

Are you ready for
CHRISTMAS?

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This book is dedicated to the displaced people of Europe and the Middle East. We are well aware of the tragedy of your situation and your terrible plight. We feel deeply for your loss and pain, and want you to know that you are not forgotten, especially at this time of year. May the age-old Christmas message bring you new hope and peace.



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INTRODUCTION

When I was growing up, Christmases seemed years apart; now they appear to have just a few months between them. Christmas never seems too far away. There are even Christmas shops open all-year round! Like a microwave meal for one, Christmas is here in no time.

At the end of each August the first signs of Christmas appear in the department stores. By the time September is over Christmas music is being piped at us, an early Christmas card arrives in our post and soon after town and city Christmas lights are switched on by someone given 'celebrity' status. It is then time for us to rummage in some cubbyhole to find last year's decorations, either using or discarding

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the old Christmas tree, and we begin dreaming of the very elusive white Christmas.

The first twenty-four days of December rush by, with the atmospheric church carol service proving almost the only hour to sit and reflect. We know Christmas Day is very near when we are asked, 'Are you ready for Christmas?' We go over the preparations. Is the food ordered? Are *all* the presents bought and wrapped? Have the Christmas cards been posted to *all* our relatives? Are *all* the guests invited for Christmas dinner? Have the games been organised? Is there enough food to see us over until the shops open next? Am I ready for Christmas? Have I forgotten something?

Once, a mother and father were having a gathering to mark the birth of their newborn child. All the guests were welcomed and had a great time celebrating, eating and drinking. After a while, though, one of the ladies said, 'Well, bring the baby out. Let's see him.' The mother went to the crib, but the baby was nowhere to be seen. Overcome with fear, she panicked. Suddenly she remembered that the baby was still at her parents' house where she had left him that morning! In enjoying the celebration the guests had forgotten who it was all about.

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On another occasion a surly teenager was asked whether he had received everything he wanted for Christmas. 'No, I didn't get everything I wanted,' he mumbled, adding, 'But then it's not my birthday, is it?' We get so wrapped up in what the shops have to sell us that we can easily miss who Christmas is all about.

From almost the beginning of time God was getting the world ready for the first Christmas. The Bible tells us that when our first ancestors disobeyed God and introduced sin and death into the world, God distinctly promised that a day would come when the seed or offspring of a woman would destroy the work of the devil himself.¹ In the very phrasing of that initial promise is the beginning of a mystery that would become clear centuries later.

As the Bible unfolds more information is given as to exactly how this pledge would be fulfilled. We read of prophets foretelling that the promised child would be born of a virgin. More wonderfully, He would be God Himself come to earth clothed in humanity. This Son of God would be the 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'. Jesus Christ would be born in Bethlehem, then taken to Egypt before

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growing up in Nazareth.² God would take on Himself humanity. The greatest gift of Christmas would be that God would give Himself.

Shepherds on the hills near Bethlehem were made ready to celebrate that first Christmas when angels told them, 'For there is born to you this day ... a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.'³ They went quickly, leaving their sheep, to visit the baby. Wise men from the East were ready for that Christmas too as they followed the star which led them to worship the King of the Jews.⁴ Today God is also helping us get ready to worship His Son, Jesus the King.

Jesus came to earth to save us from ourselves, our sin, our enslavement to Satan and rebellion against God, and our separation from God. The baby who was laid in a wooden crib would eventually be laid on a wooden cross. There He would suffer as He took on Himself the sins of the world. God's love is such that He sent Jesus to pay the price of our wrong, taking the punishment we deserve. He died that we might be forgiven and brought to know God as our loving Father. As a baby, Jesus was in a virgin womb for nine months. After His death He was laid in a virgin tomb for three days, but then He defeated death and rose again.

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Today, because of what Jesus has accomplished for us on the cross, God wants us to turn from our own rebellious ways, where we seek to ignore or reject Him. Instead He yearns for us to ask Him to forgive us, and then He will bring us to know Him. As we trust Jesus and all He has achieved for us, we find we need not fear death or hell. We can know we are God's beloved children for all eternity. Asking Jesus to become your Lord and Saviour is the best way to be ready for Christmas ... and the New Year ... and all the future!

You never know the true joy of Christmas until you look to God and tell Him that you have received His gift to you. This little book explains what that means and how you can really be ready for Christmas.