

BREAD OF BETHLEHEM

By Mary Lambrecht, M.S. LMFT

Imagine that you wake up on Christmas morning, and there is a package under the tree with your name on it. A card on it says: "Please read before you open me." You open the card and it reads: "I am a gift that will never disappoint you. I will never break, never change, and once you receive me, I will never leave you. I will bring you joy, such as you've never experienced before. I won't keep all trials from you, but I promise to be with you in them, to be a light in them, to keep you on a safe path in them. Though I won't break, when you feel broken, I will mend you. When you are tired, I will carry you and if you are afraid, my voice will give you courage. If you become confused and disheartened, I will give you wisdom. Even when you die, you can still be with me. I already died for you, and now I live on forever. If you receive me with your heart, one day you can live forever with me too."

No gift has ever seemed this good to you. You fight skepticism because in the past, things that "seemed too good to be true" eventually turned out to be false. You figure, however, that you have nothing to lose by simply opening the package. You will decide what to do with it later. So you tear open the package. Inside the box is a fresh loaf of bread, with another note that says: "Break me open. I am the Bread of Bethlehem."

This seems odd. Up until now, "Bethlehem", for you and your family, simply gave some sort of spiritual meaning to Christmas. It was a manger with baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph, animals and an angel. But you simply can't resist this invitation. So you break the bread. It is then you realize how very hungry you are—a kind of hunger that seems deeper than just physical hunger. Breaking off a small piece, you eat it. It feels confusing yet comforting that, deep in your being, the tiny bread you broke off seems to fill these deeper, empty places. You not only feel less hungry, but you also feel strangely lighter—more hopeful, you think. Others sitting around the tree are now captivated with the bread in your hands. They sense something different in you and they want it too. You hand the bread to your son sitting next to you, and he takes and eats. He passes it on to his sister, his sister passes it to Grandpa, and the same thing happens. They take and eat. On and on the bread of Bethlehem is passed to each family member, and they take and eat.

A divine revelation then enters your mind, heart, and emotions. This gift is Jesus the Christ. He is the bread of life to your soul. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which in the Hebrew language means "the house of bread." Gently, He then touches all the hungry, weary places in you. You feel consoled, you feel quieted. Big and little concerns, that just moments ago were an all-consuming din in your mind, suddenly feel less urgent.

This bread is real. It is the living bread, which came down from heaven, was born in a Bethlehem manger, died on the cross for our sins, and promises eternal life to those that believe. This Christmas, do you want to accept this gift of life-giving bread? Do you want to then open it, eat it, and share it with your loved ones? God invites you to take and eat this bread, in remembrance that Christ gave the greatest gift just for you—His very life. Feed on His goodness, feed on His forgiveness. Feed on the knowledge that in eating of this bread, you will never hunger, never thirst, and will live forever with Him.

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