

CHRISTMAS TREASURES

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CHAPTER ONE

1. HIS WONDROUS NAME based on Isaiah 9:1-7

Corrie Ten Boom is one of the best known names in the 20th century. But many do not

know that Corrie had more than one name. In 1977 a group of several hundred Christian Indians honored her in Flagstaff, Arizona, by giving her an Indian name. Tom Claus, a Mohawk and president of the group, made this presentation-

I want you to know that we accept you as an Indian; you are our blood sister, and you are our spiritual sister in Jesus Christ.

When we bestow an Indian name, it is the highest honor we can give. When your name was nominated to our CHIEF committee thought that we would like to pick a name that is really meaningful to you, Corrie.

We realize that in the past you have identified with the Jews in their suffering-now you have identified with American Indians in our plight. Even though you have been on the front line of battle and have seen bloodshed and war, you have always been a demonstration of God's love. That is why we give you the name Loma-Si, which is Hopi for "beautiful flower," because you are one of God's beautiful flowers. We do thank God for you

Like many of the people of the Bible she received a new name of honor. Because names have always been important to Indians they have left their mark on our culture. Over 20 states have Indian names. The great rivers like the Mississippi and Missouri and 4 out of 5 of the Great Lakes have Indian names. There are hundreds of cities and lakes and streams all over our nation with Indian names. The poet has rightly said,

Ye say they all have passed away
That noble race and brave
That their light canoes have vanished
From off the crested wave.
That mid the forests where they roamed
Their rings no hunter's shout
But their name is on your waters
Ye may not wash it out.

Names play a major role in our history and our heritage as Americans. In 1507 a German professor in a French college edited a map of the world. As he read up on the discovery of the new world he found that much of it was explored by Americus Vespucci. He said, "I do not see what hinders us from calling it America." He did so name it and the name stuck. Professor David Muzzy in his American History writes, "so it came about that this continent was named by a German professor, in a French college, for an Italian navigator in the service of the King of Portugal."

Names have determined so much in our history and our environment but more important yet they determine our destiny. God is a great lover of names and name giving. The book of Revelation says, we will get new names in heaven. The Bible is full of genealogies which are just lists of names. Many of them mean nothing to us but they were important to God and His people. God gave the first man and woman their names and He gave the second Adam His name as well. This most important child ever born on this planet was named by his true Father in heaven. Gabriel came to Mary and said to her in Luke 1:31, "you will be with

child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.' Later in a dream the same message came to Joseph in Matt.1:21. The angel of the Lord said to him, "she will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sin." Like the spirit of the child, the name of the child also came from heaven. This name was so important to God He made sure both of His earthly parents received a supernatural message as to what they were to name Jesus.

This name is now the most celebrated name in history. Like the vast majority of babies Jesus was born without fanfare or fame. There were no reporters and no headlines for though all heaven rang as the angels sang, on earth there was barely a ripple. Everything is different now,

There's no other name like that of Jesus,
There's none in all the world beside,
For there's no other name can give salvation,
In His love I will abide.

There are more songs on the name of Jesus than any other name-Jesus Is The Sweetest Name I Know; Take The Name Of Jesus With You; There's Something About That Name and His Name Is Wonderful, Just to mention a few that are well known.

The prophet Isaiah predicted that a child would be born in Israel who would acquire a name for himself- a name above every name. If you like to know big names then you will want to get acquainted with this coming child, Isaiah would advise. His name will be the biggest ever. In fact, His name is so big it is a multiple name. There are not enough powerful descriptive adjectives to describe it. Isaiah says He shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

Wonderful or full of wonder is His name. It inspired Handel's Glorious Messiah with it's Hallelujah Chorus that has brought millions to their feet before the bearer of this name. Napoleon was rightly awestruck by this name. He said, "Is it not amazing that whereas the ambitious dreams of Caesar, Alexander and myself should have vanished into thin air, a Judean peasant should be able to stretch a hand across the centuries and control the destinies of nations and the children of men."

There is no other name like that of Jesus. It is truly a wonder. Emerson said, "His name is not so much written as ploughed into the history of the world."

At one time the Christians celebrated the birth of Jesus on a pagan holiday. Now the pagan world celebrates on a Christian holiday. Everything connected with the name of Jesus is transformed for His name is wonderful and does wonders. There is no greater wonder in the universe than the wonder of Christmas. This marks the day when our planet was invaded by a superior force from another realm. A power opposed to the sin and folly of human nature and yet it did not invade to destroy but to redeem. This is no minor wonder but rather the greatest wonder of all and that is why His name of Wonderful.

He did not come to judge the world,
He did not come to blame,

**He did not come to seek, it was to save He came,
And when we call Him Savior, then we call Him by His name.**

There are so many names of Jesus in the Bible that He is literally all things to all men. He is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end.

**He is to the artist-THE ONE ALTOGETHER LOVELY
He is to the architect-THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE
He is to the baker-THE LIVING BREAD
He is to the biologist-THE LIFE
He is to the builder-THE SURE FOUNDATION
He is to the carpenter-THE DOOR
He is to the doctor-THE GREAT PHYSICIAN
He is to the educator-THE TRUTH
He is to the farmer-THE LORD OF THE HARVEST
He is to the florist-THE ROSE OF SHARON, THE LILY OF THE VALLEY
He is to the philosopher-THE WISDOM OF GOD
He is to the preacher-THE WORD OF GOD
He is to the statesman-THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS**

We could go on almost endlessly as there are several hundred names, titles and symbols of Jesus in the Bible. But the name above all these names is the name that covers all the rest and that name is Jesus, the Savior of His people. This is the most wonderful of all His wondrous names.

This is the name God gave to Mary and Joseph. This is the name that makes Christmas the greatest day of celebration in history. This is the name that opens the gates of heaven. In God's plan it is not what you know but who you know that makes the difference. If you know this name you can get into the very presence of God. Jesus said, "I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the Father but by me." There is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved. This name is the open sesame to the mind of God.

The New Testament is filled with reference to the power of the name of Jesus. The prayer of the church in Acts 4:30 sums up the whole of the early Christians conviction about the source of their power. Their prayer was, "Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." The early Christians called upon the name of Jesus for their every need. They were baptized in the name of Jesus. They preached and healed in the name of Jesus and they suffered for the name of Jesus.

The purpose of God in choosing Paul was that He might have someone to carry the name of Jesus to the world of the Gentiles. The essence of success in the New Testament is described in Acts 19:17, "And the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor." That is the bottom line, not just for Christmas but for all the year. Do we hold the name of Jesus in high esteem? Do we honor and exalt that name that God has made the name above all names?

Our text is the only place I am aware of where the Christ child of Christmas is given a series of names that make Him the greatest being ever born. He is called-

I. WONDERFUL COUNSELOR.

There is debate as to whether there should be a coma between these two words or not. Should it be Wonderful, Counselor as in two different ideas, or just one as in Wonderful Counselor? The NIV leaves the coma out but the Berkley puts it in. Obviously scholars are not absolutely sure which way Isaiah intended us to take it. It really does not make any difference if you realize the point is these names are to exalt Jesus. They lift Him to the heights of adoration. So you simply need to reason, if He is wonderful and a counselor it follows that He is a wonderful counselor. In this context of being the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, it follows that He is wonderful as everything that He is.

A WONDERFUL SHEPHERD

A WONDERFUL SAVIOR

A WONDERFUL SON

A WONDERFUL SERVANT

A WONDERFUL STAR

And on and on we could go from alpha to omega. There is no point in trying to figure out if the coma is needed or not. Take it both ways and any other way you can imagine, for the point is He is wonderful in every way that can be imagined. You never have to fear lest you exalt the name of Jesus in some way that is not so.

He was the wonder baby of all time. He was the only baby of all time that was older than His mother. He made the ground on which she laid to give Him birth. He made the air that she breathed and the stars that she gazed up at in her labor. Without Him was not anything made that was made.

There was no room in the inn for this wonder baby but the wonder is He grew up with a heart so big He took in the whole world. He died for the sins of the whole world and thus this wondrous gift was the only gift ever given to meet the deepest need of all mankind. No wonder people all over the world sing-

**Wonderful, wonderful, Jesus is to me
Prince of Peace, Counselor, Mighty God is He
Saving me, Keeping me from all sin and shame
He is my redeemer, praise His name!**

II. MIGHTY GOD

When a Jewish writer tells us a baby is going to be called Mighty God, he has either gone insane or he is revealing the mystery of the Incarnation. The latter is what Isaiah is doing here. He is saying a human baby will be called a name that no one would call anyone but Jehovah. Here is the God-Man in prophesy as clear as you can get it.

The Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah because they were strict monotheists. What

they failed to realize is that Jesus did not change that. There is only one God and He is the One. The Jesus of the New Testament is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Everything we know about God is known through the Word of God and Jesus is the Word. Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." Jesus is the Mighty God, the God of all gods.

If Jesus was not this we would have to agree with Judaism that it would be idolatry to worship Jesus. But at His birth this baby was worshiped by angels, shepherds and wise men. He was, is, and every will be Mighty God. Jesus said, "All power in heaven and on earth is given unto me." This was His clear claim to be the one Isaiah pointed to. Nobody else has ever claimed such power. Christmas is the celebration that it is because it is the birthday of the Mighty God in the flesh.

**This infant is the Mighty God
Come to be suckled and adored
The Eternal Father, Prince of Peace
The Son of David and His Lord.**

III. EVERLASTING FATHER

Isaiah is saying this baby is the father of eternity. He who was born gave birth to all that is. He is the father of all. Jesus said He and the Father are one and so He takes on the very name of the Father. He is Immanuel, God with us; not anyone else with us, but God with us. You cannot separate the Father and the Son for they are one.

Isaiah anticipates John's saying, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." The Old Testament and the New Testament are united in this, the Messiah who would be born as a baby was God for all eternity. The pre-existence of Jesus is clearly revealed in both testaments.

Jesus is the Father of eternity in the sense that everything that will last forever is His doing. So much of reality is only temporary and it will pass away. But that which Jesus creates will be forever for He is the Father of foreverness. If there is eternal life it is because He fathered it. If there is eternal song and joy it is because he fathered it. He only stayed a baby for months but He is a father forever. His birthday and childhood are only celebrated because of what he fathered. Adam is the father of the fallen race of men but Jesus is the father of the risen race of men. Jesus never had a child in His manhood but He has fathered the one and only race of men who will live forever. He is the Everlasting Father.

IV. PRINCE OF PEACE

Many Christians hate the war-torn pages of the Old Testament. God's people were constantly in battle and death was ever lurking near even if they won. Well, they hated it too and longed for one who would bring a lasting peace and set them free from a life of strife. This was the messianic hope. G.Cambell Morgan, the prince of expositors, writes, "If I could write one word across the prophecy of Isaiah, a word that catches the underline motive, what would it be? Peace, God's great purpose of peace. He is the Prince of Peace."

There can be no greater kingdom than a kingdom where there is perpetual peace. This will be the ultimate goal of the Messiah. Even now this is the goal for the inner life for the believer Paul writes in II Thess. 3:16, "Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way." This is a prayer for peace to the Prince of Peace because even in this battle scared world the goal is to have peace and live peaceably with all men.

Jesus had such a complex name that it would be terrible if He had to sign His name as we often do today. An Indian petitioned a judge of an Arizona court to give him a shorter name. His name was Chief Switching Train Whistle. What do you wish to change you name to? The judge asked. The Indian folded his arms and said, "Toot." This reveals that a short name can convey what is involved in a long one.

Jesus is the simple name that conveys all that is involved in His many other names. Frans Delitzsch, the Old Testament scholar wrote, "The name Jesus is the combination of all the Old Testament titles used to designate the coming one according to His nature and His works." It is not only the goal of Christmas but the very goal of life to know God by His first name-JESUS.

CHAPTER TWO

2. WAITING FOR CHRISTMAS based on Haggai 2:1-9

In 563 BC, a son was born to a ruler in India. The local astrologers predicted he would either be a great ruler or a world renowned ascetic. His father wanted to prevent that, so he sheltered his child from all contact with suffering of any kind. The little prince was to never see life's sorrows. But as he grew up he defied his father and slipped out of the palace to see life on the outside. What he saw was a shock. People were poor and sick and old and there was hardship and suffering everywhere. He began to search for why this was and the conclusion he came to has influence millions. This prince was Buddha the founder of Buddhism.

He concluded that the whole problem with human beings was there desire. They set their hearts on to many things and expect the future to fulfill their hopes. This leads to inevitable disappointment and misery. The solution is quite simple, just eliminate desire. If you aim for nothing that is likely what you will get. But you won't be disappointed because that is just what you expected-nothing.

Buddhism is a negative religion where the goal is Nirvana, which means extinction. It is the elimination of all desire, hope and anticipation. The closer you can come to this in life, the greater saint you are. To be detached from all things and people so that you no longer care if they are destroyed or die, the better off you are. You can't be disappointed if you desire nothing. This sounds awful and depressing to us maybe, but we have to face this reality, there

is a measure of truth in it. Desire to be like God led Adam and Eve to fall and much of the sin and folly in the Bible is due to illegitimate desires.

Ruel Howe in his book, *The Creative Years*, tells of the bright outgoing young woman who collapsed on the eve of her wedding day. She got more and more depressed and tried to take her own life. She had to be put in a mental hospital where she continued to deteriorate. She sat in a corner and refused to respond in any way. This went on for weeks and months and all she did was sit crumpled in a corner, a symbol of living death.

And artist working on a portrait of the superintendent heard about her and asked to see her. He took a piece of moist clay and began to work with it in front of her. He did this for weeks and finally one day she reached out for the clay. Some weeks later she began to try to mold it. She became frustrated that she could not do it and in anger hurled the clay against the wall. She then looked in terror at the artist to see his reaction. He just picked it up and brought it back to her and said, "It's all right, I still like you." Then she spoke her first words in many months-"You still like me!" That was the turning point, and from then on she made rapid progress in her recovery.

They were finally able to figure out what had gone wrong. It was a simple case of excessive expectation. She was bright and talented and her parents wanted her to be popular and to succeed in every endeavor. She worked her heart out and became cheerleader, homecoming queen and valedictorian. When she faced the expectations of marriage and the added demands of a husband, it was an overload on her spirit. She broke and retreat into sickness in order to escape.

Buddha was right, all of this misery was due to hopes and desires. By expecting less everyone involved in this true story could have experienced more joy and less sorrow. Those who expect too much and who desire perfection are doomed to disappointment in a fallen world. Buddha had a point but he took it too far. To anticipate an expect nothing would have been to waste the gifts of this girl and rob her of the potential of being what she could be. Somewhere between expect everything and expect nothing there is a place for expect something.

About the same time that Buddha was teaching his desire nothing philosophy, there was a prophet called of God to take a message to his people. Haggai was his name and encouragement was his game. The people had come back from Babylon to rebuild the temple with high expectations. But their enthusiasm was soon shattered. The Samaritans so hindered the work that the project was abandoned. The cities were in ruins and the land was a mess and their neighbors were hostile. They came back with high hopes of peace and prosperity, and this is what they find. Maybe Buddha was right. Their misery was because they expected too much.

Then Haggai came on the scene and he urges them to get back to their dreams and rebuild the temple. God never promised you a rose garden. Sure it is hard and there are obstacles to overcome, but let me tell you a little about the future. The best is yet to be. God's glory to going to fill this temple and there will be a peace come upon you as never before. The Desired of all the nations is going to come to this temple that God wants you to build. Haggai

is saying we haven't seen anything yet. The best that God has for this world is still ahead-the desire of all the nations.

Haggai is saying that desire is good. It is a God given emotion and it is universal. All nations have it. You can try and follow Buddha and suppress it but that is not God's way. He wants you to desire His best. The Old Testament rejects the Buddhist idea of eliminating desire. Instead, it builds up hope, expands expectation, and delights in desire. Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He shall give you the desires of your heart." There are dozens of texts that make desire a desirable thing. In the New Testament we are urged to desire the sincere milk of the word and to desire the best gifts. Desire is good and the best desire of all is the desired one that God promised to send for all the world.

People of every nation have always desired a deliverer. Someone who can come and show away to overcome the sinful nature and all of the negative consequences of sin. Haggai says this is not just the desire of God's people but all the peoples of the world have such a desire. That is why one of the names of the Messiah is Desire Of All Nations.

The wise men from the East were waiting for the birth of a deliverer. Virgil, the Latin poet, who lived in Rome a few years before the birth of Christ, wrote of his hope of a celestial seed who would come and bring peace. Plato wrote, "We must wait patiently until someone, either a God or an inspired man, teach us our religious duties and remove the darkness from our eyes." The Roman historian, Suetonius, wrote that it was an age old belief that a world ruler would come out of Judea.

Men of every nation have desired a God they could see. Most all of the mythology of the ancients was about just such a theme. It was the fantasy of all peoples that God would come into the world and be like them. This fantasy of all the world became a reality on the first Christmas. God became incarnated in flesh, visible to the eyes of humanity. What men had waited for from the beginning of time, had come. The desire of all nations had been fulfilled and that is why Christmas is the greatest celebration of the year.

Before Christmas God was wholly other than man. He was the infinite, exalted inaccessible and invisible God. At Christmas all of this changed for God came down to man's level, all the way to an infant. He came to a level of the visible and could be touched. He entered into a world where he had to grow and learn and where he could feel pain and sorrow and all the affects of a fallen world-even death. This is just what men of every nation had always wanted, a God who would show He really cared by coming to share their life in this fallen world. God satisfied the universal longing of the human heart that first Christmas. The world did not even know it but they got just what they were waiting for on that day. The desire of all nations had come.

It is always hard to believe when the Christmas season is here again and sometimes we complain that the merchants start so early just to make more money. This is no doubt true, but the fact is you cannot anticipate this event too early. Christmas was waited for, for many centuries. Now that it is an historical reality, we should be ever ready to anticipate the celebration of this wondrous good news.

Plants and animals cannot do what we can do by looking into the future and anticipating a coming event. We can multiply our enjoyment of a coming event by our ability to anticipate it. We can begin to enjoy it long before it is here. Much of the enjoyment of Christmas comes before Christmas. The day itself may be very ordinary. It is not wise to put all your eggs in the one basket of Christmas day. The day is not sacred but the event it celebrates is what is precious and this can be enjoyed anytime and all the time. Christmas is more than a day, it is a season and that season can be as long as you choose to make it. By spreading your celebration out over a 4 to 6 week period you can be sure you will have pleasure in waiting and seeing desires fulfilled.

Everybody is waiting for something at Christmas. Some are just waiting for it to be over so they can stop waiting for it. Some are waiting for special gifts. Some are waiting for special events. Some are waiting for special foods or special relationships they only renew once a year. People have different values that make waiting a pain and another kind a pleasure. S.Omar Barker wrote,

Waiting for a phone call frets him.
Waiting for his wife upsets him.
Almost any kind of waiting
Starts his temper activating.
He's the guy who finds delight
Waiting for the fish to bite!

The point if waiting itself can be part of the pleasure if you have pleasure in what you are waiting for. Waiting in line at the super market is not enjoyable but the reason you endure it is because the food you are going to take home is enjoyable. You will wait for any goal where you can anticipate that the pleasure is greater than the pain.

In the New Testament there was an old man who was feeble and ready to die, but he could not do so because he was waiting for God to do what the world had always desired him to do—come into the world and reveal Himself. God had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. We read in Luke 2:25, "Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel." Simeon was a God-ordained waiter. That is all we know about him. He was waiting for the Christ child and when Jesus was brought to the temple he was there to take the babe in his arms and praise God.

We don't know just how long he had been waiting but he was the only man outside the immediate family who lived in intense anticipation of the first Christmas. All the nations desired God to come but Simeon knew He was coming in his lifetime. That was truly privilege information. But note what he was anticipating—the consolation of Israel. That is another name for the Messiah. He is the Desire of all nations but also the Consolation of Israel.

Israel had a hard history. They had suffered much, but their consolation would be, they would be the nation that gave the whole world the Savior of the world. It was a comfort to know that all their suffering would not be in vain, and that through them, God would fulfill His promise to Abraham to bless the whole world through his seed. You can put up with a lot

of negatives in life if you know you are being used of God to achieve His positive purpose.

Christmas fulfilled the general hopes of all mankind and the specific hopes of God's people. Christmas was the most fulfilling event in all of history. It satisfied the hopes and dreams of all the peoples of the ancient world-both Jews and Gentiles. There is no other event that can stand in the same category with it. Christmas stands alone as the focus and fulfillment of all that men could anticipate from God. That is why it is so appropriate that we sing Joy to the World. It is not just good news for some-Christmas is good news for all the world.

We need to keep perspective to avoid disappointment. If we focus on what Christmas will bring to us we maybe let down. We need to remember, Christmas is a celebration, not of what might be or of what we hope to see happen, it is a celebration of a sure thing that has already happened. God has come down to man to dwell with him. John begins his first epistle, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-this we proclaimed concerning the Word of life." The Desire of all nations has come. The Consolation of Israel has come. We celebrate a certainty, not a hope. In I John 5:11-12 we read, "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life." The best God can give He has already given. We may not get many things that we hope for but we never be disappointed in Christmas if we see that it is a celebration of what we have already received. So what we wait for is a renewed awareness of what is already ours. We are to anticipate that Christmas will awaken in us anew, the reality of what God has given us in the Gift of His Son.

Dr. Oliver Sacks, a British Neurologist, wrote a book in 1973 called, Awakenings. A movie was made of the book by the same name because it was so spectacular. It is about the victims of a rare sleeping sickness that affected some 5 million people world wide during World War I. The disease turned people into frozen statues as motionless as stones. They were still alive but they could not enter the world of the living.

In 1967 a new drug called L-dopa was developed and Dr. Sacks tried it on his patients. It was like a resurrection. These people burst forth with joy and laughter. Some had been motionless for almost 5 decades and now they were walking and talking and able to feel and to think. They had been reawakened to what was already theirs-the gift of life. It lay dormant and unused but now they could pick it up and use it with enthusiasm. They had found anew what was already theirs.

That is what we should anticipate in the Christmas season-that all of it's color, music and special focus on Christ will awaken us to enjoy the life that is already ours in Him. Someone wrote,

It's time to light the candles once again,
and to begin those other things that let us know
that Christmas day is on the way:
soon the decorations will come out,
cards will be sent and others will arrive;
soon the baking must take place,

and the shopping and the wrapping
and the wishing, and the waiting.
waiting is the hardest part, O Lord. I wish the day
could just be here without a month to wait!
But even waiting, getting ready, can be fun-
can be exciting too-because I know,
with all these other things I do,
what I am really waiting for-
what I am getting ready for-is You!
Oh, make me patient, Lord, and help me wait:
but while I'm waiting, let me be excited too.
Each day of Advent help me celebrate the joy
I wait for: looking in the manger to see You!

Let us pray that will be the dominate desire of our lives this Christmas season. Many other desires will also be satisfied-for food, fun, and fellowship, all of which are legitimate and acceptable to God. But our priority desire should always be our celebration of having received God's best-the desire of all nations. Let this be your desire in waiting for Christmas.

CHAPTER THREE

3. CHRISTMAS SECRETS based on Matt. 1:18-2:12

C.S. Lewis is one of the most read and most quoted Christian scholars of the 20th century, but he had to endure the burden of a very heavy secret in his life. He fell in love with a divorced woman and his church, the church of England, forbid marriage to one who was divorced. Joy Davidman, the woman he loved, was an American and she would soon have to leave England if she did not marry a British citizen. Lewis was in a terrible bind. He wanted to obey his church but he did not want to lose the woman he loved. So he slipped away with her and on April 23, 1956, they were secretly married in a civil service. This kept her in England, but what a pain it was to keep it a secret. They lived in separate houses and it was not long before the gossip was growing because of his frequent visits and late night stops at her house.

When Joy took a fall and ended up in the hospital she was told she had cancer. That is when they decided it was time to tell their secret to the world. When it was learned that she would never recover, the church leaders had compassion and allowed this 42 year old divorcee to be officially married in the hospital before she died.

Joseph and Mary had a problem like this as well. They had a heavy secret to bear and at first they had to bear it alone. Mary did not have the nerve to tell Joseph she was with child.

How do you explain to man you love that you have been secretly visited by an angel who has told you that you will conceive a child by the Holy Spirit and give birth to the Messiah? No wonder she left town and headed for the hill country to stay with

Elizabeth. Gabriel had told Mary the secret of Elizabeth, that she too was with child in her old age. As soon as Mary stepped in the door and greeted Elizabeth, her secret was out and Elizabeth exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear." Here are two women who haven't said more than hello to each other and they both already know each others secret-they are going to have babies.

Three months later when Mary came back to Nazareth poor Joseph did not need an angel to tell him what Mary had been hiding. Her body language exposed her secret and poor Joseph was plunged into a secret civil war. How would you feel if your bride-to-be took off for three months and then came back pregnant? Joseph was caught in a terrible bind. Do I expose her to public disgrace and let her be the victim of the law, which could lead to he being stoned, or do I just divorce her and let her go quietly? He loved her even though he was deeply hurt and so he was leaning toward divorce. Then the angel came and let him know in a dream the secret that Mary was to give birth to the Messiah.

When he woke up he was a partner in the secret and he took Mary to be his wife and the bore the secret together. Nobody in Nazareth ever knew that Joseph was not the father of Jesus. The virgin birth was a secret that became a Christian doctrine only after Jesus died and rose again. Let's look for a few moments at-

I. THE SECRET OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH.

This was not a secret Mary was urged to proclaim from the house tops. She never even told Joseph. The angel had to reveal this secret to him. This was their family secret and not a matter of public information. There is not a hint that anybody outside of their family ever dreamed Jesus was virgin born. The references to Joseph and Mary and Jesus make them seem like normal family with nothing unusual about them. Doctor Luke in Luke 2:27 says, "When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the law required...." Joseph is called the parent of Jesus. In verse 41 Luke refers to them both again as the parents of Jesus. In verse 33 he writes, 'The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.'

There is no doubt about the reality of the virgin birth. Joseph was not the literal father of Jesus, but the fact is, it was kept a secret. As far as the people were concerned, Jesus was the son of Joseph. The virgin birth was not known until after the death and resurrection of Christ. In His lifetime He was known only as the son of Joseph. John 1:45 says, "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." People who say they interpret everything in the Bible literally do not realize that would force them to reject the virgin birth.

Secrets are legitimate, for information known before it can be understood can do more harm than good. There is an appropriate time for truth to be revealed. Jesus said He had a lot of things to tell His disciples but they were yet not ready. A secret can simply be knowledge kept hidden until it can make sense to those who hear it. The virgin birth would

have been a total hindrance to the plan of God had it been revealed in the early life of Jesus. He was to be a normal child and raised in a quiet obscure way; not as the Son of God drawing the attention of the world. The truth of the virgin birth had no value until after Jesus proved that He was indeed the Son of God by His resurrection. Then it made sense.

The very first reference we have to the Virgin Birth outside the New Testament goes back to around 125 A.D. Ignatius wrote a letter to the Ephesians and said, "Hidden from the princes of the world were the virginity of Mary and her child bearing." It was a part of the plan of God that the Virgin Birth be a secret to all but those who had to know. It was a secret until the time was right for all to know it.

God has His secrets and it is fascinating to see how secretly He worked in developing the whole Christmas story. We do the same thing by keeping our Christmas gifts a secret until Christmas day. We hide them and wrap them to assure they will stay a secret until the time is right. Secrecy is the name of the game. If you know what you are getting what is the point of wrapping it up? It is the secrecy and the mystery that make you anticipate. It drives children crazy of course and they shake the packages trying to hear some tell-tale sound that will reveal the nature of the gift. There is wonder and excitement all because there are secrets. This is certainly a legitimate form of fun for God plays this game Himself. Look for example at-

II. THE SECRET OF THE STAR.

All through history there have been spectacular events in the heavens that grab men's attention and scare the wits out of them. In 1833 and again in 1866, as many as two hundred thousand meteors could be seen flashing across the sky. People panicked and thought it was the end of the world. But God did not start a panic with the Star of Bethlehem. It was so secret that only the Magi in a land far away could see it. The people in Israel saw nothing and Herod and his scholars knew nothing of it until the wise men told them of its appearance.

God could have pulled off a supernova that would have burned the eyeballs of every being in the land, but he chose to go the way of the secret star. It may have been spectacular to those few sky watchers but for all others it was hidden.

God did not even need the star, for He later warned these wise men by means of a dream. He could have gotten them to the Christ child by means of a dream also. But God wanted the star in the story of His Son's birth because it was an important symbol for the fulfilling of prophesy. Numbers 24:17 says, "A star will come out of Jacob." But the secret of the star is also based on the fact that the more precious the gift the greater the secrecy connected with it. A precious gift is meant to be a surprise and so it is kept secret. I remember keeping the wedding ring I gave to Lavonne, an other items of jewelry also. But I don't ever remember hiding the fact that I picked her up a can a spam or a box of toothpicks. A secret has to do with something of great value.

It may be unknown but it is no secret that I got my mail yesterday. It would be a secret if I got a fortune in the mail that my uncle left me in his estate. There is an endless number of facts about life that are unknown, but they are not secrets until they become events of value. Secrets are about what is weighty in life-things that can greatly hurt or help. The secret Star

of Bethlehem is a symbol that heaven is involved in the birth of this Christmas baby as it has never been involved before. This is the only baby in history, so precious, that God created a special star to announce His birth. Next look at-

III. THE SECRET OF THE SHEPHERDS.

They had no secret very long, for as soon as they learned of the secret birth of the Messiah, they ran to be eye-witnesses of the child in a manger. They were recipients of the secret but they did not keep it a secret. They immediately began to spread the news. Luke 2:17-18 says, "When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them."

We have no idea how many people were told, but a lot of people got in on this secret. Why didn't the angels just appear over Bethlehem and let everybody in on it at once, instead of appearing to small group of shepherds secretly? We don't know all of the reasons for why God works secretly with small groups, we just know that He does. Only a small group saw the star and not thousands of people. Only a few shepherds saw the angels and not the masses. The Christmas secret was revealed slowly, beginning with small groups and then spreading to larger groups. This is no accident, but a clear method by which God works in the world and in history. Jesus chose a small group of men to be His disciples. He taught them the secrets of the Kingdom of God. His goal was then to get these secrets into all the world by means of this small group. Christianity operates much like science. The great ideas and discoveries are made by one or two, or a very small group. They then reveal the secrets to the world. So Jesus said to His disciples in Mark 4:11, "The secret of the Kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables."

Jesus starts with the inner circle and reveals the secrets of the Kingdom. Then they are commanded to go into all the world and make these secrets known. This method of God is itself one of God's secrets. His plan is to use men to spread His secret. He could have used the star or the angels to tell the whole world. All kinds of amazing things can be conceived that God might have done. But He did not do them, but chose instead, not to use miracles, but to use men to achieve His purpose. The spectacular events of the star and the angels were for the few only-the masses were reached by means of the commonplace method of word of mouth.

The great commission is the command to spread the secret to all the world. Secret spreading is the ministry of every member of the church. I've Got A Secret, was once a popular T.V. program. People with very strange jobs would try to stump a panel as to their mysterious secret. I remember one program in which the secret of the twelve people there was, they were named after every month of the year. Some months sounded just fine such as, Fanny Mae and Sally April or Bill June. But John October, Ed December and Fred February sounded a little strange. Their names no doubt got them into a lot of conversations.

As Christians, we take on the name of the one who was born at Christmas. Bearing this name carries with it the responsibility to get into conversation about the name of Christ. This name is not only the heart of Christmas, but of all that Christianity stands for. The secret of Christmas is still a secret to masses of people and that is not God's plan. He wants the secret

spread so everyone knows how to become a child a God through faith in Christ-His Christmas Gift. If we are not in some way spreading the secret of Christmas we are not fulfilling God's plan.

Two men rode into New York City on the same morning train for twenty years. They became close and intimate friends. One day the one man missed the other, He missed him the next day, and on enquiry learned that his friend had suddenly passed away. The man attended his friend's funeral, and discovered to his utter amazement that all through those twenty years his friend had been an officer in a Protestant Church. The survivor said: "I cannot understand it; through all the fellowship of those years he never once mentioned the name of his Master, nor did he once make any allusion to personal religion, or show the slightest interest in my religious standing. If he had only spoken a word on these matters he would have found me anxious to be led to his faith ! Think of it! Twenty years of silence on the vital themes of religion. He was keeping that a secret which God intended for him to share.

God does not expect you to change the world at Christmas. He didn't even do that. He just let a few people in on the wondrous secret and let it spread. So all you have to do is one on one or small group sharing and let the secret spread. It was not what was in the headlines that most mattered that first Christmas, but what was done in secret. This is still true today. Life changing events are going on everywhere as individuals hear about Jesus and trust Him as their Savior. They quietly enter into the secret of Christmas as they receive God's Gift.

There are some secrets that have to be told or the end result is tragedy. Anne Davis tells of her first experience of spending the night with her little girl friend. She was amazed when her friends mother came in and tucked her into bed, kissed her and told her good night. In Anne's family this was never done. Overt affection was just not shown. But seeing it made her hunger for it. So the next night at home she put her cheek up to her mother at bedtime, but nothing happened. Her mother just went through the usual ritual of laying out clean clothes for school the next day. Anne cried herself to sleep that night and concluded her mother did not love her as her friends mother loved.

That disappointment sank deep into her and festered for years. It was only as an adult that she finally confronted her mother and asked why she had not shown more physical affection. The mother's eyes were filled with tears as she said, "my mother died when I was five and there was never anyone to tuck me in and say good night. There was no one to wash out my clothes and often I had to go to school with a dirty dress. I made up my mind, then and there, that if I ever had children of my own, they would always have clean clothes every morning. This is the way I tried to show my affection and love." Both of them were crying and Anne said to her mother, "You never told me that. It always use to irritate me that you were so fussy about my clothes. I wanted you to spend your time doing something else." Here was a tragedy because of secrets never told..

The world is filled with suffering because of secrets that are unrevealed. There are so many different love styles. People show love in so many different ways and the ones they love do not feel their love because they do not understand what love means to them. Like ships

passing in the night they miss each other because of unshared secrets. People have strange ways of saying I love you based on their unique background and personality. We need to know their secret to feel their love. Lets face it, the only reason the Christmas story does not seem strange to us is because we know the secret of what God was doing. But try to imagine what it seems like to one who does not.

The world is a mess and lost in darkness and what does God do?-He sends the world a baby. This is not exactly a logical gift to make anybody in a mess feel more secure. Nobody was saying what we really need in this world is another baby. It was not good news that another baby was born. You have to be in on the secret before it is good news.

It is no secret what God can do
But it is often a mystery why.
Why would He begin anew
With a little baby's cry?
He was the Lord before all time,
Now in a secret guise he lays.
No longer the Lord in His prime,
Yet, the angels sing His praise.
What wondrous things God will do
To show the world His grace.
Revealing that His love is true,
Through the smiling Christ-child's face.
God opened up the secret of His eternal plan,
When He sent His only Son to be a real man.
It's now an open secret that He's the only way,
And that is why we celebrate this joyous Christmas day!
That day God came in secret, known only to a few,
But now the secrets out-God loves the whole world too.
It is no longer a secret what God can do,
But the spreading of this secret is still up to me and you.

May God help us to be sharers of the Christmas Secrets.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. HIS WONDERFUL NAME based on Matt.1:18-25

Some people are born risk-takers. Such was the case with Dr. John Haldane who was born in Scotland in 1860. His professional life was spent in seeing how close he could come to dying without actually ending up dead. He wanted to learn why it is that carbon monoxide kills people. So he got himself a partner and they both sat in a lab breathing carbon

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