

The Problems and Pressures Of Christmas

Romans 15:13

Christmas feels heavy this time of year. Christmas is supposed to be magical. Joyful. Peaceful. That's what the commercials tell us. But for many of us, Christmas doesn't feel like *peace on earth*. It feels more like *pressure*. Pressure to buy the right gifts. Pressure to create perfect memories. Pressure to attend every party, cook every meal, smile through every conversation. And the pressure doesn't just come from the outside—it comes from inside us.

We want Christmas to *fix things*. Fix family tension. Fix loneliness. Fix grief. Fix our faith, but instead of feeling lighter, we feel heavier. Sometimes Christmas feels like a burden instead of a blessing.

We hear a lot about many characters in the Christmas story. Along with the Christmas celebration come the Christmas challenges! But we also learn about the one thing we need – Hope!

Hope is one of those church words that sounds strong...until life makes it feel fragile. We sing about hope. We post verses about hope. We tell people, "*Just keep hoping.*" But sometimes hope doesn't feel like a soaring eagle. Sometimes it feels like a flickering candle in a dark room—still burning, but barely. And if you're honest, you might be thinking: "*I believe in hope... I'm just not sure I feel it anymore.*" That's where I want to begin—because the Bible doesn't shame thin hope. It speaks directly to it.

Hope is not positive thinking.

Hope is not pretending everything will be okay.

Hope is not denial dressed up as faith.

Optimism says, "*Things will probably work out.*"

Biblical hope says, "*Even if they don't, God is still at work.*"

Hope isn't an idea. Hope isn't a verse on a coffee mug. Hope is a Person. Jesus didn't come to give hope. Jesus is hope!

Romans 15:13 says, "*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*"

Notice what Paul does not say:

- May your circumstances improve.
- May your questions disappear.
- May your pain be explained.

He says, "*May the God of hope fill you.*" Hope doesn't come from outcomes. Hope comes from who God is. If our hope depends on what happens, it will collapse when life doesn't.

Hebrews 6:19 says, "*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.*"

An anchor doesn't remove the storm. It keeps you from drifting while the storm rages. Some of us are praying for escape when God is offering an anchor. Hope doesn't always change your situation. Sometimes it changes what holds you steady inside it.

Notice where the anchor is placed. Not in our strength. Not in our faithfulness. Not in our understanding. Our hope is anchored behind the curtain—in the presence of God Himself. Hope isn't about getting out of the storm. It's about not being swept away by it.

This is what we learned the first Christmas from Mary and Joseph. There were real problems and real pressures. The First Christmas was stressful too.

We tend to romanticize the first Christmas. Soft music. Clean animals. Peaceful faces. But the first Christmas was full of problems. Mary is pregnant... and not married. Joseph is confused, hurt, and considering walking away. They're forced to travel while expecting a baby. There's no room. No comfort. No plan B. This is not a Hallmark moment. This is anxiety. This is uncertainty. This is pressure. And yet—this is exactly where God shows up. God didn't wait until everything was calm. He entered *the chaos*. There were challenges the first Christmas.

- There were FAITH CHALLENGES.

“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. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.’ So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’ Then Joseph, being awakened from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.” Matthew 1:18-25

There were problems and pressures that first Christmas. There were also promises and peace that first Christmas as well. Christmas is all about the Promises.

1. Joseph Helps Us Discover That, For Every Problem, There Is A Promise.

- Trust God's Promises In The Middle Of Doubt.

Joseph was wondering – should he break off this engagement?

“Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet.” Matthew 1:22

“Fulfill” is the key word in the Gospel of Matthew. Every prophecy of God is also a promise that the prophecy will come true.

Romans 15:13 says hope overflows *“as you trust in Him.”* Not when you understand Him. Not when you feel Him. But when you trust Him.

Trust is choosing God when the emotions haven't caught up yet. Trust is obedience when clarity hasn't arrived. Trust is praying, *“God, I don't see it—but I'm still following You.”*

Faith isn't a feeling—it's a decision. And hope grows in the soil of that decision.

- God's way is not always the softest way.
- God's way is not always the safest way.
- God's way is always the surest way to His blessing and His protection.

God's plan for Joseph was a lot bigger than Joseph's plan for Joseph.

2. Mary Helps Us Discover That, For Every Promise, There Is A Provision.

“In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.’ ‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’ The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.’ ‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May your word to me be fulfilled.’ Then the angel left her.” Luke 1:26-38

- Trust God's Promises In The Middle Of Difficulty.
- There are the FAMILY CHALLENGES.

“The angel said, behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and will call His name JESUS.” Luke 1:26-27

“Mary asked the angel, ‘But how can I have a baby? I am a virgin.’ The angel replied, ‘The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of God shall overshadow you. For every promise from God shall surely come true.’” Luke 1:34-35, 37

“For nothing will be impossible with God.” Luke 1:37

Mary is not left to wonder how God will keep His promise. We learn from Mary that for every promise there is a provision. The reason why God was able to use Mary in such a great and a mighty way is because she decided to believe God's Word.

Mary’s cousin, Elizabeth, said, “You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what He promised.” Luke 1:45

God's promises are not just to be believed, they are to be acted on.

“Mary responded, ‘I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to accept whatever He wants. May everything you have said come true.’” Luke 1:38

The secret to Mary's greatness was in her relationship with God. When we understand why God chose Mary, it gives all of us hope of why He would choose us. Mary was the only person who was present at both the birth of Christ and His crucifixion. Mary was the woman who saw Jesus come into the world as her son and leave the world as her Savior. Mary is the best-known woman in the history of the world.

Her name occurs over 51 times in the New Testament. She has every reason to be worry, but instead of worrying, she worshipped. Instead of panicking, she praised. When you are in over your head, and it is getting more dangerous and difficult, don't worry – worship, don't panic - praise.

- There are the FINANCIAL CHALLENGES.

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.’” Matthew 2:1-2

“On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.” Matthew 2:11

“When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up,’ he said, ‘take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.’ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’” Matthew 2:19-20

They had travel expenses: food and water for themselves and for their animals.

We know that Mary and Joseph were not wealthy people. When they brought Jesus to the temple for his version of our dedication, they offered the lowest level of an offering. This was allowed by the Levitical law if you were a poor person.

“And she offered a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: a pair of doves or two young pigeons.” Luke 2:24

3. Jesus Helps Us Discover That, For Every Provision, There Is A Purpose.

“For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:11

There is no recorded birth in scripture after the birth of Jesus Christ. The last genealogy or family tree listed in the New Testament is the family tree of Jesus. The entire Bible pointed to the birth and the name of Jesus.

Why would He leave the glory of heaven to come to a planet where He would be ridiculed, rejected, and crucified as a common criminal? The only reason He came was because He was the only one who could. He was the only one who could come and take the sin of the world because everyone else already had the world's sin. We can never fully understand the sacrifice that Jesus made to come and live among us and die for us.

Sin is the human race's biggest problem, and a Savior became the human race's only solution. For the problem of sin, God made a promise that He would send a Savior.

“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Philippians 2:8

He left heaven and came to earth to live among us as a man, not only to live among us, but to die for us. He didn't become a man just so He could live. He became a man so He could die. He experienced the pain of death and the wrath of hell so that we wouldn't have to. Jesus did not have to die. Jesus was under no obligation to come to die for us that we might be saved. God didn't send Jesus because He had to. He sent Jesus because He wanted to.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whosoever shall believe in him will not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

“Christ Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame.” Hebrews 12:2

Jesus did not come to die a dignified death. He came to die a glorified death. He died a sacrificial death, the just for the unjust, so we could be saved.

You are in one of three positions in your spiritual journey.

- You already know Jesus Christ as your Savior, and you have surrendered your life to Him.
- You haven't yet made the decision to receive Christ.
- You know Jesus Christ, but you've drifted away from Him, and you are not walking with Him like you should.

“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:9-10

To bow the knee is a sign of surrender. It is something you do when you're going to worship someone and pay total homage to the person so honored. Paul makes it plain that every knee will bow, whether by choice or by force. Every knee above us in heaven, whether it be angels or men, is going to bow. Every knee around us on earth, whether believer or unbeliever, is going to bow. Every knee under us, the devil and his demons, are going to bow, and we're going to accept His Lordship.

One day all creation will bow to our Lord. Even now, among angels, His name is adored. May we at His coming with glorified throng, stand singing His praises in heaven's great song: “Jesus, Jesus, Savior adored-of all men and angels forever the Lord.”

Christmas night was a Holy Night because on that night the only One in all of the universe who could save us, Jesus Christ the Lord, was born.

- Jesus was born as a man, so that He could relate to us.
- Jesus died as a Savior so He could redeem us.
- Jesus was raised as Lord that He might rule over us.

If your hope feels thin today, know this: God is not disappointed in you. Jesus is not distant from you. The Holy Spirit is not done in you.

You don't need stronger hope. You need a stronger grip on the God of hope. So hold on. Even if it's with trembling hands. Even if it's with whispered prayers. Even if it's just enough to say, *“Jesus, I'm still here.”* Because hope doesn't let go of you—God does.

When hope feels thin, Jesus is thicker than your doubt, stronger than your fear, and faithful beyond what you can see.