



THE
CHRISTMAS
READER

A NOTE TO THE HOST:

This Christmas Reader is designed to be read aloud, together

The idea is that before you open presents, everyone will connect around the meaning of Christmas and family.

Hearing and reading aloud together will create an atmosphere of grace and appreciation for the gift giving tradition.

Some of the readings are for individuals, and some are responsive readings two people (you and one other). It ends with a reading for the entire group to read as one.

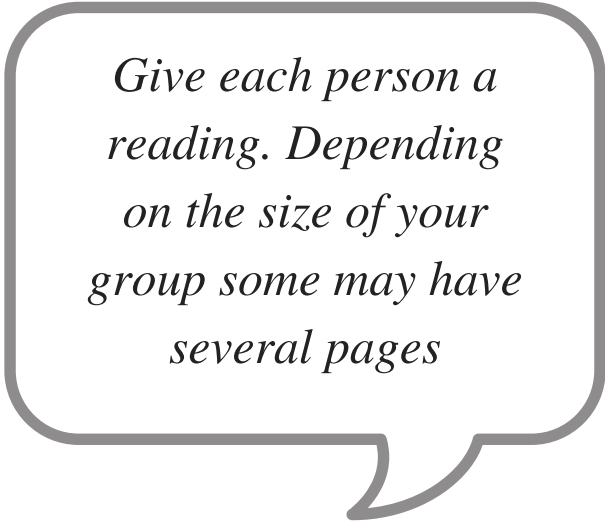
Each reading is a separate page, so you can decide which ones, and which order, fit your family and situation best.

Of course you can add your own.

You print the pages and hand them out one page at a time around the room. Go around the room as many times as you need to distribute all the pages.

You and one other person each get a copy of the responsive reading toward the end. And print enough copies of the final group reading for every other person to have one to share.

(The Christmas Reader is inspired by Seth Godin's Thanksgiving Reader).



Give each person a reading. Depending on the size of your group some may have several pages

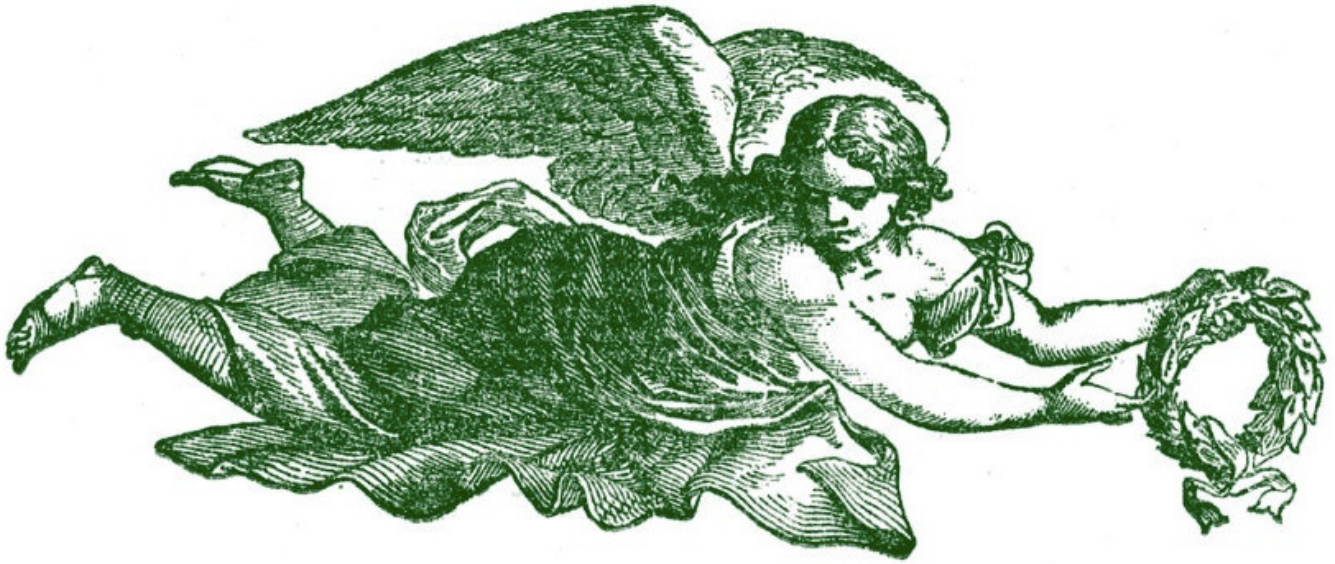
[The following pages are the readings]

If what Christians believe is true, Christmas is not only a Christian holiday, but also a commemoration of a supernatural historical event intended for every human, no matter the religion, nationality, or race.



This Reader will remind us of the heart and purpose of the God of the Bible, and how Christmas reveals his love of peace, forgiveness, reconciliation, generosity, humility, and keeping promises.

These words are meant to be in the air in the space we share, heard in the voices of family and the ones we love most. All the Christmas season has lead to these moments of gathering and appreciation.



Hail! the heav'n born Prince of peace!
Hail! the Son of Righteousness!
Mild he lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die:
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"

~ (From 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing') ~

HOME AND FAMILY and Christmas go together. But no matter how strong our family memories feel, we're all part of something bigger than Christmas feelings.

When God did the most important, meaningful thing in the world, he started with family. And it started with God himself personally. God says he is the father and Jesus is his son.

They have a FAMILY relationship.



THEN GOD created a nation to bring his son the Savior and Lord into the world to rescue and bless the world. That nation started with the FAMILY of Abraham and Jacob.

GOD MADE a promise to that nation. When he fulfilled the promise to the nation that started with a family, he started again with another family, Joseph and Mary. The son of God was born into a FAMILY, with a mom and a dad, and eventually brothers and sisters.

FAMILY IS in the middle of how God saves the world. It doesn't matter how our family looks or how we feel about it. Our family is still part of something deep in the heart of God. It's his idea. He loves it. He delights in it. He made it on purpose to bless the people in it and to bless the world. We're all part of something created for glory.

HE'S PLACED each of us in the middle of this idea, right where he always is: here in our family, in the middle of his own idea that's so important to him. For the good we all want for our family; he wants it too, he wants it more than us, and he wants to bless the world.



Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn

~ (From 'O Holy Night') ~



The coming of Christ makes it possible
for us to welcome one another in joy
and in gladness. As people who live in
His unshakeable kingdom,

May we be willing to hear wisdom
from unlikely people and receive grace
in an unexpected place. May we be
present for someone else, put fear
aside, and trade praise.

Father, show us the people you ask us
to love. Give us the courage to be
loved in return.

~ Emily P Freeman ~





All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”

~ 2 Corinthians 5.18-19 ~

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,
Born this happy morning;
Jesus, to Thee be all glory giv'n;
Word of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

~ (From 'O Come All Ye Faithful') ~



Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.



The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness.

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him.

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

~ John Chapter One ~

So God throws open the door of this world—and enters as a baby. As the most vulnerable imaginable. Because He wants unimaginable intimacy with you. What religion ever had a god that wanted such intimacy with us that He came with such vulnerability to us? What God ever came so tender we could touch Him? So fragile that we could break Him? So vulnerable that His bare, beating heart could be hurt? Only the One who loves you to death.

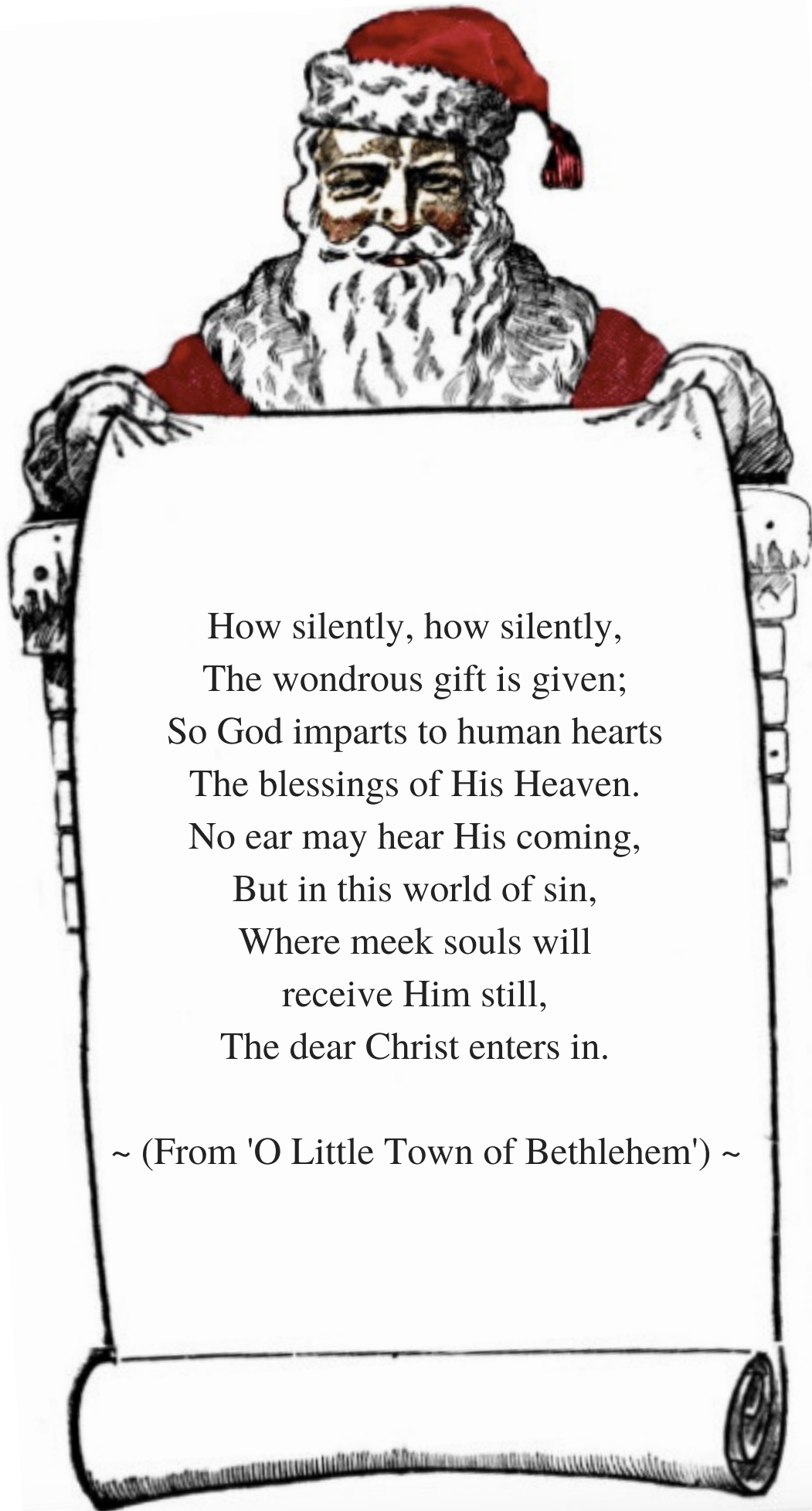
~ Ann Voskamp ~





He was created by a mother whom he created.
He was carried by hands that he formed.
He cried in the manger in wordless infancy -
he the word - without whom all human
eloquence is mute.

~ Augustine ~



How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is given;
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His Heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will
receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in.

~ (From 'O Little Town of Bethlehem') ~

The sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace – Luke 1.78-9

His words remind us that what was to come HAS COME, and is true right now.

The sunrise HAS visited and is giving light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Right now.

The sunrise IS guiding our feet in the way of peace.
Right now, here.

Wherever darkness and shadows grip our thinking, our family, our hopes, there is a sunrise giving light.

Our feet may feel stuck in disagreement, disharmony, fighting, and war, but there is a light guiding us in the way of peace.

In the darkness of unbelief we can only see the dark.

Or we can believe, and look for the hint of blue and yellow in the brightening early morning. Tidings of comfort and joy. Light in our darkness and peace in our turmoil are here.

The sunrise is here.

And Christmas is the celebration of its first rising.



Because God's children are human beings
—made of flesh and blood—
the Son also became flesh and blood. For only
as a human being could he die, and only by
dying could he set free all who have lived their
lives as slaves to the fear of dying.

~ Hebrews 2:14-15 ~



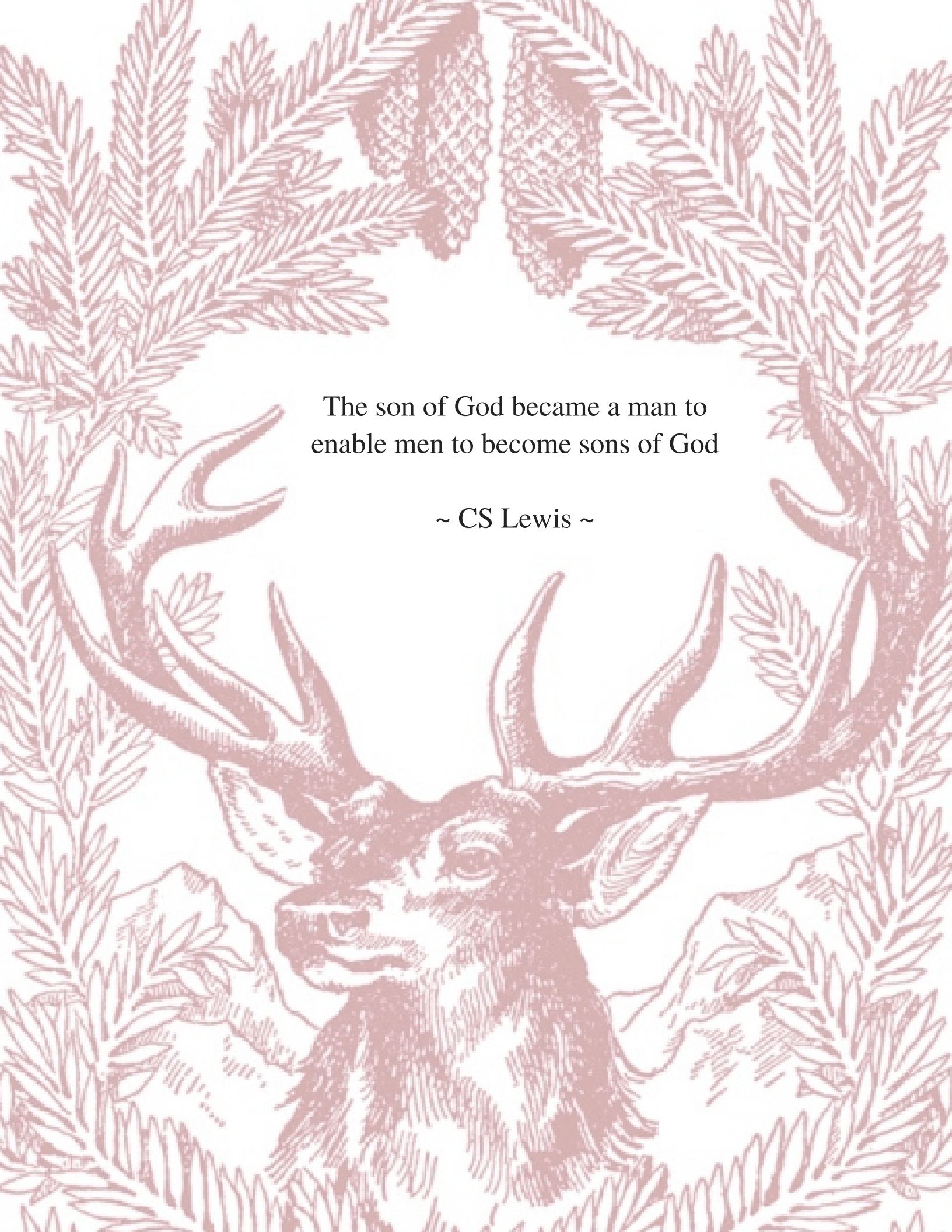
HE SLIPPED into humanity that night, born to die so we can have life. Not just life forever later, but life on this real day, in this moment where we are right now.

Christmas means we have a choice between death or life, conflict or peace, despair or hope.

We are like that little town called Bethlehem, and in the dark streets of our inner life He shines His everlasting light. He chooses to be born in us so that life and peace are made always available in limitless supply.



May we believe with our lives that all of these things we so desperately seek - worth, attention, love, and belonging, are found in Him. He has come, and we are free.

~ Emily P. Freeman ~



The son of God became a man to
enable men to become sons of God

~ CS Lewis ~



Let's release high expectations and pressure on ourselves to meet some standard we made up that no one else is even aware of.

Standards for our family, for our relationships, for what a 'successful' family gathering or Christmas Day should look like.

Let's take our invented idea of a perfect Christmas and family time, and exchange it for the simple expectation of
“good news of great joy.”

The wise men brought riches.
The innkeeper had only a stable.
The shepherds just showed up.
The Little Drummer Boy only played his best for Him.

Let's resist looking at the number or value of our gifts and comparing them to the gifts given by others.

Money and presents are one kind of gift.






Hospitality is another.

So is attention, patience, grace, gratefulness, forgiveness, and words of encouragement.

Let's give what we have.

And let's be generous with it.

"The gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have." - 2 Corinthians 8.12



God started the giving spree when he gave a gift beyond words,
the unspeakable gift of his son.

~ Robert Flatt ~



PAGE 1
YOURS

This is a two page responsive reading. There are two copies of each page, one for you and one for someone else. You both alternate - you read the bold lines

Lord thank you for helping me release the expectation that I can fix or repair anything today.

Thank you for helping me know I only control myself.

May you be patience and calm inside me today.

I trust you to bring out positive, encouraging words at just the right moment, to keep stressful scenes from getting worse.

Don't let my mood or tone of voice be influenced by any chaotic negativity.

Remind me if I start to scold, or get huffy or flustered on the outside. Forgive me when I do it anyway.

Give me the gift of calm silence.

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Grant me grace and wisdom in steering conversations away from past offenses, controversies, and drama.

Remind me of one true, positive, unique, good thing about someone here that I love and want to touch.

Grant me the courage and grace and the opportunity to tell them that one thing and to mean it.

Help me just show up as my normal self today and to not underestimate the power of you in me.

Fill the space between the walls here with supernatural grace and love and a spirit of calm appreciation.

And thank you Lord for reminding us, "In me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

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TO BE READ TOGETHER

(Print enough copies for two people to share one).

God bless the ruler of this house
And send him long to reign,
And many a merry Christmas
May live to see again;
Among your friends and kindred
That live both far and near.
O tidings of comfort and joy,

~ (From 'God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen') ~