

raised Jesus to life on the third day to show that his death is now the doorway to life for those who put their trust in him.

With us now to rescue us for ever

Jesus is alive today, and is the Lord of all. As a baby, he received precious gifts from wise men who travelled from the East. But now he showers gifts that are far more valuable on anyone who places themselves under his loving rule.

- ♦ He gives the gift of forgiveness of our sins, won through his death on the cross.
- ♦ He gives the gift of new life and offers a fresh start through his resurrection from the dead.
- ♦ He gives the gift of his Holy Spirit to anyone who follows him as their Lord and Saviour. His Spirit is, quite literally, his continuing presence with those who would be his friends and follow him.

There may be many presents you receive this Christmas that are precious to you. But the greatest gift you can ever receive is the gift of new life through Jesus. Friendship with Jesus lasts for all eternity.

Receiving the gift

God has done everything to make himself know to us. He sent Jesus to be *God with us*, to show us our need and to rescue us for a wonderful future.

Jesus, the saviour of the world, can be *your* saviour. Jesus, the resurrection and the life, can give *you* new life this Christmas. For those who respond to his invitation—those who receive Jesus the Lord into their hearts and lives—there is a wonderful welcome that we don't deserve. A welcome into God's presence with our sins forgiven. A welcome into God's worldwide family. And a welcome, ultimately, into his home in heaven—to be with him for all eternity.

How will you respond to his invitation this Christmas?

A Christmas prayer

Dear Father in Heaven,

Thank you for sending Jesus on that first Christmas day. Thank you that Jesus shows us the truth about God and about ourselves.

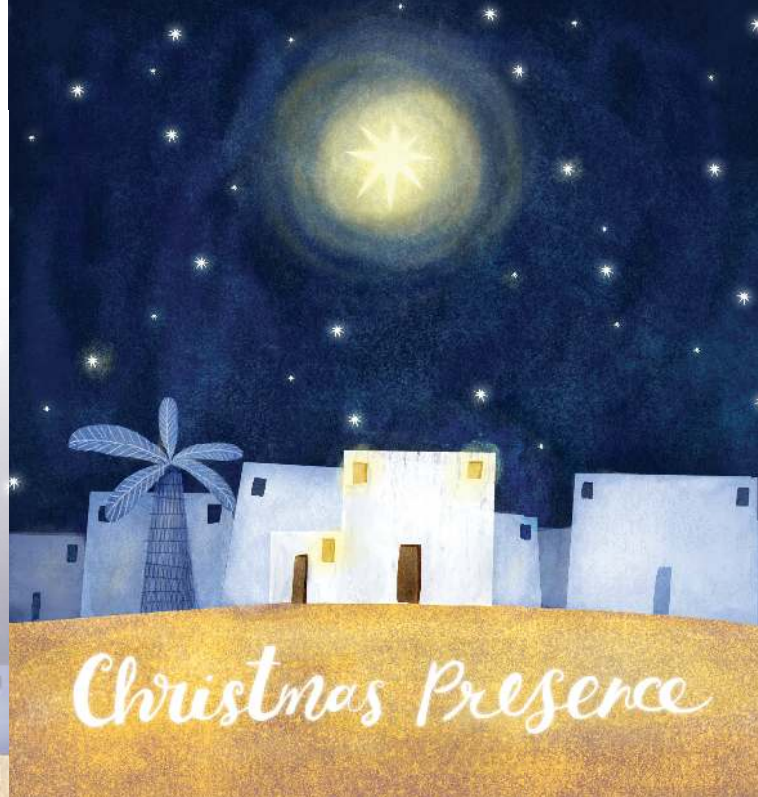
Thank you that Jesus died on the cross so that my sins could be forgiven. Thank you that he rose again to bring us new life.

Please forgive me. Jesus, please come into my life as my Saviour, Lord, Teacher and Friend, and help me to live for you from now on.

Amen

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Christmas Presence

Why are the roads, trains and airlines so busy on Christmas Eve? Because—like pigeons—we have a homing instinct. And that instinct is especially powerful as we approach December 25th.

We feel the need to be present with friends, family and loved ones on one special day in the year. We just want to be home with the people we love—to catch up on the news, to relax and enjoy time with family, and to celebrate life together.

This drive to be *with* the people you love is at the very heart of the Christmas story, and the Christian message today. It's there in the words of a Bible passage which may be familiar to you from Christmas services. Matthew reports that, in a dream, an angel spoke to Joseph, saying:

"Mary will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means 'God with us.'"
Matthew 1 v 21-23

With us to show who God really is

The ancient world was used to tales of "gods" coming down to earth. In Greek, Roman and Egyptian mythology, there are stories where the gods appear for a brief time. They pass on an important message to a great king, or help a muscular hero in their time of need, or have their wicked way

with a beautiful mortal they have fallen for. But the Bible tells a story that is totally different from these myths. Different in *how* the Son of God came to live on earth; but also different in *why* he came.

What makes the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth so remarkable is the sheer *ordinaryness* of it all. Here is an unremarkable couple living in an obscure town in a dusty backwater. The child is born in squalor, with a makeshift crib made from a cattle trough. The birth announcement is made, not to great warriors or kings, but to a few peasant shepherds on the hillside outside Bethlehem.

There is a profound message here for us. The Christmas story is no time-polished fantasy that celebrates royalty and power—but the story of how God has shown who he really is—to all mankind; from the least to the greatest. Many people have imagined what God might be like. But from this point onwards, all the guessing games about God come to an end. Because he has revealed himself, not just to the privileged few, but to all mankind. Jesus was born to show you and me who God really is.

With us to show us ourselves

For the next 30 years Jesus shared the daily life and work of an ordinary home, working as a carpenter. And then, for three remarkable years, he walked around the land of Israel, teaching people about God, healing the sick and performing amazing miracles. He called twelve ordinary men to be his helpers.

Jesus had no money. He wrote no books. He commanded no army. And during his life he never travelled more than 200 miles in any direction.

But as time went by, the conviction grew among his followers that what was said about him at his birth, and throughout the Old Testament, was true—that Jesus really was *God with us*.

He did the kind of things that only God could do. He stilled storms and fed thousands. He set people free from evil spirits and raised the stone-cold dead to love-warmed life.

This passionate and perfect man stuck out "like a healthy thumb"—and as he did so, he showed the truth about who we are as weak and failing people, who fall below God's standards. Those who spent time with him needed no convincing that they were sinners in need of rescue. And these were the very people that Jesus welcomed.

But others hated him for the way he showed their hypocrisy and false religion—and so they plotted and schemed and he was killed by being nailed to a cross and left to die.

With us to save us from our sins

The angel had said to Joseph that they were to "*Give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins*". Jesus' death was not a mistake or a failure. His death was the chief reason he came into the world. He died so that sinful failures like you and me could be forgiven. And God