

A New Normal!



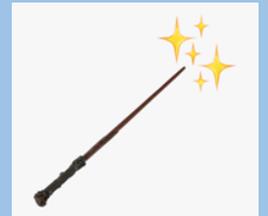
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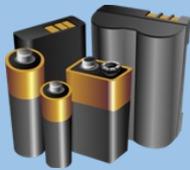
All I Want For Christmas Is....?



Devotions for Families
Heather Roth Johnson
EDITOR



Madlibs



All I Want for Christmas Is?...

Advent, Christmas & the Day of Epiphany Devotions for Kids and Their Families

Heather Roth Johnson, editor

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December 1

All I want for Christmas is “My Two Front Teeth.”

“LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens. Through the praise of children and infants, you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.” Psalm 8:1-2

“All I Want for Christmas is My Two Front Teeth” was a famous song when I was a kid. I can remember watching Alvin and the Chipmunks belt out this song between their two front teeth! Our two front teeth are important; they help us sing, whistle, and cut into food. Life would be bland without our two front teeth! But most importantly, our teeth help us talk – ask any 6 year old who is missing their two front teeth. The psalmist reminds us that we are to praise God and give thanks to the heavens for who God is in our lives. As you wait for Christmas, read a devotion from this book and say a prayer. Use your lips, and teeth, and tongue to praise God.

Dear God, let us rejoice and give praise to God now and always! Amen.



December 2

All I want for Christmas is a Flashlight.

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." John 1:5

Advent is marked with symbols of light: Advent candles, Christmas tree twinkles, and outdoor blinking lights on our houses. We are totally lost without light. I remember one time on a camping trip I had to go from the campfire to the car without a flashlight. I banged into logs, turned this way and that, and realized quickly that not only could I not see the car, the campfire was no longer in sight. Light is obviously something many of us need. But sometimes obvious things become profound when we cope with their absence. Light often helps us to see what's in the dark, but it also call out to us. With the light, we can see and move. What kind of Christmas lights do you like the best?

Dear God, this Advent, let your light help us to see more clearly, so that we might know where to go and whom we should follow. Amen.



December 3

All I want for Christmas is Binoculars.

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight.”

Luke 12:6

My sister uses binoculars to observe birds. She watches them carefully, notices details, and records what she sees. If my family had binoculars, we would use them to watch squirrels in our yard. We might count them, notice their homes in the tall trees, or look at their tiny paws close up. We could see many details using binoculars to watch small, far-away things!

In the gospels, Jesus reminds us that God watches the small birds, too. God cares about everything in creation, from the birds, to the squirrels, and even to us! God is with us in the smallest details of our lives. God doesn’t need binoculars to see us, but we can see God better through Jesus. Following Jesus, we can observe our world and love our neighbors better, too. What would you watch if you had binoculars? What (or who) does Jesus help you see well?

Creator God, you observe everything in your amazing creation. Help us observe and love, too. Amen.



December 4

All I want for Christmas is Mad Libs.

“Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them.” Psalm 126:2

A family favorite stocking stuffer is a book of Mad Libs – those stories filled with blank spaces to fill in with your own silly words, often creating hilarious results. Miles of long road trips have sped by coming up with odd-ball words while trying to remember the difference between an adjective and an adverb. (Here’s your English lesson in case if you’re rusty on those terms -adjectives are describing words for nouns while adverbs describe verbs and often end in “-ly”) The results usually involve quirky stories that don’t always make the most sense but are good for a belly laugh. The writer of Psalm 126:2 reminds us that “Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them.” What are the things that you are thankful for that fill you with laughter?

_____ God, Thank you for _____ and
(a greeting) (adjective) (noun)

_____. All I can say is _____! Amen.
(adjective) (noun) (positive exclamation)

Madlibs

December 5

All I want for Christmas is a World Atlas.

“The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.”

John 1:9

I am a former Middle School Geography teacher who loves looking at maps and exploring new countries. I have traveled as far away as Africa! In each place I visit, even if we look different and eat different, everyone likes similar things – presents and selfies! During Advent, all around the world time is spent preparing for Jesus, who is the true light John is talking about, and preparing our wish list of Christmas gifts! No matter where in the world we live, we are excited about these lists and gifts. Some may be similar, some very different, and they probably don't include the “light of the world”. But you know what is cool? God sent his son, Jesus, as a gift to EVERYONE in the world! Jesus didn't have to be on your wish list, he is God's gift for everyone, everywhere all over the world. Jesus is the light, who shares the light of God's love and if I received a World Atlas for Christmas I could explore all the places that light spreads.

Dear God, thank you for creating such a beautiful world and for sending your Son into this world so he could share the light of your love with everyone all around the world. Amen.



December 6

All I want for Christmas is Companions.

"He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him..." Luke 24:30-31a

The word "companion" comes from Latin words meaning "bread fellow." It's about FOOD. Yes, sharing a meal with someone is a good thing! Think of the friends and family you are used to eating with at a restaurant or in the cafeteria, or at birthday parties and holiday meals. Eating with those who are close to you and who are just plain fun to be with...those are great times, aren't they? I know when I think of special times growing up, and even with my own adult children, so many good memories involve food. In this time of COVID 19, many of us miss those times. They are even more special now! Imagine how special it was to the followers of Jesus who saw him on their way to Emmaus and didn't even recognize him—until he blessed their meal and suddenly, they realized who it was they were sharing bread with—their "companion," Jesus. Thank God for those with whom we've shared meals--our "companions!"

Dear God, thank you for all the companions with whom I've shared special times over food. Help me to see you, too, every time I enjoy a meal with a friend or family member. Amen.



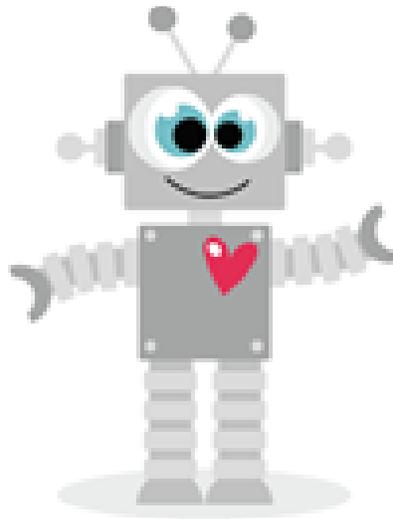
December 7

All I want for Christmas is a robot.

"We love because he first loved us." 1 John 4:19

If you had a robot, you could design it to look however you want ... serious or silly, on wheels or legs, metal or wild colors! What would you program your robot to do ... get you a snack, do your chores or homework? So many choices! Aren't you glad God didn't program you like a robot when God created you? God did make you unique and loves you so much! That's why He sent Jesus, and why we celebrate Christmas. Robots can be commanded to do whatever their creator makes them do. But you're not a robot, and God didn't program you to automatically love and follow Him. You get to decide. And when you do receive God's gift of Jesus, you can then return your love to God through your words, actions, and sharing God's love with others. Robots rock! But God's love is way better!

Jesus, thank you for the gift of God's love that you share with me. Amen.



December 8

All I want for Christmas is Legos.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:3

You want to know the best part about Legos? If they break you can put them back together again. Legos come with step by step instructions. The first time we open the box and take out the Legos, we follow the directions and end up with a great creation. The final product always turns out awesome! And, if the Lego creation breaks, we can put it back together again. Sometimes, we fix it according to the instruction manual, and sometimes we just build something new. Broken Legos are never thrown out or deemed useless, nor do they lose their value or purpose. Legos are meant to be broken and rebuilt over and over again. New creations are made and this process provides hours of entertainment and joy. Like Legos that break, we also have struggles. Sometimes, we fall completely apart. Our hearts are broken, and we need time to heal. In the process of being put back together, we are made new. Our struggles and brokenness are not the end of us. With Jesus, he promises to pick us up and put us back together, in a new way to serve his purpose of peace.

Healing Jesus, please pick me up when I am broken and heal me, so that I can be the new creation you need me to be. Amen.



December 9

All I want for Christmas is a Piano.

“With all my heart I praise the Lord, and I am glad because of God, my Savior!” Luke 1:46-47

When I was 3 years old, all I wanted for Christmas was a piano. I got one, but not exactly what I expected or even what I had hoped for. I wanted a full size piano, one that I would need help to scramble up onto the piano bench. Instead, I was surprised to receive a small child-size toy piano. Even though it was not what I had dreamt to get for Christmas, it was just right. Have you ever been surprised at Christmas? Mary the mother of Jesus was! She did not expect to be the mother of God’s son. That seems like a really big job for a young person! Mary sang for joy and thanksgiving to be Jesus’ mother. And when it was time, Jesus arrived as a baby, he was just the right size to enter and change the world.

Thanks, God, for daily surprises – in gifts of pianos to Baby Jesus being born. Because of Jesus, we all sing with Mary! Amen.



December 10

All I want for Christmas is a Harry Potter Wand.

"...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." Galatians 5:22

Harry has the best of friends, doesn't he? Ron and Hermione would do just about anything for Harry. They hide from their enemies using the invisibility cloak. They use spells they have learned in school. Harry uses his wand to protect himself and those he loves and cares about at Hogwarts. Do you have friends like Ron and Hermione that you would do just about anything for? How about we use our wands to cast love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control for one another?

Gracious God, teach us to cast our wands of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in this divided world. Amen.



December 11

All I want for Christmas is a Go Kart.

"It is for freedom, that Christ has set us free." Galatians 5:1

Why do I want a go kart? Because they're fun, they go fast, and it's something I can do all by myself. No one else can ride in it with me. But friends can go with me, maybe my family sometimes, too. I love go karts because they give me freedom. I can control how fast it goes, and the curves on the track are the best! I've had a bike for years now, I still have a helmet, and no one will let me drive a car. Yet, I want to be free. Luckily, we have Jesus. Because of Jesus, we are free to be people of God. But really? All I want for Christmas is a go kart.

Dear God, give us freedom you know we're looking for. Remind us that baby Jesus came to set us free from all that we're tangled by. Guide us to drive life's track together. Amen.



December 12

All I want for Christmas is Super Powers.

*“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

Isaiah 9:6

Obviously this isn't possible BUT ... if I could get anything for Christmas it would be Super Powers! But WHICH SUPERPOWER would I choose?! There are so many cool possibilities: flying, super speed, and invisibility. The list goes on and on! What if I could shrink myself to the size of an ant or grow tall as a tree? What if I was strong enough to stop a car from crashing or a building from falling? What if I was super smart and I could figure out how to fix all the world's problems and help people to finally respect each other? Sometimes I wish God was a superhero who would come to earth to make it better and to show us how to love. But, wait a minute? God did that in Jesus! I guess I already have everything I need.

Thank you, God, for the gift of Jesus. Help me to do everything in my power to make the world around me a little better every day. Amen.



December 13

All I Want for Christmas is a Drone.

“With the LORD on my side I do not fear...” Psalm 118:6

I want a drone because they are amazing things! They can fly with no pilot inside, and they can do lots of cool stuff like take pictures from the sky--and even deliver packages. Drones can do all this because a person on the ground with a controller is in charge and directing their actions.

Sometimes it feels like I am flying through my life, kind of out of control and scared. But I need to remember that God is in control, wherever I go and whatever I do. No need to fear, because I know God will always lead and guide me safely—I just need to listen!

Dear God, thank you for being in charge, keeping me safe as I go through life. Help me listen to you. Amen.



December 14

All I want for Christmas is a bike.

“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among all peoples!’”

Luke 2:13-14

They say, “Good news travels fast,” but Jesus’ birth had to wait for donkeys, camels, sheep, and shepherd boys to come around. It’s only the angels making good time! Good news is hard to keep to yourself! Since I do not have wings, I would like to have a HEAVENLY BIKE so that I can spread the Christmas good news to everyone. The peace that God sent in Jesus is not just for those close to us, but it is for those far away, too. This is not a “ONE DAY ONLY” special, so I am going to need a bike that is made for the long haul with lots of gears to keep me going. How can I cover the lakes and mountains, the curves and the turns ahead of me throughout the year? Thank goodness God’s Christmas gift of Jesus is not one that will run out of batteries or break after a few days. I can count then on My HEAVENLY MOUNTAIN BIKE, which is faith. That faith will sustain me all year long. I can ride that all of the way through the year and into next Christmas. But for now, I wonder which hill I can bike up first to share the good news?

God of mountains, hills, twists, and turns, give my faith wheels so that I can spread the angel’s Christmas gift of peace to all peoples. Amen.



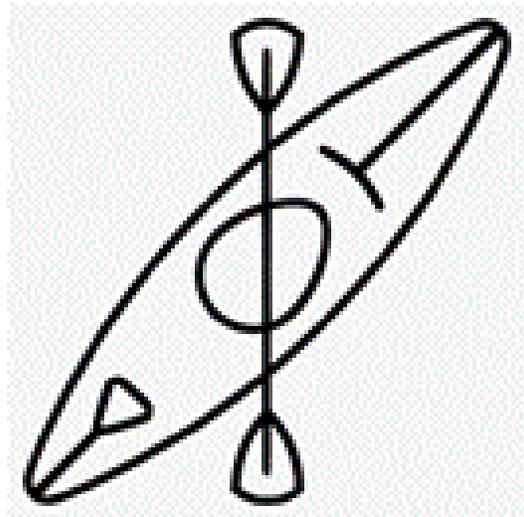
December 15

All I want for Christmas is a Racecar – and a Kayak.

“I look behind me and you’re there, then up ahead and you’re there, too— your reassuring presence, coming and going.” Psalm 139:5

All I Want for Christmas is a RACECAR— and a KAYAK! What do you notice about these two “wants?” Look closely. Read racecar and kayak in reverse. Ah-ha! Frontwards or backwards each spells the same word. Such a sequence of reversible letters is called a “palindrome.” We already had two young sons when we realized our last name, Staats, is a palindrome. We teased our boys, “If we had known about palindromes when you were born, we would have named you Otto Edde Staats and Neven Bob Staats. If a girl, we could have named her Anna Elle Staats.” Following our discovery, family road trips included creating lists of palindrome words and phrases. One of our favorites was to imagine that Adam’s and Eve’s first words, and that they were palindromes: Adam would say, “Madam I’m Adam.” And Eve responded, “Do geese see God?”

Dear Jesus, whether I feel up or upside down, stuck within, or reaching out, falling backward or running forward, I know you are always with me. Amen.



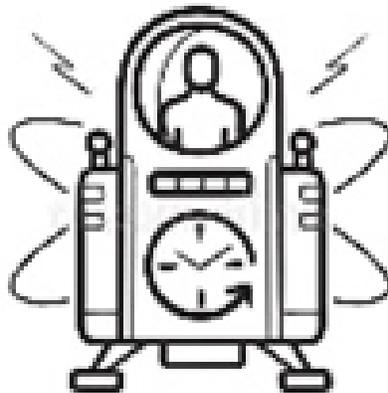
December 16

All I want for Christmas is a Time Machine.

"I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." Jeremiah 29:11

If I got a time machine I would never need another gift, ever! I could visit the future! I could find out when we can quit wearing masks to school, if I'll ever be a Dad one day, or where I will work when I grow up. Maybe I could find out if the Vikings could win the Superbowl? Or worse, will I have hair in my ears like Grandpa when I am old? My mom tells me the Bible says "I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." She says the future is waiting like a Christmas gift and I should worry more about homework and less about the future. I still want a time machine. . .

Dear God, help me to trust you as I wait for the future. Amen.



December 17

All I Want for Christmas is Aquaman.

“This is because all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. You have put him on as if he were your clothes.” Galatians 3:27

Aquaman is an amazing superhero, with incredible strength and speed, sonar power, and an ability to withstand impacts from bullets to heat rays. He can also talk to all kinds of sea life, and they obey his commands! But did you know he has one weakness? He can't live without regular contact to water. Neither can you! You already know you need water for drinking, cleaning, keeping you healthy and more. Water is as necessary as clothing because you also need water to put on Christ! In your baptism, water was used to bring you this promise from God: “You are mine, and I love you.” Regular contact with water can remind you of this promise. Try it! “Clothe” yourself with water and pray:

Dear Super God, I am your child! Yea! Amen.



December 18

All I want for Christmas are High Top Sneakers.

“[Jesus] ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.” Mark 6

When someone invites you on a journey, it's hard to say no to an adventure. This journey is to go and tell people about the love of God. What an exciting invitation! But this invitation from Jesus for the disciples came with some interesting, maybe strange, instructions: take no food, no money, and no bag. A walking stick is needed, and only one pair of shoes and one shirt. That doesn't seem like enough for a very long journey, not even a short one. But it sounds like this journey will involve some walking, so some comfortable high top sneakers would be great! The packing list for this journey seems way too short! But maybe the mystery of only bringing a walking stick, one shirt, and one pair of shoes is part of the excitement. Maybe part of this journey of meeting new people and telling them about Jesus will also be about making new friends and eating together. In any case, doing lots of walking will be better in high top sneakers!

Dear Jesus, thank you for inviting me on this journey and for providing the things I need...especially the cool high top sneakers which will keep my feet comfortable along the way.

Amen.



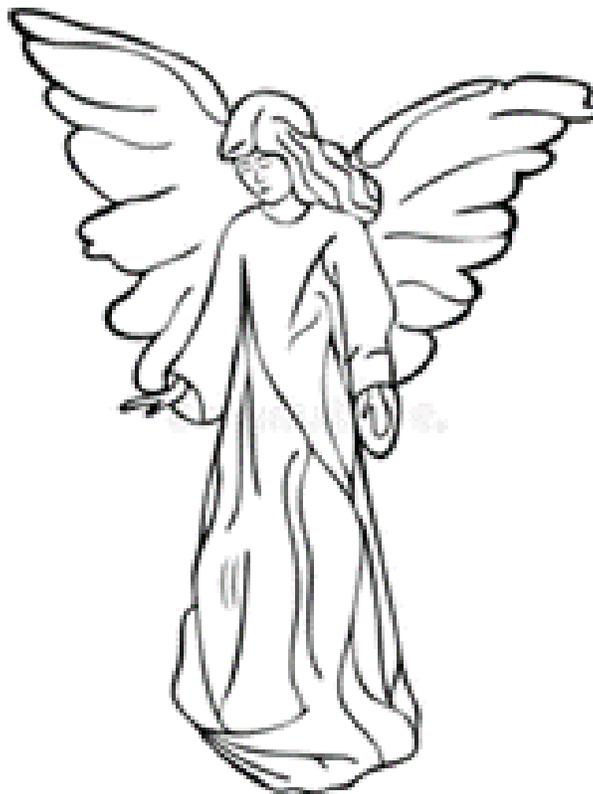
December 19

All I want for Christmas is an Angel.

“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.’” Luke 2:10

Have you ever played “Among Us?” All of the players look the same, but the point is figure out which one is not one of “us” but the imposter. Everyone is a suspect until the imposter is found. Now think about Mary and Joseph, just carrying on with their lives trying to complete the tasks before them and WHAM! An IM-POSTER shows up! Totally sus, right? (“sus means suspect in kind lingo!) There wasn’t a whole lot of question about it and the angel didn’t even try to deny it. The angel owned it, and says, “Do not be afraid.” There are times in our own lives where we are carrying out the tasks, trying to figure out who is who, or even who we are. We wish an imposter angel would appear to tell us the Good News! But more often than not, we don’t have an angel showing up delivering these words to you. Instead, God comes to us through ordinary people, who remind you over and over again that we don’t need to fear but if we do, God is with us!

God among us, in us, and for us, help us to feel your presence even when we feel overwhelmed or afraid. Amen.



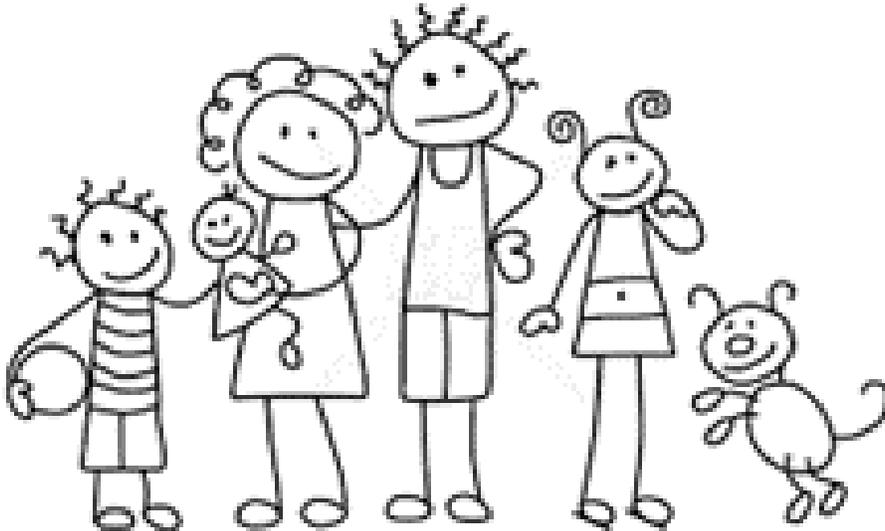
December 20

All I want for Christmas is my Family.

“He and all his family were devout and God- fearing, he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.” Acts 10:2

As a young kid I remember making my Christmas wish list each year. I spent time wandering down the toy aisle deciding what items I needed to have. Christmas morning would I arrive and the rush and thrill of finding out what I might receive would fill me. I would spend the day playing with my new gifts with my sister. Looking back, I cannot tell you what toys I got when I was 5, 8, or even 10. My memories are however filled with the people instead of the things. I especially remember playing with my sister and being surrounded by my family, and the love family brings.

Lord, this Christmas help us to remember the best gifts you have given us: Jesus and our families. Amen.



December 21

All I want for Christmas is Quiet.

“Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.” Psalm 46:10

Life can be busy and loud! You probably have a lot to do every day, and you’re probably on the move a lot. Even when you’re not actually running around, does it feel like there’s a lot going on in your mind? Sometimes life can feel like constant movement and constant noise. That can be stressful and make you feel angry and frustrated; it can distract you from what’s important in life, and it can lead you to forget God’s still and calming presence in your life.

Take a moment right now to be still and quiet -both in your movements and in your busy brain-and take a deep breath. Feel the presence of God. Feel and know God is with you now and always. Feel God’s love and strength. Repeat this exercise every day- even if it’s only for a few seconds. It will help you to remember that God is always with you.

Dear God, help me to pause and find a quiet moment to remember you’re always with me.

Amen.



December 22

All I want for Christmas is a Bicycle.

“God is able to do far more than we can ever ask or imagine.” Ephesians 3:20

When I was about seven years old, I knew exactly what I wanted for Christmas, a new bicycle! I imagined a groovy, glittery purple bicycle with rainbow tassels streaming from the handlebars.

However, the one I found on Christmas morning was not even close to what I expected. Behind the tree was a boring, white bicycle with a John Deere emblem on the front and “John Deere” in big bold letters on the side. Who knew the same company that makes the bright green tractors also made bicycles? My face must have shown my disappointment, but my dad did not see it. He was full of joy and excitement to see me take my new bicycle out for a spin. My dad and I spent the whole afternoon together. He carefully adjusted the seat to just the right height, showed me how to use the gears, and helped me stay steady as I learned how to balance on the bigger bike. I did not get the dream bicycle I had imagined or expected. Instead, God had something even better in store for me. God gave me the gift of spending time with my dad.

Creator God, your dreams for me are bigger than I can imagine. Help me to see the gifts you give me each day. Amen.



December 23

All I want for Christmas is Lefse.

“Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt...no leavened bread shall be eaten. You shall tell your child on that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’” Exodus 13:3,8

“Why do we eat smelly fish and lefse every Christmas Eve?” my then seven year old daughter had asked. I responded with “It is tradition! Nana made it for my family when I was growing up and great grandma made it for grandpa’s family before that.” Her question made me think though, why do we pass things down from one generation to the next? I’m sure there are more “modern” or easier ways of doing things. We could pull frozen cod out of the freezer. We could buy pre-made lefse from the store. (This is Minnesota after all!). I think, though, that there is more to our traditions than just seeming to make our lives more complicated at the holidays!

In Exodus 13, Moses tells the Israelites about God’s command to celebrate their rescue by God from Egypt by eating special foods such as unleavened bread. I think God knows the importance of keeping traditions. They are a way to build connections with and remember people and events that have come before us. So it is with every scoop of flour for my lefsa and every roll of the dough, that I remember the gifts God gives to our own generations—like my ancestors overcoming hardships and dreaming dreams as they travelled to America in search of a better life, giving to each generation after them the happy memories of lefsa making undertaken by families like my own every Christmas season!

Thank you, God, for remembrance food that we celebrate Christmas with year after year. Amen.



December 24

All I want for Christmas is to see Santa

"But as for me, I will look to the LORD, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me." Micah
7:7

I grew up in Michigan, but quite often my family would drive to Florida to visit my grandparents for Christmas vacation. I hated it. Christmas to me should be covered in snow. I didn't like palm trees with Christmas lights, mobile home communities full of senior citizens, or driving for days stuffed into our GMC Safari mini-van. One Christmas Eve, as we made our final approach to the trailer park, I told my mom over and over that, "Tonight we are going to see Santa!" I was SO sure of it. Mom on the other hand insisted that I would most definitely NOT be seeing Santa that night. Well lo and behold, we pulled in and SO DID SANTA! "I told you so! I told you so!" I screamed as the one with the white beard and the red suit I had watched and waited for stepped out of a long black limousine. We are waiting for the God of salvation. Look to the Lord. God hears us. How will you watch for God this Advent? Our baby king who was once coming, is still coming and on Christmas Day we can proclaim together, "I told you so!"

Dear Jesus, we wait for you, and we can't wait to see you on Christmas Day. Amen.



December 25

All I want for Christmas is A Baby Sister (...A Baby Brother would do, too!).

"In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling shortchanged." Romans 5:5

This has been my daughter's wish for the last four Christmas seasons! This year will be no exception! Though my daughter prays every night for a baby sister, she would be equally pleased with a brother. To become a "Big Sis" is her long-hoped-for Christmas wish! You might be wondering if my daughter has ever given up on her prayer. I think that would be understandable. I mean, how many times can she get "no" for an answer?! Here's the rub: she doesn't hear the word "no." She hears, "not yet!" She is hopeful enough that "Baby Sister" stays at the top of next year's list. Until then, she practices diaper changing skills on her doll and reads books to her baby cousins. My daughter expects something wonderful and stays alert long after the Christmas decorations are put away. What is your Christmas hope? How do you stay alert to it?

God, helps us be patient for what we really want out of life. Amen.



December 26

All I want for Christmas is Mashed Potatoes.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!" John 16:33

Have you ever made mashed potatoes? Try it! Boil some peeled potatoes, drain, mash and add butter, milk, salt and pepper! EASY PEASY, right? Last Christmas, our entire family-about 30 of us were together for Christmas dinner. Everyone brought a dish to share for our big meal. It was the first time Hannah was bringing a dish to share, and she volunteered to bring the mashed potatoes. She was nervous, and she wanted them to be perfect! But she mashed, beat, and added a little too much of everything to those potatoes. When she arrived, something didn't seem quite right. They were unusually runny, like soup! Hannah felt terrible. Her heart raced, and she knew there was nothing that could be done to fix them. Tears started to form on her cheeks as one of the older members of the family gave a disapproving glance at her large pot of runny potatoes. She tried so hard to make them perfect and was devastated that it all failed. But a very hungry family embraced them, and they used the runny mashed potatoes as gravy for their turkey!

We can spend a lot of time hoping and trying for one thing, but in the end we get something completely different happens. God knows no matter how hard we try, we are going to fail.

We can even fail at the easy things, the things that should turn out, but sometimes just don't like mashed potatoes. Luckily for us, Jesus' love never fails to love us despite our failures, big or small.

Dear Jesus, embrace our worries, and grant us your love. Amen.



December 27

All I want for Christmas is Fun.

“But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.”
Luke 14:13

Have you ever planned a party? It can be fun to think about it. What food will you eat? Which friends will you invite? What will you do? Then you can imagine all the fun you will have as you celebrate! When we get together with friends, we can be sure that we are going to have fun! But have you ever been left off the invitation list to someone else's party? That can be miserable! It's never fun to feel like you've been left out.

In Luke 14:12-14, Jesus tells the story of someone who gives a party, and he actually has some suggestions for what your guest list should look like. Jesus says that it's not just our best friends that should be on our list--but that we should include everyone we can, especially those people who might need a little extra care and fun in their life. Maybe you know some of these people from school or your neighborhood--the people who might feel left out. How much more fun can we have when the party includes everyone?

This year we may not be having big parties very much. The world is a different place as we figure out how to live in a pandemic. But while this year may look a little different from other Christmas seasons, we can still do something special to help other people have a little bit of fun. Who can you reach out to that can use some fun? Who can you share a gift with? Is there someone that can use an extra smile? Can you make some cookies, send a card, or sing some carols for a neighbor? Whatever you do, have a little fun!

Jesus, guide my heart to help my neighbors. Amen.



December 28

All I want for Christmas is Batteries.

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." Matthew 25:15

I don't listen to the radio often. But this one day I did--and I was glad! There was a contest! The third caller to reach the station when they played a song was going to win concert tickets to my favorite singer. I wanted to go, so I waited patiently to call in. Then it happened. They played the song. I picked up my phone and went to push the radio station phone number I had already saved....but I couldn't call because my battery was dead. I had forgotten to charge my phone. Because I wasn't ready, I missed out on the chance to go to the concert.

Jesus tells a story a little bit like this in Matthew 25:1-15. It's a parable about being ready. Some of the people in the story are watching and waiting, and some aren't prepared. When it's time to go to the party, if you aren't ready then you will miss out on something great. God has something special for each of us to do. Maybe there is someone in the world that needs what you have to give. Maybe you will get to see God do something wonderful in the world. Whatever that is, we need to be ready and waiting. Like that cell phone battery, we might not know exactly when the amazing work of God will happen--so watch for it wherever you can.

God, help us to keep our eyes open and our batteries charged so you don't miss out on something great!
Amen.



December 29

All I want for Christmas is Play Dough.

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made: your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

Psalm 139

I love to open up a new container of play dough and smell it. Then I carefully take the play dough from its can and begin rolling it in my hands. When I first start working it with my hands, the possibilities for what it will be are endless. Will it be a bird? A robot? A pizza? I decide to make a flower, and then start opening other cans and colors to add to this garden I suddenly am creating. Next I add a worm and then a rainbow. Finally, the garden would not be complete without a tree. I'm so proud of my creations! I wonder if this is how God feels when looking at the things God has created? Does God look at me and call me good? Yes! I think so because God knitted me together and calls me beloved.

Dear God. Thank you for creating us and allowing us to create. Amen.



December 30

All I want for Christmas is an ugly Christmas Sweater.

“As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Colossians 3:12-14

A few years ago, my family decided that we would have an ugly Christmas sweater contest for our annual Christmas gathering. There would be prizes, so everyone got busy to find or create the best sweater they could. Someone wore a snowman sweater with the carrot nose protruding. Another person created their own snow globe sweater by gluing a clear plastic bowl onto the front of the sweater after filling it with confetti. Others found sweater vests with crazy sparkles and funny images as well as sweaters with fuzzy cats wearing Santa hats and more. We laughed as we each modeled our finest Christmas sweater, and the winner was chosen. Finally, we gathered for a photo with Grandma in the middle surrounded by the rest of the family from the retirees to the babies. That photo is one of my most treasured possessions because some of the people who were with us that day are now in heaven. That’s the promise that Baby Jesus brings to us, not an ugly sweater, but eternal life with him in heaven one day.

Heavenly Father, may we model what you would have us wear: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience and love; for these are the greatest gifts of all which were given to us in

Jesus. Amen.



December 31

All I want for Christmas is People.

"This is true because if two or three people come together in my name, I am there with them." Matthew 18:20

2020. Phew. What a year it's been, huh? Most of what we've known and done in the past has been turned upside-down during this pandemic. Did you know what ZOOM was a year ago?

Had you ever Facetimed a music lesson a year ago? Had you ever gone months without seeing loved ones? Had you ever been told you couldn't leave your home? Have you ever considered a mask a fashion statement? Has your church ever been closed? They tell us we are safer being apart. They say we shouldn't gather. They say we shouldn't be in churches together. But people need people. It's safe to say we miss being together. It's safe to say we miss traveling. It's safe to say we miss church. But through it all, we must remember the words in Matthew 18:20, ".....if two or three people come together in my name, I am there with them." This has been a special time of doing things different with our families. With our friends. With our church. We may say we are isolated and socially distanced may seem like an isolating word.....but when we have God with us, we have all we need.

Dear God, thank you for a new year to embrace and do new things. Amen.



January 1

All I Want for Christmas is a New Normal.

Jesus said, "You believe..!" John 1:50

In this past year, we have had to adjust to so many big changes. You've already experienced some big changes like when you reached milestones in life. When you learned to walk, you adjusted. No more crawling. It became a new normal. Today's new normal is about adjusting - all we have to do due to COVID-19. But like life milestones, life is always full of changes and adjusting to new things.

One thing that doesn't change though is your role as a child of God. This normal begins at birth and is never-ending. Jesus gets it. When Jesus meets Phillip he asks him to follow along. Phillip was excited and believes! Phillip introduces Jesus to his friend, Nathanael, in his excitement. But Nathanael reacts with some uncertainty!

We may react the same way when our normal is always changing. We sense there's good in there, but we look for the negative. Jesus reassures us. Read and reread verse 50, and believe.

Dear Jesus, I love comfort and knowing what to expect, but I love you more and am thankful you are my teacher. Amen.

A New Normal!

January 2

All I Want for Christmas is A Box of Crayons.

“For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.” Isaiah 55:12

I remember the joy of a new box of crayons and a new coloring book. In our house, it was a big deal just to have 24 colors, but my grandparents had the box of 48, with the crayon eraser, and that seemed to be abundance indeed. There were so many possibilities! And the smell of the crayons, and the blank paper -- well, that was pretty good, too.

Now I'm thinking that as cool as the coloring book was, it would be even better to have blank sheets of paper on which to draw on and color. Blank paper invited my imagination into the process. It is imagination that is the thing: the imagination to believe that trees can clap their hands, the imagination to believe that the mountains and the hills can break into song, the imagination to see the good things in life.

Sometimes our imaginations have become so small, our hopes so tiny, but at Christmas and even into the New Year, it is a time to know and to remember how great the promises of God are. They encompass all of creation being made new. They include all of the colors in the box of crayons, and then some.

God, let this time together remind that Jesus has come to make the world vibrant with color and with life. Amen.



January 3

All I want for Christmas is a pair of New Ice Skates.

"A new command I give you; Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." John 13:34

When I was little, my dad taught me how to ice skate. I remember him tying up my skates and guiding me onto the ice. As a little girl, I wobbled more than I skated. Over the years, I got better. I had three older sisters and each winter Dad found an old pair of skates that fit me. One year, I remember all I wanted for Christmas was a pair of new ice skates. I didn't get them.

What I got instead was Dad, sharing his time and love with me. Now, I realize Dad was living out the commandment Jesus shared: "A new command I give you; Love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another." We share love in many ways. My dad shared his love teaching me to ice skate, and I still have my dad's love in my heart.

Dear Jesus, thank you teaching us to love God and to show others your love. Amen.



January 4

All I Want for Christmas is S'mores.

"But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart." Luke 2:19

I don't know how my family will spend Christmas 2020 or New Year's 2020; I just know I want to end it with s'mores. It'll get loud and rowdy -- but it's tradition. I have 3 sons who love to make s'mores and who have 3 different systems for sorting wood, building campfires, and even stacking ingredients. They'll get excited, and words will fly.

Soon after Jesus is born, Mary's night is interrupted by some loud and rowdy shepherds who come "with haste" -- bursting in their excitement to tell her stories about seeing and hearing angels. I bet there were words flying! Luke 2:19 says that Mary treasured these words. I wonder if Mary smiled or shook her head? I wonder if she was quiet so she could save up that moment and to think about later? I hope she felt warm and full and surrounded by her favorites.

Dear God: Help us realize when we're in a special moment with our favorite people, so that we can look around and save it up, to remember. Amen.



January 5

All I want for Christmas is Colors.

"...in him was life, and the life was the light of all people." John 1:4

A single line on a sheet of paper becomes the stabilizer of a rocket ship, the first petal of a flower, an abstract design that makes you think of a party. Colorful crayons or markers transform a blank sheet of paper into a new world. A blank sheet of paper is just waiting for the brilliant colors of the crayons to give it life and depth and joy. Our patient wait for Christ at Christmas is like waiting for life and joy to erupt into a bleak winter world to inspire us in the holy mission of creating and sharing God's love because "in him was life, and the life was the light of all people." As Jesus lived among people, he showed us how beautiful the world is when compassion and love transform it.

Loving God, may we let Christ's love color the world and give it life. Amen.



January 6

All I want for Christmas is a Clubhouse.

"And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules." 2 Timothy 2:5

There was an old building in the backyard. The perfect clubhouse. Sure, it was rundown, but for our group it served as the command post for our meetings and campouts or slumber parties. From an army surplus we had uniforms as well as an impressive array of equipment. This was an outdoor recreation club for inner city youth. We camped. Cooked on a campfire and hiked all under the watchful eye of Grandpa Job. Reflecting on the experience with the hindsight life provides I see that the club provided many benefits: Responsibility, self-esteem and acceptance come to mind. These seem like good star-like qualities to try for this new year, 2021.

Lord: may we learn to follow the rules, and value the relationships in which we come to know the love of God so that we too can win the prize! Amen.



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