

Ready or Not - Preparing for Christmas!  
December 1, 2019  
Luke 2:1-20

I have run our Summer Kids Camp every year since 1990 - until this past year when Stacy ran it without me! - I missed everything about camp . . . EXCEPT sleeping on the TINY BED - in an NON-AIRCONDITIONED cabin - in 95 degree HEAT & HUMIDITY! - other than that, it is A GREAT TIME!

The HIGHLIGHT of every camp for the kids has always been the LATE NIGHT GAME we call COMMANDANT - It is basically a HIDE & SEEK game - One person (always an adult) is the Commandant - Everyone else runs and hides while the Commandant COUNTS DOWN out loud from 100.

When the commandant is done counting, they yell out at the top of their lungs, **“Ready or not, here I come!”**

They use a POWERFUL FLASHLIGHT to search for and hunt down the HIDING STUDENTS - Thus, by the time the Commandant is done counting, you had better have a GOOD HIDING PLACE because HE IS COMING whether you are READY OR NOT!

So, ONCE the Commandant’s countdown REACHES ZERO, the time for PREPARATION is over - the FLASH LIGHT is shining - the HUNT is on - and you had better BE READY!

This is the way I often FEEL ABOUT CHRISTMAS - Right about November FIRST, the COUNTDOWN STARTS - and with each passing day, it is like the COUNTER GETS LOUDER & FASTER - and then on Christmas Eve around 5:00, the STORES START CLOSING, and you hear those infamous words, **“Ready of not, here IT COMES!”** - and CHRISTMAS DAY ARRIVES whether you are prepared or not!

The KEY WITH CHRISTMAS is the same as the key with COMMANDANT - You better have A PLAN ONCE the countdown starts - In our Kids camp game, THE BEST PLAYERS start way ahead of time - long before the SUN GOES DOWN, they start PLOTTING & PLANNING WHERE they are GOING TO HIDE - and they MAP OUT how they are going to get there!

Likewise, when it comes to Christmas, your BEST CHRISTMAS SEASON will be the RESULT OF WISE plotting & planning - So, here we are on December first and let me ask you a question: **Do you have a plan for your Christmas Season?**

IF YOU DON'T have one, don't panic - I am GOING TO HELP you out this morning - I am going to give you FOUR BIBLICAL GUIDELINES taken from THAT FIRST CHRISTMAS to help you prepare for YOUR BEST Christmas Season ever! - Let's take a look at Luke Chapter 2 this morning.

But, first I want to read to you a passage from Gal 4:4-5 - **But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.**

Notice there WAS A COUNT DOWN to that first Christmas morning - Paul here says, **“when the fullness of the time had come”** - That WAS THE MOMENT Jesus shouted, **“Ready or not, here I come!”** - Well, he had SOME ANGELS SHOUT it for Him!

This phrase **“the fullness of the time”**, speaks of God waiting until EVERYTHING WAS READY - All the planning, all the preparing, all the circumstances were in place - God had everything right where HE WANTED IT in order to bring Jesus into this world!

God did MUCH TO PREPARE for the first Christmas morning - He had to find a YOUNG WOMAN with just the right PURITY OF HEART - She had to be in love with a YOUNG MAN WITH A DEEP FAITH in God and a STRONG LOVE for her.

God had to then move this POOR, YOUNG COUPLE from Nazareth to Bethlehem at a time when they had NO REASON AT ALL to travel - Mary EXPECTING ANY DAY!

God needed to have a STRONG, STABLE GOVERNMENT in place - one that would build a NETWORK OF SAFE ROADS so that the GOOD NEWS of Jesus' BIRTH, DEATH & RESURRECTION could travel quickly.

He had to PLANT A STAR in the sky and position it in just the RIGHT LOCATION - He need some STAR GAZING MAJI who were knowledgeable of the Biblical Prophecy's of Daniel and others OT MEN - Lastly, God needed some WORKING-CLASS SHEPHERDS to welcome His birth into this world.

God had actually started the COUNTDOWN YEARS EARLIER - Through the PROPHETIC WORDS of Daniel, God began His countdown in 445 BC - That's when A DECREE WENT OUT from King Artaxerxes to Nehemiah to return to the land, and restore and rebuild the WALLS OF JERUSALEM - At that point, God was counting down the days!

MY POINT is simply this - God put much PLANNING & PURPOSE into everything He did that first Christmas morning - We would be wise to do the same - We need to be INTENTIONAL IN PREPARING for Christmas as well - That way WE WILL GET THE MOST out of our Celebration of HIS WELL-PLANNED BIRTH.

So many times I have found myself WAKING UP on December 26 WISHING I had done more to WORSHIP & HONOR The Lord Jesus during the busy Christmas Season - So many times I HAVE LOOKED BACK feeling I had missed some of the JOY OF THE SEASON - So many years I have gotten distracted by UNNECESSARY & UNIMPORTANT THINGS!

Let's DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY this year - Let's PLAN & GET INTENTIONAL with our Christmas celebration - This morning I want to share with you A FEW IDEAS that will help you do just that.

**Chapter 2:1 And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.**

For Mary and Joseph, that very first Christmas Season was A DIFFICULT ONE - Because just like what OFTEN HAPPENS TO US, someone else STOLE THEIR TIME & ALTERED THEIR PLANS at the first Christmas.

We all know the BACK STORY - God needed to get Mary & Joseph to Bethlehem because it had been PROPHESED AS THE PLACE where the Messiah was to be born.

So He used the PRIDE OF THE CAESAR to accomplish His purposes - BUT this was a MAJOR DISTRACTION for this young couple anxiously awaiting the birth of THEIR FIRST CHILD - This long journey of ABOUT 90 MILES from Nazareth to Bethlehem WAS NOT A PART of their Christmas plans!

The FIRST THING we need to do this Christmas Season is BE FLEXIBLE - especially WITH OUR PLANS - No doubt, many of you already have FILLED UP MUCH of your December calendar - but have you LEFT ROOM for God's plans?

I think OVER SCHEDULING is a big problem for most of us during the CHRISTMAS SEASON - It could be that God has SOMETHING SPECIAL in mind for you over the NEXT FEW WEEKS - Do you have ROOM FOR HIS ALTERATIONS? - Are you OPEN TO CHANGES He might want to make in your busy schedule?

Many of us have LEFT NO MARGINS in our schedules - We have planned all we can SQUEEZE IN TO THE HOLIDAYS - And that is fine right up until the time when God uses SOME ARROGANT CAESAR TO CHANGE those plans!

Suddenly you find your family MAKING AN UNPLANNED trip to a DISTANT CITY - or a local hospital - or there is an emergency at work you had not left time for!

Suddenly your plans are WRECKED - Your NERVES are frazzled - Your family is FRUSTRATED - but you HAVE NO CHOICE - Powers beyond your control have ALTERED YOUR TIME LINE - How do you respond?

Mary and Joseph had to learn quickly to GO WITH THE FLOW - They could complain - they could get upset (and MAYBE THEY DID!) - they could SCREAM & BLAME each other - but that WOULDN'T CHANGE a thing - At some point, all they could do was PACK THEIR BAGS and head out!

I want to encourage you to LEAVE ROOM FOR DISRUPTIONS to your Christmas Schedule - Leave yourself A LITTLE MARGIN for God to work!

There may be A FAMILY that will need your help this December - there may be A FRIEND that will EXPERIENCE A CRISIS - there may come an OPPORTUNITY for you to SHARE YOUR FAITH with a lonely co-worker.

But if you ARE TOO BUSY, you might get SO UPSET AT THE CHANGE in plans, that MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE A LIFE.

Was this UNEXPECTED TRIP CONVENIENT for Mary & Joseph? - Absolutely not! - But was IT NECESSARY? - was IT IMPORTANT? - Absolutely! - and IT WAS UNAVOIDABLE if the plans of God were going to be accomplished!

This same thing MAY BE TRUE for your life this holiday season - Have you LEFT ROOM in your busy schedule for GOD'S INTERRUPTIONS? - Are you FLEXIBLE & OPEN FOR HIM to change your plans?

Let me give you TWO SIMPLE TRUTHS: **#1 The more flexible you are, the less painful it is when you are stretched!**

**#2 It is always easier to EMBRACE CHANGE than it is TO ENDURE CHANGE!** - And the difference in embracing change and enduring change is ALL ABOUT OUR ATTITUDE towards it!

**Vs. 6-7 "So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger (a feed trough), because there was no room for them in the inn.**

Jesus was certainly NOT THE FOCUS of the World that first Christmas morning - The whole town was busy RUSHING AROUND, doing their own thing - while Mary GAVE BIRTH in a cave for animals - and NO ONE EVEN NOTICED!

This can very EASILY BE THE CASE for us as well - We too can go through our Christmas Season and JESUS GO BASICALLY UNNOTICED!

To keep this from happening, you need to develop a PLAN FOR WHAT WILL BE YOUR FOCUS during the Christmas Season - What will be the focus of YOUR FAMILIES' CHRISTMAS?

If you don't SET A FOCUS, one will be set for you by WORLD AROUND YOU - Your extended family WILL SET IT - your work - your children - your friends - your church - even the HALLMARK CHANNEL would like to SET THE FOCUS for you.

What do I mean by SETTING OUR FOCUS during the Christmas season? - I mean this: **What do you hope you and your family will remember about this Christmas season after it is over?** - What would you like TO ACCOMPLISHED over the next 25 days?

The focus of most of America during Christmas is SHOPPING & GIFTS - It is all about WHAT I WILL BUY - OR - What I hope someone will PURCHASE FOR ME - These two things absorb most of OUR TIME & ATTENTION this time of year - The month of December can easily become one GIANT SHOPPING SPREE!

For children this often translates into the ALL CONSUMING QUESTION of **"What is Santa going to bring me?"** - I am amazed how many times I HEAR THAT QUESTION asked of children this time of year - OFTEN BY well meaning adults WHO SHOULD KNOW BETTER!

Please know this, I am NOT AN ANTI-SANTA guy - I just don't like SANTA & PRESENTS becoming the CENTRAL FOCUS of the Season - I think every young family NEED TO DECIDE how they will handle Santa in their family - if not, the OLD GUY can take over!

Growing up, my family was PRETTY TYPICAL of most American families - My parents took us to sit in SANTA'S LAP & MAKE OUR REQUEST known - I also spent most of December CIRCLING ITEMS in the BIG, RED Sears **"Wish Book"** Catalogue! **(SHOW PICTURE)**

We watched WSB TV TRACK SANTA'S MOMENTS on the radar beginning about 6 PM on Christmas Eve - Then, Gifts MAGICALLY APPEARED on Christmas morning under the tree - and for THIS YOUNG BOY, this all TOTALLY CONSUMED my focus & attention from Thanksgiving to Christmas Day.

For most of my childhood SANTA SQUEEZED OUT Jesus during Christmas! - and because of this, I ALWAYS EXPERIENCED what I call the CHRISTMAS DAY BLUES right after the last gift was opened - No gift could EVER MEET the expectations created by Santa & the SEARS WISH BOOK!

When Donna and I had children, we decided to take a DIFFERENT APPROACH with Santa - We didn't make HIM THE ENEMY of Christmas - We were just HONEST WITH OUR KIDS about who he was.

When we saw him in the DEPARTMENT STORES, we talked about WHERE THE STORY of Santa came from - And WE EXPLAINED that he had changed during the years - For our children, Santa was NEVER THE FOCUS of the Christmas season - He was just a PART OF THE PICTURE!

We wanted to make CHRISTMAS MORNING MORE ABOUT the birth of Jesus than the GIFTS OF SANTA - We tried hard to turn the focus from WHAT I'M GETTING, TO WHAT I'M GIVING - this necessitated giving Santa THE RIGHT ROLE at Christmas.

He had a SMALL ROLE in our Christmas - much like our Christmas tree and Candy Canes, he was just part of the scenery.

The ONE BIG PROBLEM I do have with Santa is the DECEPTION of it all - We never wanted TO LIE OR TO DECEIVE our children in any way - I wanted them to know Mom & Dad WOULD NEVER LIE to them - Why?

Because if we lied about Santa, they MIGHT THINK we are also DECEIVING THEM ABOUT JESUS? - And I never wanted that thought to CROSS THEIR MINDS - Again, I am not trying to BASH SANTA - I just want us to THINK THROUGH what we are communicating to our children & grandchildren.

I would encourage all of you to decide WHAT WILL BE THE FOCUS of your family's Christmas - If you just GO WITH THE FLOW of the world, I can promise you, FOR YOU CHILDREN it will become ALL ABOUT WHAT I AM GETTING! - How do I know this? - Because it is the OVERWHELMING MESSAGE of the world around us!

**BE PURPOSEFUL with your families focus this Christmas Season. If you don't choose a focus, the world will choose one for you!**

**Vrs. 8-11 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."**

This Christmas Season we also need to make a PLAN FOR OUR GIVING - That FIRST CHRISTMAS was all about giving - God sends a GROUP OF ANGELS to announce to a BUNCH OF SHEPHERDS that He had SENT THE WORLD a gift - HIS GIFT to the world was A SAVIOR wrapped in the flesh of a little baby!

When we think about GIVING GIFTS at Christmas time, we often go back to the gifts that the WISE MEN BROUGHT to Jesus - that becomes OUR MODEL for giving gifts to others - But the FIRST GIFT GIVEN was by God our Heavenly Father - on this dark night He gave a VERY BRIGHT GIFT.

A long-awaited Savior WAS GIVEN to this world - A PROMISED GIFT made thousands of years earlier HAD FINALLY ARRIVED - and these shepherds would be the FIRST TO WITNESS the incredible gift!

The third thing your family NEEDS THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON is a plan for giving - Work to make this the FOCUS FOR YOUR CHILDREN - Is this HARD TO DO in our advertising filled world? - Absolutely!

This time of year everything our children SEE & HEAR SCREAMS AT THEM that their is some NEW TOY OR GAGET they have to have - No matter WHERE THEY GO or what THEY WATCH, the message will be, **Here is something you can't live without!**



How do we FIGHT THIS? - First, make a CONSCIOUS EFFORT to make your conversations with them about OPPORTUNITIES TO GIVE rather than about WHAT THEY ARE WANTING to get!

As a family, plan AT LEAST ONE OR TWO ACTIVITIES you can do that will INVOLVE GIVING to someone else - The SNOW FLAKE tree is a great place to start - Make sure you INVOLVE YOUR CHILDREN in picking out the gifts for that child - Make it PERSONAL FOR THEM!

Constantly reinforce WHY WE ARE GIVING - Remind them of the gift GOD HAS GIVEN us! - Help them to learn the BLESSING OF GIVING - Help them to learn the JOY THAT IS FOUND in seeing happiness on someone's face!

Second, get your children EXCITED ABOUT PICKING something out for their siblings or for MOM & DAD - Talk to them about what their SIBLING MIGHT REALLY WANT - Again, get the conversation off of what THEY WANT - this will not be easy - Your children may already be CONSUMED WITH WHAT they want - Patiently help them REFOCUS THEIR HEART.

Let me give you one GOOD IDEA that might help - Stop making Christmas the time when you give your children and grand children SPECTACULAR GIFTS - When Christmas is the time FOR GIANT SURPRISES, there is no way our children are not going to become CONSUMED WITH THAT IDEA.

For many families Christmas becomes a time of BIGGER & BETTER - This year we have to OUTDO LAST YEAR - If you want to give your children SOMETHING REALLY SPECIAL do it at some other point in the year - Maybe their BIRTHDAY - or just give them a gift for NO REASON AT ALL - or give it to them when they NEED IT!

Please make sure you DON'T SHOW FAVORITISM - What you do for one, you need to do for all at SOME POINT IN THE YEAR - But just don't feel you have to GIVE EXOTICALLY at Christmas time.

One other thing, don't ever GIVE WHAT YOU CAN'T AFFORD - At no point in the year do you want to GIVE YOUR CHILDREN gifts you really can't afford as a family - This teaches them all the WRONG LESSONS.

I always wanted my children to have WHAT THEY NEEDED - But I also wanted them to know WE WEREN'T RICH - and we weren't going to PRE-TEND WE WERE!

I wanted them to learn to BE CONTENT with what we could afford - I wanted them to learn that they DON'T HAVE TO HAVE EVERYTHING that others have - We can be content with what GOD HAS BLESSED US WITH.

I never wanted to be STINGY WITH MY CHILDREN - if they needed something, I would DO MY BEST to sacrifice and get it for them - but there is a difference between NEEDING & WANTING - and I wanted them to LEARN THE DIFFERENCE.

One other thing to do THROUGHOUT THE YEAR is to involve your children in YOUR TITHING - Let them join you in WRITING THAT CHECK - or take them with you when you go to the IPAD TO MAKE THAT OFFERING.

Let them see YOUR YEAR-ROUND COMMITMENT to giving - that it is a LIFESTYLE, not a once a year event - this is the GREATEST FORM of teaching there is - Let your children be a part of the TITHES & OFFERINGS from your family.

Understand this parents: **You are teaching your children everyday in every way! So, consider what you are teaching them, especially at Christmas. Make Christmas about learning to give.**

**Luke 2:12-20 "And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." 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, goodwill toward men!" So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned,**

**glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.**

Lastly, I want your family to have A PLAN FOR WORSHIP this Christmas season.

The birth of the Son of God would have gone VIRTUALLY UNNOTICED by all had it not been for this GROUP OF SHEPHERDS - and they might not have noticed had their lives NOT BEEN INTERRUPTED BY a band of Angels!

They had NO PLANS for worship THAT BUSY NIGHT in Bethlehem - God had to INTERRUPT THEM & INFORM them of His Son's arrival on this earth.

But once informed, THEY TOOK ACTION - Without hesitation they were off to FIND THIS CHILD - But they didn't have TO GO FAR - For they found the MOTHER & CHILD in one of their own caves!

Jesus had been born in a CAVE DESIGNED FOR HOUSING animals to protect them from the outside weather - My guess is that this was NOT HERE THEY WERE EXPECTING this precious child - I mean God had SENT ANGELS to announce the birth of this SPECIAL CHILD - Why would HE BE BORN HERE?

Yet, this may have been the ONLY PLACE THIS GROUP of shepherds would have been welcomed this time of night in the city - Shepherds were a ROUGH BUNCH - They were NOT WELCOME in the better parts of town.

So God BROUGHT HIS SON to them - His birth in this LOWLY MANGER was God SENDING THE MESSAGE that everyone could GET TO JESUS - Jesus had HUMBLER HIMSELF to the level where ALL COULD REACH HIM - He was God IN THE FLESH, but He was AVAILABLE TO all mankind.

Notice in verse 20 the RESULT of their encounter with Jesus - **the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen!**

Their encounter with THE SON OF GOD caused them to PRAISE & GLO-RIFY God for the gift He had given mankind! - Praise was their RESPONSE to Jesus - The REST OF THE NIGHT was one giant traveling worship service - But, IT WOULD NOT have been had the Angels NOT INTERRUPTED their plans and SET THEM ON A PATH to worship.

Let me ask you a question: **Is God going to have to interrupt your Christmas plans for you to worship His Son? Or will you make worship a part of your families' plan this Christmas Season?**

Interestingly, God did not interrupt THE PLANS OF ANYONE ELSE that night - There was a WHOLE CITY full of people who missed this OPPORTUNITY TO WORSHIP the child - And during this BUSY SEASON we can miss many opportunities also IF WE DON'T PLAN FOR THEM.

Why don't you GET OUT YOUR CALENDAR when you get home today and plan some TIMES OF WORSHIP for the Christmas Season - Set aside some times you will COME TO CHURCH - and some times you will GATHER WITH YOUR FAMILY and worship at home - Maybe set aside a COUPLE OF MORNINGS when you will GET ALONE and praise THE SAVIOR - Be PURPOSEFUL with your praise this holiday season.

I want to end today's message with ONE FINAL THOUGHT - It comes from verse 19 - There we read, **"But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart."**

While all of THE CRAZINESS of the night is going on around Mary, notice what she is doing - She is PONDERING IT ALL in her heart - She is just SITTING BACK TAKING IT ALL IN - She is NOT RESPONDING as much as she is just HIDING IT AWAY!

She is THINKING ABOUT ALL THAT IS HAPPENING - She is CONSIDERING WHAT it all means - She is TAKING THE TIME to contemplate all that has happened to her since that angel Gabriel APPEARED TO HER 9 months earlier.

The WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT He gave to her - She had FOUND FAVOR with God - There was THE PROMISE of a child - There was the REALITY THAT she had been with no man - she was a VIRGIN.

There was the STRANGE PROMISE that the Child would be the SON OF GOD, planted within her by the HOLY SPIRIT of God - There was HER SURRENDER to the will of God by saying, **“Let it be to me according to Your Word.”**

There was HER EXCITING VISIT with her cousin Elizabeth who is also pregnant VERY LATE IN LIFE - Elizabeth’s baby HAD LEAPED in her womb at the arrival of Mary.

Then there was the FRANTIC TRIP to Bethlehem - Followed by the LACK OF A PLACE TO STAY - She found herself in a COLD, DAMP CAVE having her child surrounded by NOISY LIVESTOCK & A FRIGHTENED HUSBAND.

This is followed by a SURPRISED VISIT from a bunch of EXCITED SHEPHERDS who claimed THAT ANGELS had told them to COME & FIND this child - Now she COULD ONLY PONDER all that had happened to her!

Have you ever PONDERED ALL God has done in your life? - Have you ever spent time REMEMBERING & MEDITATING on the incredible things God has done in YOUR LIFE? - If you stop and think about it, there have been SOME MIRACLES in your story as well.

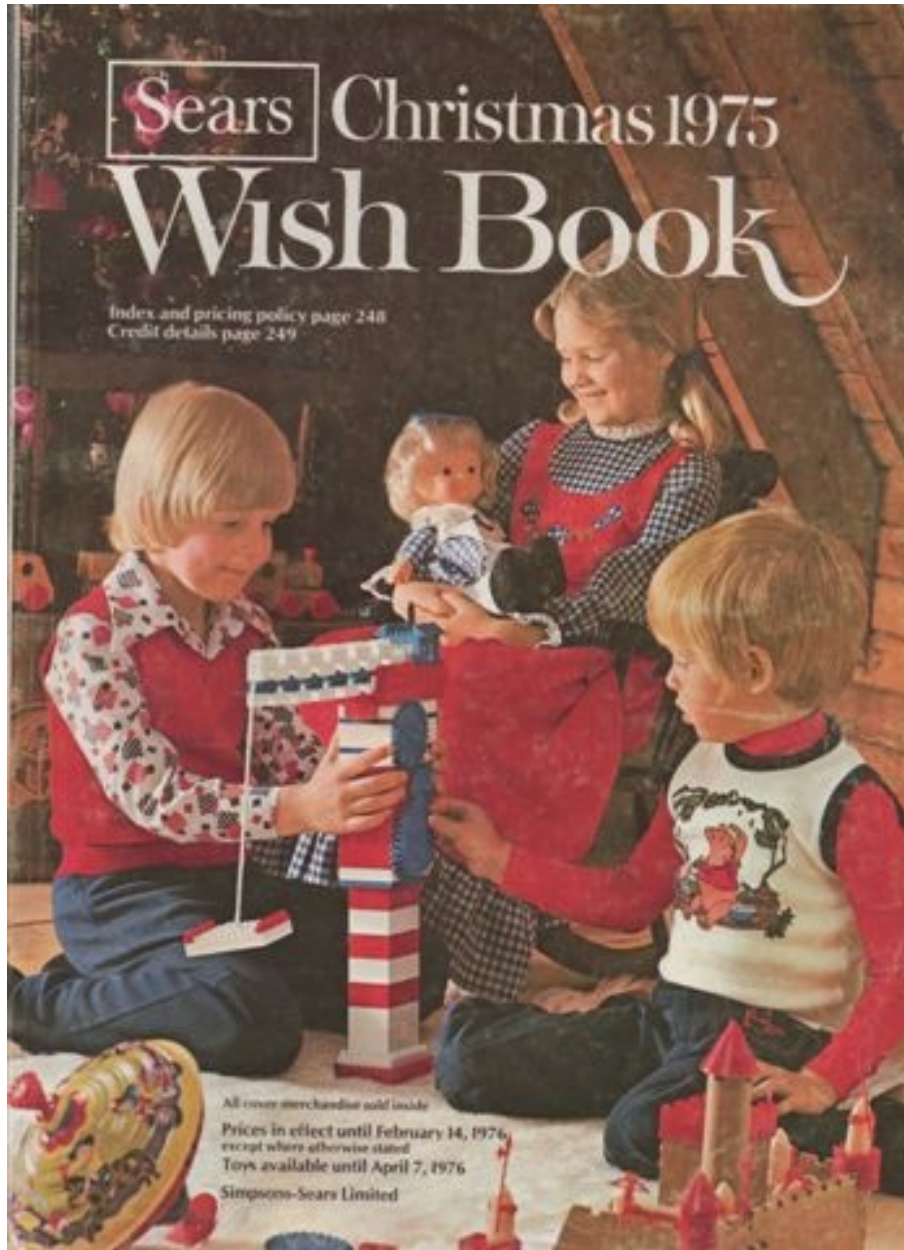
God made PROMISES TO YOU that you couldn’t conceive of - MANY OF THEM have come to pass - Maybe NOT THE WAY you have planned - Maybe, like Mary, you GAVE BIRTH to some of God’s promises IN A CAVE rather than in a PALACE! - But they CAME TO PAST!

He has done some AMAZING THINGS in your life that you NEVER THOUGHT were possible - Yet they have happened!

Why don’t you take some time and PONDER THEM during this Christmas Season - You might just be SURPRISED at how it will BRING YOU TO TEARS as you consider all that God has done - It will also bring to TO PRAISE in your heart as you recount all that GOD HAS DONE for you!

**May your Christmas season also be a time to praise and to ponder the mighty things God has done in your life!**

Let’s Pray.



Sears Christmas 1975  
**Wish Book**

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