



DREAMING OF A **White Space** **CHRISTMAS**

What happens when the traditions of the season obscure the birth of Jesus?

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New Year's Day 2012. I found myself standing in the wake of Christmas—a trail of wrapping paper, bank statements, and chocolate fondue pots strewn throughout the month of December. I was exhausted. All I had to show for the Advent season were bags under my eyes, a new bathrobe, and a husband who knew better than to talk to me until I had my first three cups of coffee.

Hindsight can be hard on a girl. I should have smelled Christmas coming. I should have forecasted it as I swallowed my last bite of pumpkin pie. I should have noticed how the month of December in our calendar was blacked out by office parties, church gatherings, and family celebrations. It was disguised in the taste of Starbucks peppermint mochas and shopping lists, but I should have known. Christmas was coming like a

big, overwhelming tidal wave—about to wash over me, knock me around a few times, and leave me on the shores of the new year wondering what had just occurred.

In November everything made sense. I knew what Advent was about. Tradition. Family. Community. Everything scheduled for the optimum Christmas experience. Pancakes with Santa. Don't forget about the annual Christmas cookie exchange. The craft fair. Choir rehearsals. Grab bags. White elephants.

Then December hit and I burned out the first week. As I tried to maneuver through everything I had scheduled, I immediately realized it was all too much. Even when my Batmobile lost a couple of wheels, I kept moving—for the sake of saving face, for good will toward all and all that.

All those well-intentioned things left me in a candy-cane-induced stupor, stumbling into church on Christmas morning. I was wound tightly after cooking our traditional breakfast, opening gifts, packing our Jeep full of more yuletide goodness for another family celebration, and outfitting my children in their matching Christmas attire. I was feeling inconvenienced that Christmas fell on a Sunday. Seriously, I had so much to do. I knew we needed to celebrate the birth of Christ, but how was that going to fit with our schedule?

And there it was. Laid bare like an ugly sore airing itself out. As I sat down for the first time in days, I was overwhelmed by a holy sadness. I had missed it. In all my fa-la-la'ing, in all my eggnog drinking and outfit coordinating, I had missed him—Jesus, born to a teenage girl without an epidural in a dirty stable two thousand years ago, the birth that changed the history of everything. In my frenzied state of chaos, I had dropped my gaze from Jesus and fixed my eyes on whatever was before me. Prone to wander, Lord,

I feel it, especially at Christmas.

I am ever learning.

I know that Christmas time calls for a posture of holiness—a time that is set apart from all other seasons, a time to remember our infinite God contained in a swaddling babe. Let's not pretend we have truly wrapped our minds around that last sentence. *Fully God. Fully diapered.* Should all things Christmas point toward that miracle?

Um, yes. As one who believes that this Event did indeed change everything, I need to find a way to face Advent head-on. Eyes fixed. Heart set. But what does that look like? When we are standing in the middle of November, red

Sharpie poised toward those few short weeks of December, how do we keep our gaze fixed on Jesus?

One of my favorite passages in Scripture is Luke 2:19: "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." She had just given birth, for the first time, in a barnlike atmosphere. She was unwed. Mary was a baby herself. She had strange visitors in the stable, shepherds who confirmed what Gabriel had told her months before. This child she had just birthed was indeed the Messiah her people had been waiting for. What a rush! But what was Mary's response? She treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. She didn't tweet about it. She didn't make birth announcements on Snapfish. She treasured her good news. She pondered that this little baby, borne of her own body, was going to save her world and the rest of humankind. No big deal.

I want to be like Mary. I want to create space in my life to ponder. I want the opportunity to treasure the good news that I have been given. I

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want to stay calm in the flurry of the Advent season, eyes fixed on Jesus. For me, that will take the form of more white spaces on our December calendar. I am committed to protecting set times for reflection and restoration.

That means I have to learn to be OK with disappointing people, OK even with breaking tradition so that my heart can be aligned with the One who made it. I am going to plan a few meaningful moments and conversa-

tions with my children and husband that point toward Jesus. I am not going to rush through gatherings, mind already on the next event. I am going to take opportunities to look my family mem-

bers in the eyes and encourage their hearts when we speak. My husband and I are going to be purposeful with our gifts this year, knowing that all things Christmas should point toward the miracle that is Christ Jesus.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Let us treasure what we know. Let us ponder how to make this Advent season one in which all things point toward the Promise we hold—the Promise delivered in baby form. Let's not let Christmas just happen to us this year. Let us not get so caught up in all the good things that our perfect thing gets lost in eggnog frenzy. Let us face it head on, full of intention and celebration. Let us choose what to celebrate wisely. Let us not get tangled up in the garland of "should dos." Let's be OK breaking tradition for the promise of what is sacred and good.

Christmas 2012. I can smell it coming. But I am so ready for this. I have my red Sharpie, ready to do some damage. ■

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