

as our Lord. We ask that we would live for him, as he has lived and died for us. We bow to him in faith. The faith and obedience he works in us create joy, at Christmastime and all year round. Wherever we go, even if we find ourselves at “the ends of earth,” he is our salvation. He is our reason to celebrate.

Taking It Home

Today as you leave, we want you to take with you this (*name the item*) as a reminder of all Jesus came to do—to do for you! Remember to see the cross each time you bow before the manger. Remember . . .

Jesus, born on earth to raise a fallen world;
Jesus, sent from God, fulfiller of his word;
Jesus, joy of all, Redeemer, Savior, Lord.

Yes, God has proven his Word true: “All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (Isaiah 52:10).

May you see that salvation more and more brightly this Christmas and all year round. And may you share it with increasing joy, too!

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The Scripture quotation is from the King James or Authorized Version of the Bible.

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**Expanding the Impact of Your
Gifts of Encouragement**

The Christmas Cross

Introduction

If you’ve ever lived in London, you know about Guy Fawkes and the holiday observed in the name of a traitor. Bonfires, straw dummies, and firecrackers all are a part of the celebration.

If you’ve ever lived in Japan, you know about Shichi-Go-San, or “Seven-Five-Three.” This ancient holiday celebrates children who are three, five, and seven years old.

If you’ve ever lived in Italy or Sweden, you may have observed Saint Lucia Day. Saint Lucia was a young Christian girl killed about 1,500 years ago by Roman soldiers for refusing to deny her faith. Parades, cakes, and candles often form a part of the celebration on her feast day.

If you’ve never lived in another country, you’ve likely never heard about these celebrations! Despite today’s worldwide communications capabilities, only a few holidays are celebrated worldwide. But Christmas is among them. Christmas is celebrated in almost every country on earth.

Getting to the Heart

Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah promised: “All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (Isaiah 52:10). Listen to that promise again. (*Reread the verse.*) Did you hear it? “All the ends of the earth!” We live at a time in which this promise has literally come true. The “salvation of our God” is being broadcast throughout the earth! Portions of the Bible are available in nearly 2,300 languages. Christmas has come—and is coming—into more and more places, into more and more hearts!

But what is this “salvation” that all the ends of the earth are seeing this Christmas and throughout the year?

Jesus, born on earth to raise a fallen world . . .

This salvation existed in the mind and heart of God from all eternity. God spoke—and our universe leapt into being. God fashioned it into a perfect home for human beings and placed the first people into that home. God intended that we live in joy as his children, his family, the objects of his eternal love in never-ending joy. He intended that nothing disrupt our peace or our ability to love him and one another fully.

But we rebelled. We cut ourselves off from our Creator. We thought we could live apart from him, independent of him. We fell into sin. Maybe you’ve heard the expression “He cut off his nose to spite his face.” That’s what our rebellion amounted to. We hurt ourselves—terribly—by it.

But you know the story doesn’t end there! God’s love for us didn’t stop when we sinned. Our rebellion could not drive him away or make him give us up. Instead, he sent his Son,

Jesus, to rescue us. Jesus came down to raise us up! That’s what Christmas is all about!

Jesus, sent from God, fulfiller of his word . . .

A baby born to save the world! God kept the promise he had made on the very day sin entered his good creation. But the birth of a baby—even the birth of the God-man, Jesus—wasn’t enough to effect our rescue.

That baby grew up to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to teach us what God is like, and to model that for us. In Jesus, we see the perfect picture of our Father’s anger at our sin and yet also, the Father’s commitment to rescue us. But the ministry of a great teacher—even the ministry of the God-man, Jesus—wasn’t enough to effect our rescue.

Behind the manger, above the manger, in the manger, we see the cross and the empty tomb. In the manger, we see the bloody death by which Jesus would win our salvation. And in the manger, we see our Rescuer’s Easter victory. All this in fulfillment of God’s Word!

(Read some or all of the following prophetic Scriptures, perhaps from a translation or paraphrase that will shed new light on them for your hearers: Isaiah 9:6–7; 53:2–6; Psalm 22:1–2, 6–8, 22, 25, 29.)

Jesus, joy of all, Redeemer, Savior, Lord.

By his birth, his ministry, his death, and his resurrection, Jesus became the joy of all who believe. By doing all this for us, Jesus became our Redeemer, our Savior.

What can we say in response? What can we do in the face of all this? We simply believe it! We ask him to reign in us