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Christmas Hope

Christmas is an exciting time. It is a time when we can be extravagant and lavishly give gifts to those we love! We can even give gifts to our enemies, in the hope that they will become our friends again.

For some people, however, approaching Christmas Day is filled with fear and anxiety. You may be all alone, or close loved ones may no longer be present to enjoy the celebrations. For others it may be that they have no job, or no money with which to really celebrate.

Before the first Christmas, the young girl Mary was also filled with fear. She, too, was scared. She was facing a situation she had never faced before. Let's have a look at how the angel of God encouraged her, and how his message can encourage us, too.

1. Don't be afraid. The first thing the angel told Mary was not to be afraid. I believe we all need to be told this at times. When confronted with a situation beyond our control, and for which we feel totally helpless and hopeless, we need someone stronger and wiser to tell us there is nothing to fear. God says to all who love Him: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you."¹ God is never far from us², and his thoughts towards us are more in number than the sand of the sea³. Therefore, do not fear - you are not alone.

2. You will conceive. For Mary, a miracle happened. Before any male had ever touched her, she became pregnant. The impossible became reality. Something came out of nothing. And the same can occur in your life today. What is it that you need? Do you need a job? Do you need your family to get back together? Do you need new health? Do you need forgiveness? The Bible says: "For with God *nothing* will be impossible."⁴ Do you believe this? Have you asked God for what you really need and want? Jesus said: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"⁵ Ask, and you *will* receive.⁶

3. Call his name Jesus. The name 'Jesus' means 'saviour'.⁷ The baby boy whom Mary gave birth to would be the saviour of the world. He would bring great joy to all who would believe on Him⁸, because Jesus came to save us from our sins and give us a new life.⁹ Mary's miracle baby was her saviour. In a similar fashion, I believe the

same occurs in our own experience. When you get what you asked for from God, when you get your miracle, you are so happy and you feel like you have been 'saved'! When you get that job, when the money comes in, when the family gets back together, when you get what you really need, "Jesus!", it's so good! You are entering into the joy and message of that first Christmas! Be sure to say 'thank you' and give God the glory!

4. His kingdom will never end. The miracle which began at the birth of Mary's child didn't just stop there. His influence began to spread uncontrollably and irreversibly. From shepherds in nearby fields¹⁰, to wise men who lived thousands of kilometres away¹¹, the whole world began to be changed, until today at least one in six people on planet earth claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. I believe the

same ripple effect occurs in each one of our lives. Just like what happens when a pebble is thrown into a lake, you will not be able to contain the good blessings you receive. They will spread out and overflow to bless others around you as well. Your life, and the things that happen to you, are significant. You are a blessing, and God wants to use your life to bless many others!

This Christmas, when you are giving, stop and realize that you may in fact be giving a miracle! The smile and joy you bring into someone's life, the hope where

there once was pain, the hand reached out in love again to someone who had become your enemy during the year - your gift and kind words could have a ripple effect far beyond what you ever dreamed!

Christmas hope. I think that's what God had in mind the very first Christmas. The Bible says that all of us were God's enemies because of the sinful lives we have lived¹², but that at Christmas, God reached down to earth and gave us a gift - His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ - so that we could become His friends again¹³. It is written: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."¹⁴ I hope you have already 'unwrapped' God's gift to you! Believe in Jesus. Put your trust in Him. It's worth it!

This Christmas, may you enjoy being a blessing to others, especially those in need, and may the blessings overflow all year round!

Then the angel said to her,
 "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."
 Luke 1:30-33

(1) Isaiah 41:10. (2) Acts 17:27. (3) Psalm 139:17,18. (4) Luke 1:37. (5) Matthew 7:11. (6) Matthew 7:7. (7) Matthew 1:21. (8) Luke 2:10,11. (9) 1Timothy 1:15; John 10:10. (10) Luke 2:8-10. (11) Matthew 2:1-12. (12) Ephesians 2:1-3; James 4:4. (13) 2Corinthians 5:19. (14) John 3:16.