

December 2011

Lighted Lamp Magazine



From the Editor

I always love the time of year where we can celebrate our Savior's birth and remember His great love for us and His place in our lives.

This month in Lighted Lamp, you will find lots of poems to get you into the Christmas spirit, and a variety of articles. I especially encourage you to check out the book review this month. Hannah's enthusiasm about *Kisses from Katie* got me interested, and I've read enough of it to know that it's a very hard book to put down. It's not often that I've read about a young person so devoted to God.

You might also notice that a column called "Praying Hands" has replaced the "Prayer Page" that used to be in every issue. Each month, "Praying Hands" will feature a prayer from the Bible.

Have a great December, and a merry Christmas!

God bless,

Priscilla

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"Queen Anne's Lace" by Elaine Schnider

“It was a choice saying of Augustine,
‘Every saint is God’s temple, and he who
carries his temple about him, may go to
prayer when he pleaseth’.”
—Thomas Brooks

Photography by Rebekah M.



Mission:

To encourage and strengthen Christian teens to love and follow God with their whole hearts, souls, and minds; and to glorify God.

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

-Matthew 5:16

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For God So Loved

by Priscilla Carsten

Hopeless. That word best describes what my life would be if Jesus had never come to earth. All the lies I've told, all the words I've said that hurt God and other people, and all the other things I've done that are against God's laws would stare me in the face from the time I got up in the morning until the time I stopped restlessly tossing and turning in bed at night. I would be unable to pray, because a perfect God wouldn't accept the prayers of a sinful and rebellious person. My entire life would be plagued by regrets, and most of all the terrible feeling of separation from God. I can't even imagine how much worse that feeling would be if I knew that I could never have fellowship with God but would remain under His wrath forever.

In short, all the love, inner peace, and joy in my life are gifts from God at the greatest imaginable expense to Him. Jesus didn't have to die. It wouldn't have been any loss to Him if I, who had rejected Him and made myself His enemy by disobeying His commandments, had perished. The angels who rebelled against Him never had the chance at forgiveness that I, and all of you, have received. God so loved that when Jesus was arrested, He healed the ear of the high priest's servant. God so loved that when Jesus died, He asked God to forgive the

men who killed Him. God so loved that Jesus took all the guilt of my sin upon Himself, and all the punishment, and all the hopelessness, and all the separation from God that I deserved to bear and died so that I can have fellowship with Him. So that you can have fellowship with Him.

With all mankind, I walked in darkness, hiding my evil deeds, hoping that no one would know the wrong things I'd done. But Jesus came, the Light of the World, and shone into my life, exposing my sin, and when I repented, forgiving my sin. That's how much Jesus loves each of us.

Just as Jesus' death shows us His great love, so does His birth. He laid aside the glory that was His due to live a humble life here on earth. And when He could have lived as a king, He chose to live as a servant. Jesus didn't wait to be born until there were running water and electricity. He was born in a despised city in a stable. He slept in a manger. I don't know about you, but I don't see or hear much about mangers except at Christmas time. I don't think much about what a hardship it would be for a baby to lay in one. Yet I have pets, and I couldn't imagine putting a baby anywhere near where they eat.

Not only did Jesus come, but He made it clear that He didn't only love the lovable and the worthy. In fact, none of us could ever be worthy of His love. But instead of associating with only the best people, Jesus spent time with dishonest tax collectors, and spoke to a Samaritan, one of the partly-Jewish people born when the Israelites broke God's commandment not to intermarry with other nations. He did not condemn a woman caught in adultery, but told her to go and sin no more. He healed the demon-possessed daughter of a Gentile woman. His love is not conditional. He loves me even though I am a sinner and a Gentile, and He loves you no matter what you are. He didn't just come to save "good" people. He came to forgive all who repent and call on Him.

God's love doesn't give out or give up when faced with scorn, disbelief, or rebellion, though His words of warning to the Pharisees were cutting and honest. They, too, could be forgiven if they chose to accept Him.

God so loved me that He forgave me and changed my life. God so loved me that I can talk to Him whenever I want for as long as I want, as loudly or as quietly as I want, and He'll always listen. He loves me enough to listen when I say the wrong things, and when I don't use the right words, and even when I stop in the middle of a sentence because I can't remember what I was trying to tell Him. He loves people who pray to Him in Hebrew, Greek, French, and Arabic. He loves us so much that even when we don't know how to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groans that cannot be uttered.

God's love cannot be measured. It is wider than the ocean and deeper than the sea. It is too marvelous to understand. He has no ulterior mo-

tive, He loved us even when He had no reason to. There is nothing good in us, nothing worth redeeming, but He redeemed me and lives in me. His love is the only thing that makes life worth living. He is love, and He is the only one who gives us hope.

This Christmas season, I wonder why I don't love Him more. I wonder why I forget to thank Him for my food before I eat. I wonder why I spend time watching television that I could spend reading His word. I wonder why I don't always do the right thing when no one is watching.

As I picture the newborn only Son of God lying in a manger on prickly hay surrounded by animals, dirty animals that had journeyed a long distance, I wonder, and I hope. I have hope that God will help me become more like Him. And I have hope that someday I will never have to struggle with temptation and sin again. Someday I will live with God in heaven and never ever have anything between us. I pray that you have the same hope, the same certain expectation, and that if you don't, you tell Him today that you want it. And He will give it to you. Because "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life." ☩



10 Things To Do For Others Over Christmas Break

All photography from <http://www.photos-public-domain.com/>

These are just a few examples of ways to be a blessing this holiday season. I pray we will all think about ways we can impact others in small ways and hopefully be a light in a dark world as Christmas makes its way onto the scene. May we celebrate Christ's birth, death and resurrection everyday of the year and may this Christmas be one of giving of ourselves for His glory. Merry Christmas!



1. Tell a friend about your relationship with Jesus.



2. Bake cookies for a neighbor.



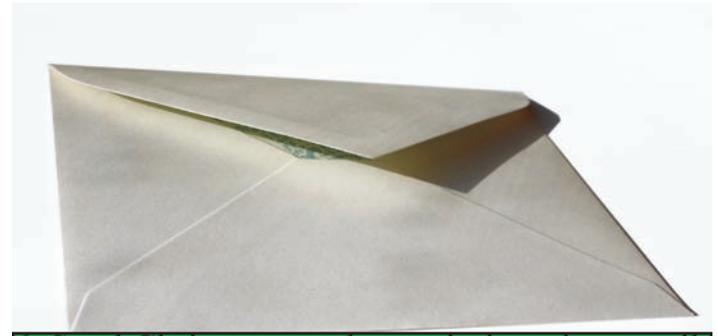
3. Spend a day doing whatever your younger sibling wants to do.



4. Pay for the person behind you in line at McDonald's or Starbucks.



5. Give money to an organization like Samaritan's Purse, Dollar for a Drink or your church's mission's agency.



6. Send Christmas cards to missionaries or military members.



7. Work at a homeless shelter.



8. Give a gift to your mail or trash man. You can attach an invitation to come to your church's Christmas service.

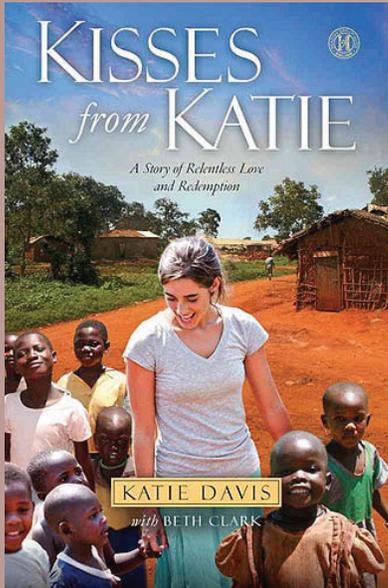


9. Visit elderly people from your neighborhood or your church. Especially the shut-ins who aren't having company for the holidays.



10. Support a child through Compassion International.

Book Review: Kisses from Katie



by Hannah Beam

Kisses from Katie is a self-titled book written by Katie Davis. This young lady currently lives in Uganda and is 23 years old. She has no college degree, no boyfriend, and no nearby family. But she has already adopted 13 Ugandan orphans and is feeding and providing for hundreds of children in Uganda. In her book, Katie writes about the challenges and adventures that she must face and overcome while in Uganda. She writes about the hardships of parents who expect her to become a nurse, she writes about the loneliness of living in an unfamiliar country, and she writes about the poverty that has swallowed her closest friends. However,

in the midst of these trials, she knows that God is still there and that He is the Ultimate Provider. Putting all of her faith in Him, Katie starts an organization called Amazima Ministries, which feeds and sends nearly 2,000 of Uganda's most vulnerable children to school. With a bitter-sweet ending, Katie describes her love for Uganda and for the One who is behind it all – her Everlasting Father.

This book is written beautifully. It is more than a story of an extraordinary girl; it also captures the heart and inner-most thoughts of her journey. It is clearly written to the full glory of God, with passion and love for Him on every page. It will cause tears and laughter, and sometimes, you feel like you are standing right there with Katie in Uganda. This book is highly recommended to anyone who can get their hands on it. The effects that it will leave on your heart will be permanent and life-changing. 🙏

Baby Jesus' Tears

by Nichole Garcia

He came upon a star-lit night
And filled the world with his cry
Mary leaned close
And kissed His little nose
Praising God,
While heavenly chorus rose.

Jesus' tears fell for the world
So filled with sin and sorrow
His newborn cry rose high,
So pure and fresh and hollowed,
And drifted through the night.

The shepherds heard,
And drew near
The kings came upon Him
While the star burned clear
They heard the heavenly voice
While the tears flowed still
And Mary caressed his brow
His voice rose, every ear was filled
With His cry
Every eye saw His tears
That fell for the world
So wasted and worn through the years...

Our eyes are brimming
With the tears of our greatest joy
For you're the greatest gift to men,
Precious little boy!
Your tears fall for our plight,
Ours stream for our joy
For you've come, Precious little boy,
To set things right. ☩



Breath of Christmas

by Nichole Garcia, photography by Katie Prescott

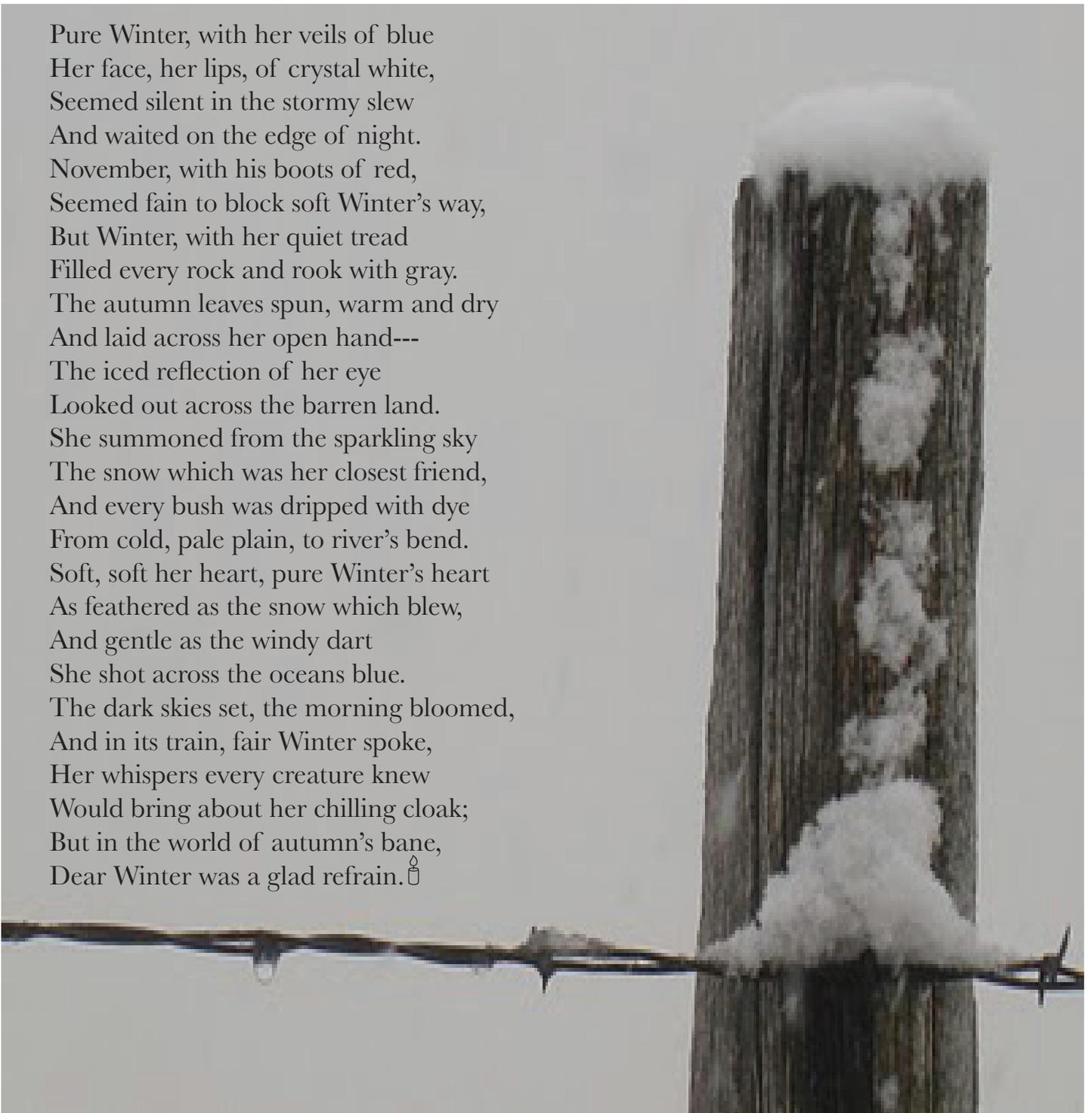
Oh beautiful air
Oh lovely taste--
How lovely, how fair!
So crisp, but warms,
It's winter, but it transforms
Into the echoes
Of the long-sung song
Of undying love, angel-sung
In a multitude, thousands strong
Singing! Singing!
Singing for all to hear!
Hark! Hark!
Jesus King of Kings, most dear
Is born, is laying near.
That song is sung every season
Heralded by something sweet and fresh
It's never old,
It's Christmas breath!
I breathe it--
And the song starts to sound

Of love, and Love profound!
Of the season we celebrate
The Child we hold dear
In the humble hay-filled manger
Sleeping soundly, and without fear.
O' Breath of Christmas!
So loved, so sweet
So cherished,
Ans so happy to meet
Walking under bough
Evergreen
Treading on the snow
With crystal sheen
I breathe you in
You're crisp, but you warm
For no chill is in you
Only charm
And the remembrance of a Child
Who was in a manger laid,
Him, in whom a Saviour was made. 

* Winter's Appearance *

by Tabitha Hope, photography by Riley S.

Pure Winter, with her veils of blue
Her face, her lips, of crystal white,
Seemed silent in the stormy slew
And waited on the edge of night.
November, with his boots of red,
Seemed fain to block soft Winter's way,
But Winter, with her quiet tread
Filled every rock and rook with gray.
The autumn leaves spun, warm and dry
And laid across her open hand---
The iced reflection of her eye
Looked out across the barren land.
She summoned from the sparkling sky
The snow which was her closest friend,
And every bush was dripped with dye
From cold, pale plain, to river's bend.
Soft, soft her heart, pure Winter's heart
As feathered as the snow which blew,
And gentle as the windy dart
She shot across the oceans blue.
The dark skies set, the morning bloomed,
And in its train, fair Winter spoke,
Her whispers every creature knew
Would bring about her chilling cloak;
But in the world of autumn's bane,
Dear Winter was a glad refrain. ❄️



It's Christmas Time!

by Nichole Garcia, photography by Isaac Swanson

It's Christmas time!
It's Christmas time!
The season is drawing near
And all the joy and glory it brings
Will soon all be here!
Let it snow
Let the ringer sound!
For the hot chocolate is waiting
And we're ready for "It's Christmas, Charlie
Brown".
Let the diamond powder fall
In heaps, great big heaps!
Let it cover everything,
And cloak trees with starry fleece.
Let the new songbird emerge
And sing its happy song
While we throw snowballs
As we sing along!
Let the tree arise--
Alight oh angel top!
Glow, burn bright,
Burn strong, never stop.
For you bring me joy,
And we all laugh and sing
While we rummage for ornaments
And caper 'round the tree.
How I love you!
You, a symbol of joy
You burn with glory light
In remembrance of the Little Boy.
Oh Holy Child
I love you most
For you came in miracle
Heralded by angelic host.
Your first cry
Was like the loveliest music

No jingle bell or sounding horn
Could ever compare to it.
You came with a promise
"Glory to God in the highest
And on earth, Peace,
Goodwill toward men."
Oh glorious verse!
O song of hope!
How you stir me,
Eyes upturned to heavenly slopes!
And Christmas time is here,
Is here!
In honor of the night most dear
When all was quiet
There was not a sound
Until a Baby cried,
Was laid near the ground...
Then the chorus broke forth
"The King! The King!
Born this day, for men
God's Son, Child of Peace!"
I sing, sing out loud!
For I am glad
In this joy so profound
In this most wonderful season
When my King was born
Turning the world light,
From being lost and forlorn.
You're our Hope,
Our Love, our Deity,
Our Joy, our Peace,
And the Saviour of me!
We celebrate you this season
No matter what others may make it
For Christmas time is here,
And all the glory and joy with it! 🕯

No Room

by Priscilla Carsten

“No Room”

This is what the innkeeper told Mary and Joseph one day so long ago, just before the birth of Jesus. There was no room in the inn because there were too many other people inside, filling the space. The innkeeper didn't know he was turning away his Maker.

“No Room”

This is what Christians say every day as they hurry from one activity to the next. There is no room in their schedules to accommodate an hour of prayer or twenty minutes of reading the Bible. There are too many other things in their lives, like work and time for friends and watching their favorite television shows and telling people about their lives on Facebook. They don't stop to think that their Maker might be interested if they told Him about their lives. They know they are turning away their Maker, but they tell themselves there will be plenty of time for Him later.

“No Room”

This is what Christians say when they are with other people. Other people have different opinions about religion and it's not nice to disagree. They don't want to be disliked. They don't want to tell their friends that anything they are doing is wrong. They don't stop to think that their Maker is listening to their conversations, too. They don't worry that slighting their Maker is a worse betrayal than slighting their friends.

“No Room”

This is what the public says about Christmas. It's too long of a word. “Mas” will be quite enough. There's no room for the “Christ.” Besides, it might offend someone. Other people can wish each other, “Happy Hannukah” or “Happy Kwanza,” but if we say, “Merry Christmas,” someone might be offended. There's no room for anything but “Happy Holidays.” Christmas is a time of Santa Claus and make believe reindeer. There is no time to read the Christmas story around the tree. Christmas is for presents and loud, gaudy music more than for humbly praising God for salvation. The public doesn't care that they're turning away their Maker. They don't think they need Him.

“No Room”

Is this what Jesus will say when we come to the gates of heaven? What would you do if you had a friend who you gave your life for, even if you only had a friend that you gave a bunch of money to, and your friend never had time to call you or read the e-mails you sent? What if your friend partied on your birthday, but made up a different excuse for celebrating and didn't even think of you on your day? If this is what we are saying to Jesus, don't you think He will probably say, “No room”? ☹

dreams

by Sarah Kaylee

photography by Isaac Swanson

dreams
impossible?
or at least that how it seems,
especially in this cold world.
people just throw them away,
give up, refuse to stay.

on our own they truly are,
unreachable,
we just always, surely...
fail.
on our own we are nothing.

but I know someone,
who can do anything.
makes strength in our weakness.
and that one thing?
a dream?
with Him,
it CAN happen.

trust Him.
believe,
He won't let you down,
leave you,
or hurt you.

dreams are possible,
love God,
with all that you are,
all your life...
He makes dreams come true. 0



World, Love My Jesus

by Priscilla Carsten

World, love my Jesus
Let Him take your hurt and fear
Fill your loneliness
Give your life meaning and worth
Won't you please love my Jesus?

I know you might laugh
I hope you aren't offended
But I know He's real
And I want to help you so
Won't you please love my Jesus?

He wants to be your friend
He'll listen to all your pain
And help you through it
Holding your hand through trouble
Won't you please love my Jesus?

He's the only One
Who can give your life meaning
He cares about you
He'll stay beside you always
Won't you please love my Jesus? 



Photography by Rebekah M.

by Priscilla Carsten

Alison sketched the greasy hair drooping around the gaunt face with its jaded eyes and sharp nose. Unsettled, she tore out the page and shredded it. That girl could not be her sister! Alison longed to call her friend Yolanda, but somehow she felt paralyzed. Not even her friend's upbeat response could soothe her nerves and guilt. Even now, her aunt was meeting with the police, breathlessly hoping that her niece was alive. Alison just wanted to wake up from the nightmare.

Her cell phone rang. "Hi Yolanda." The enthusiasm that made Alison a favorite in high school had drained from her voice.

"Hey, don't worry," Yolanda said, unperturbed. "She's long gone, and no one will ever know she's your sister."

"You know," Alison choked miserably.

Alison could imagine Yolanda's sly brown eyes. "I won't tell. You're my friend. But seriously, they'll never find Leigh, and she won't follow you around anymore. Forget the whole thing and help me plan my Christmas party. Well, call me if you hear anything else. 'Bye.'"

A few months ago, Leigh had been a likeable, fun-loving new senior, but as her appearance declined, so had her friendships. The funny thing was that even after they shunned her, Leigh kept trying to talk to Alison. Yolanda even joked about "Alison's stalker." Finally one day, Yolanda told Leigh to leave Alison alone, and Alison herself had agreed. Then, not quite a week later, Leigh stopped coming to school. When the secretaries could not get ahold of her by phone, two of them drove to the address she had given them at registration. They found an abandoned old house with a broken window and snowdrifts on the floor. There was a fresh stack of wood by the fireplace, so they began to think that Leigh might have really lived there. When they saw the dust-free upstairs, they knew. The police got involved, and somehow the local newspaper learned about it and put in an article. A lady called the police station anonymously and said she knew who Leigh was. Her name was Amy Leigh Walker.

Amy, Alison's sister, had been presumed dead in the car accident fourteen years ago, along with her parents. Alison, almost two at the time, remembered them more from pictures than real life. It was a strange feeling to suddenly have a living sister. If only it were someone other than Leigh.

Alison wondered how Leigh had eaten while in that house, or if she had eaten much at all. She had never had lunch at the school. On the other hand, a lot of kids did go home to eat, but Leigh had no job; no one wanted an employee who looked like that. How could she afford groceries?

The answer stumbled into her brain at last: the soup kitchen. Alison had never been there before. More for the walk and feeling of doing something than because she cared about her sister, Alison got up from the table and went out to find it.

Alison blinked, adjusting her eyes to the dimly flickering lights of the church basement. She closed the door behind her as something brushed against her arm and a low voice muttered "excuse me." A muted hum flowed through the room as the people churned around her. Alison aimed for the clinking of bowls in the kitchen, avoiding snow puddles on the floor and wishing for a speedy exit. "Hey! Back of the line!" called a weather-beaten woman, and a chorus of agreement followed. A portly volunteer with her identifying yellow shirt bustled past with several empty coffee pots. Alison asked her, "Do you know anything about Leigh Johnson?"

"Sorry, Hon, I can't keep track of who everyone is," the volunteer replied, leaving Alison feeling stupid. There were no more volunteers in sight, and since the people in line still stared, she stood next to a table and watched them go by.

It was an interesting spectacle, but the main impression she got of each face was weariness and hunger. She watched men gulping down their soup and women thanking the volunteers

as if they had just fished them out of the ocean. A haggard young woman tried desperately to keep track of her two preschoolers while holding a baby. A yellow-shirted volunteer came up beside the woman. "Here, sit down. I'll bring your soup."

Startled, Alison recognized Wendy, an odd classmate she had never gotten along with. Now Wendy was kneeling down next to a little boy. "What's your favorite animal?" she asked.

"G'raff. They're big."

Wendy grinned at him. "I like giraffes, too, but tigers are my favorite. They look so fierce." She made a scary face, and he giggled. Alison cringed. That face looked as terrible as Wendy's square glasses. Wendy boosted the boy up above her head. "Pretend you're a giraffe." She circled around a couple times before depositing him next to his mother. Struggling to the kitchen, she grabbed three bowls and filled them with steaming knefla soup. She talked to them for awhile, and before she went back to the kitchen, the boy had a stuffed giraffe in his arms, and his little sister cuddled a cloth doll.

Alison watched, wondering if she had misjudged Wendy. "Hey Wendy!" she called. "Can I talk to you for a minute?" Wendy's eyebrows rose above her square glasses. Alison almost never talked to her, and when she did, it usually was not a pleasant conversation. Alison waited confidently for her to come over, but instead Wendy said, "Sure, but wait 'til the rush is over. This is a tough time to talk." Alison watched her glide through the crowd to the kitchen. Ignoring her surroundings, Alison made pictures out of the waterspots on the ceiling.

Twenty minutes later, Wendy caught Alison's arm and towed her to the kitchen. "I'm washing dishes now, so I'll be in one place. Now what did you want to say?" Wendy poured some dishsoap into the steaming water in the sink.

"What do you know about Leigh?"

"Why should I tell you what I know?" snapped Wendy.

"She's my sister."

Wendy's eyes narrowed skeptically, and she scrubbed the cup in her hand more vigorously.

"Seriously. After she disappeared and was in the paper, some lady called and said that Leigh was really Amy Walker, my sister that died.

"How does that work? I mean, Leigh's alive."

Alison smiled faintly. "We thought she was dead, but apparently not."

"Oh." Wendy was still skeptical. Alison had played tricks on her before. She studied Alison's expression for any hint of being over-sincere. Eventually, she put down the rag. "Well, I have her notebook. But if this is a joke..."

"Look, I'm sorry about that. I shouldn't have done that to you."

Wendy shrugged awkwardly and reached into her oversized purse. "Let's go upstairs; it's quieter."

They sat down on the fluffy green carpet of the entry and Alison began leafing through Leigh's notes. "English, math, not so much. I hope she

has something in here besides notes."

"Can't tell you," Wendy replied, "but if it was me, I'd use the back." Alison turned it over indulgently, and sure enough, inside the back cover there was a line of dates and short entries.

"Hey, hey. You sure called that one." Alison offered Wendy a high five.

Aug 23- Mrs. Nellie Johnson found me curled up by the side of the road, badly bleeding. She called the police and took me home and took care of me. The police couldn't find anyone who lost me, and Mrs. Johnson offered to let me stay with her. I told her my name was Leigh. After all these years, I decided to try to find my real family, since she can't afford to keep me longer, writing for the Littleton Weekly. I checked the obituaries for the day she found me, and I guess I am Amy Leigh Walker. I have a little sister, Alison, somewhere. I'm going to the town where the paper was printed.

"I don't get it," Wendy said. "Why didn't the police know who she was?"

"The gas line caught fire. They couldn't tell who had been in the car, and they assumed all the passengers were accounted for."

Wendy nodded comprehensively.

Sept 15- I found a place to stay and fixed it up. Enrolled in school, am searching the phone book and last year's school annual for Walker.

"Not a very good place to stay," said Alison reflectively. "I wish I had realized... I mean, all that trouble to find me, and I wasn't even nice to her. Poor Leigh!"

Sept 19- I found Alison!

Oct 4- She lives with her aunt

Oct 5- Birthday Nov 9

“She even wrote down my birthday.” Allison was ready to cry.

Oct 17- Visited Wendy from kitchen

Oct 25- Went to see Mrs. Johnson. Health better.

Oct 26- Alison’s friends don’t like me.

Nov 8- My litter sister hates me.

“Wendy! I made her think I hated her. That’s why she left. Do you think we’ll ever find her?”

“Hope so. Anyway, go ahead and keep the notebook.”

“Thanks Wendy.” It was getting dark, and Wendy got up to go home. Alison listened until the footsteps faded into nothingness. Pulling the pen from the spiral, Alison wrote. “Leigh, I’m sorry. Please come home. Alison.” Then she looked up the number of the Littleton Weekly. “Hi. I’d like to place a personal ad,” she said.

The lights on the Christmas tree danced across the red-clad tables and the frosty windows. Alison reached over and twisted on the fire-safe plastic candles on each table. The aroma of the turkeys and gravy wafted around her as the subtle music drew shivers of anticipation up her back.

“Ho, Ho, Ho!” cried a female voice behind her, and Alison turned and saw Wendy, weighed down with an armful of wrapped shoeboxes, stumbling toward the tree. “Merr-rry Christmas Alison!”

Giggling, Alison ran to her assistance. “Santa, I think you overloaded this time!”

“And there are more where these came from. I must have wrapped a hundred of these this weeeek!”

Alison grinned. She had boxed up at least that many toys. “I bet it helped you get your technique down.”

“That it did. And Sarah’s bringing the manger scene, so leave a space for it.” Wendy grinned. “The people will be thrilled. It will be just like a family Christmas party.”

“Okay.” Alison looked down at her feet, wondering what it would have been like to spend Christmas with her sister.

Wendy read her thoughts. “Alison, I’m sorry about Leigh. You haven’t heard anything else?”

Alison sighed. “Mrs. Johnson told me Leigh visited her and said she would never come back here. She is going East to look for a job and some adventure. Mrs. Johnson said Leigh cut out the advertisement and took it with her, so at least she knows I don’t hate her.” Alison ran her hand across her eyes. “But there are some things I can never take back.”

Wendy said nothing, just put her arm around Alison. ☹

The Full Armor of God

by Zachary Azzarito

Life is like a battleground. We are going to experience times of success, failure, difficult, and peace. We are always having to fight against the things we want to do because it's how the world "has fun". It's easy to want to get wrapped up in them. Yet, Christians are given the tools to fight back. Just as soldiers go into battle prepared, so do the sons and daughters of God.

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;"

This is a passage from the 6th chapter of Ephesians talking about the Armor of God. Let's break down what Paul is talking about here as the Armor of God. The first item that lays the foundation, and helps to hold things together is the Belt of Truth. Girding your loins with truth



Picture from <http://karenswhimsy.com/knights-armor.shtml>

is another way of talking about fastening a belt around your waist. Truth is what lays the foundation for fighting against sin and the devil. Knowing what is true will help us in making the right decisions in life and knowing that our God is true and faithful. If we don't know what is true, then how can we believe God, know what is right and wrong, and make the right decisions? So putting on that belt of truth is the foundation of living a Godly life.

Now we take a look at the breastplate of righteousness. Righteousness is the ability to know what is right and wrong, and then make the Godly decision. What's interesting is that righteousness is described as a breastplate. Breastplates protect the heart. In a spiritual sense, our heart is where our desires in life come from. So when we put on that breastplate of righteousness, we are protecting our heart, letting it's desires line up with God's righteousness.

When we talk about reaching out to people, and taking the Gospel to different places, we don't go there on our hands, or our head. We use our feet. Our feet take us places. That is why we prepare our feet for the Gospel of truth, to take it where God is leading us to.

Shields are the pieces of armor that are used as the main article of defense. Just like in our walk in life, the shield of faith is our main defense. When we are unsure of ourselves, our situations, or going through trials and temptations, we can always fall back on our faith to lead us through and to overcome these temptations. Our faith is what keeps us going, and protects us the most. This why Paul describes faith as a shield, the foundation of defense and protection.

The helmet of salvation is always a powerful

one for me. It's what protects our minds. In Romans Chapter 12 is says, "Therefore do not be conformed to the ways of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Our salvation begins with the mental realization that we need Jesus, and the decision to follow Him. As we put on the Helmet of Salvation that God has given us, we will be ready to make wise decisions and lead a Godly life with "our heads on straight".

Finally, our weapon of warfare, the sword of the Spirit. When we face trials and temptations, hard times, good times, the armor that God gives us protects us. However, we can't just sit there and continue to take a beating; we've got to fight back. God gives us the perfect weapon, His Word. The Bible gives us everything we need to lead a Godly life and to fight back against what the devil throws at us. That is why we call the word of God our sword.

As you wake up each morning, preparing for school and life, I encourage you to put on the armor of God so that you can live a life that is honoring and pleasing to Him. When we continue to seek Him, God will give us the Armor that we need to honor Him each and every day. ☺



Mary's Joy

Luke 1:46-55 (NKJV)

And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy, As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever."

Mary is a popular topic of sermons, plays, songs, and dinner-table discussions around the Christmas season. People talk about how old she was, how she must have been frightened, and what kind of disapproval she faced

for her pregnancy. The Bible, however, doesn't mention any of these things. Instead, it tells of Mary's willingness to be obedient to God.

The Bible doesn't mention age at all, but refers to Mary as "His mother" in Matthew and "a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph" in Luke. In fact, Mary's age doesn't matter. God doesn't choose or judge people based on their age, but based on their actions.

Secondly, betrothal in Bible times was different than engagement is today. Matthew 1:18 says, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit." The next verse begins "Then Joseph her husband." This indicates that at the time Joseph was already considered Mary's husband, and that people would not view Jesus as an illegitimate child.

Thirdly, Mary's words in the Luke 1:46-55 pas-

sage indicate that instead of being worried and frightened at becoming the mother of Jesus, she was happy and thankful, even excited. While her words in this passage are more of a reply to her cousin Elizabeth than a prayer, they reveal much about Mary's attitude toward God.

Mary's joy shines in her little speech. She said her spirit rejoices in God, that God has done great things for her, and that all generations will call her blessed, which indeed they have. She was excited and happy that God chose her to be the mother of His Son.

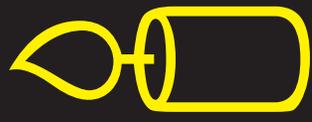
Her humility also stands out. She called herself a maidservant of God. She also celebrated God's choice on behalf of the poor, hungry, and lowly. She didn't credit His choice to her goodness or godliness, but accepted that she did nothing to deserve the great blessing that she received. She said, "My soul magnifies the Lord." She gave God all the glory for the miracle He was working out for the salvation of men.

Most of all, Mary focused on God. In conversation, people tend to talk about themselves most frequently. "I" and "me" are a couple of the most common words in the English language. But if you examine what Mary said, she mentioned herself infrequently, but made God central. She talked about what God was doing for herself and for all Israel, and praised His might, mercy, and faithfulness.

In contrast to what popular rhetoric tells us, the Bible shows us that Mary did not view her role as the mother of Jesus as worrisome or an imposition, but rejoiced in God's favor and felt honored to do God's will.

When we pray that can be a hard thing to do.

We know that the Bible says God has a plan for us, but sometimes we become more concerned about what following God's will and ways might cost us than how they bless us. But Mary chose a better way. She knew that God's intended to bring salvation and blessing to the world by sending His Son, and we can trust that whatever situation God sends us into will likewise result in His glory and blessings to the world. In our prayers and in our lives, let us delight to do God's will and feel blessed that He allows us to be a part of it. 



LL Magazine

Matthew 5:16