

# CHRISTMAS GIFTS

## A Story For Young And Older Children

### PART ONE:

### The Gift of the Saviour, Jesus Christ the Son of God



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Isaiah 9:6 (English Standard Version) For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

“Family meeting! Hellooo!” Seven year-old James bounced into the lounge.

His sisters, Sophia, Grace and Sarah were sitting around the dining room table. They were busy with their home school assignments.

“Important family meeting in half an hour in the back yard! Be there or else!” shouted James.

Sarah rolled her eyes. “So *overly dramatic*,” she sighed. As the second youngest she felt that using big words raised her status in the family. She waited for someone to ask what “overly” meant. But no one did. Sighing, Sarah pushed away the book she was studying.

“Sounds like the pot calling the kettle black,” remarked Sophia, her eyes twinkling. Sarah was known for her own “drama queen” behaviour.

James, who was leaping around the room, hopped over excitedly to his oldest sister and gave her a squeeze.

“You're hugging all the breath out of me, James,” laughed Sophia, tousling his hair.

Sarah frowned. She didn't like to be reminded of her faults. “Gracie, what do you think?” she asked. “Don't you think James is being overly dramatic?”

“Hmm?” murmured Grace. She smiled at Sarah, but her attention was on the art book she was enjoying.

“Oh, Grace! You haven't been listening to anything I've said!” Sarah's lip quivered.

“Come now, Sarah, don't take it personally. You know Grace is in her own little world. Aren't you, Gracie?” Sophia smiled at both her younger sisters who were so different.

Eleven year-old Grace raised her head and asked, “Did I miss something?” They all laughed. Even Sarah.

Sophia asked, “Where's Daniel? He also needs to know about the meeting.” As the oldest, Sophia was like a mother hen making sure all the chicks were in order.

“Daniel's helping Daddy in the garage,” James informed them. “He knows about the meeting. He wrote out the agenda for Mommy.” James waved the sheet of paper.

“Not *agenda*, Jamie. Agenda,” corrected Grace gently. She gave him a hug. “Let's see.”

They all crowded together to read the agenda. “Christmas gifts! Ooh, lovely!” smiled Grace.

“I thought we wouldn't be able to have gifts this year,” revealed Sophia. “I'm so glad Mom and Dad have made a plan!”

“But it says here we shall have to make our own. That's so disappointing!” grumbled Sarah.

Sophia took charge. “Come on everybody, let's tidy up and go to the meeting.”

In the back yard, Mom was setting out red plastic chairs around the table under the spreading flame tree. She smiled as the children joined her.

“How can I help, Mom?” asked Sophia. On her way through the kitchen she had thoughtfully collected a jug of ice cold water with lemon and mint. She had put seven glasses on a tray with the jug.

“You've already helped, dear,” smiled her mother, looking at the tray as Sophia put it on the table.

“I do wish we weren't so poor,” complained Sarah. “Cool drink would be much nicer.”

“Sugar rots your teeth,” announced James. “Water's healthier.” They all had to laugh, as James was known for his sweet tooth.

Dad and Daniel came out of the garage, dusting off their hands and wiping their sweaty faces. The day was very hot. Durban summers were humid, although the sea breezes cooled the houses along Bluff Road. They were quite high up on the Bluff and overlooked the harbour.

“Well, this is great,” grinned Dad. “All present and on time. Water with ice blocks too! Who wants to take minutes?” He poured himself a glass of water.

"Please let me Daddy!" urged Sarah.

"Thank you, Sarah, that's my big girl," praised her father.

Sarah ran back into the house for the meeting book. While the family waited for her they helped themselves to the chilled water. "Ah, that's better," sighed James, sounding like a junior version of Dad.

Sarah, returning, rolled her eyes. Mom and the other girls giggled. Dad winked at James. James chewed an ice block, his eyes sparkling.

Dad cleared his throat. "Before we start, let's thank the Lord for His blessing on our family." They all took turns to say a personal "thank you" to God the Father. Grace looked up at the orangey-red flowers above her. She thanked the Lord for the beautiful flame tree.

"I take it you've all seen the agenda?" asked Dad. "So you know what Mom and I want to do this Christmas? It was impossible two years ago to buy Christmas gifts. Remember that the Covid lock down in 2020 ate into all our savings when I lost my job. But God gave me enough work so we didn't have to sell the house. There's still no money for luxuries, though. But Christmas without gifts would be rather sad. So your mom and I decided to help you all make gifts for one another. Back in the day, many people used to make their own gifts."

"And it can be a lot of fun," encouraged their mother. "Especially when the gifts are surprises!"

"Do we each make seven gifts?" asked Daniel. "We don't have time for that. There's the veggie garden to tend, holiday homework and everything." He frowned.

"You're right, Daniel," agreed Dad. "Seven would be too much. No, each of you will draw the name of one brother or sister. Then you can take your time making something he or she will love."

"But how can the gifts be surprises?" inquired Sophia. "We don't have our own bedrooms. There aren't many places to work in private in this small house."

"Ah, that's where you shall have to make a plan," answered her father, his brown eyes twinkling. "Your mother and I shall help."

"What about gifts for you and Mom?" asked Grace.

"Don't worry about that, Gracie," Mom said. "Helping you all will give Dad and me much joy."

"Okay. Why don't we draw the names now?" suggested twelve-year-old Daniel. He had been writing their names on bits of paper which he put in an empty glass. Now he held out the glass for each child to draw a name. "I'll have the one that's left in the glass," he said.

"Oh, well done, Daniel," smiled Dad. There was giggling as each child drew a name. Daniel put his piece of paper into his pocket. Then he poured cold water into the glass and downed it in one gulp.

"Before we start to think about the gifts, let's not forget the true reason for the Season," reminded Dad. "Let's not forget God's great gift to us."

"Yes, indeed," nodded Mom. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. That's from Isaiah 9 verse 6."

"I love that verse!" exclaimed Grace.

"Why did God give us His Son?" asked James. He brushed away some ants that had climbed up his leg.

"Good question, James. Who can help him?" responded their father. "Sarah?"

"Um," Sarah thought hard but she wasn't sure. She shook her head.

"Because we needed a Saviour," Daniel answered.

"Why do we need saving, Daddy?" asked Sarah. "I'm sorry. I've forgotten." She rocked back on her chair in embarrassment.

"That's okay, Sweetie. We all need reminding," her father comforted her. "Be careful you don't fall over on that chair though! Anyone know the answer?"

"Yes, Dad. We need to be saved from the punishment we all deserve because we are all sinners," said Sophia. "I'm not a sinner!" exclaimed Sarah.

"Unfortunately you are, dear. We all are. No one is good enough for God. No one can please God. God is perfectly good and true. But we are born selfish and full of pride and all kinds of sinful thoughts. From those thoughts come all kinds of bad behaviour."

Dad looked kindly but seriously at his two youngest children, for this was a life and death issue. He knew that Sophia, Daniel and Grace had put their complete trust in Jesus Christ as their Saviour. They had trusted in Him to save them from the punishment of eternal separation from God in hell. This punishment hangs over the head of every human being and we all deserve it. But Sarah and James did not yet understand their need for God's salvation.

"Do you remember what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us all?" asked Mom gently.

"Yes, Mom, He was born a human and lived a perfect life. Then He died and shed His blood on the cross to take our punishment. They buried Him but He rose from the dead on the third day," replied Grace.

"What does it mean that Jesus rose from the dead?" asked James.

Dad explained, "He did not stay dead. He is alive forever. This shows that His sacrifice for us was one hundred percent successful. Like getting ten out of ten for a test. So those who believe in Jesus and what He did for us are saved from the punishment they deserve. We could never be saved by what we do."

"That's why we need the Lord Jesus," murmured Grace.

"Yes, Gracie. Only the God-man, Jesus Christ, could fully pay for all our sins," agreed Mom.

"Does that mean that because Jesus Christ died for the whole world that everyone is now saved?" asked Sarah.

"No, Sarah. But everyone *can be saved*. A person must put his or her trust in what Jesus Christ alone did for us. Then that person will be saved. At that very moment he or she will get God's gift of eternal life." Mom went on, "As long as we trust in ourselves we can't be saved. We have to realize we are totally unable to save ourselves. We must trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross."

"And God doesn't want to punish anyone in hell forever," said Dad rather loudly. "That's why He gave us God the Son to die in our place."

"So what must I do to be saved?" asked Sarah.

"*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved,*" declared her mother. "That's in the Bible. Acts 16:31. Depend on what *He* did for *you*."

"*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.* That's John 3:16, NASB" quoted Daniel. "That's God's promise to us. Trust Him."

"Thank you, Daniel. And that's the true Christmas gift," said Dad. "Sarah and James, when this meeting is finished, go and think about what we have been saying. Then put your trust in Jesus Christ alone for the gift of salvation."

The two youngest children nodded solemnly. "Yes, Daddy. We'll do that," promised Sarah. James agreed.

## PART TWO:

### The Gifts Of Salvation And Eternal Life



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John 19:30 (English Standard Version) When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 10:28 (English Standard Version) I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

“What are you doing, Daniel?” Daniel was unaware that James had entered the garage and was right next to him. He was startled when James spoke and he poked himself accidentally with the tool he was using.

“Ouch!” Daniel sucked his thumb to ease the pain.

“Sorry, Daniel,” apologized James. But James did not look very sorry, judging by his cheeky grin.

Daniel stopped himself from telling James what he thought of him. “It’s my surprise Christmas gift,” he admitted. “And that’s all I’m going to tell you. Otherwise the secret will be out.”

“Ah, please! You can trust me, Brother. Just whisper it in my ear! I promise I won’t tell.” James’s eyes twinkled mischievously.

“Nope. Definitely not! Out, out!” Daniel shooed James out of the garage and locked the door from inside.

Then he went back to the plan that he and Dad had drawn up. He was making a bookcase for Sophia’s books.

Sophia loved books. Daniel smiled to himself as he pictured her delight at receiving his gift. At present, her books were stacked up on a corner of the desk that all the girls shared. Daniel couldn't wait for it to be finished. However, Daniel knew from God's word that patience was a key ingredient in his success. And he knew that God is most pleased by our faith. This is especially true when we have to do something difficult. He remembered that his namesake in the Bible, Daniel the prophet, had been patient and faithful.

Grace sat at the desk in the girls' bedroom. She thoughtfully began a sketch using a picture of lions. Then she sighed and crossed it out. She flipped the paper over to try again on the back. Suddenly the door popped open.

"Boo!" It was James. Grace's pencil hand jerked. A dark line spoiled her drawing.

"Oh, James!" she scolded. "Look what you made me do! I've spoiled my sketch. Naughty boy."

"Sorreee!" said James, smiling broadly. "But it's such fun creeping up on everyone!"

The door opened again and Sarah came in, wiping her hands on a cloth.

"What are you up to, Sarah?" James bounced over to nine-year-old Sarah, who looked down on him, loftily.

"That's for me to know and for you to guess," quipped Sarah. She had on an apron that Grace had outgrown. Before Grace got it, it had belonged to Sophia. Being the youngest girl meant that almost all Sarah's clothes were hand-me-downs. She resented the fact that she was the youngest sister. She dreamed of having something new. Something made just for her.

"Ah, that sounds like you're making a surprise present, Sarah. Do tell me. I won't tell!" James hopped around Sarah making her dizzy.

"Out, you little pest!" Sarah pushed him firmly out of the room and locked the door.

"Naughty child!" she remarked, as if James was so much younger. Sarah looked at her normally placid sister's tense face. She smiled. "I see that James disturbed you too, Gracie. He's bouncing at everyone in the family. He's just like Tigger in Winnie-the-Pooh." They both laughed.

There was a knock at the door. "Let me in, please!" called Sophia. Sarah let her in. Sophia was hurriedly stuffing some fabric into a shopping bag.

"Oh, what's that?" Sarah asked.

"Ask no questions and you'll get no lies," laughed Sophia.

"Who's it for, then?" persisted Sarah.

"Oh, Sarah, you're as bad as James!" declared Sophia, smiling.

Sarah pouted at the comparison. "James is just a little pest. I'm civilized!" Her sisters both laughed. Sarah plopped down on her bed and stretched. "What are we going to do with James?"

"He needs to start making a Christmas gift too," said Grace. "That'll keep him busy and out of our hair."

"I'll chat to Mom about it," promised Sophia. "In fact, I need to ask her something -" she began. She blushed and said hurriedly: "Er, something about ...."

Grace and Sarah laughed. "Aha! What are you trying to hide, Sophia? Something about something you're

making?”

“I’m out of here,” giggled Sophia, and whisked out of the room, clutching the shopping bag. Grace and Sarah looked at each other and dissolved into giggles.

“I must say this Christmas gift thing is actually fun,” admitted Sarah.

Supper was unusually late that evening. Mom was normally fussy about making healthy meals. But tonight's supper was boerewors rolls with baked beans and bottled beetroot. Sarah sensed that something was going on. Mom and Dad kept glancing at each other and grinning.

After supper they had their usual family devotions and Bible reading before bed. They were reading through the book of Ephesians.

“Let's talk some more about God's wonderful gifts,” began Dad. “We have just finished chapter 2 of Paul's letter to the Ephesian church. Did anyone notice the reference to a gift?”

“Oh, yes, Dad,” said Grace eagerly. “It's in the same verse that talks about the grace of God. One of my favourite verses. Ephesians 2, verse 8.”

“Well done, Gracie,” encouraged her father. “Well, who would like to read it?” Dad's face creased into a big grin as he saw Sarah's hand shoot up quickly. “Go for it, Sarah.”

“Ephesians 2, verse 8. New American Standard Bible. *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,*” read Sarah in her clear voice.

“Well done, Sarah. Do you all understand that?” Dad looked at each of his children in turn. He noticed that his wife was keen to say something. “Mom? I can see you want to add something.”

“Yes, I just wanted to say that some people think this means that faith is the gift of God. But when you carefully examine the Greek, it's clear that Paul means that salvation is God's gift,” explained their mother.

“Was the Bible written in Greek first, Mom?” Grace was surprised.

“Yes, Grace. English wasn't even a language at that time in history. Most people in the Roman Empire understood Greek.” Mom was about to plunge into a history lesson. But Dad guided them back to the book of Ephesians.

“Let's read verses 8 to 10. Sophia will you read them this time?” suggested their father.

Sophia read, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”*

“Dad,” observed Daniel, “it says we are God's workmanship. Like a master carpenter creating a piece of furniture. Wow!”

“Or an artist painting a beautiful work of art,” added Grace.

“What about a chef making a delicious Black Forest cake?” contributed Sarah.

“You're making me hungry,” chuckled James. Sophia poked his stomach and he doubled up with laughter.



“Yes, indeed, like all of those lovely things, but much, much better!” Mom smiled at them. “You see, when we believe on Jesus, God puts us into Christ. Then God the Holy Spirit begins to help us change to be more like Jesus Christ, as we trust Him.”

“Sarah, do you remember how a person can get saved?” gently questioned her father.

“Yes, Daddy,” she responded confidently. “By putting your faith in Jesus Christ who died for each one of us, was buried and rose again.”

“Good answer!” confirmed Dad enthusiastically. “That’s what verse 8 tells: For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Now, verse 9 tells us why this gift of salvation has to be through faith by the grace of God. Who can help us understand?”

“I can Dad!” Sophia was bursting to give the answer. “It’s so that no one can boast! That means that God gets the glory He alone deserves. He gave His Son. God the Son gave His life. We get this gift of salvation purely because of what God has done.”

“Correct, my child. Remember, the only way we can be saved is to believe in what Jesus Christ has done. And to believe that God counted His work on the cross good enough to save anyone who trusts in what God has done.”

“What if I *try* to be good enough for God? Like if I promise I’ll never disobey Mom and Dad again? And I’ll never lie or steal?” asked James.

“You forgot to say lie or steal *again*,” put in Sarah.

The family laughed. James wriggled uncomfortably. “Okay, you’re right,” he admitted. “So doesn’t God look at that and see I’m trying to be good?”

“Well, then, if those things could save you from the punishment you deserve,” Dad said seriously, “then you could boast. But Ephesians tells us that no one can boast. Only God deserves the glory for salvation.”

“And Dad,” burst in Daniel, “if we could do anything to earn heaven, then it wouldn’t be a gift!”

“Also,” added Sophia, “if anything we could do or promise or say was good enough for God, then the Lord Jesus didn’t have to die on the cross! But God knows we are hopeless sinners who can never be good enough. We need *Him* to save us.”

“You know what?” shared Sarah, shyly.

“What, dear?” asked Mom.

“I understand. I know I’m never going to be good enough for God. I understand that He alone can save me because He died for me and rose again. I know that if I choose to trust in *myself* I shall go to hell,” she confided.

“So what now, Sweetie?” asked Dad gently.

“So - right now I’m trusting in Jesus Christ alone to save me!” Sarah smiled and it was like the sun breaking through the clouds. The family erupted joyfully: Daniel clapped, Dad “high fived” Sarah, and Mom and her sisters gave her big hugs. Just James sat still in his chair, looking thoughtful.

Dad went over to James and hugged him. He and Mom were praying that James would understand too.

## PART THREE:

### God's Gift Of Love



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John 3:16-18 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Sophia sat under the flame tree in the back yard. The early morning sun shone through the flowers so that they looked like they were on fire. A few tiny leaves drifted down and settled on Sophia's Bible. She blew them off and went on reading and talking to the Lord.

A small figure came up behind Sophia. “Boo!” It was James of course.

Sophia pressed her hand over her thumping heart. “Oh, James! You gave me such a fright!”

“Sorrreee, Sophee,” sniggered James. “But that was such fun!”

“Just don't do that to Grandpa and Grandma, okay? It's bad for your heart.”

James grew serious. “Really? I don't want to hurt anyone.”

“You're forgiven, little Brother. Come sit with me.” James slipped on to a chair next to her.

“Whatcha reading?” he asked.

“I’m reading about the Lord Jesus telling Nicodemus he must be born again.”

“How can you be born again?” James was puzzled. “You can’t go back into your mother’s body can you?”

Sophia laughed. “You know, James, that’s exactly what Nicodemus said!”

“So what did Jesus tell him?” asked James.

“He said that being born again is something the Holy Spirit does when we believe on Him,” replied Sophia.

“Listen to this: John 3:16: *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.*”

“I didn’t know God loved the whole world,” commented James.

“Well, that’s what the Bible says. And because He loves the whole world He gave His Son. Remember, we were talking about gifts?”

James nodded eagerly. “You know,” he admitted, “I just don’t know what gift I’m going to make. Please help me.”

“Of course I will,” promised Sophia. “Who are you making it for?”

“Grace,” whispered James. He looked around in case someone was listening. “I thought we weren’t supposed to tell.”

“Well I need to know so I can help. Grace is easy, James. Just draw her a picture. She’ll love it!”

“But that’s boring,” complained James. “A picture is a good idea. But something different.”

“Hmm,” Sophia prayed silently. “Oh, I’ve got it! You remember those hand prints we made when we were little? Why not ask Mom for paint and then dip a leaf in the paint and make a pattern?”

James’s face brightened. “I like that! I’ll ask Mom for all different colours. I’ll make it look like a tree. Thanks, Sophy.” James rushed off to ask Mom for paint and cardboard.

The family gathered around the kitchen table for breakfast. It was Grace and Sarah’s turn to cook.

“Mmm, looks yummy, thank you girls,” praised Dad, accepting a plate of crisp French toast from Sarah. “Today, Mom and I will be away all morning. We trust that you will get on with your chores and gifts. Listen to Sophia and Daniel. We trust you will all be responsible.” Dad looked pointedly at James.

There was a chorus of “Yes, Dad.” James squirmed a bit but gave his father a thumbs up as he munched his sugary French toast.

Sarah and Grace cleaned the lounge after breakfast. “Something’s up with Mom and Dad,” guessed Sarah.

“Why, Sarah?” asked Grace, wiping a window ledge.

“They winked at each other at breakfast after Dad said they were going out,” replied Sarah.

“That's not much to go on,” disagreed Grace.

“I just know they are up to something! I think it's got to do with Christmas,” declared Sarah.

“Sounds like wishful thinking,” laughed her sister. “Don't get your hopes up!”

After their kitchen chores, Sophia and James went outside again. On the table they spread out newspaper, then cardboard and pots of paint. Sophia showed James how to coat a leaf with paint. She made him practice before starting the picture.

“Please tell me more about God's love,” asked James.

Sophia smiled. “Well, let me go get my Bible.”

Going in through the back door, Sophia disturbed Sarah looking at a recipe book. Sarah quickly turned to another page.

“Relax,” said Sophia. “I promise I won't look or tell! Please be careful, Sarah; don't burn yourself! Call me if you need help.” Sarah nodded.

Opening their bedroom door, Sophia surprised Grace, sitting at their desk, sketching. Grace tried to cover her sketch.

“Oh, boy! This household is so funny! You can't go anywhere without disturbing someone making a surprise gift!” laughed Sophia, as she picked up her Bible.

Grace giggled. “Well, at least James has stopped bouncing everyone! Now it's you!”

Back in the garden with James, Sophia turned to 1 John 3 and read the first part of verse 1: “*See how great a love the Father has given us, that we would be called children of God; and in fact we are.* This is about the special love God gives us when we are born again. He becomes our Father. We become His children.”

James frowned. “But I thought we were all God's children anyway.”

“That's what people say, James,” answered Sophia. “But it's not what the Bible teaches.”

“Why do people say that, then?” queried James. He carefully placed a wet, red leaf on the cardboard.

“That's looking good, Jamie,” complimented Sophia. “Well, people don't take time to read the Bible and just make up their own ideas.”

“Oh. So, tell me again how I can get born into God's family.” James placed a yellow leaf next to the red one.

“It all goes back to trusting in the Lord Jesus. Remember, we are all born sinners and we all deserve God's punishment because we sin against Him. But God loves us, so God the Father gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, to take our punishment. And Jesus shed His blood for us, to pay for all our sins. Then God raised Him from the dead. So anyone who trusts in Jesus Christ and what He did, is forgiven by God. And God gives them eternal life. Believers will never be judged by God for their sins because Jesus Christ was judged in our place,” explained Sophia.

James frowned, trying to take it all in. “I don't quite understand,” he admitted.

“No worries, Jamie. I'll keep praying for you to get it,” encouraged Sophia.

“Thanks, Sophy. You're the best!”

“That picture is going to look great, James. I'm going to leave you to work on your own now. There's something I have to do.” Sophia winked at James.

Opening the back door, Sophia peeped into the kitchen. At the table Sarah was measuring out sugar into a bowl. Sophia softly knocked at the door.

“Hi, Sister. It's just me,” Sophia said. Sarah added half a teaspoon of salt to a mound of sugar in the bowl.

“Hi, Sophia. Thanks for not giving me a fright. Where's James?”

“He's outside working on his present,” said Sophia. “Um, please don't let Grace go outside.”

“Ah, that's giving secrets away!” Sarah chuckled. “Okay. Maybe I'll go bounce James myself.”

“Please don't,” begged Sophia. “He's trying so hard to be good!” Sophia turned to go. “By the way, that's a lot of sugar. Must be for a boy who loves sweets!”

“I'm busted,” groaned Sarah. But she laughed. “How long before he comes inside?”

Sophia looked outside. James was carefully placing leaves on the cardboard. “Probably an hour. Where is Daniel, by the way?”

Sarah checked her recipe. “Um, Daniel's disappeared again. He's probably in the garage.”

Sophia frowned. “What do you mean, 'disappeared'?”

“Oh, he hides away in the garage for hours at a time. Supposedly helping Dad. Are you thinking what I'm thinking?” Sarah grinned at Sophia who smiled back.

“Definitely, Sister,” agreed Sophia. “He's got to be working on a -”

“Surprise Christmas gift!” they said at the same time, and laughed.

In the girls' bedroom, Grace was concentrating so hard on her sketch that she didn't notice when Sophia came in. Quietly, Sophia took the shopping bag from its hiding place and left. In her parents' room, Sophia sat at Mom's sewing machine. From the bag, she took out a piece of pink and purple flowered fabric. Sophia had found a free pattern online for a girl's frilly apron with a halter neck. She could just picture how pretty it would look on Sarah.

Tasty smells drifted from the kitchen to the back yard. James rubbed his aching back. “Biscuits?” he wondered aloud. He thought he should have a break.

But, right then, the hadeda that lived in the flame tree let fall a sloppy dropping right in the middle of his picture. Hadedas are big, wild, grey birds with noisy cries that live in and around Durban and other places in South Africa.

Horrified, James yelled a very rude word at the big bird. The hadeda wasn't scared and cawed back, looking at James out of a beady eye.

Sarah heard the noise from the kitchen. “O-oh,” she thought. “I'd better get outta here before he comes looking

for a cloth.” She poured her very hot toffee mixture into an oven dish, and rushed to the kitchen door. But Grace was coming into the kitchen from the passage and they nearly collided. “Oh no! I nearly burned you, Grace!” Sarah exclaimed, shocked.

“That’s okay, Sis, don’t worry,” reassured Grace. “Is that your Christmas present?”

“Yup. I thought I’d put it in our bedroom to cool down.” Sarah replied.

“Mmm,” said Grace. “Is that for James?”

Sarah smiled. “Of course. How did you guess? He’s right outside swearing at the hadeda. I’ve got to get this out of here before he sees it.”

“What?” Grace peered out of the back door. “Oh, the bird must have pooped on something he was making!” She giggled. “Shame, I’ll go help him.”

“No, no! Please Grace, won’t you take my toffee to the bedroom? I must clean up the kitchen,” explained Sarah.

“Ooh, yes, it’s quite a mess,” agreed Grace.

Sarah sighed with relief as her kind sister took the toffee to their room. She thought happily about how she had kept both her and James’s gifts secret.

Outside, James had scrunched up his ruined picture. He gathered up the paint, cardboard and leaves and stomped over to the back door.

But before he got there, Daniel called him from the garage door. “What happened, Jamie?”

James made a face. “That horrid hadeda made a big poop right on my Christmas gift!”

“Oh shame!” exclaimed Daniel. “Come to the garage. It’s the safest place to work. No birds, and no quizzzy sisters either!”

James liked the idea. The garage was a man’s place to work. He grinned at Daniel. “Thanks, Bru.”

## PART FOUR:

### The Gift Of God The Holy Spirit



[https://media.freebibleimages.org/stories/FB\\_LGR\\_Peter\\_Pentecost/overview-thumbnails/005-lgr-peter-pentecost.jpg?1652793050](https://media.freebibleimages.org/stories/FB_LGR_Peter_Pentecost/overview-thumbnails/005-lgr-peter-pentecost.jpg?1652793050)

Ephesians 1:13-14 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

A few days' later, from her bedroom window, Grace saw Daniel and James go into the garage and shut the door. She sighed with relief, glad that Daniel would be out of the house. He had been in and out of the girls' bedroom, gazing at the desk and Sophia's things. Grace guessed he was making Sophia something to store her things.

Now she could try to finish her painting of Daniel in the den of lions. She opened the desk drawer and took out her pencils, paints and special paper. She carefully removed her pencil sketch from under her mattress. Grace's dream was to become an artist.

In the garage, the two brothers were working hard. Christmas Day was next week and all the children were feeling pressured.

“So won't Sophia's bookcase fit into the girls' room, Dan?” asked James. Working together on their gifts had brought them closer. James was almost as proud of his brother's woodwork as he was of his own leafy picture.

“No, it will fit, Jamie,” Daniel reassured him. “How's your picture coming along?” Daniel inquired.

James held up his bright, leafy, tree picture. “I'm not sure she'll like it,” he sighed.

"She'll definitely like it," beamed Daniel. "It just needs a firm base and frame. Let's see what we can find to make a nice frame."

James's face brightened. Then it fell again. "But, Dan, if you make it, it won't be *my* gift anymore."

"No worries, little Brother, I'll just show you what to do."

At the sewing machine, Sophia was near to tears. Making the apron had turned out to be very difficult. Especially the frills and halter neck.

Mom came in with some dry laundry. She noticed Sophia's flushed face and quivering lip.

"What's the matter, dear?" asked Mom tenderly.

"I'll never finish this in time, Mommy! I should have chosen something easier!" wailed Sophia, giving in to all her worry and frustration. Her mother held her until she had cried it all out.

"Come, let's pray and ask our heavenly Father for His grace, peace and joy," comforted Mom.

Together they prayed and were filled with the peace of the Lord that passes human understanding.

"Wow! I feel so much better, Mom. How does God do that?" exclaimed Sophia.

"Do what, Sophy?" asked Mom. She was examining the apron.

"Give me peace like that? I was so upset but now I feel calm and happy."

"It's the ministry of God the Holy Spirit." Suddenly Mom's face broke into a smile. "I'll teach you about another of God's amazing gifts to His children, Sophy. But before that, I can help you make some changes to speed up your sewing."

Lunch time seemed to come too soon as far as the children were concerned. They were all absorbed in making their gifts. Mom was quietly finishing the children's chores to help them. So Dad decided on a picnic lunch under the flame tree. Having chased away the irritated hadeda, he put all the lunch things on the table and called the family.

As they tucked in, Mom brought up the subject of the gift of the Holy Spirit. "James, please run and fetch my Bible," she said. Off sprinted James, his mouth full of his peanut butter and jam sandwich.

"Sophia and I were talking about another of God's gifts," explained Mom. "That is the Holy Spirit, who helps us as believers to walk by faith. Then we can experience God's peace and joy even when things aren't going well. Oh, thank you, James." She took her Bible from James and wiped a bit of jam off the cover. Mom didn't scold him though.

James grinned a peanut buttery grin at Mom and dived into the rest of his sandwich.

"Look what the Bible says here in John 7:38-39," continued Mom. "*The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' But this He said in reference to the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*"

"What does that mean, Mom?" asked Sarah, while she cut a juicy pear into quarters.



"It means that first Jesus Christ had to die on the cross for our sins, be buried and rise from the dead on the third day. Then, after His ascension back to Father God in glory, He would send God the Holy Spirit to live inside those who believed in Him."

While they were eating, Sophia told the others about how the peace of God had comforted her earlier when she had thought she wouldn't be able to finish her Christmas gift.

"Mom said that the peace came from God the Holy Spirit. Before we prayed I was so upset but afterwards I felt happy," shared Sophia.

"Isn't the Holy Spirit called the Comforter, Mom?" asked Grace. "And He comforted Sophy just now?"

Mom agreed, "Yes, Gracie, that's here in John 16:7. And if we go to John 14:16, the Lord promised to ask Father God to give the disciples "another Helper" to live with them forever. You know, I prayed for wisdom to help Sophy with her present and He helped me to help her! That's another name for God the Holy Spirit."

Dad added, "The Bible gives us many names for God. Each name tells us something about who God is and what He does. Also, as soon as we put our trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, the Holy Spirit seals us so that we will live forever with God. That's in Ephesians chapter 1."

"How do I know that happened to me when I believed?" asked Sarah, brushing bread crumbs off her lap. "I didn't feel Him do anything to me."

"That's a good question," said Mom. "Our faith is in what God's word tells us. We can't trust our feelings. If God's word says in Ephesians 1:13-14 that the Holy Spirit seals us when we believe, until God takes us home to be with Him forever, then we believe that that is true. God does not lie. His word is true."

Lunch was over. The family quickly cleared the table and the hadeda flapped back into the flame tree.

In the main bedroom the children's parents stopped a private chat they were having, when Sophia knocked at the door.

"Oh, sorry to disturb you," she apologized when Dad opened the door. "I just wondered whether I could work on my Christmas gift?"

"Of course you can," smiled Dad. "Do you need the sewing machine?"

"Yes, please," nodded Sophia. "I want to try to finish the frills today."

Her parents smiled and left her alone to get on with her work.

"Let's see if we can talk in private in the garage," suggested Dad. However, the garage door seemed to be locked from the inside.

"What?" exclaimed Dad. Then he laughed. "Knock, knock!"

"Who's there?" came Daniel's voice through the door.

Dad winked at Mom and replied, "Boo."

They heard James say: "That's what I say!"

Mom giggled. Dad tried again: "Knock, knock!"

Daniel joined in the game: "Who's there?"

"Boo," answered Dad.

"Boo who?" responded Daniel.

"Ah, don't cry," laughed Dad. There was a guffaw from Daniel and James opened the door, grinning.

His parents spent a few minutes admiring the almost completed bookcase and picture in its frame. Then Mom and Dad withdrew to leave their sons to work on their own.

"Well," sighed Mom, "it seems we have no private place to discuss *our* Christmas surprise."

Dad put his arm around her. "So we'll just have to hang out in the back yard with the hadeda." His eyes twinkled merrily.

They sat down close together under the flame tree.

"Hah, hah, hah!" screeched the hadeda. Beating its big, grey wings, it flapped away to perch on the roof of their house. "Hah!" it croaked loudly, turning an accusing eye on them.

"Oh, dear," chuckled Mom. "Now we've disturbed the hadeda too!" Dad threw his head back and laughed.

"Anyway," said Mom, "I want to tell you what my parent's plans are for a special family treat for the seven of us. It will be a Christmas gift from my folks."

Dad looked a bit uneasy. "Don't worry, dear," Mom said. "Just let me explain."

Grandma had phoned to find out what the family's plans were for Christmas. She knew that they were struggling financially and they wanted to help. They wouldn't take no for an answer, Mom explained to Dad. In fact, Grandma and Grandpa were planning to arrange a really special outing for the whole family. This would be later on in January, once the holiday makers from other areas had left Durban. Grandma and Grandpa thought it would be nicer to avoid the crowds. Also there were often special deals in January.

Dad wasn't too keen on what he thought of as charity. Mom reminded him that God values a humble attitude.

"In fact," said Mom, "God often puts us in difficult situations to get rid of our pride."

Dad admitted that that was true. He put his arms around Mom and hugged her tenderly. "You are the best wife a man could have," he said, smiling down at her as she sat close to him.

"And you are a man after God's own heart," praised Mom.

Grace happened to look out of her bedroom window right then and smiled to see her mother and father having a quiet moment together under the beautiful flame tree.

## PART FIVE: The Gifts Of The Wise Men



[https://media.freebibleimages.org/stories/FB\\_LGR\\_Birth\\_Jesus/overview-thumbnails/033-lgr-birth-jesus.jpg?1646232710](https://media.freebibleimages.org/stories/FB_LGR_Birth_Jesus/overview-thumbnails/033-lgr-birth-jesus.jpg?1646232710)

Matthew 2:10-11 (English Standard Version) When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

There was pounding on the girls' door. Sarah snuggled down and pulled the sheet over her head. Sophia groaned and peered at her clock. It was only five. Being summer in Durban, the sun was already shining.

Grace smiled and called, "That you, James?"

"Yebo!" yelled James through the keyhole. "It's Christmas morning in case you forgot! Time for gifts!"

"Come in Jamie," invited Grace. "The door's not locked. Thanks for knocking first."

"You call that knocking?" complained Sarah. "It sounded like he was breaking the door down!" They all laughed.

James bounced in. "Get up, sleepy heads!"

In the kitchen Mom was cooking up a storm. As the children crowded in they could smell bacon sizzling and bread toasting. Dad had the coffee mugs out in a row and was filling them. "Merry Christmas!" he greeted them.

"We thought we'd have an early breakfast before the Christmas church service," explained Mom.

"Somehow we knew that you would be up early today," teased Dad, winking at them. "So we planned to have devotions after breakfast and open the gifts before church."

After the special breakfast, they gathered around the dining room table in the lounge. The Nativity Scene that the family had made a couple of years earlier, took up a third of the table. It reminded them that Christmas was about the greatest gift of all: the gift of the Son of God in human form.

They continued reading Matthew's record of the birth of Jesus the Christ. In chapter two they had read about the arrival in Jerusalem of the wise men from the East. Now they read about the wise men worshiping the Saviour and giving Him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

"Does anyone know what these gifts mean?" asked Dad.

"Doesn't gold speak of royalty and glory, Dad?" asked Daniel.

"Yes, I would agree with that, Daniel. Only very rich and powerful people could afford gold. Truly that was a fitting gift for the King of kings, the One born to rule not just Israel but the whole earth one day."

"What's frankincense?" asked James.

"That's a kind of resin used in the incense the priests had to burn before the Lord in the temple in Jerusalem," explained Mom.

"So the wise men were saying that Jesus Christ would be a priest?" asked Sophia. "But I thought that Jesus was from the tribe of Judah. And only men from the tribe of Levi could be priests?"

"Excellent point, Sophy," praised her father. "But the book of Hebrews explains that Jesus Christ is no ordinary priest from the tribe of Levi. Jesus Christ is the ultimate great High Priest according to a different order." Dad smiled at the puzzled faces around him. "We'll study that next year."

"Does anyone know what special offering Jesus Christ made?" questioned Mom.

Grace's hand shot up. "I know! He offered Himself as a sacrifice. By dying for our sins."

"Correct, Grace. And why would He do that?" asked Mom, hoping that James would really understand what Jesus Christ had done for him. To Mom's great delight, James answered.

"He died in our place to save us from paying for our sins forever in hell," declared James.

"Absolutely! Thank you, James," affirmed Dad. "This is God's great free gift of salvation. He died for each one of us, for all the world. Then He was buried and then He rose again! And those who believe on Him will also be raised from the dead."

"And we'll live with Him forever and ever!" James was bursting with excitement at the thought. He jumped off his chair and rushed over to his mother. Giving her a big hug, his face beaming, he declared, "I believe in Jesus! I believe He died for me!"

Mom and Sophia cried tears of joy. The others all crowded round Mom and James, hugging James and giving him "high fives."

Dad blew his nose and wiped his eyes. "This is a wonderful Christmas gift. Thank You, Lord for answered prayer."

Once the family had settled down, they discussed the gift of myrrh. Myrrh was used to prepare a dead body for burial. It spoke of Jesus Christ's sacrificial death and burial.

"How did the wise men know all this, Dad?" puzzled Daniel.

"Well, they came from the East. Maybe Babylon, maybe Persia. And what great prophet lived in Babylon and served under the Persian king?" He winked at Daniel.

"Oh, of course, Dad!" Daniel laughed at himself. "Daniel lived there and studied the scrolls of the Hebrew Bible. That would have included the prophecies about the birth and death of the coming Messiah."

"Yes," agreed Dad, "like Numbers 24:17 and Psalm 22."

Mom added, "And most of the Jewish people didn't come back to Israel when the exile ended. They went on living in the East. They would have looked after the scrolls. That would have included those written by Daniel and the later prophets. So the wise men could have studied copies of Daniel's scrolls hundreds of years after his death. In fact, God told Daniel in advance the time when the Messiah would be born. That's in Daniel 9:25."

"History lesson alert!" warned the irrepressible James. The family all laughed.

"I agree with Daniel and Mom," affirmed Dad. "That explains why they had come to worship the One who was born to be the King of the Jews. They would have also read that one day He will rule the whole earth."

"When will that be, Dad?" asked Grace.

Their father explained: "That will be after He has defeated the Antichrist and rescued the believing Jewish people from destruction. That will be at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. And those who believe in Him will come back to earth with Him, riding on white horses. How exciting that will be!"

"So will that include us, Dad?" asked Sarah, hopefully.

"You believe on Him for salvation, don't you, Sarah?" She nodded eagerly. "Yes, of course you will be there too!" Dad grinned at her.

"And me!" piped up James.

He was sitting next to Sophia who gave him a hug. She said, "All of us, little Brother. How wonderful!"

After devotions it was time to bring out their gifts. They rushed off to collect them.

Soon Sarah was back with a large, flat box tied up with a shiny red ribbon. Grace was next, with her sketch in a large envelope she had made. James bounced in with a flattish object covered with newspaper. Sophia had something in a pretty gift bag Mom had helped her make.

But where was Daniel? Dad was about to see if Daniel needed help, when in he came. He puffed as he carried a long, rectangular object covered by an old sheet, into the lounge. Then he sat down, smiling.

"Right," said Mom, taking charge of the gift giving. "Youngest first."

"Merry Christmas, Grace!" exclaimed James, rushing over to her to give her his gift. As Sophia had expected, Grace was delighted with James's bright, leafy, tree picture in its varnished frame.

"That's beautiful, Jamie. Oh, thank you so much! That's going above my bed," bubbled Grace, enthusiastically.

"James made the frame, too," explained Daniel. He was proud of his little brother.

"Daniel taught me how to!" laughed James and "high fived" Daniel. Everyone admired the picture.

Next, Sarah gave the box with the bright, red ribbon to James. James had to feel it, shake it and smell it first. Then he tore off the ribbon. "Lots of yummy toffee! Sarah you're a star!" He hugged her delightedly. Then he surprised the family by offering them all toffee. Sarah loved the compliments she was getting!

Then Grace gave her gift to Daniel. "My hero!" Daniel exclaimed. "Daniel in the den of lions with the angel of the Lord closing their mouths! Those are terrifying lions! But they are no match for the angel of God! And old Daniel just sitting down calmly.... It's a wonderful painting, Grace! Many thanks. I'll make a special frame for it. It will remind us to be true and courageous, trusting in God like Daniel."

"It's amazing that Grace got it done in time," laughed Sophia. "Because we all kept disturbing her."

"The girls' bedroom feels like a shopping centre sometimes, with everyone coming and going!" announced Sarah. Everyone laughed.

"Now," said Daniel. "Sophia, would you mind coming over here to unwrap your present? It's a bit big to carry to you over there!"

Sophia took the sheet off her present and exclaimed, "Oh, Daniel, how did you know that's exactly what I wanted! A bookcase for all my books! It's so nicely made too." She gave him a big hug. "So that's why you were forever in the garage!"

Sophia stood up. "Now for Sarah's gift! You've been so patient," smiled Sophia.

Sarah's face lit up when she saw the flowered, frilly apron. She slipped the halter over her head. The apron fitted her perfectly. "Oh, Sophy! You're the best! I just knew you were making something for me! My own apron! Not a hand-me-down!" Sarah tied on the apron and twirled around.

"Did you all enjoy the Christmas gift project?" asked Mom.

"Definitely!" declared Sarah.

"I understand now what the Lord meant when He said it's more blessed to give than to receive," said Grace.

"It seems to me that you have all been growing in the process," said Dad. "I see more patience and kindness and thoughtfulness -"

"And grace," added Daniel.

"How come Gracie always gets mentioned?" joked James. The family laughed and Grace blushed.

Then the children looked expectantly at their parents. Mom was clutching an envelope and both she and Dad were wearing big, silly grins.

Mom said, "Your grandparents decided we needed a special treat. So they got our church friends to join them in raising a lot of money - and this is what they have given us!" Mom held up the envelope, enjoying the suspense.

"Open it, please, Mom!" begged James. Opening the envelope, Mom fished out seven tickets to uShaka Marine

World. There were amazed cries of delight.

"This gives us a whole day to enjoy the rides, the shows, the venues. And these amazing, dear people have included money for us to have a meal together at one of the restaurants, as well as ice cream, cool drink and snacks. I can hardly believe it!" Mom wiped away her tears of joy.

"It's God's grace. He is so good to His children," said Dad reverently. Then he put his arm around Mom and said, "Seriously, kids, the best Christmas gift your Mom and I could have, is knowing that you *all* know, trust and love the God of the Bible like we do! Praise God for His amazing grace!"

THE END

## In Conclusion

Dear Reader

This link takes you to a short video presentation of the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

<https://duluthbible.org/the-gospel>

My prayer is that it will bless you.

Julia Reynolds

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