



Christmas . . . the Season of Giving . . .

Darkness comes early in December. The nights are colder and we tend to draw within ourselves a little more. At least I do. When it's dark outside, I want to be home, not out and about, not having to drive in the dark. As I age, I notice that it's harder for me to venture out into the unknown. I am more aware of, and more focused on, all the things that can go *wrong*, instead of all the possibilities for things that can go *right*. That focus seems to have changed since my younger self was at the helm.

So, too, with my life. I find myself more at ease with zoom meetings and much more inclined to self-isolate. In the *winter* of my life, I seem to be becomingly more introspective and less drawn to the frivolity that life can offer. I am enticed to pull inward, like a sea anemone that is touched by my hand, to protect, to stay safe with what I know.

Pastoral Council
Mission San Antonio de Padua
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God knows my human tendencies. He knows that darkness and the unknown are scary places for us, even more so as we age. How does God respond? He delves directly into the dark world, both the natural and within our very souls. He offers what we need most in our darkness . . . **Light**. He offers what we desire most . . . **Love**. He provides the help we need most . . . **Hope**. God gives us *Who we need most* . . . His only begotten Son, our Savior, **Jesus Christ**.

In His infinite love and goodness, He offers these gifts at the perfect time . . . when our lives are at their darkest. He offers them in a very non-threatening way, through the birth of a baby. He enables us to bond with Him in a fashion that we can understand. By caring for a vulnerable baby, we learn our dependence on God. By tending a tenacious toddler, we learn self-control and the importance of learning to *do it my own-self*. While setting our children free from the nest and allowing them to take flight, we learn how to release our worries to our heavenly Father, we learn to trust. As we mature as adults, we learn to take stock in our lives, to review our decisions honestly and learn to admit our mistakes and learn from them. We grow in compassion and wisdom. All of this is a journey. All of this is the story of our lives. All of this is intended to bring us right back to where we started . . . as a vulnerable, lovable, amazing, unique individual who was created by God, loved by God, cared for by God and invited home to God.

Christmas is a reminder of the *Season of Giving* that began with an infant in a manger. It is not meant to be a season that begins and ends with the putting up and taking down of decorations. It is meant for the *seasons of our lives*.

That means that I need to stay open to the Holy Spirit's leading. I need to remain aware of those people around me who are also on the journey. I need to remain open to their stories, their pain, their joy and their challenges, as I am becoming more aware of and embracing of my own.

Christmas can *begin a new season of giving* in my life and in yours. With a spirit of gratitude, I can truly thank God for the bountiful blessings He has bestowed into my life. I can better accept and try to understand His gifts of guidance, temperance, the challenges and struggles, all necessary for me to grow into the best *me* who God created me to be.

God comes into a dark world in desperate need of Him. With his Light, his Love, his Help, his Hope . . . I pray that I, and all of you with me on this journey, will be better able each day to begin not with "*What do I need today?*" but rather, to follow the example modeled by our God and ask, "*What do others need today?*". I am richly blessed and it is fully within my power to offer others a listening ear, an empathetic, compassionate heart, a hand to help others up, a shoulder to cry on. I can offer intercessory prayer for those around me and share with them a sense of calm amidst the storms of life. I pray that God will use me as a conduit to reach others. I pray that I may become a *key* that helps open the door to a better future for my brothers and sisters and with all us who travel the journey of life together. As we review our lives and contemplate our futures, let us realize that there has never been, nor will there ever be, a time when we have not been *perfectly loved* by our Creator God. Christmas and Easter are exclamation points on that truth.

Christmas is the *Season of Giving*. Let's thank God for his infinite gift of everlasting life by becoming the seasoning that makes each day a gift back to the glory of God. Let us become the hands and feet, and shoulders and hearts that bring God's gifts of light, love and hope to the world.

Merry Christmas! Warm regards, Joan

Welcome To Our World

By JJ Heller
(Originally by Chris Rice)

Tears are falling, hearts are breaking
How we need to hear from God
You've been promised, we've been waiting
Welcome, Holy Child
Welcome, Holy Child

Hope that You don't mind our manger
How I wish we could have known
But long-awaited Holy Stranger
Make Yourself at home
Please, make Yourself at home

Your peace into our violence
Bid our hungry souls be filled
Word now breaking Heaven's silence
Welcome to our world
Welcome to our world

Fragile finger sent to heal us
Tender brow prepared for thorn
Tiny heart whose blood will save us
Unto us is born
Unto us is born

So wrap our injured flesh around You
Breathe our air and walk our sod
Rob our sin and make us holy
Perfect Son of God
Perfect Son of God
Welcome to our world

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CHILDLIKE

Who can seem more helpless, vulnerable or needy than a tiny infant? On their own they cannot survive. When we are born, we are totally dependent on someone else to live. As we grow to infant stage we are still as needy and vulnerable. We need to learn how to talk, walk, express our every need and wait for someone else to fill that need. It took years to earn our independence, and yet, Jesus tells us that to be childlike is the only way to Him.

"Truly I tell you, **unless you change and become like children**, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
Mathew 18:3

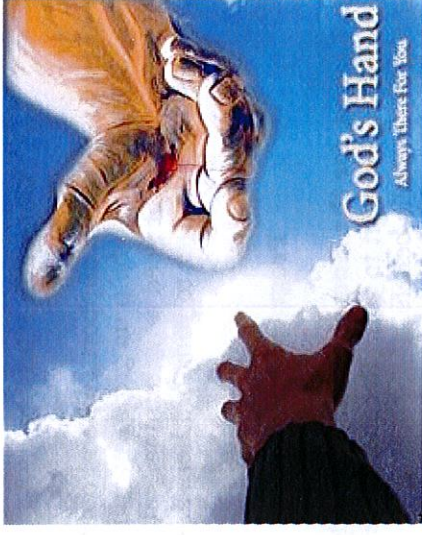
“People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. **Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.**” Luke 18:15-17.

Why? Why would we ever want to be that helpless, that dependent again? We have learned how to care for ourselves and others. We have accomplished many things... some that seemed impossible to even visualize. We have grown older and wiser and have a wealth of life's lessons that have seen us flourish. Why would we ever want to give that all up and go back to being that vulnerable, needy self? We finally have the independence we have strived so long and hard for, so why would we ever want to be so totally dependent on someone else?

We need to change the pronouns! ‘We, Us, I, Me.’ Everything we are and everything we have achieved was a gift. The same gifting that the infant received in total trust. Being loved and taken care of and provided for all these years is not on ‘we, us, I, me’, it is completely on “Him”. We did our part; we used the gifts that God gave us and acquired some independence. However, we must also acknowledge that we have always been dependent on God, even for our every breath, trusting that He knows the plans that He has for us. Trusting Him like a child.

For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Jeremiah 29:11

May you begin this New Year trusting like a child. Georgia



I believe; help Thou my unbelief

I believe; help Thou my unbelief
I take the finite risk
Of trusting like a child

I believe; help Thou my unbelief
I walk into the unknown
Trusting all the while

I long so much to feel the warmth
That others seem to know
But should I never feel a thing
I claim Him even so

I believe; help Thou my unbelief
I walk into the unknown
Trusting all the while
I walk into the unknown
Trusting ...Lyrics by Bill Gaither

Outreach Ministry

Mission San Antonio de Padua supports several outreach programs. We are looking for someone to help us grow this ministry. It won't take a lot of time; you do not need any training and you will be answering God's call to minister to your brothers and sisters.

Programs:

Communion Service for the Homebound: Please let us know if you need communion brought to you. Receiving the Eucharist is fundamental to our Catholic beliefs.

Prayer Circle: Are you willing to pray for those in need? Do you need special prayer? The prayer circle is a great way to reach out and reach up! You don't need to be able to travel; prayer requests can be shared within the group via the telephone or email. A scheduled prayer time of 8 a.m., 12 noon and 8 p.m. unites those offered prayers. Join in any time or all times to add your united voice of prayer for those in our parish family who are in need.

Meals during a family illness/hospitalization: Would you be able to provide a meal for someone who is in need? Are you in need of some help while you deal with health issues?

Carpooling services for Mass: If you need a ride to Mass or if you can provide a ride, this might be the ministry for you.

If you are interested in lending a hand or would like to be remembered in any of these ministries, please contact Joan at the office.

Mission San Antonio

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