



How long Is the Christmas season?

While retail stores may be discounting Christmas decorations and putting up Valentine's Day displays by December 31, Catholics and many other Christian denominations are just getting started on their Christmas celebrations. This is good news for families who want to unplug from the commercial holiday sales season by taking Advent seriously as a time of prayerful anticipation, reflection, and repentance.

Just how long is the Christmas season? Well, it depends on what you mean by "Christmas

season." The Church marks the end of the Christmas season on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord (usually the second Sunday of January). However, others measure the Christmas season differently, and even within the Church, the various feasts and observances can get a little tricky. Like, what is the "Octave of Christmas"? And what about the famous Twelve Days of Christmas—do we do those? And how come some people keep their Christmas tree up until February?

Here is a rundown of the different ways of measuring "Christmas time."

Retail Christmas season

November 1 – December 24

In the United States, retailers begin promoting Christmas sales immediately following Halloween (or earlier, in some cases), even though this period is not really part of the liturgical Christmas season.

Advent

Four Sundays prior to December 25 – sunset on Christmas Eve

Advent is not part of the Christmas season, either. Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas (almost always the Sunday after the U.S. celebration of Thanksgiving, unless November 1 is a Thursday). Advent is a season of prayerful anticipation of the coming of Christ at Christmas. During Advent, the liturgical readings recall Israel's longing and waiting for Christ, as well as the Church's longing and waiting for his return in the fullness of time. The observance of Advent dates back to at least the fifth century, and perhaps longer. At one time, this was a significant penitential season, like Lent.

Christmas Day

After sunset on December 24 – sunset December 25

For the Church, Christmas Day begins not at midnight, but with the celebration of Mass following sunset on Christmas Eve. This follows the ancient Jewish way of keeping liturgical time. (This way of marking "sacred time" is also the reason you can attend Sunday Mass on Saturday evening.) Similarly, Christmas Day ends (liturgically, anyway) at sunset...a good excuse for bundling the little ones off to bed!

Octave of Christmas

December 25 – January 1 (inclusive)

An *octave* extends the celebration of a feast or solemnity for eight days. During the Octave of Christmas, for example, all the readings and prayers during the celebration of Mass are related to the birth of Christ. Octave celebrations got their start in the Church way back in the fourth century. ([Check out a detailed history of octaves at Wikipedia.](#)) The "octave day" (eighth day) of Christmas is January 1, the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God—a holy day on which all Catholics are obliged to celebrate Mass.

The Twelve Days of Christmas (Christmastide)

December 26 – January 6 (or Epiphany)

Amazon and other retailers run “12 Days of Christmas” sales during the twelve days leading up to Christmas, but traditionally, the twelve days of Christmas begin on December 26 and end on January 6, the traditional date of Epiphany. (Other traditions mark the twelve days beginning Christmas Day and ending January 5, the day before Epiphany.) Many Christians continue to celebrate Twelfth Night with special foods and traditions.

Since 1970, Roman Catholics have celebrated Epiphany on the first Sunday after the Octave of Christmas (that is, the first Sunday after January 1) . . . which kind of messes up the whole twelve nights tradition. However, the twelve days of Christmas and Twelfth Night are not official liturgical celebrations, but more of a popular tradition.

The Christmas Season (for Catholics)

December 25 – The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

Roman Catholics (and some other Christians) mark the end of the liturgical Christmas season with the celebration of the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, which falls on the Sunday after the Feast of the Epiphany (usually the second Sunday of January). Ordinary Time begins the day after the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

Fun fact: Centuries ago, the baptism of Christ was the primary event celebrated as part of the feast of the Epiphany, along with the visit of the Magi and other events from the childhood of Jesus. *Epiphany* means “manifestation” or “appearance.” So, while the baptism of Christ marks the beginning of his public ministry, it is also part of his “manifestation” or “appearance”—one of the events signaling that God has broken into human history in a unique way.

Bonus! The Presentation of the Lord

December 25 – February 2 (The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord)

But wait, there’s more! The Church circles back around to the Christmas season forty days after Christmas, on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. The Law of Moses required first-born sons to be dedicated to the Lord, so Mary and Joseph dutifully brought the baby Jesus to the Temple for his dedication and circumcision (Luke 2:22-38). In some countries (and some households), it is traditional to keep Christmas decorations up until this feast.

This feast is also traditionally known as Candlemas; centuries ago, the feast was accompanied by a candlelight procession and a blessing of beeswax candles from the home.

Every day is Christmas

For Catholics, every day is, in the most basic sense, Christmas. That’s because every day, the Word becomes flesh in the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist; and through the sacraments, the people of God become of the Body of Christ in the world. Just as Mary’s “yes” made her an instrument of God’s incarnation in the world, by our “yes,” we too birth the Son of God into the world.

The Real Meaning of Christmas

By Dawson McAllister

In the previous blog on [How to Give a Gift that Matters](#), I talked about how materialistically crazy Christmas has become. For many, especially children, the meaning of Christmas is simply how many good presents they get. But as we all know (hopefully), that's not the real meaning of Christmas.

As we get older, we realize that there's more to it than presents. Every now and then there will be a movie or news story on television about some truly generous giver. And with that, we are reminded of a better perspective on the holidays; that it is like Jesus said, "More blessed to give than to receive."

So then, the real meaning of Christmas is giving, right? Well actually, no.

For many, Christmas is either merry or depressing because of how many good presents they are able to give. And for some, because their financial situation makes it very difficult to give, they have come to hate the Christmas holidays *because of all the giving*. Whether your focus is on getting presents or on giving presents – either way, the true meaning of Christmas is NOT about the presents.

So, if the true meaning of Christmas is not about giving or receiving presents, then what?

Many Facebook and blog comments state that the most difficult part of Christmas for them was missing a person who was not with them anymore.

Amanda wrote: The best part of Christmas is being with my family. The worst part is not having my grandfather here anymore. He passed away in August of 2010, 3 weeks before my birthday. He always was the life of every family gathering, especially Christmas when he dressed up as Santa. Every year when he dressed up, I always had a picture taken with him...I'm only 22 and he's been my everything. It's hard knowing he's not here. He got me Santa figurines every year...

Tragedy will always help us recalibrate our values. It shakes us up and brings us back to reality. Those of you who are regular listeners to DM LIVE radio program or who follow us on Facebook, know about the tragedy in my family; that my son, Fulton, was **seriously injured in a car accident** and was in a coma. There was great uncertainty about if and when he would come out of the coma.

It's like the old Cat Stephens' song (way before your time) "You don't know what you've got till it's gone." With my son Fulton's accident, I have been forced to stare this truth in the face. Yes, I'm just like the rest of you, and especially like those for whom tragedy (or near-tragedy) is a reminder to us of what is really important. Christmas is so much more than presents, receiving them or even giving them.

So then, the real meaning of Christmas is about the people in your life that you love – right?

As much as I feel the importance of loved ones at this moment (and will be reminded of it every Christmas for the rest of my life), no, that's not the real meaning of Christmas. There are people all over the world who love their friends and family, but who do not celebrate Christmas.

Okay, so what is the real meaning of Christmas?

I'm no Scrooge. Christmas is partly about giving and receiving gifts and it is about celebrating the family and friends in our lives. But the real meaning of Christmas is something even higher, bigger, and infinitely better than all of that.

Christmas is about totally pure, unconditional, irrepressible, inconceivably awesome, self-denying TRUE LOVE.

John was one of twelve disciples of Jesus, and he wrote the book in the Bible known as *The Gospel of John*. The word gospel means Good News. ***John, Disciple of Jesus, wrote:*** *For God so loved the world* *that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)*

Christmas is about totally pure, unconditional, irrepressible... self-denying

TRUE LOVE.

I like what Michelle wrote on our Facebook page. I could easily understand how Christmas could be the worst time of the year for her. But she seems to have put it all together, realizing the importance of the people in her life, the real meaning of Christmas, and because of both of those things, the true joy of giving.

Michelle wrote: *The hardest part of Christmas was losing my mom on December 26th to cancer. The Best part of Christmas is celebrating the true reason for the season – the birth of baby Jesus and the HOPE He brings to all. Another best part of Christmas for me is visiting the cancer center where my mom had treatments and giving a teddy bear to a cancer patient from Build-A-Bear workshop in honor and in memory of my mom. Bittersweet moment but well worth the tears.*



The Meaning of Christmas Decorations

Evergreen Tree

The evergreen tree points to Heaven.
Its needles remain green all year,
a symbol of God's gift of eternal LIFE,
and a reminder of Jesus' living presence.
(1 John 5:11-12)

Stars

Star ornaments and decorations symbolize
the star of Bethlehem. (Matthew 2:1-10)

Angels

Angels announced Jesus' birth to
Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. (Luke 1 & 2)

Lights & Candles

Jesus said He was the "Light of the world." (John 9:5)

Red Decorations

Red symbolizes God's LOVE and
the love of Jesus who died for us on the cross.
(Mark 8:31)

Gold Decorations

Gold symbolizes the Kingship of Jesus.
(Revelations 1:5)

Gifts under Tree

Gifts remind us of the gifts of the Wise Men,
and of the greatest gift of all—Jesus.
(Matthew 2:1-12)



Christianity — Christmas



What does Jesus' birth mean for Christians today?

Jesus lived over 2000 years ago, and yet Christianity is the world's biggest religion, with over 1 billion followers across the world. What does Jesus' birth mean for Christians today? Here are five quotations from the Gospels which will help you answer this question. The highlighted words will give you a clue. Underneath each one, write down:

- What the quotation tells us about Jesus;
- Why this is important for Christians today.

Matthew 1:21

'She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name **Jesus**, because he will **save his people from their sins**.'

John 20:31

'...Jesus is the **Christ**, the **Son of God**, and... by believing you may have life in his name.'

Luke 2:7

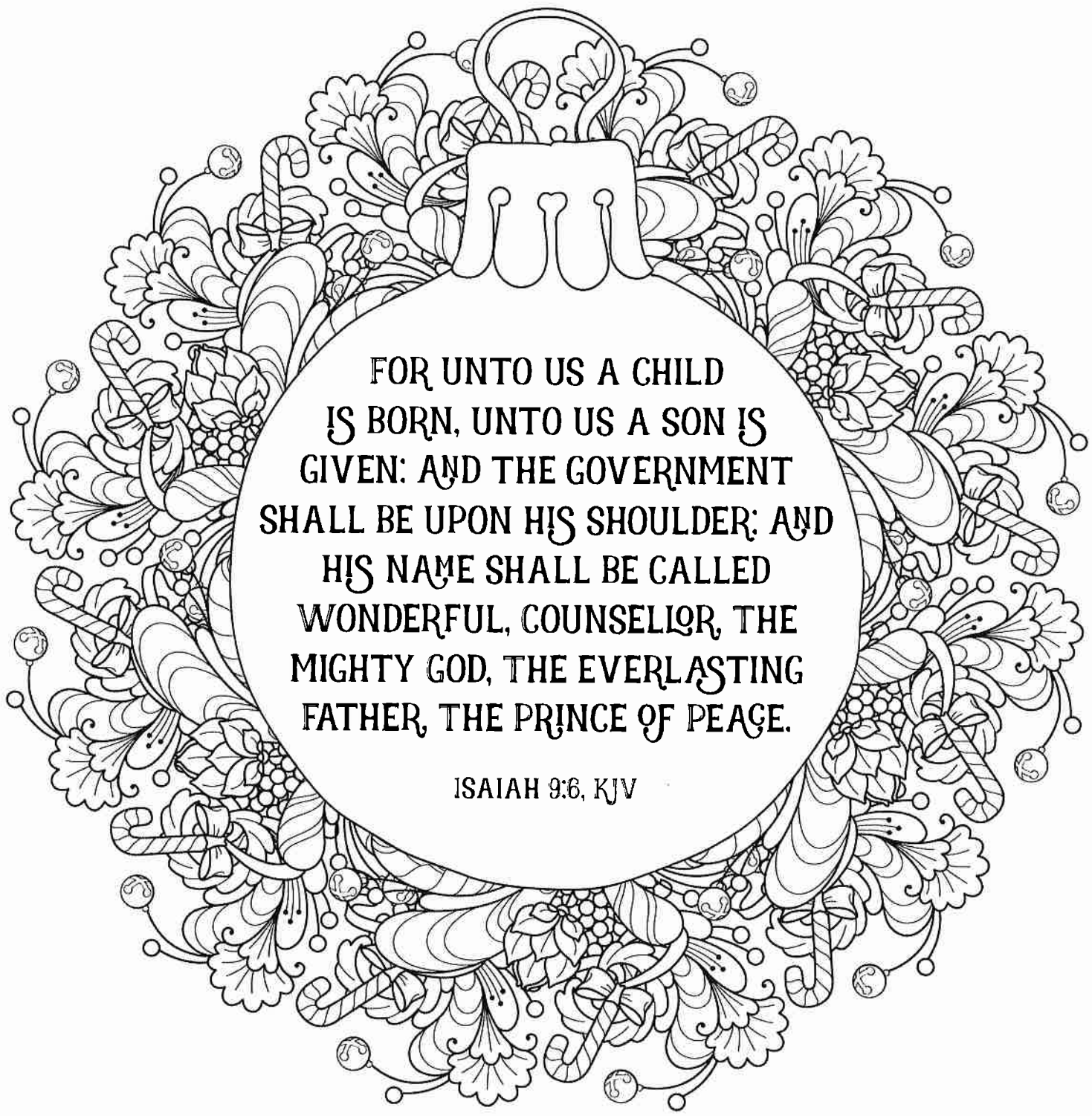
'She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a **manger**, because there was **no room for them in the inn**.'

Matthew 2:11

'...they bowed down and **worshipped** him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with **gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh**.'

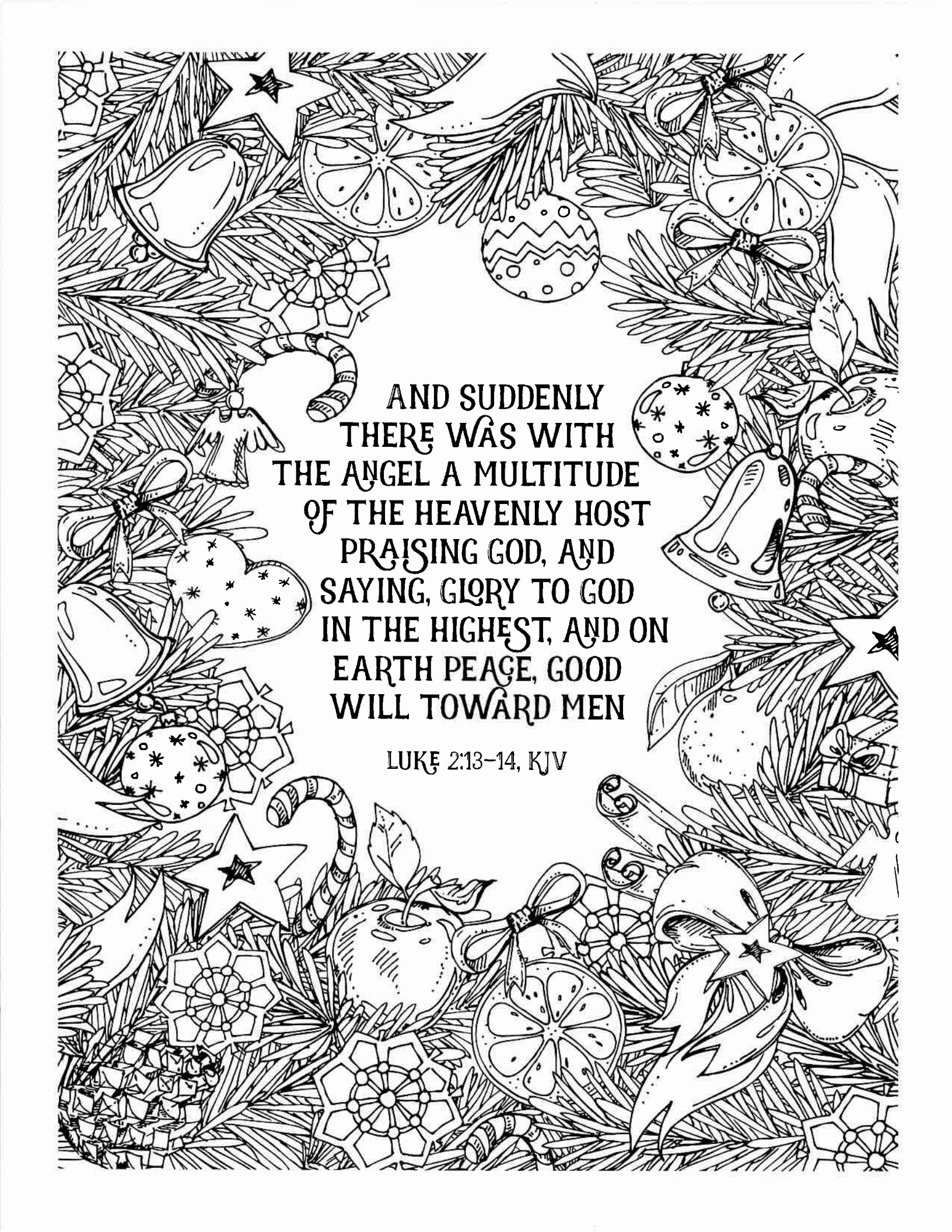
John 13:34

'A new command I give you: Love one another. As **I have loved you**, so you must **love one another**.'



FOR UNTO US A CHILD
IS BORN, UNTO US A SON IS
GIVEN: AND THE GOVERNMENT
SHALL BE UPON HIS SHOULDER: AND
HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED
WONDERFUL, COUNSELLOR, THE
MIGHTY GOD, THE EVERLASTING
FATHER, THE PRINCE OF PEACE.

ISAIAH 9:6, KJV



AND SUDDENLY
THERE WAS WITH
THE ANGEL A MULTITUDE
OF THE HEAVENLY HOST
PRAISING GOD, AND
SAYING, GLORY TO GOD
IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON
EARTH PEACE, GOOD
WILL TOWARD MEN

LUKE 2:13-14, KJV

