

## Day 1 - God's Extraordinary Gift

God's extraordinary gift of salvation was sent in the form of a baby — a child! Reflect on what God did....He became a powerless, dependent, subservient baby! He was thought of as the illegitimate son of a teenager. More than two thousand years later, it can still be difficult to comprehend how phenomenal, astonishing, remarkable, and amazing the incarnation was and is! The Jewish people were waiting for Israel's deliverer, but this extraordinary entrance into the world was not what they imagined! ONLY A GREAT AND HOLY GOD could enter into a human body, and into time, to accomplish salvation!

Christmas Gift Shop (CGS) shares the extraordinary gift of salvation through Jesus Christ with many parents, grandparents, and guardians of children and youth each year. Over the past 23 years, over 800 of these adults have received Christ into their lives! Only God's Holy Spirit can empower those who share this message and open the hearts and minds of those who hear. Our main focus is to provide a beautiful and welcoming appointment time for each guest so that parents realize that God's people love them and HE is providing for them. We want every detail to be special. It has been an incredible effort for our churches to provide such an amazing ministry year after year! God has always raised up "an army" of volunteers who have loved, prayed for, and supported CGS with their gifts of time, money, and loving service. Our prayer is that God will use all the preparation, the beautifully decorated building, the gifts for their children and youth, and the words spoken during their visit to soften hearts and create an atmosphere where they can hear and receive the Gospel.

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)*

*Oh Father, our hearts are full of wonder and praise for your extraordinary entrance into the world you created. As Jesus is lifted up by volunteer chaplains and buddies at CGS, may He draw to Himself those needing salvation.*



## Day 2 - An Extraordinary Humble Birth

There's no disputing that the Bible says Mary placed her baby in a feeding trough shortly after His birth. This detail highlights the humble circumstances surrounding His birth. "But how many of us have ever wondered if there's more to it — another reason why God's Son began his life in a feeding trough? Could God have been telegraphing a message, hoping we would understand that Jesus would become a source of nourishment for his people, feeding and sustaining us throughout our lives?" ("Immanuel" by Ann Spangler)

*Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst." (John 6:35)*

"Lacey," is a single mom struggling to provide for her three children. Last year was her second year to come to Christmas Gift Shop. A part of our ministry is to give age-appropriate new Bibles to parents, children, and youth. "Lacey" received Bibles for her children the first year she was a guest. Last December, she shared with the chaplain that she reads the Bible to her children each night. What a joy to know that parents consistently share the "Bread of Life" with their children!

There are many grandparents and great grandparents raising children as a result of their own children and grandchildren abandoning their responsibility. Lucy is raising three grandchildren, Doris is raising one, Frank, a widower, is raising three. The list is long and their gratitude for this ministry is priceless. Their number one prayer request is for God to help them as they raise those entrusted to their care. Their financial resources are very limited since the overwhelming majority of these senior adults only receive a small Social Security check.

Our Heavenly Father cares more than we can comprehend for the needs of children and Godly family members who take them into their homes. May we comfort each one as they are our guests at the shop with the words, "Immanuel, GOD IS WITH US!" May God grant that each child will come to know personally the God who will never allow them "to hunger or thirst."

*Thank you, God for the selfless church members who provide beautiful clothing, stockings, and toys for children each Christmas.*

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## Day 3 - The Extraordinary Light

"Jackie" entered the Christmas Gift Shop exhausted and sad. Her husband was in the hospital and very sick. It was Christmastime, and not only did she not have money for gifts, but her limited income was not paying all the bills. Her husband had been ill and hospitalized for several weeks, so their income was greatly reduced. Jo Bailey, then Christmas Gift Shop Coordinator, introduced me to "Jackie" and I took her to the age appropriate rooms for her to choose gifts for her children. Afterwards, we headed to the buddy room where I offered her refreshments and shared with her the greatest gift anyone can receive — Jesus Christ. "Jackie" prayed and asked Christ to come into her life that day. The next year, a knock came at the back door of the shop. There stood "Jackie" with a \$100 bill in her hand. Jo invited her to come in and she said, "I just wanted to give something back to help someone else." Jo thanked her and said, "Let me show you the shop; it's more beautiful this year than last year." As they walked through the building, "Jackie" exclaimed, "There it is! That's the room where I became a Christian! It will always be the most beautiful room to me."

The truth is, when I shared with "Jackie," she was so tired and burdened that I truly wondered if her decision was genuine or just a response to nice people for being helpful to her at a difficult time. Isaiah 55:11 tells us *"So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."* It is a wonderful joy to know that our witness is never in vain! We will never know all the results of our giving and sharing of the Gospel at CGS, but we can be sure God does not waste that which is done in His Name.

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

"Jackie" received life that day amid a difficult time in her life. Chuck Swindoll says, "Ministry allows us to gently touch our hand to the chins of those who need Christ and lift their faces skyward, so they can see beyond their circumstances to their celestial calling."

*God, thank you for allowing ordinary people to be a part of your extraordinary plan here on Earth.*

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## Day 4 - An Extraordinary Shepherd

*"I AM the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep... I AM the good shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me." (John 10:11, 14)*

Every Christmas Gift Shop, there are parents who are terminally ill, children who are critically sick, families devastated by terrible fires, women who have been brutally abused, and persons who have been imprisoned. There are many in deep distress over the problems and life choices of their children. Heart attacks and strokes have forever altered the lives of some parents. The list of needs is long that result in financial hardship. Who can provide comfort, direction in life, and the ability to move to a place of wholeness other than "THE GREAT SHEPHERD OF THE SHEEP?"

When David says, "He makes me to lie down in green pastures," he is saying, "My shepherd makes me lie down in his finished work. With his own pierced hands, Jesus created a pasture for the soul. He tore out the thorny underbrush of condemnation. He pried loose the huge boulders of sin. In their place, he planted seeds of grace and dug ponds of mercy. His pasture is a gift to us. This is not a pasture that we have made. Nor is it a pasture that we deserve. It is a gift of God." (Max Lucado)

*"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)*

This is THE MESSAGE that allows us to share with confidence — IN CHRIST there is HOPE for all of life's problems and circumstances. He is a personal shepherd with the personal mission and ability to get all of us home safely. Therefore, "nestle deeply until you are hidden, buried, in the tall shoots of His love, and there you will find rest." (Max Lucado)

It will always be the mission of CGS to tell parents about the Good Shepherd who freely gives eternal life to all who will receive it.

*We praise You our God for the gift of salvation through faith in your Son Jesus Christ. Thank you that your gift to us is "exceeding abundantly above all that we could ask or think." (Ephesians 3:20)*



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## Day 5 - The Extraordinary Door

*Jesus said, "I am the door. If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." (John 10:9)*

Last year, "Celia" needed help with gifts for her children. Her husband lost his leg and money was tight. They have a 15 year-old son with special needs and an 11 year-old daughter who has had five heart surgeries. "Celia" did not have a relationship with Jesus. The volunteer helped her to understand that she does not have to live life on her own, and that Jesus can be with her in all things as well as give her hope and a unique joy throughout her life. "Celia" chose to enter through "The Door." She "found pasture," and left with a peace that only Jesus can provide!

Through the years, over 800 have chosen to enter through "the door." God has used the testimonies and gospel witness of the chaplains and buddies serving in the Christmas Gift Shop ministry to articulate the invitation of Jesus. One of the miracles we see repeated every year at CGS is God matching the "right" buddy with the guest who needs to hear what that buddy can uniquely articulate about salvation. The transformed life in Christ matched with the person needing to hear that message is truly something only the extraordinary Lord Jesus can accomplish. What a privilege it has been to watch God work!

Why focus on the "I AM's" in scripture? We begin to perceive how deeply God loves us and how outrageous His plan to save us truly is! "He is the tender Father who cannot bear to be separated from His children, who, in fact, is driven to reveal the extent of His love by performing the greatest miracle of all – allowing his Son to become one of us, to take us by the hand and lead us out of darkness. This is a miracle we cannot fathom no matter how often we celebrate it." ("Immanuel" by Ann Spangler)

God forever changed religion to a relationship with the birth of His Son.

*Father, thank you for the extraordinary invitation you offer to all who will enter through "the door". Thank you for selfless volunteers who prioritize sharing the gospel with CGS guests.*



## Day 6 - The Extraordinary Vine

*"I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)*

Christmas Gift Shop began with a prayer to use the season of Christmas to share the gospel message with those in our county who need gifts for their children and youth. The churches and volunteers of the Shelby Baptist Association have prayed that all we do would glorify the King. The largeness of this ministry requires over 1,000 volunteers to give and serve each year. Thousands of dollars worth of gifts are needed. A prepared building in which to conduct CGS was a critical need from the beginning. This ministry has been the largest evangelistic ministry of our associational churches for 23 years. God raised up an army of people within our churches who love and support CGS every year. God uses this ministry to create a fellowship among our churches as we do local missions together!

CGS has not only touched countless lives in Shelby County, but it has been a model for other Alabama associations as well as associations in Florida and Tennessee. All of this is a result of continuous, consistent prayer and service of persons in our SBA family of churches.

Charles Spurgeon says, "Thou art coming to a king; Large petitions with thee bring."

I believe God has honored our hearts desire to bear fruit for Him.

One of the most profound promises in the Bible is this: "I am with you."

The Christmas story in Matthew emphasizes this truth, and Jesus said it to his disciples (and to us) at the end of that same Gospel: "Surely I AM with you always, to the very end of the age." If the Lord is with us, what do we have to fear? What do we lack? How can we lose? He hears us, watches over us, and guides us as we attempt to serve in His Name. How incredible it is to be a branch in THE VINE and draw on the resources of Heaven to attempt great things for God!

Thank you, Father, that you allow us to be "laborers together with God" (1 Cor. 3:9 KJV) so that others may know the joy of being branches in the Vine.

## Day 7 - An Extraordinary Eternal Home

We stand on holy ground in the Christmas Gift Shop. God has done amazing things in the lives of volunteers and parents alike over the years as He has brought them together to share appointment times.

Phyllis Page is a well-known and loved volunteer who has experienced life with and without Christ. She has walked a path with physical difficulties and has known tragedy with the shock of her husband's sudden death. God has given her the ability to communicate the Gospel in a clear and powerful way that draws others to the Savior.

Last December, "James" and his wife arrived at the gift shop, and were introduced to their buddies. One of them was Phyllis. "James" shared that he was ill and not sure he could walk long enough to choose the gifts for their children. However, "James" was able to shop for their children and was thrilled he could help choose their gifts. While sitting in the buddy room waiting for the gifts to be wrapped, "James" shared that he had been diagnosed with cancer in August and had to quit work. His cancer was terminal, and he had little time. Phyllis immediately asked him about his relationship to Christ. "James" said he knew the Lord and was going to heaven. It just so happened that day was the anniversary of the death of Phyllis's husband. This provided the opportunity for her to share her own painful journey. For the first time "James" and his wife found the freedom to begin talking about his approaching death. The visit to the gift shop led them to be able to address several issues as well as plan for his funeral.

As Phyllis headed home that day, she remembered a letter her husband had written her. Not knowing of his fate, he had the foresight to write this letter to her in the event of his death. He told her and their family where he had put it. After his tragic death, Phyllis's son remembered the letter, and they read it as a family. It was "a hug from Heaven," she said, and it provided a closeness and encouragement that she could have never imagined. Phyllis believed God was leading her to get in touch with "James" to tell him about the letter and encourage him to write his family. He was delighted she called and told her he would write them before the day ended.

The family found the letters after his death on January 16<sup>th</sup>, less than five weeks after coming to CGS. The letters continue to comfort his wife and children.

*Jesus said to her, "I AM the resurrection and the life; Anyone who believes in Me will live, even after dying." (John 11:25)*

WHAT AN EXTRAORDINARY GOD WE SERVE WHO CARES ABOUT EVERY DETAIL OF LIFE! How amazing that He allows us to watch HIM work in the lives of others!

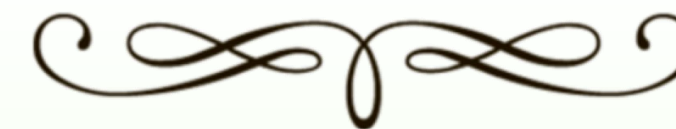
*We praise and thank you, our Father, that you prepared a place for us in your eternal home.*

# Christmas Gift Shop 2018 Devotional



*"The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

*Romans 6:23b*



### Christmas Gift Shop

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