setting free” that is the work of the mission of God. It is a cooperative work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A work initiated by the Father, fulfilled in the Son and reassured us by the Spirit. Jesus’ work can be seen as a fulfillment of the work done earlier by the Father and their work together. ☩





## hope

**“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine” (Isaiah 9:2).**

In the darkest season of the year, we light the candles of the Advent wreath as a reminder that God is light and there is no darkness in Him at all (1 John 1:5). In the darkest seasons of our lives, the light of God often shines through when we least expect it. Advent reminds us that hope is not just wishful thinking. It is the confident assurance that God is with us. He is always working for our good when we place our trust in Him.

Some hopeful actions you can take:

- Light a candle every night this week to remind yourself that no darkness can ever extinguish the light of God.
- Write the scripture verse from Isaiah on a piece of paper and put it where you will see it often.
- Send an encouraging text to someone who is going through a hard time.

## peace

**“Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased” (Luke 2:14).**

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. When the world is chaotic or we experience the uncertainties of life, He offers a peace that the world cannot give. From the first announcement of the angels to the shepherds, the good news of Jesus is that we can experience His constant presence in our daily lives. We can even become messengers of peace to others who need to hear about Him.

Some peaceful actions you can take:

- Listen to some Christmas carols or hymns that bring you a sense of peace. Let them remind you of the angels' announcement of peace on earth.
- Make time each day for some quiet prayer and meditation. Ask God to show you some ways you can share the good news of Jesus during this holy season.
- Each morning, invite Jesus to speak peace to your heart and the hearts of those with whom you will interact that day.

## joy

**“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people” (Luke 2:14 NIV).**

Joy is our most basic response to God's presence. When we recognize and receive the hope and peace He offers, we naturally experience the great joy the angel described to the shepherds in Luke 2:10. We rejoice not because everything is perfect, but because God is with us. He does not reserve this gift for just a select few. It is for anyone who will receive the good news of Jesus.

Some joyful actions you can take:

- Each day this week, make a list of things that bring you joy and thank God for them.
- Listen to some joyful Christmas music. Sing along, even if you don't think you're a great singer. Release some joy in the world!
- Spread joy by doing something kind for someone else. Sharing joy actually increases it for both giver and receiver.

## Love

**“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).**

The Christmas story is a love story. The season of Advent invites us to receive God's love and to share it with others. As we tell and re-tell the story of Jesus' coming into the world, we cannot help but to be shaped by that story. God's love changes us and enables us to love others generously – the way Jesus loves us.

Some loving actions you can take:

- Make room in your heart for love and healing.
- Forgive someone. Let go of a long-standing grudge or resentment. Be the one who takes the first step toward reconciliation.
- Do a random act of kindness or two. Pay for someone's coffee or lunch. Donate to a red kettle, knowing you are anonymously helping someone in need.







### An Open INVITATION

You can receive  
the free gift of salvation  
through Jesus Christ  
by praying something  
like the following:

**Dear God,**  
**I KNOW I AM A SINNER.**

I need Your forgiveness  
and grace. I believe that Christ  
paid the penalty for my sin,  
and He died in my place,  
and He rose from the dead.

I invite Jesus Christ to  
come into my life as Savior.

Thank You for saving me  
from my sin and making me  
Your child. Help me to grow  
and learn how to serve You.

**Amen.**

# UNCHANGEABLE CIRCUMSTANCES. UNCHANGING GOD.

Psalm 86

by PHIL LAEGER



**THE AUTHOR OF PSALM 86 CRIES OUT TO GOD BECAUSE THERE ARE LITERALLY MEN out to kill him!** It reminds me of a scene from the movie “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade.” Indiana and his father find themselves tied back-to-back in chairs with the room burning down around them. They manage to move themselves into an empty fireplace, activating a switch that revolves them into a secret room, only to immediately revolve them back where they started, fire still blazing. Indy’s father wryly says to him, “Our situation has not improved.”

Have you ever felt like that? Like you keep coming back to the same kind of difficult situation in your life? You’ve managed to escape one bad relationship or circumstance, only to come full circle, right back to the thing you were trying to avoid.

Elisabeth had a heart for Bible translation. She met her future husband, Jim Elliot, while studying at Wheaton College. After marriage, they moved to Ecuador, bringing the gospel to its indigenous peoples. Three short years into their marriage, Jim was killed while trying to make contact with an unreached tribe. This was not the life that Elisabeth had imagined. How would she manage? How would she carry on? She could not change anything that had happened, nor alter her current situation. Years later, she would write, “The secret is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances!”

Her words echo the Apostle Paul’s. In the midst of his suffering, and in order that his readers might patiently endure their own suffering, he reminds the Church at Colosse of the unsurpassed privilege that is theirs, to have “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27 NIV). In Paul’s words, this “great mystery” — Christ in us — is something that the people of God have looked forward to for a long time. Let’s rewind the clock a few thousand years.

Moses stood on Mount Sinai, receiving the Ten Commandments from God. As he stood there God revealed the essence of His character to him:

*The LORD, the LORD,  
a God merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger,  
and abounding in steadfast love and  
faithfulness”*  
(Exodus 34:6 NRSV)

This character is the basis of His covenant with Israel. Over the next several hundred years, they would repeatedly test His patience until He finally gave them over to their hearts’ desire: a life apart from His love and protection. He allowed them to be defeated, captured, and exiled to Babylon. Yet still, there in exile, He did not abandon them. Through the prophet Jeremiah, He promised to bring them back to their homeland. Not only that, He promised, “I will put My law within them, and I will write it on their hearts ... I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me for all time, for their own good and the good of their children after them” (Jeremiah 31:33; 32:39 NRSV).

Scholars think that the author of Psalm 86 was reflecting upon these two passages when he wrote his psalm of lament (remember, men are trying to kill him). He prayed, “Give me an undivided heart to revere Your name” (v. 11), and he recalled to mind God’s self-revelation to Moses, “You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in mercy and truth” (v. 15). In the midst of his painful circumstances, he postured himself towards God: I am devoted to You (v. 2), I trust in You (v. 2), I cry to You (v. 3), I lift up my soul to You (v. 4), I give thanks to You (v. 12).

But notice also that the psalm does not end with a nice, pretty bow, tying everything together. There are still men who hate him, still those trying to kill him. So, what has changed? What has changed is that, after the Psalmist has looked around at the mess of his life, he has then refocused his gaze on the love of the Lord. And not just some abstract concept of God’s love, but God’s personal love for him (v. 13). He has invited God into the very depths of His being, to tie up all of the loose ends of his heart. He was, in essence, praying, “O Lord, how great is Your




*“In the midst of his  
pain, he turns his  
attention instead to  
the love of God.”*

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love! Help me to love You like that!” His situation may not have improved, but His experience of God’s love changed him right smack dab in the middle of it.

Do you find yourself in circumstances that you would not have chosen? Most of us will never know the distress that rises to the level of people actively seeking our destruction, but all of us will experience the corruption and brokenness of our world bearing down on us. Life interrupts our plans. It does not bend to our will, no matter how strongly we wish that it would. Perhaps you have come to a place where you are bargaining with God, “Please take this thing from me, and I will...” As many of us have discovered, God does not operate like that. The Psalmist knows this, too. In the midst of his pain, he turns his attention instead to the love of God.

This love is the bedrock of our faith as Christians. It is the Father’s love, which Jesus came to demonstrate, to invite us into. His prayer in John 17, right before He faced the cross, was that the Father might make us all one in Him, partakers of the same love that the Father and Son shared before the foundation of the world. This eternal love, this unity, is what Jesus is painting a picture of when, just a few chapters earlier, He tells His disciples to abide in Him, the same way that branches of a tree abide in the tree itself. We are invited into the love of God. Into unity with Him. Into the joy of fellowship with the One who took our pain into Himself. And this fellowship can weather every circumstance.

Rather than trying to claw your way out of your current circumstances, turn your attention to meditating on the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord in the midst of everything you are going through. How can the reality of Christ in you change your perspective about the things in your life that you would not have chosen yourself? The secret is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances. 





## Christmas Light

by ENVOY DIANE URY

*O gracious Light,  
pure brightness of the everlasting Father in heaven,  
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!  
You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,  
O Son of God, O giver of life,  
and to be glorified through all the worlds.  
-Phos Hilaron*

**THESE WORDS ARE A HYMN BELIEVED TO BE ONE OF THE VERY FIRST WRITTEN BY THE CHRISTIAN Church. It was sung in the dark as candles were lit. Pagans of the first and second centuries documented that they could hear Christians secretly hidden in shadow, “singing, as if to a god.”**

Perhaps the dark hopelessness of trying to live a life of meaning has enshrouded you. It's as if your reality is a casket with a lid that's closing, and there's just a small gap remaining from which to cling to a glimmer of light. I can remember what living in that

darkness felt like when I didn't know Jesus. The memory feels like a thick, palpable, black fog (Psalm 82:5, Ephesians 4:17-19). One of the great things about reading a chronological Bible is that you experience the darkness, even of the people of God,

**"Jesus, the  
eternal Son,  
creator of  
the universe,  
will shine  
upon us"**

when they've failed to walk in the light of His face. A friend reading the Bible chronologically sighed, "There's no Jesus until September!" One enters the story of human existence and senses the agony of brokenness and despair that results from rejecting God's ways. Our ridiculous choices lead to horror and futility. It's important that we sense how intensely bleak our reality is without Jesus (Isaiah 59:1-15).

Even more powerful to consider is the fact that after the closing words of the Old Testament, there are 400 years of silent darkness. No word from Yahweh to the hard-hearted blind. They didn't want to listen, so He didn't speak.

But they still had the revealed word of the prophets filled with outrageous hope and promise. "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; on the inhabitants of a country in shadow dark as death, a light has blazed forth" (Isaiah 9:2 NJB, also Isaiah 59:16-22; 61). Meanwhile, those in darkness who had turned their faces away from God cried out to Him for the Light of His Face (Psalm 4:6; 67:1; 80:7,19; 89:15).

What is this longed-for light? It's fascinating to consider that before the sun or moon were created, light was already there (Genesis 1:1-5).

"This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you:


God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all" (1 John 1:5 NLT).

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1-5, 14 NASB).

The entrance of God into the world by taking on our humanity blazed forth uncreated personal light into our world of seething, suffocating darkness. He will not tolerate our tomblike existence. Jesus, the eternal Son, creator of the universe, will shine upon us, lifting us out of hideous, overwhelming gloom. Jesus is the Face of God turned toward us in omnipotent mercy.

"The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God ... For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of the darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4,6 NASB).

"He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me. I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness" (John 12:45-46 NASB). No matter how foreboding the world's condition or our own personal despair, during Christmas, we lift our eyes to Jesus. Even that gesture breaks the power of darkness by creating a chink through which the powerful love and light of the Triune God will fill our sight, encourage our hearts and enable our vision and voices to sing:

*Dispel the shadows of the night,  
and turn our darkness into light.  
Rejoice, rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee!* 

### QUESTIONS TO PONDER

**1.** For many, Christmas brings a mixture of feelings. Are there dark parts of your heart in need of light and encouragement?

**2.** Meditate on John 12. Offer to God any dark places in your life and allow His light to enter in.



EXPLORE

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Mystery answer: RESURRECTION

## Miraculous Events

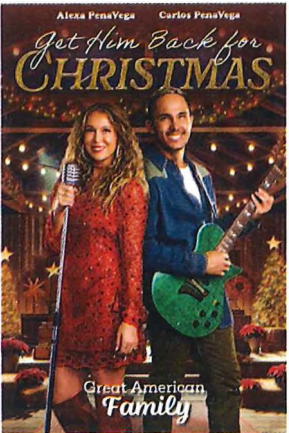
AARON	GREAT FISH	MOSES
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CLOAK	JOB	RED SEA
DAMASCUS	JOEL	SAUL
DANIEL	LADDER	SHADRACH
DEATH	LAZARUS	SUN
DIP	LEPROSY	TEMPLE TAX
ELIJAH	LIONS	WHIRLWIND
ELISHA	MALCHUS	WIDOW
EMPTY TOMB	MESHACH	WINE
EVIL SPIRITS	MOON	

After you have found all the words, unscramble the remaining letters to form the mystery answer!

## WATCH

## HOLIDAY MOVIE PLAYLIST

Grab some cocoa, gather the family, and press play on these heartwarming holiday classics! Whether you’re watching a young basketball star rise in “Like Mike” or discover how paths cross in “Silver Bells,” make it extra fun by spotting appearances of The Salvation Army in each film. From ringing bells to red kettles, you’ll see how giving back is part of the season’s magic. How many Salvation Army moments can your family find?





# STRENGTH IN THE DELICATE

by CAPTAIN STEPHANIE PAVLAKIS


I LOOKED OUT THE WINDOW, AND THE FIRST THING THAT CAUGHT MY EYE WAS THE WEEPING WILLOW tree. While it's certainly a large tree, in many ways it seems so delicate. The trunk was the same as any other tree, but the branches were what caught my attention. They were thinner than an average tree branch and stretched from the top of the tree all the way down to the grass. In fact, the branches were so thin that I almost couldn't see them because of the many thin leaves that traversed two sides of each branch.

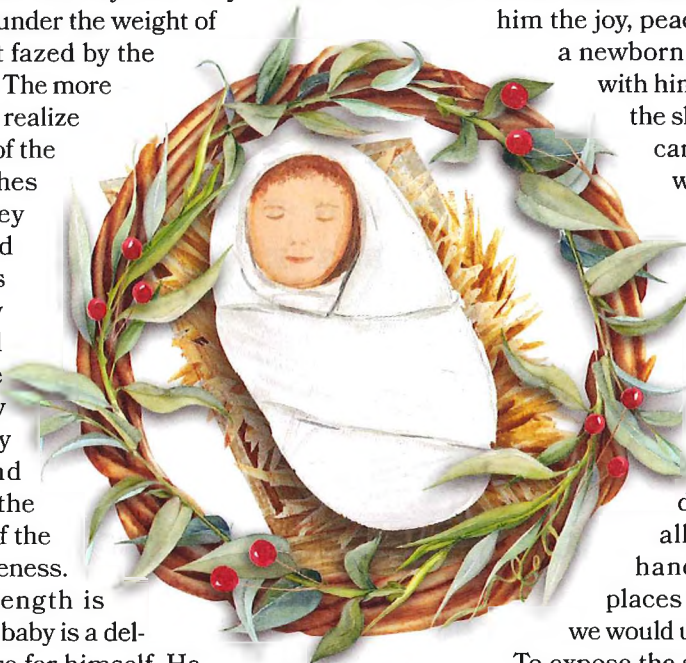
What is interesting is that despite their delicateness, the branches seem to be the strongest part of the tree in many ways. They are not overwhelmed by the many narrow leaves. They do not break under the weight of their length. They are not fazed by the breezes that push through. The more I watch this tree, the more I realize that it is actually because of the delicateness of the branches that they survived. If they were rougher, they would not be suitable for the types of leaves they bear. If they were thicker, they would be too heavy to extend the length of the tree. If they were less movable, they would break in the wind rather than moving with the flow of air. The strength of the willow tree is in its delicateness.

This same type of strength is visible in the baby Jesus. A baby is a delicate thing. He cannot care for himself. He has a weak immune system and limited mobility. He is entirely dependent on his caretakers. It is surprising that this delicate form is the one in which God would

choose to send His only Son. Yet, this delicateness is truly a strength. In coming in a delicate form, Jesus experienced all that we did, from birth to death. He brought with him the joy, peace and hope that come with a newborn baby and then carried that with him to the cross, the grave, and the sky so that we can continue to carry that newborn excitement with us every day.

Similar to a weeping willow tree or a newborn baby, there are places in our lives in which we are delicate. Places we protect with self-defense coping mechanisms. Maybe even places we are ashamed of. Could it be that in hiding our delicate places, we are actually playing into the enemy's hands? Could it be that these places carry such strength if only we would use them for God's Kingdom?

To expose the strength of our delicateness would be a victory against the devil. Let the reminder of the newborn Christ lead you in embracing the delicate today. 



## Experiencing God:

- Where are the places in life in which you feel most delicate? Other ways to consider the delicate places might be as vulnerabilities, weaknesses, or differences.
- Ask the Lord to show you why He made you delicate in these ways. How can He use it for His Kingdom?

### Supporting Scripture:

*"My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."*  
—2 Corinthians 12:9

“Our strength grows out of our weaknesses.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

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-Ralph Waldo Emerson

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His one and  
only son...

(1 John 4:9)