

the story of Jesus

Joy in the Gift
John 1:1-18
Week 3 of 4

While working as a journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*, I was assigned to report on the struggles of an impoverished, inner-city family during the weeks leading up to Christmas. A devout atheist at the time, I was mildly surprised by the family's attitude in spite of their circumstances:

The Delgados—60-year-old Perfecta and her granddaughters, Lydia and Jenny—had been burned out of their roach-infested tenement and were now living in a tiny, two-room apartment on the West Side. As I walked in, I couldn't believe how empty it was. There was no furniture, no rugs, nothing on the walls—only a small kitchen table and one handful of rice. That's it. They were virtually devoid of possessions.

In fact, 11-year-old Lydia and 13-year-old Jenny owned only one short-sleeved dress each, plus one thin, gray sweater between them. When they walked the half-mile to school through the biting cold, Lydia would wear the sweater for part of the distance and then hand it to her shivering sister, who would wear it the rest of the way.

But despite their poverty and the painful arthritis that kept Perfecta from working, she still talked confidently about her faith in Jesus. She was convinced he had not abandoned them. I never sensed despair or self-pity in her home; instead, there was a gentle feeling of hope and peace.

I completed the article, then moved on to more high-profile assignments. But when Christmas Eve arrived, I found my thoughts drifting back to the Delgados and their unflinching belief in God's providence. I continued to wrestle with the irony of the situation. Here was a family that had nothing but faith, and yet seemed happy, while I had everything I needed materially, but lacked faith—and inside I felt as empty and barren as their apartment."

I decided to pay a visit to the Delgados. When I arrived, I was amazed at what I saw. Readers of my article had responded to the family's need in overwhelming fashion, filling the small apartment with donations. Once inside, I encountered new furniture, appliances, and rugs; a large Christmas tree and stacks of wrapped presents; bags of food; and a large selection of warm winter clothing. Readers had even donated a generous amount of cash.



northeast daily reading

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As surprised as I was by this outpouring, I was even more astonished by what my visit was interrupting: Perfecta and her granddaughters were getting ready to give away much of their newfound wealth. When I asked Perfecta why, she replied in halting English: "Our neighbors are still in need. We cannot have plenty while they have nothing. This is what Jesus would want us to do."

That blew me away! If I had been in their position at that time in my life, I would have been hoarding everything. I asked Perfecta what she thought about the generosity of the people who had sent all of these goodies, and again her response amazed me. "This is wonderful; this is very good," she said, gesturing toward the largess. "We did nothing to deserve this—it's a gift from God. But," she added, "It is not his greatest gift. No, we celebrate that tomorrow. That is Jesus."

To her, this child in the manger was the undeserved gift that meant everything—more than material possessions, more than comfort, more than security. And at that moment, something inside of me wanted desperately to know this Jesus—because, in a sense, I saw him in Perfecta and her granddaughters.

They had peace despite poverty, while I had anxiety despite plenty; they knew the joy of generosity, while I only knew the loneliness of ambition; they looked heavenward for hope, while I only looked out for myself; they experienced the wonder of the spiritual, while I was shackled to the shallowness of the material—and something made me long for what they had. Or, more accurately, for the One they knew. [Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christmas* (Zondervan, 2005)]

This week's daily reading will cover the chronological account of the arrival of God's greatest gift to us, Jesus.

- DAY ONE – John 1:1-18, Matthew 1:1-17
- DAY TWO – Luke:1:5-80
- DAY THREE – Matthew 1:18-25
- DAY FOUR – Luke 2:1-38
- DAY FIVE – Matthew 2:1-23, Luke 2:39-40

Memory Verse: "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came to from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)