



THE INCREDIBLE
**CHRISTMAS
STORY**



AS TOLD BY
MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE, AND JOHN
SHAUN ROSSI



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THE INCREDIBLE CHRISTMAS STORY

INCOMPLETE STORIES

Everyone has a favorite Christmas story.

For some, our stories involve family and food, glögi by the fire, a memorable gift under the tree from “Santa,” or perhaps a humbling day in a soup kitchen. For others, our most memorable Christmas stories may involve disasters with the ham in the oven, family arguments, or other ways that the holiday never seems to go quite as planned. Whether warm, humorous, or poignant, we all have stories which make Christmas a special time of the year.

But is there something fleeting about the joys of Christmas which comprise our stories. The sense of wonder never lasts into the new year. The season always seems to satisfy some vague longings we have, but the satisfaction is never complete.

What is it about the traditions our families have—the food, the songs, the decorations—handed down through the generations, that we treasure so much? They are able to bring us together every Christmas, yet by January the atmosphere has faded.

What is it about the good deeds and acts of service we feel compelled to do at Christmas, and not during the rest of the year?

What is it about the simplicity and humility of the nativity scene that we find so compelling?

What is it about lights that illuminate the streets downtown and our trees that home that draw us in, only to be taken down once the season passes?

There is something beautiful, true, maybe even transcendent about these experiences, but we can't always put our fingers on what it is. We can never seem to explain why our Christmas stories matter so much to us. That may be because, though these stories are true, they are not the complete story of Christmas.

THE COMPLETE STORY

Though it often gets sidelined by the real and valuable truths we taste in our own stories, there is another story which explains why Christmas exists at all, and why it's so special. This is not to say that your Christmas story doesn't matter! But our stories and the joys of which they tell are not meant, nor are they able, to fully satisfy us. As C. S. Lewis has written, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." Similarly, if we find in ourselves a desire which our Christmas stories only partially satisfy, we need to turn to hear the story to which they are all pointing: the Incredible Christmas Story.

THE INCREDIBLE STORY

For something to be credible (from the Latin word for “believe”), we must have sufficient grounds for believing it. It is a credible statement to say, for example, that China is bigger than Finland. But what does it mean for something to be *incredible*? Sometimes, it may just mean that we can’t believe it because it is not true.

But sometimes we use the word “incredible” to describe something that is so amazing and extraordinary that we have difficulty believing it to be true – even though it is.

When we talk about the Incredible Christmas Story, we mean exactly that: the story that is amazing and wonderful, yet completely true.

The story is about God himself coming into the world 2,000 years ago in the person of Jesus Christ.

We know about Jesus’ coming into the world because it was written down by the people who knew him.

The New Testament contains four books known as gospels which record the life and teachings of Jesus. While each gospel gives us a true, eyewitness account of the same Christmas story, each has its own particular emphasis. Each gospel highlights different aspects of who Jesus is and what he came to do. The four gospels offer unique but complementary accounts of the Incredible Christmas Story, the story of Jesus Christ, the One and only Saviour.

In order to have the deepest possible understanding of the Incredible Christmas Story, this booklet will look at what each of the four gospels tells us about Christmas. Each will be introduced with a brief personal story which illustrates a particular truth found in each gospel.

MATTHEW: THE INCREDIBLE ROOTS OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY

17 Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah. **18** This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. **19** Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. **20** But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." **22** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: **23** "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). **Ē**

Matthew 1:17-23

CUTTING THE ROOTS OFF

It's just not Christmas without the perfect tree. At least that's what my father would say. Each Christmas was an attempt to find a Christmas tree more perfect than the last – a little more round, a little taller, fuller, sprucier. Sometime during the first week in December, my dad would usually drive my sister and me down to Olson's Christmas tree farm. Mr. Olson attended the same church as our family and we were always greeted warmly. He would then hand us a saw and we would head off into the vast acreage of Balsam Firs, Blue and Norway Spruce, and White Pine's in search of the perfect tree. Once the elusive evergreen was found and a vote was taken on its suitability, we would cut it down, tie it to the roof of the car, and drive it home to meet its fate as the centerpiece for our Christmas festivities.

One year, all of this changed. My father brought home a Christmas tree unlike any other we have ever had which will be indelibly marked on my mind.

On a brisk December afternoon, my dad called us all outside and we stood and watched as he struggled to pull out of the back of his car a large wooden barrel. It was filled with dirt and, to our surprise, planted right in the middle of it was a fine looking spruce tree.

"What do you think?" asked my father. "It is our Christmas tree. Now we can plant the Christmas tree in the yard after Christmas is over this year." None of us quite knew what to say! I don't think anyone was impressed. I remember thinking, "No, it's not, this is not right... In fact it's all wrong!" What was it wrong? It took me a moment to pinpoint the reason. It was because the Christmas tree *still had its roots!*

We had never had a Christmas tree like this before. Normally, we would cut the roots off and leave them in the ground back at Mr. Olson's Christmas tree farm. That is where they belonged. What was this scandalous attempt at a Christmas tree!?

Is our dad playing a joke on us? It sure seemed that way. A Christmas tree with roots was not very pretty, and the dirt on the roots made it a lot messier. Well, as it turned out, we decided to have two Christmas trees that year: one with roots, and one without roots. And as it turned out, the roots were not so bad after all.

Similarly, I think many of us are accustomed to a Christmas story without any roots. We celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we are often quick to cut the roots off the story and leave them in the ground of the Old Testament. That is where we think they belong. If we are honest, the little we do know about the roots of Christmas is boring, messy, maybe even a bit scandalous. Why then would we want to bother with them? But we really should take the time to understand the whole story. The truth is that the "roots" of the Christmas story are part of what make it truly incredible.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the author is particularly keen to help us understand the meaning of the birth of Jesus by taking us to the roots in the Old Testament; specifically, the roots of *Jesus*. That is why he begins with a genealogy.

FINDING THE ROOTS

To properly understand the Christmas story in Matthew, we must understand the greater story which Scripture had told up until the birth of Christ. In the Hebrew Scriptures, or the Old Testament, the story had so far been revealed in two main movements.

First, God created the world, and it was good. Everything flourished under his loving rule.

In the second movement, which begins in Genesis 3, human beings rebelled against their Creator. Tempted by the serpent in the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, even though God had forbidden it. This is known as the fall, when sin entered to world.

As a result of the fall, human beings alienated themselves from God, from each other, and from creation.

Yet even here, early in the story, God promises that there will be a third movement: redemption. To the serpent, God says that the Seed of Adam and Eve will bruise his head (Gen. 3:15), revealing that God would eventually triumph over sin and evil. How will God do this? Matthew is eager to answer this very question in the opening verse of his account of the Christmas story.

GETTING AT THE ROOTS

Matthew begins: “This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham.” This verse is packed with meaning and immediately we can notice three things:

1. That Jesus is a Jew: From the line of Abraham
2. That he is the a King, like the king David
3. That Jesus is Messiah

Let’s unpack this a bit. God had chosen a people—Israel—through whom he would bring his redemption. In Genesis 12:3, God made promises Abraham, the father of the Israelites: “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” To accomplish this, God purposed to establish a kingdom which would be a light to the nations. After graciously saving Israel from their Egyptian captivity, God gave his people a law which detailed his righteous standards. Obedience to this law would set them apart, allowing them to shine as that light to the surrounding nations. The problem was that even after God brought them to the promised land, Israel was constantly breaking God’s law and worshiping idols (false Gods).

This situation is well summarized in Judges 21:25: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Israel needed a righteous king to reign over the people, restoring justice and true worship of the one true God.

While the Lord would eventually bring king David to throne, followed by his son Solomon, even these noteworthy rulers turned out to be flawed and sinful kings.

Eventually the kingdoms of Israel went into exile, and it seemed that the hope for a kingdom were dashed. We read in the prophets, however, that God had promised to not abandon his people and intended to rule over them—indeed, the whole world—through a Davidic king. Despite Israel's earthly failure God, God said he would send a Messiah through the Davidic line.

This is what the genealogy is painstakingly trying to reveal to us: Jesus is the (in) credible fulfillment of all of God's promises to Israel, to humanity, and the world! This also explains why Matthew is the first book in our New Testaments. It was not because it was the first gospel of the four written, but because its genealogy serves as a clear bridge between the two testaments.

But does this mean Jesus is the Messiah King of the Jews only, and not everyone else? Certainly not. Jesus was born into the Jewish nation in order to be the Savior of the world. We see this even in the genealogy, which includes Gentiles. But it also includes notorious sinners and women (Tamar in 1:3; Rahab in 1:5; Ruth in 1:5), who would have been excluded from any typical genealogy in a patriarchal cultures. Thus, even in this seemingly mundane list of ancestors, Matthew is pointing to the gracious plan of God to reach all nations and lift up the marginalized.

The genealogy may seem pretty messy, but putting a little dirt in Jesus' roots it is God's way of saying that he came truly to redeem all people who trust in him.

DON'T CUT THE ROOTS

As we approach Christmas are you ready with saw in hand, waiting to cut the roots off of Christmas just like every other year? To make Christmas as simple, predictable, and smooth as possible?

Why not leave the roots on by considering the history of all that took place to prepare for the birth of Christ into the world?

MARK: THE INCREDIBLE OMISSION OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY

45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Mark 10:45

WHERE YOU SLEEP

“Shaun, my grandson is not going to sleep in a box!”

To be honest, it took me a little while to warm up to the idea that my first child would sleep in a box. In my earlier years, I had never given much thought much about having and raising kids, let alone the practical details of their sleeping arrangements. In the months before the birth of our first child, had I been confronted with a question about where the baby would sleep, I would have suggested crib

of some sort. You know, something sturdy, wooden, elevated, and comfortable. At least, that was my assumption as an American. But my wife and I (who is Finnish), then as now, live in Finland, and things are done a little differently here!

One day while on the phone with my father, he offered to contribute monetarily to the new baby's needs and suggested he purchase a crib. After casually throwing this offer out there to my wife, she stated rather matter-of-factly: "Oh, we won't be needing that right away. The baby will sleep in a box."

"Huh? In a box?"

"Yes, that is where Finnish babies sleep," she said. "Kela (the Finnish government's social insurance institution) will send us a box with baby supplies, and that box is what the baby will sleep in."

"Yeah, I don't know," I said, trying to mask my internal outrage.

My wife continued, "Well, I slept in the same kind of box when I was a baby, as did my sibling and my parents." How could I argue with that?

Breaking this news to my father, however, was another matter. As he was similarly unfamiliar with this Finnish practice, he insisted we purchase a proper baby bed.

"Shaun, my grandson is not going to sleep outside in a box!"

I tried to explain that it was not about the money, that it was just how things were done in wFinland. We played verbal tug a war for a while. Eventually, I insisted: "Dad, it does not matter where the baby sleeps."

When we get to the Gospel of Mark, the second account of Jesus' life and ministry in the New Testament, we notice an obvious difference from the Gospel of Matthew: There is no "Christmas" story!

HOW YOU LIVE

The gospel account begins from Jesus' baptism, recounts his ministry, and ends with his death on the cross. Unlike Matthew, which begins with a genealogy and account of Jesus' birth, in Mark we find an incredible omission of Christmas. What is Mark saying about Christmas by not saying anything?

First of all, keep in mind that Mark wrote his gospel to evangelize non-Christians in the Roman empire. The values of honor, status, and pedigree were of the utmost importance in this culture. Had his readers learned where Mary and Joseph laid the baby Jesus down to sleep, they would have been outraged just as my father was about the box. Including the birth narrative would thus have been an unnecessary stumbling block to understanding who Jesus was.

Second, and related, Mark's purpose was to highlight the incredible servanthood of Jesus, which culminated in his death. We see this in several ways.

For example, the text is simple and brief (the shortest of the four gospels), orientated around the concrete actions of Jesus. There are fewer teachings in Mark, and he portrays Jesus as constantly on the move.

The word "immediately" occurs at least forty times in his gospel, giving us an impression of the urgency with which Jesus served humanity.

And remarkably, almost forty percent of the Gospel of Mark is devoted to the last eight days of Jesus' life. This may seem disproportionate, but it serves to emphasize the importance of Jesus' march to the cross and the suffering which preceded it. Jesus faced intense hostility from his own people, the Jews. In offering no resistance to his arrest, followed by a mockery of a trial, and ultimately an agonizing death on a cross, we see the primary way in which He would serve humanity. Jesus' suffering for others was his act of service which made their redemption possible. It is only through faith in these works of Jesus Christ that people can find salvation.

The message of Mark's gospel is well summarised in the following verse: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). By not mentioning the birth of Jesus, Mark helped his Roman audience not get hung up on where the baby Jesus slept, and instead points to the importance of Jesus his death. What Mark's gospel wants to teach us about Jesus is that he lived a remarkable life of sacrifice and service to the point of giving his life as a ransom.

NAUGHTY OR NICE?

Santa Claus famously has a list of those who are naughty and those who are nice, and he serves people by distributing his gifts accordingly. It is a way that parents are able to encourage good behavior among their children before Christmas.

Yet this way of thinking about service stands in stark contrast to the offers of the Christian gospel. Santa serves the good. Jesus serves the sinner. Jesus is the only perfectly good and sinless man, and offers us a gift that Santa could never bring: the gift of salvation. It cannot be earned with our good behavior, but can only be received by trusting in Jesus' work.

LUKE: THE INCREDIBLE HUMILITY AND REALITY OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY

1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. **2** (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) **3** And everyone went to their own town to register. **4** So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. **5** He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. **6** While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, **7** and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Luke 2:1-7

WHAT'S IN THE MANGER?

The live nativity scene acted out by children is a beloved and idyllic Christmas Eve fixture in the church where I was raised – and I wanted absolutely nothing to do with it! I was not at all the type to stand up in front of people. More than that, the whole nativity scene thing just

did not make much sense to me. Children dressed up in first-century Middle Eastern garb playing the parts of Joseph, Mary, shepherds, the angel and so on, all the while being gawked at by a packed room of misty-eyed strangers, many of whom who were on the annual pilgrimage. At the center of it all was, of course, the manger. And what was in the manger? If only the people knew!

Since there never seemed to be a new born baby willing to play the part of the Christ baby, who would want that job, we always had to improvise. Sometimes it was a bunched-up towel or a lump of hay, other times a raggedy old doll whose head kept falling off, all wrapped in "swaddling cloth."

It never seemed to matter, since you could not see inside the manger from the wooden church benches fixed in rows anyway.

But one year I was cast as the angel Gabriel and was given a perfect view of the manger. While everyone else was standing flat on the stage, I was standing high on a stool (naturally - since everyone knows angels fly!). From my prime perch I could look directly down into the manger filled with hay and a doll with a detached head wrapped into cloth. As people began to reverently file into the church and stare meaningfully at the scene, I could tell many were moved. "This is is ridiculous!" I thought. "Do they really think a King was born this way?" If they only knew just what was in the manger?

As I stood motionless in my position with these thoughts, someone began to read from Luke's gospel:

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the

Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:31-33)

The narrator kept reading Scripture after Scripture from this gospel, each of them revealing another aspect of what was really in the manger that first Christmas. As I listened to the rest of Luke's careful and orderly account of the birth, I started to think if the baby Jesus was the King of Kings, what kind of King he must be! Suddenly the details of the nativity scene began to make sense. Not only did he become human, but he humbled himself to be born in a stable. Could this be true?

INVESTIGATING THE MANGER

You might have visited a palace where a king lives or has lived, and you have very likely been to a stable where animals live. But you need not have visited either to realize the contrast between them. Palaces are filled with crowns, thrones, servants and beautiful things. Stables are filled with... well, animals and the things that animals eat, and the things that animals produce. Kings, of course, should be born in palaces, not in stables. And yet Luke describes in great detail that that is precisely where Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, was born. His first crib was not made of glass with a satin pillow, but was instead an animal's feeding trough with a bit of hay to prop up his tiny head. There were no servants, just some sheep, a donkey, and the like. There were no armed guards at the door keeping watch, only a temperamental latch on an old wooden gate which is never locked.

Luke tells us that through that gate came visitors who wanted to honor the newborn king. There came a troop of wise men from the east who were probably kings, not Jews. But there were also shepherds visiting from the nearby fields. Recall that shepherds were not the most savory of characters, often rather rough around the edges, and yet they received an angelic invitation. As the baby would grow, he would continue to be visited by all kinds of people, and he welcomed them all. Some even worshipped him.

What humility is in the manger! Jesus didn't come to earth as a mighty king baby with an entourage making demands for everything to be just right. That would make him intimidating and inaccessible. Rather, he came in complete vulnerability, needy, born into a poor family in the most humble of circumstances. Everything about the very beginnings of the life of our King on earth was humble, lowly, simple and unassuming. Jesus seems from his very birth to understand us, to identify with us. He is not distant. He is truly God-with-us, our Emmanuel.

This is a glorious truth for those of us who know their lives smell like a stable. Who can deny the Bible's assessment of us that we have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23)? And yet the God of glory comes right in to be with us in our messy and stained lives. He doesn't require us to have fame, full bank accounts, or titles to access his throne room. The stable is not locked. In Luke 19:10, the author reveals the purpose of his careful account of the life of Jesus: to present him as the one who came to seek and save the lost. This is at the heart of his Incredible Christmas Story.

HAVE A LOOK IN THE MANGER

Maybe you will be dragged kicking and screaming to a nativity presentation this year. Or perhaps you will walk by one in a store window display, or find it on a Christmas card. It will be tempting to quickly move on, or perhaps even look on with a bit of mockery in your heart. But this Christmas, consider taking your time at the manger.

Hear the sounds of the animals, take a whiff of their smells, take in the messiness of it all. As you do this, remember the real manger at the center of it all. Remember where Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, once was laid after laying aside eternal glory and a heavenly throne, to become your Saviour.

JOHN: THE INCREDIBLE LIGHT OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY

5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. 9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

John 1:5-9

TOTAL DARKNESS

Not every Christmas story is filled with jingle bells and cheer. Not every good gift when unwrapped is what you expect it to be.

Our third and fourth children, twin girls, were born one month before Christmas Eve. We were obviously eager to meet them, and excited for their arrival. The birth, however, was surrounded with complications, infections, and an unexplainable illness. There was a point when we did not expect our girls to live—in fact, there were several of these points. What followed were weeks in the hospital, seemingly endless doctor visits, and generally dark times.

When we were finally able to return home and things began to feel normal again (as normal as things can feel with four young kids), we were in for another surprise. One day we started to suspect one of our daughters could not see. It was difficult to accept.

We soon found ourselves in yet another doctor's office. I remember sitting with my wife as we waited for the test results when the doctor came in. She said something like: "It seems no light is getting into your daughters eyes."

"So, she is... blind?" I asked.

She gave a solemn nod, confirming our fears. Total Darkness. A dark time at Christmas got even dimmer.

Since the blindness was not due to a fault in the eye, the doctor said it was unlikely, but possible, that our daughter may develop some form of sight. We were hopeful, and we prayed that our daughter might be able to have enough light enter her eyes to see us.

About half a year later, the doctor told us that surprising news that light had indeed begun entering our daughter's eyes. She is still basically unable to see, but she can at least make out something, and for this we are grateful.

I have spent much time thinking about what it means for someone to go from complete darkness to suddenly and unexpectedly be invaded by light. What that must have been like for my daughter and for others! To suddenly experience the sensation that many of us whose lives are filled with natural light take for granted. Light is what enables us to see.

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

Imagine Christmas without lights.

In John's Christmas story, he invites us into the darkness. John takes us to the beginning, all the way back to the Genesis 1 account of creation. Jesus the Word was in the beginning, and he was God. All that is created was created through him. He is the light that shined in the darkness of creation.

In the creation account of Genesis 1, darkness is the absence of light. John is making the point that before God created out of nothing, there was nothing. Everything changed, however, when the Word of God went forth: "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3).

John says Jesus is that Word of God that overcame darkness in the creation.

This is worth thinking about for a moment, because many perhaps assume Jesus began to exist at Christmas. This is not true. Jesus has eternally existed as God even before the creation of the world. God exists eternally as Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. John tells us that God is love (1 John 4:16), and we know that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have existed in perfect love, enjoying intimate and perfect fellowship with one another for all eternity.

When God sent forth his Word to create – “Let there be light” – it was not because he was bored or lonely before creation. Not at all. God is totally sufficient in himself and is in no way dependant upon his creation. Why then did God send forth his Word to overcome the darkness? In a word, love.

Beginning with verse 5, John’s distinct use of “light” takes on a different yet equally profound meaning as he shifts metaphors. John says that “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5). Before the fall (Genesis 3), darkness was merely the *absence* of light. After the fall, darkness is the *human condition*. When the human race fell into sin, the light of the human race fell into darkness. In John’s gospel and his letters, evil is described ten times as “darkness” that came upon the human race in Adam’s sin.

What is John saying happened at Christmas time? In creation, God sent his Word out of love to dispel the darkness through his light. And after the fall of humanity, God sent forth his Word Jesus Christ, the Light of the Word (John 8:12), to dispel the darkness of sin in the lives of people whom God loves. At the cross, Jesus experienced the darkness of our sin and overcame it, enabling us to live and walk in God’s light. Christmas is about the light!

TURN ON THE CHRISTMAS LIGHT

As you string up your Christmas lights this December, hanging them in exactly the right place on the tree, mantle, or window against the backdrop of darkness, let them remind you of John's Christmas story of light. May your lights remind you of how God brought the light of His beloved Son Jesus Christ into this world on Christmas day against the backdrop of a dark and sinful world. What's more, like light came into my daughter's eyes, allowing her to see her parents, he has placed the light of Christ into your eyes to allow you to see him as loving Father. Will you let the light in this Christmas?

HAVE YOURSELF AN INCREDIBLE CHRISTMAS STORY

It is Christmas time, which means it is time again to make new Christmas stories. Some will prove to be warm and others chilly, some with lots of light and others dim. You will have stories filled with laughter, and you may even have stories filled with tears. All of these stories should be treasured because they tap into a truth that transcends the holiday itself. But this year, may your Christmas stories also be complete by looking to the Incredible Christmas Story, the good news of Jesus Christ.

When you are in a room filled with relatives, near and distant, and things get tense, remember Matthew's genealogy. Remember how Jesus' family had messy roots too, and it was by the roots that he came to show unconditional love to sinful people of all backgrounds.

Maybe you are the type goes out of their way for others at Christmas: you wrap the gifts, cook the ham, and drag everyone to church. Maybe you'll get a "thank you," but maybe you won't. Remember Mark's omission of the Christmas story and how he shows Jesus Christ as the ultimate Servant, the One who served us with his life before we could show our gratitude. Jesus was "kind to the ungrateful and wicked" (Luke 6:35).

There is nothing like the business and stress of the Christmas season which reveals our personal weakness, often at the expense of loved ones. Remember Luke's careful account of the stable where Jesus humbly plunged into our mess, showing us a Saviour King to whom we can come freely.

Finally, if you find yourself with darkness at Christmas, the kind that hides deep within our hearts; the kind that cannot be fixed with food, drink, gifts, or time off from work; the kind that only surfaces once in awhile, which you quickly push away... Remember the only light which can illuminate that darkness is the light of your Creator, the light of Jesus Christ.

Have yourself an Incredible Christmas story this year.

READ THE INCREDIBLE CHRISTMAS STORY AS TOLD BY MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE, AND JOHN

We suggest the following reading plan for the
Christmas season:

11.12 - 17.12:	Matthew 1:1-2:23
18.12 - 24:	Luke 1:1-2:40
25.12:	John 1:1-14
26.12 - 31.12:	Mark 1-16 (Yes, the whole gospel!)

As you read ask God to show you the truth about Jesus Christ; his birth but particularly his death on the cross.

If you have any questions from your reading, we warmly invite you visit us in person. For more info about our church, where and when we meet, and how to get in touch with us, please visit us at: www.ucclife.fi

WE ALL HAVE CHRISTMAS STORIES.

Whether joyful or regrettable, humorous or poignant, we all have stories which make Christmas a memorable time of the year. Yet the traditions, the people, the nativity, and the lights of our stories bring us a joy that is fleeting, which longs for completion. That's because the stories are mere shadows cast by a greater truth, the true Christmas story.

In this book, we will look at how the shadows of Christmas point us to the truth: the Incredible Christmas Story. It is the story of Jesus, the Christ Child, as told by the four gospel writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

"This book is inviting you to stop for a moment to look beyond the lights and sounds of the season, to hear about and consider the real Christmas story. Read it—it was written for you!"

- Gary Witherall

Missionary & Author of Total Abandon



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