



**“The Christmas Family” A Novel Adapted from the Play by Frederick Passmore  
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## **Chapter One**

The imagination is a wonderful thing, a gift straight from the hand of a loving God. It’s not only for children, though they seem to use it best. With it, we can see what we’ve only heard about, things too beautiful or too far away for our eyes alone. Through eyes of faith and wonder, we glimpse the stories in the Bible—not just as words on a page, but as living moments. I hope as I tell you my story, your own heart will picture it the way I did, all those years ago.

Let's go back now, together.

My name is Daniel, and nearly twenty years ago, on a snowy Christmas Eve, I was a ten-year-old boy living at the Midvale Children's Home. The old orphanage sat on the edge of our small country town, and it had been my home for most of my young life. Three years earlier, a disease had taken the strength from my legs. Doctors weren't sure I'd ever walk again. I'd been in and out of foster homes since then, but caring for a sick boy in a wheelchair proved too heavy a burden for most families in our poor county. Time after time, I found myself rolling back through the orphanage doors.

That Christmas, hope felt thin. The bright joy I once knew as a smaller child had begun to fade. I was older than most of the other kids, and I had few friends. Who wants to be pals with the boy who can't run and play?

Still, the orphanage buzzed with excitement that evening. The big activity room glowed with colored lights and the sharp, clean scent of pine. A Christmas tree stood in the corner, already partly trimmed earlier in the month. Miss Dickenson, our activity director and the closest thing most of us had to a mother, believed in keeping old traditions alive. She wanted us to feel the special joy of decorating on Christmas Eve itself.

A group of little ones tumbled into the room, cheeks flushed, voices high with anticipation. Miss Dickenson followed, pushing my wheelchair gently until I sat right beside the tree. She was a kind woman in her late fifties or early sixties, with soft eyes and hands that had comforted countless children over the years.

She lifted a big box of decorations like it held hidden treasure. "All right, everyone," she said warmly, "come see what we have tonight." The children gathered close, eyes wide. One by one they reached in, pulling out shiny ornaments, and began hanging them on the fragrant branches.

I pushed myself closer to the tree and added a couple of my own. Then I eased back, watching the others. Miss Dickenson rested her hand on my shoulder. We stood there together—well, she stood and I sat—taking in the sight of the little ones laughing and stretching on tiptoe to reach higher limbs.

You wouldn't think such a place, filled with lonely children and worn furniture, could birth wonderful Christmas memories. But sometimes the sweetest gifts come wrapped in the most unlikely packages. And there, in the middle of loneliness and questions, I found hope, love, and acceptance... all tied together in what I came to call my Christmas family.

Miss Dickenson gently clapped her hands for attention. The children quieted—mostly. Their excitement still bubbled just beneath the surface. "Now, children," she said with a twinkle, "I have news of a very special visitor coming a little later tonight."

The room erupted in squeals. Everyone knew it was old Saint Nick—or rather, Mr. Clements, the kindly gardener and janitor everyone loved. He would arrive in his red suit with a bag of gifts

donated by local churches and generous neighbors. Even knowing the gifts weren't bought especially for me, the children's joy was contagious.

Miss Dickenson believed deeply in passing traditions to "her" children. Every Christmas Eve as the sun dipped low, they bundled up and walked through the neighborhood singing carols. The townsfolk welcomed them with cookies and hot cider. I had loved it when I was smaller and stronger. This year, though, the deep snow and my fragile health meant I had to stay behind.

Once the final instructions were given and songbooks handed out, the children lined up and headed off to get their coats and boots. Miss Dickenson wheeled me over to the table where an old radio sat beside a beautiful antique nativity scene. She tuned the radio until soft Christmas music filled the room.

Bending down so her face was level with mine, hands on her knees, she smiled. "We won't be long, Daniel. And when we get back, I have a wonderful surprise for you."

I tried to smile back. "I'm too old for Santa to bring me presents, Miss Dickenson."

She gave me that meaningful look of hers. "You're never too old for a gift from those who love you, or to be surprised." She squeezed my shoulder affectionately, then headed out to lead the children on their caroling adventure.

The door closed, and the room grew quiet except for the gentle music from the radio. I sat alone with my thoughts, eyes resting on the little manger scene. Mary and Joseph knelt beside the baby in the straw. A shepherd or two stood nearby. The tiny figures seemed almost alive in the soft lamplight.

As the carols played, my heart felt a familiar ache—the longing for a real family, a place where I truly belonged. Yet something in the simple scene before me, and in Miss Dickenson's kind words, stirred a quiet hope I hadn't felt in a long while.

Little did I know that this ordinary Christmas Eve was about to become the most extraordinary night of my young life—a night when imagination, faith, and the true story of Christmas would come together in a way I would remember forever.

## **Chapter Two**

I settled back in my wheelchair, letting the Christmas music from the radio wrap around me like a warm blanket. My eyes kept drifting to the little manger scene on the table. The tiny figures glowed softly in the lamplight—Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus lying in the straw. Something about the quiet room and the ache in my heart made the scene feel closer than usual.

Soon the music faded and a cheerful voice came on.

"You are listening to an evening of special Christmas Eve programming here on WWOR radio..."

I smiled a little. I knew what was coming. Grandpa's Storytime. I had heard it before, but tonight felt different. Maybe it was the loneliness pressing in, or the stillness of the empty room. Or maybe God was speaking straight to my young heart.

As Grandpa began, the familiar warmth of his voice filled the room. I leaned my head on my hand and closed my eyes. Suddenly I wasn't just a boy in a wheelchair anymore. In my imagination, I stepped right into the story.

"Hello, everyone," Grandpa said, his voice cozy as a crackling fireplace. "Your favorite Grandpa here, broadcasting on this cold, snowy Christmas Eve. Uuum, boy, that Ovaltine sure hits the spot!"

He told how an angel had visited a young woman named Mary, promising her a son named Jesus who would save His people from their sins. Joseph, her husband, had been worried at first, but God spoke to him in a dream, and he chose to care for the child as his own.

Then came the journey. The Roman emperor had ordered a census, so Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem. I could almost see them on the dusty road—Mary heavy with child, riding a donkey, Joseph walking beside her, steady and protective.

In my mind, they arrived tired and dusty in the crowded town. Door after door closed in their faces. "No room," the people said. My heart squeezed. I knew what it felt like to feel unwanted, to be told there wasn't space for you.

Finally, one innkeeper took pity on them. He couldn't give them a proper room, but he offered his stable out back. Joseph helped Mary inside, made her as comfortable as he could in the hay, and lit a small oil lamp. There, in the humble place among the animals, Jesus was born. God's own Son entered the world not in a palace, but in a stable, wrapped in simple cloths and laid in a manger.

The story moved on, and so did my imagination. Out on the hills near Bethlehem, shepherds watched their flocks under the quiet night sky. These were ordinary men—poor, unnoticed, looked down upon by many. Yet God chose them.

Suddenly, the night exploded with glory. A brilliant angel appeared, shining with heavenly light. The shepherds fell to the ground in fear.

But the angel said, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

Then the sky filled with angels, their voices like rolling thunder and sweet music all at once: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!"

When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds looked at one another in amazement. They laughed, shouted, and hugged. The Messiah had come—and they were invited to see Him first! Not kings or priests, but simple shepherds like them.

They ran to Bethlehem as fast as their legs could carry them, hearts bursting with wonder.

Back in the orphanage, I opened my eyes, but the feeling stayed with me. A warm tear slipped down my cheek. For the first time in a long while, I didn't feel quite so alone. If God could notice lowly shepherds on a hillside, maybe He could see a boy in a wheelchair too.

Grandpa's gentle voice came back on the radio. "I reckon we've all felt plain and unexciting at times. But somewhere, often when we least expect it, we get a heavenly invitation to come and meet the Savior."

The music of a beautiful carol began to play. I sat there, heart full, still seeing that stable in my mind. Hope, small but real, flickered inside me like the oil lamp in the Bethlehem barn.

Something special was happening tonight. I could feel it.

### **Chapter Three**

The carol on the radio played softly as the beautiful pictures in my mind slowly faded. I blinked and found myself back in the orphanage activity room, the wheelchair beneath me and the little manger scene still glowing on the table. For a moment I just sat there, letting the wonder settle deep in my heart.

I had felt as if I stood on that hillside with the shepherds—afraid, then amazed, then filled with uncontainable joy. The invitation the angel gave them seemed to echo in my own chest. *Come and see*. It felt personal, as if the Baby in the manger had been waiting for a lonely boy like me too.

I reached out and carefully lifted the tiny figure of baby Jesus from the creche. I held Him in my palm, studying the little carved face. A quiet longing rose inside me. If God could come to a stable and notice humble shepherds, maybe He hadn't forgotten me either. The answers I needed—the hope I'd been missing—could only be found in Him.

Just then, I sensed I was being watched.

A shiver ran down my spine. I turned my wheelchair toward the doorway and peered into the shadows. A dark shape stood just outside the room. For a second my imagination ran wild—maybe the Ghost of Christmas Future had come, dark and stern, to show me a hopeless future.

Then the figure stepped into the soft light, and relief washed over me.

"Danny-boy," a kind voice said.

It was Dr. Spencer, the staff physician and psychologist. He was an older gentleman with a fatherly way about him that always made you feel safe. I liked him a great deal.

He crossed the room and knelt beside my chair. "How are you feeling tonight, son?"

I shrugged. “I’m fine, I guess.” But as he gently examined my legs, moving my knees and flexing my ankles with careful hands, the words I’d been holding inside came tumbling out. “I just wish I was stronger. And... I wish I had a real family. One that wanted me because they loved me, not because they were paid to take care of me.”

My voice grew quieter. “Sometimes I feel worthless, Doctor. Like there’s no hope for me.”

Dr. Spencer stopped what he was doing. He placed both hands on my shoulders and looked straight into my eyes. His gaze was steady and full of love.

“Danny-boy,” he said firmly, yet gently, “don’t you dare think like that. You are a priceless gem. You are infinitely special to our Heavenly Father. He has a plan for you—one that will lead you down paths of greatness. We all go through tough times, but we can look to God and trust Him to bring us through. And He *will* bring you through, if you open your heart to Him and let Him give you His strength.”

His words sank deep into my soul. For the first time in a long while, I didn’t feel invisible. I felt seen. Valued. Loved by a Father who would never leave me.

Dr. Spencer reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a small New Testament. He opened the front cover where he had written my name in his neat handwriting, along with a personal message. Then he pointed to a verse:

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* —Jeremiah 29:11

Below it he had added: *Don’t forget us when you are blessed.*

I traced the words with my finger, my eyes misty. It was the most wonderful gift I had ever received.

Dr. Spencer stood and rested his hand on my shoulder one last time. “Sometimes, a blessing can be lurking right around the corner, waiting for us. The trick is holding on until you get to it.” He smiled warmly. “Merry Christmas, Danny-boy. And a very, very Happy New Year.”

As he left, the Christmas song on the radio ended and Grandpa’s voice returned. I leaned closer to the radio, heart beating faster, eager to join the shepherds on their journey to the stable. For the first time in years, real hope—warm and alive—stirred inside me.

Maybe my own story was just beginning.

## **Chapter Four**

The radio crackled softly as Grandpa’s warm voice returned. I leaned in closer, my heart still stirred from the doctor’s visit and the earlier part of the story.

“Well, the shepherds didn’t waste any time,” Grandpa said with a chuckle. “When heaven invites you to something that important, you don’t put it off. They hurried straight to Bethlehem, going from stall to stall until they found the place.”

In my imagination, I walked with them through the sleeping town. The night air was cold, but their hearts were burning. No one paid much attention to a band of lowly shepherds. They weren’t important enough for fine houses or royal courts. Yet because Jesus had come in such a humble way—in a simple stable, laid in a manger—no door was closed to them.

They found the little barn behind the inn. One shepherd peeked through the curtain, then motioned excitedly to the others. Joseph stepped out at first, surprised and protective of his tired wife and newborn. But when the shepherds poured out their story—the angels, the glorious announcement, the message that the Savior had been born—the wonder on Joseph’s face matched their own. He let them in.

There, in the soft glow of the oil lamp, they knelt around the manger. Mary, though weary, gently pulled back the swaddling cloths so they could see the Baby’s face. These rough-handed men, who spent their nights with sheep, looked upon the face of God.

They worshiped Him right there—some with heads bowed, some on their faces, some with hands lifted in awe. This was no ordinary child. He was the Promised One. The Good Shepherd who would one day lay down His life for His sheep. The Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.

Tears filled my eyes as I sat in my wheelchair. Something beautiful broke open inside my heart. If shepherds were welcome at the manger, maybe a crippled orphan was welcome too. Christmas wasn’t just about pretty trees and presents. It was about God breaking into our broken world. Eternity stepping into time. Heaven reaching down to earth so that even the least of us could come close.

I understood for the first time that I didn’t have to be strong or important or from a “good” family to belong. Jesus had come for people just like me—for the lonely, the hurting, the overlooked.

As the shepherds left the stable rejoicing, telling everyone they met what they had seen and heard, a sweet peace settled over me. The images in my mind slowly faded, replaced by the twinkling lights of the orphanage Christmas tree. I wiped my eyes and gazed up at the star shining at the very top.

The music on the radio swelled, a gentle carol that seemed to wrap itself around my soul. In that quiet moment, I realized something deep and true: I might not have an earthly family waiting for me, but I could belong to a much bigger one. A family that included a humble Baby born in a stable, shepherds on a hillside, and a boy in a wheelchair who now dared to hope.

I turned the radio down just a little, listening. Something was stirring outside the room—soft footsteps and the faint jingle of bells. My heart beat faster with a childlike excitement I hadn't felt in a long time.

A surprise really was coming.

## **Chapter Five**

I sat quietly, my heart still full from the shepherds' visit to the manger, when a strange noise pulled me from my thoughts. It came from the emergency exit at the back of the building—something like a soft thud and the faint jingle of bells. Curious, I turned down the radio and rolled my wheelchair closer to the door.

When what to my wondering eyes should appear but a man dressed as Santa, who worked here all year!

Mr. Clements stepped in carrying a large box of brightly wrapped presents. He was the skinniest Santa you ever saw, and he nearly dropped the whole load when he spotted me sitting there. His eyes widened behind the white beard.

“Well, what have we here?” he boomed in his best Santa voice. “A boy who's not where he should be!”

I couldn't help grinning. “I couldn't go caroling with the others this year.”

He tried to stay in character, giving a hearty “Ho, ho, ho!” but I shook my head gently. “I know it's you, Mr. Clements. No need to be Santa when it's just me.”

He looked a little deflated for a moment, then chuckled. “You know?”

“For the last three years,” I said. “I think most of the kids know. But they all love you for doing it.”

That seemed to brighten him. He smiled and began placing the presents under the tree. He picked one up and held it out. “This one's for you. I wonder what it is?”

I looked at the small box and felt a familiar sadness creep back in. “I doubt you could fit a home in that little box, Mr. Clements.”

He set the gift down right away and came over, kneeling beside my wheelchair so we were eye to eye. His voice grew soft and kind, no Santa voice now—just Mr. Clements.

“Aw, now son, don't you worry none about that. Your time will come. One day you'll look back on this and think, ‘I kinda miss all them people at the children's home now that I'm out of there.’” He patted my arm. “We might not be blood kin, but we're still family. We all love you,

Daniel. We love taking care of you until the right people come along—or until you grow up and don't need us anymore.”

His words wrapped around my heart like a warm blanket. I felt my throat tighten and my eyes grow misty. This skinny old janitor and groundskeeper, with his baggy red suit and crooked beard, suddenly seemed much more. If Dr. Spencer was like a father to me, Mr. Clements was the kindly grandfather I had always longed for.

He misted up a little too and gave my shoulder a gentle squeeze. Then he stood and continued placing gifts under the tree while he talked.

“You know, I spent some years here myself when I was a boy—just like you. It was during the Depression. My folks couldn't feed all of us, so as the oldest, I was sent here. It was hard, but I didn't let it defeat me. After the war, I came back and took a job. Been here ever since. This is about the only home I ever felt I truly belonged in.”

He nodded toward the hallway. “Only one who's been here longer than me is Miss Dickenson. She's done more for the children here than anyone. The good Lord knows she has her reasons... but that's a story for her to tell someday, if she chooses.”

I sat quietly, thinking about that. Miss Dickenson had always felt like a mother to us. Now I wondered what hidden chapters lay in her own life. I made a quiet promise to myself that one day I would ask.

Mr. Clements finished arranging the presents, picked up his empty box, and headed for the side door. “Home is where you find it, Daniel,” he said softly before leaving. “We're all related through Adam... and we Christians are related through Jesus.”

The room grew quiet again. I rolled back to the radio, turned it up, and settled in. My heart felt fuller than it had in a very long time. I might not have the family I had dreamed of, but tonight I was discovering I wasn't alone. Not really. Love was all around me—in Dr. Spencer's steady encouragement, in Mr. Clements' kind words, in Miss Dickenson's gentle care, and most of all, in the Baby who had come to a stable so that even a boy like me could belong.

I leaned forward, eager to hear how Grandpa would finish the greatest story ever told.

## **Chapter Six**

I took the small New Testament Dr. Spencer had given me and opened it on my lap, ready to follow along with Grandpa's words. The radio had become a trusted friend that night.

“In case you're just tuning in,” Grandpa said warmly, “we've heard about the shepherds and how they hurried to see the newborn King. Now, you may be wondering about the wise men. Many people think they arrived at the manger the same night, but it happened a little differently...”

A bright star had appeared in the eastern sky, and the wise men, students of prophecy and the heavens, recognized its meaning. They traveled a long, difficult journey with a great caravan. About a year and a half after Jesus' birth, they arrived in Bethlehem. There, in a simple house, they found the young Child with His mother. They fell down and worshiped Him, offering gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And so began the beautiful tradition of giving gifts at Christmas.

Grandpa's voice grew tender. "We like getting presents, don't we? But the gifts we give each other eventually wear out or get forgotten. The gift God gives us lasts forever—eternal life through Jesus Christ. The real question is this: What will you do with this Jesus? Will you accept Him as the Gift of Heaven, or turn Him away?"

The words landed straight in my heart. He spoke of feeling rejected and alone, and then read from Galatians: God sent His Son so we could receive the adoption of sons—becoming part of God's own family.

Right there, in the soft glow of the Christmas tree lights, with the little manger scene before me, I bowed my head and clasped my hands. Praying along with Grandpa, I asked Jesus to come into my heart. I told Him I believed. I made room for Him, just as the shepherds and wise men had. I gladly opened the door of my young heart wide, and He came in.

When I lifted my head, a deep, quiet peace filled me. The heavy sadness I had carried for so long had lifted. In its place was joy and hope I had never known. I belonged. I was loved. I had a future with my heavenly Father.

Just then, the front door opened with happy noise and cold air. Miss Dickenson and the other children spilled back into the room, cheeks pink from caroling. Their eyes lit up at the pile of presents under the tree. Miss Dickenson laughed and told them the gifts would wait until morning. Right now, their special Christmas guest had arrived.

Mr. Clements burst in as Santa, bag swinging, and the children crowded around him with delight. They paraded off together toward the main foyer for the big gift-giving.

I started to follow, but Miss Dickenson gently touched my shoulder. "Stay a moment, Daniel. Your surprise is too big for Santa's sack."

My heart quickened as she smiled down at me, her eyes misty with joy.

"You remember the last couple you stayed with?" she asked. "The ones who had to send you back? The lawsuit over their inheritance has been settled. They received what was theirs. The adoption papers went through. They're waiting in the administrator's office right now... to take you home. For good. Dr. Spencer examined you earlier and said you're strong enough to go."

I sat speechless, hardly able to breathe. A real home. A forever family. It felt like a dream.

Miss Dickenson put her arm around me. “I’m so happy for you, sweet boy. But I will miss you terribly.”

Tears stung my eyes. “I’ll miss you too.” Then I asked the question burning in my heart. “Miss Dickenson... why did you come here? Why have you stayed all these years?”

She stood slowly and turned slightly away, arms wrapped around herself. After a long pause, she spoke softly, her voice carrying old pain and deep grace.

“When I was younger, my husband died in the war. Then a house fire took all three of my children. The sorrow could have swallowed me whole. But I turned to God, and He comforted me. I was a mother with empty arms, so the Lord led me here—to children who needed a mother. You all became my family. One day, when I join my own children in heaven, I’ll bring many more with me.”

Her words wrapped around my heart. She bent down and held me close for a long, tender moment. Then she reached under the tree, picked up a special gift, and placed it carefully in my hands. I held it like the treasure it was.

As she wheeled me down the hallway toward my new family, my heart overflowed with gratitude. Yes, I was going to a new home with people who had chosen me. But the greatest gift had already been given. I was now part of the family of God.

That Christmas Eve, hope and love had found me in the most unexpected place. I would never forget where I came from, or what I had learned: family is made not only of flesh and blood, but of hearts bound together by love. And belonging to Jesus connects us all in the most beautiful, eternal way.

I looked back one last time at the glowing tree and the little manger. A quiet thank-you rose from deep inside me.

And somewhere in my heart, I heard the gentle, joyful reply: *I came for you.*

## **Chapter Seven**

More than twenty years have passed since that unforgettable Christmas Eve. Yet whenever I return to the old Midvale Children’s Home, it feels as if I never left. The halls, the smells, even the way the Christmas lights reflect in the windows—everything brings the memories rushing back, soft and golden around the edges.

I stood near the Christmas tree in the activity room, running my hand gently over the familiar ornaments. Funny how life works. When I was a boy here, I saw mostly the loneliness and the ache. Only later, looking back, did I see the love that had quietly surrounded me all along.

My new family had been a tremendous blessing. With their help and the care of good doctors, I grew stronger. By my teenage years I was walking again. In time I graduated, went to medical

school, and married Fran, one of the kindest and most beautiful interns I had ever met. We have a precious daughter, Danielle, and later we adopted a bright-eyed little boy named Tim from this very home. I still smile when I think how full circle life has come.

My foster parents—now simply Mom and Dad to me—gave a generous gift to the orphanage that helped repair the building and hire more staff. Not long afterward, Fran and I returned. I became the staff physician here, and Fran serves faithfully as my nurse. We come often, especially at Christmas.

Just then, excited footsteps filled the room. Danielle and Tim came running in and threw their arms around me.

“Dad!” they shouted, faces glowing.

Fran followed close behind, smiling that gentle smile I have loved for years. Other children from the home soon gathered around us too, drawn by the laughter. I greeted each one, resting my hands on small shoulders and speaking words of encouragement I once longed to hear myself.

Our family is richer for these visits. It has become our favorite holiday tradition—joining the children on their Christmas Eve caroling walk through the neighborhood. And of course, it wouldn’t be complete without Miss Dickenson.

Fran wheeled her in just then. Dear Miss Dickenson, now much older, sat wrapped in a warm blanket. When the time came that she could no longer manage on her own, we could not bear the thought of her going to a nursing home. She had no living relatives left. So we brought her into our home, where she is loved and cared for every day. She is family.

We all gathered around the Christmas tree—Fran and I in chairs, Miss Dickenson beside us, and the children sitting cross-legged on the floor in a happy circle. I opened the old, well-worn book in my lap.

The children looked up at me with shining eyes.

“Tell us the story, Dr. Daniel,” one little voice said.

So I did. I told them about the shepherds on the hillside, the angels filling the night sky, the humble stable, and the Baby who was God with us. I told them how the wise men came later, and how the greatest Gift of all is Jesus Himself. I spoke of hope, belonging, and the Father who never forgets the lonely or the hurting.

I hope the story becomes as real to these children as it did to me that night so long ago—first in my imagination, and then forever in my heart.

Grandpa left this earth years ago and went home to heaven, but his gentle voice still echoes in my memory. Now it is my turn to pass the story on.

As I looked around at the faces—my wife, my children, Miss Dickenson, and all these precious boys and girls—I felt a deep and quiet joy. Life had come full circle in the most beautiful way. The place where I once felt lost had become a place where I could offer hope. The ache I once carried had been replaced by compassion I could share.

Sometimes family isn't only flesh and blood. It is made of love given and received, of hearts knit together by grace. And the greatest family of all is the one God builds—where every lonely heart finds a home.

That is my hope and prayer for you, dear reader. That you, too, will hear the invitation of the Savior, open your heart to Him, and discover the hope, joy, and belonging that never ends.

Because Christmas is not just a day—it is the promise that God has come near, and He is making all things new.

**The End**