

Timmy's
Spiritual
Christmas

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Published by
Inscript Books
a division of Dove Christian Publishers
P.O. Box 611
Bladensburg, MD 20710-0611
www.dovechristianpublishers.com

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Cover Design by Paul Bobkowski, Sr.

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ISBN: 978-1-7343032-7-8

Printed in the United States of America

Chapter One

Miracles

C'mon, Mom, why do I have to go to Sunday school, anyway? For the last few weeks, all our teacher has been talking about is the Bible Christmas Story. She hasn't even mentioned Santa Claus, or presents, or putting up a Christmas tree."

Timothy Albert Dennison, better known to all as "Timmy," was the nine-year-old almost grown-up baby of the Dennison family. His older sister, Lindy, short for Melinda, was a freshman in college and was about to return home for Christmas break. Matthew, second of the three Dennison children, was a junior in high school and the current star of the basketball team. Timmy's dad was a history teacher at the local middle school. His mom was a full-time homemaker, part-time "mom-helper" at school, part-time volunteer at St. Alban's Hospital, and part-time assistant at Cookie's Bakery.

At nine years of age, Timmy was caught in that magic time warp where Mom, Dad, and he did this little dance where it was almost impossible to tell who was fooling

whom with the whole Santa Claus thing. His mom and dad knew that Timmy was approaching the age where he would question the existence of Santa Claus. They continued to talk and act as if Santa were the moving force of the Christmas Season. For his part, Timmy did the same. He didn't want to disappoint his parents by letting on that he was having some doubts. Already, some of Timmy's classmates had declared that they no longer believed Santa to be real, but Timmy had fought the urge to fall in with them.

Timmy's family had recently moved from the southern part of Wynhope to the northern region, where they now lived just three houses away from Timmy's maternal grandparents. His mom and dad were involved with their jobs. Matt seemed to be always at practice or at a game. With Lindy away at school, the household was quiet most afternoons, leaving Timmy to his own devices. Consequently, Timmy spent an extraordinary amount of time with "Gram" and "Gramp." More often than not, Timmy would stop on the way home from school and spend an hour or two with his grandparents. They cherished his visits and always made time for whatever was going on in his busy little life. He frequently ran things by Gram and Gramp and looked to them for assurance and advice. He once confided to his mom, "They understand me better than anyone else."

The non-denominational church that they all attended, "The Way," was grounded in the fundamental tenets of Christianity. It served about a hundred families in the area. It was a little more appealing to Timmy because the families of several classmates worshipped there. During the Advent

Season, the church focused on the scriptural references to The Christmas Story. Sermons, as well as Sunday school lessons, were centered on the “real Christmas” as told throughout the Scriptures. While he didn’t want to ruin a good thing and break the Santa atmosphere of Christmases past, Timmy was intrigued by some of the awareness that Scripture was beginning to open up for him. He found himself thinking more and more about what this Christmas thing was really all about.

During the First Sunday of Advent, the Lauden family had been selected to light the first candle in the advent wreath, the candle of “hope.” During the lighting, they read to the congregation a short dialogue of scriptural passages about hope. Timmy had never paid much attention to the lighting of the candles; however, for some reason, he listened to those thoughts of hope and expectancy. His thoughts of hope had always been related to what Santa Claus would bring. He had never thought about hope as it related to a spiritual Christmas and the hope that the birth of Jesus would bring to a troubled world.

Timmy was a fourth-grader at Wynhope Elementary School. Wynhope was a relatively small K-6 school of about two-hundred-forty students. Timmy’s class had twenty-three students, many of whom had been in school together since kindergarten. Timmy had always been an outstanding student and easily focused on his schoolwork. He was an eager learner and almost always on task.

School on Monday was the usual thing. Yet, on this particular day, his mind was wandering back to the

previous day's Sunday school discussion about hope and miracles. *Why am I thinking about this now?* he wondered. Never before had he given Sunday school so much as a second thought, especially when he should have been paying attention in class. But Sunday school had awakened something in him. He felt as though he had stepped into a new room and needed to familiarize himself with all the new and different things it had to offer.

Dismissal came right after the class did their math lesson. Timmy held his breath in dreaded anticipation of a lengthy assignment. To his gleeful surprise, tonight, there would be no math homework. Hooray! He hustled out of school and started on the fifteen-minute walk that would take him right to his grandparents' house. When he arrived, he found Gramp busy putting up some outdoor decorations. Timmy gave him a big hug, left him to his tangle of Christmas lights, and went inside to see Gram. He settled in at the kitchen table where Gram let him "test" her latest batch of Christmas cookies. Timmy knew that Gram didn't need anyone to "test" her cookies; they were always delicious. The testing was one of Gram's clever ways of getting around the fact that Timmy's mom didn't like him snacking before supper. Nevertheless, as Gram put it, "I need someone to test these out before I bring 'em to the Church Cookie Exchange."

"Duty calls," Timmy said as he quickly snarfed a handful of cookies and sat at the kitchen table. After a few cookies and several gulps of milk, Timmy turned to Gram and tentatively asked, "Hey Gram, what's a miracle?"

Gram answered with a question of her own. "Why do you ask?"

“My Sunday school teacher, Mrs. Fuhrman, said that the birth of Jesus was a miracle.”

“It was, indeed.”

“Yeah, I know, but ... every time you see a baby, you call it a miracle. Isn’t every birth a miracle?”

“Well, yes ... in a way ... but ...”

“Yesterday when the Giants finally won a game, Gramp jumped up and down and shouted, ‘It’s a miracle! It’s a miracle!’”

Gram laughed. “I guess,” she quipped, “different people mean different things when they use the word ‘miracle.’”

“Well, what do you think a miracle is?”

“First of all, I don’t think it’s a miracle when a team wins a ballgame. It may be a rare event, but it’s not a miracle.”

“Aren’t rare events miracles?” he persisted.

“Miracles are definitely rare events, but not all rare events are miracles.” She paused and carefully formed her next statement. “I think a miracle is when some force outside of nature interferes with the laws of nature.”

“Like, what kind of force?” asked Timmy.

“Well, honey, for you and me, God would be such a force.”

“What’s a law of nature?”

“You study those in school. Gravity is a good example. If you pick up a stone and then let it drop from your hand, what happens?”

“It falls to the ground.”

“Do you think it would ever float up to the sky?”

“Of course not ...”

“Unless ... someone or something momentarily changes the Law of Gravity.”

"Gram, only God could do that."

"Exactly. And if He did, it would be a miracle..."

"Can we get back to Jesus' birth? Why was that a miracle?"

"Because, when God chose Mary to be Jesus' mother, His life in Mary's womb didn't begin in the usual way."

She paused and thought for a moment before continuing.

"Why don't you go fetch my Bible."

Timmy went into the TV room and got Gram's Bible from her reading table. After he returned and handed it to her, she leafed through the pages for a moment. She then handed the Bible to Timmy and said, "So much of the Christmas Story is found here in the Gospel of Luke." She pointed to Luke 1:31 and said to Timmy, "Read from verse 31 to the end of verse 35."

Timmy carefully read, "'You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name, Jesus. He will be great and be called the Son of The Most High. The Lord will give Him the throne of His father, David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob 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 upon 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.''''

Timmy paused and then thoughtfully asked, "Who was this angel that was talking to Mary?"

"His name was Gabriel," answered Gram. "And he was sent by God to explain everything to Mary."

"How'd Mary know Gabriel was an angel? Did he have wings? How'd she even know about angels? How did he

get from heaven to earth?"

"Whoa, Whoa, Whoa! That's enough for now. You need to hustle home before your mom and dad send out a search party, and I need to finish my cookies. We can talk about angels another time."