

# Waiting for Christmas

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Date: 14 December 2014

Preacher: Panel Discussion

- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     So my name's Lenore Cumming and I'm going to start, I'm just the opening act for Nora Johnson and Christine Green here. Lenore, I need to, I left the first page of my paper home. Will is very kindly going to get it for me.
- So I'm going to be third. Third, okay. Okay, no problem. Christine. Okay. So let's start in prayer.
- Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us. And because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us.
- Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be honor and glory now and forever. Amen. Okay. So this is a Christmas panel.
- Now, because we're at Learners Exchange, I'm going to present my themes in the form of two questions, which we're not going to discuss right now, but you can just ponder them in your heart. These are two questions.
- [ 1 : 0 7 ]     Okay. So the first one is, and this is a question I kind of bored from Phil when he asked a question one time. But it is, what brings us real Christian joy at Christmas?
- And the second question is, how do we nurture that joy? Okay. There's a lot. We all enjoy Christmas. There's a lot to enjoy. There's a lot to enjoy. There's a lot to enjoy. There's a lot to enjoy. There's a lot to enjoy. The music, the food, the friends, the parties, all kinds of lights and things that are going on all around us in the world.
- We do enjoy that. And even at my work, I was thinking I'm blessed with a wonderful group of enthusiastic, multicultural, diverse people working there who really celebrate the happy holidays.
- They all have their workstations festooned with all kinds of tinsel and baubles and lights and whatnot. But I noticed among the about 100 people there, only two of us really have anything really Christian at our workstation.
- And I thought at work we celebrate the holidays, but we celebrate Christmas without Christ, I find, and in the world as well.
- [ 2 : 1 7 ]     And so I was thinking, as Jeanette said last week, as we wait with eager longing and patience for Christ to come, but the reality is in our world, I think the enemy has subverted or taken over the real meaning of Christmas.
- And Christmas has become kind of a secular holiday celebration. And even, I'm not very bold, but I feel like at my work in a way, I have one Christmas thing at my desk, and people kind of look at it sort of sideways, but I'm not very bold.
- Because I think that Christ has been declared politically incorrect at Christmas, sadly, in a lot of places. And the world has twisted the reason for the season as well, in that it's not about Christ, it's actually about us, you know?
- We all, in our culture, for a lot of us, Christmas has become a time of noisy and kind of frantic indulgence, chaos, and consumerism.

And kind of summarized by the question you get asked after Christmas, was Santa good to you? Not anything deeper than that. And also, songs, silly songs like, Santa baby, hurry down the chimney tonight.

[ 3 : 43 ] Anyway, we're bombarded by messages like that. It's about you, it's about your friends, your family, and it's a time to indulge. We've had a challenging year, so at Christmas we're going to indulge and just go crazy, enjoy things.

And I'm not against that, I enjoy these things too. But as Dr. Prager also reminded us, as Christians we need balance and proportion too. You know, we enjoy the things of the world, but we also know the other reality.

Because, oh, I almost forgot. This is kind of a Sunday school illustration, but this is kind of the theme of my talk today. At Christmas, I see this encouraged.

You think about all the things that you need to do, and then you get the treasures. And you put them in your agenda first. We have the treasures in paper bags.

And you think about what are the treasures, the good things at Christmas that you want to make sure that you have as part of your celebration. And you put them in here. And you try and make these the main focus of your celebration.

[ 4 : 50 ] Because in the world, as we know, we have all kinds of other distractions and things. These are actually called silly shreds. Once you have the treasures in there, then you can enjoy some of the other fluffier, sillier things.

But make sure that you have the, we want to make sure that we have the real treasure in the agenda, the schedule there first. Okay.

So, all this frenzy and noise can also stir up feelings of, not so good, of entitlement, being deprived, wanting, wishing. And if we don't get what we want, shopping.

You know, we can go, we're flooded with ads. And I brought a whole bunch of them here. And I saved up. These are examples of some of the ads that we get.

And we get them online, too. Bring home a Honda for Christmas. Suitcases. iPhones. All kinds of great food.

[ 5 : 55 ] Books. Boots. And a lot of them say, today only. Every day for weeks now. Today only. There's always this pressure and rush to rush out and bar.

And there's all kinds of wonderful Christmas lattes and all kinds of things you can have. Trips. Food. Liquor. And we all enjoy these in moderation.

But we're bombarded with all of these things. And then, you know, there's Black Friday, Cyber Monday. Gadgets of all kinds. Fur coats.

And I indulge in these myself. I shop online. I buy things. But even charities, kind of, there's a big rush, push in the fall. Donate now and we'll double your donation.

Or things like that. And there's even one here. If you've got someone who's been bad on your shopping list, give the money to a charity instead of giving it to that person.

[ 6 : 59 ] So, as Christians, we all know what to do with all of this noise. We can just throw it away. And filter it out of our lives. But charities rush you to give.

I heard the other day, I think it was last week, was Giving Tuesday. It was a special Tuesday where you give. We feel pressured and rushed and stressed. We all know about all of this noise.

But we can sort it. We can filter it out of our lives. But also, we also know there's deeper emotions that are stirred up at Christmas that we know about. That stem from what we feel we lack.

From broken and flawed relationships. From pain. Fears of being alone. Fears of being uncared for. Fears of being poor. Hopes for our families.

You know, we have hopes of good health, comfort, everybody getting along. There's all this stress of wanting to make Christmas very meaningful for everybody. And sometimes we have unrealistic expectations.

[ 8 : 03 ] You know, Christmas is a family time. And there's also sadness that we talked about last week, too. Of sometimes family members, friends, or dear ones aren't Christians.

And there's that sadness, that pain of the ones that we love the most don't really share our treasure. What we treasure the most is our relationship with Jesus Christ. And ironically enough, somebody was telling me this, too.

Sometimes these folks that don't want to bring Christ into it are the most adamant about having a full-blown traditional family Christmas. But without Christ.

They're missing the reason for the season, really. And that brings us sadness. And there's also sadness from limitations or constrictions that we feel. We feel rejection.

We feel we're not on the A-list. We feel we're grieving losses. And then we also feel much deeper, more existential pain in some ways, just of being human.

[ 9 : 02 ] Our desires, our longings, the hopes and fears of all the years. We long for peace on earth. We long for that God would drive the dark night of sin away.

We hope for a better world, for the way things should be. Justice, peace, security, world peace. We long for all of those things. And as we were reminded, I think it was a couple of weeks ago in the Ezekiel studies, even as Christians, because of our own sheepishness.

Elizabeth likes that word, sheepishness. Because we're sheep, we wander off. We don't know what's good for us. We hunger for things that don't satisfy long-term. Even when trying to serve the Lord, we sometimes run up into disappointments, disillusionments, things that we don't know how to rest.

And I think it was Aaron that said, we forget who our God is and who we are in relationship to him. And all of these things bring, can bring deep melancholy, deep-seated sadness at Christmas.

So we're aware of all of that. But the question that we raised here was, what brings us real Christian joy at Christmas? And how do we nurture that joy?

[ 10 : 17 ] We know that all of these things are going on. We can enjoy the good and filter out the not-so-good. But there's so much more. A lot of the people who celebrate the happy holidays have never really heard the story of Christmas.

But we as Christians can have real joy because we know what Christmas means. Christmas, as we know, is a wonderful time for reflecting on and celebrating God's gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

And we're freed up to because we know, again, as Dr. Parker, I think, reminded us, Christmas is, I mean, Christmas is not ultimately about us. Often our faith, our witness, it's about us.

But it's really, and it's self-focused. Whereas in the Bible, our faith, our hope is expressed as God-centered, Christ-centered. The Christian center of adoration is the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it kind of lifts our eyes off of ourselves. And at Christmas, we can have real joy because we believe in the incarnation.

[ 11 : 23 ] I don't know if there's a book by that name, but it would be a good one. We believe that Jesus really came into the world. God really became human and dwelt among us.

It's not a myth. It's real. It can bring us real joy. Because what incarnation means for us, God has become man at great cost to himself.

And he did it because he wants to know us personally. And we can have a living relationship with the living God who wants fellowship with us. Sort of the joy that comes from realizing that at the heart of Christianity is a deeply satisfying relationship with the God who loves us.

And this is a source of profound and long-lasting joy. That you can't buy at them all. And also that Jesus, we know that also Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world.

And his life and death has dealt with our sinfulness, our sadness, our sheepishness, our waywardness. He's dealt with that at the cross. And the incarnation also means for us that God became human.

[ 12 : 38 ] He came into our world and he became one of us. He knows us. He cares about us. He empathizes with us. He became involved in our brokenness and our grief.

He took all of that on himself. So all of these things that we mentioned earlier, whether they affect us or not, we can take them to the cross because he has dealt with them. He understands them. He knows them.

We can leave them there. The deep longings, disappointments, everything else that gets stirred up at Christmas, we can take them to the cross. And the other thing that we know that brings us joy if we deal with it, we'll come to this, we're made to long for God.

Like Augustine said, we're made so that we long for God and we're not satisfied with other things. We're not satisfied with buying stuff or retail therapy or all of that.

We're made to long for God. And it's not because he lacks anything or needs us, but it's for our own good. And then again, I say because the incarnation, because we believe in the incarnation, we experience real joy, the good news that the Lord has come.

[ 13 : 49 ] He's kept his promises. What he said is true, that the babe in the manger is the Savior, the Redeemer of the world. And how do we nourish this joy? At St. John's, we're very fortunate to have many of the means of grace, wonderful services, communion, which many of you have participated already today.

We have access to the means of grace, communion services, hymns, Christian community like this that we can partake of at Christmas and be richly blessed. And then personally, this God has come near to us.

He's come into the world, come near to us. And I think we also mentioned this last week. He waits for us to say yes. He doesn't force or push.

He waits before he enters more deeply into our lives, before his presence is deepened into our life. So when we say yes, we turn to him, receive him, dare to welcome him in.

He will come in. The greatest example of this, as we know, was Mary, the mother of Jesus. And Lucy Shaw, as we know, writes brilliantly and sensitively about Mary.

[ 15 : 00 ] I'll just read a little quote. I'm not, not her poem, but I'm going to read something she said. Lucy Shaw said, I find in Mary, the mother of Jesus, and her willing involvement in the drama of incarnation, an almost infinite world of possibility for reflection and poetry.

And she says, I have always seen her as a model to both women and men of active participation in the work of God, no matter how tricky or risky it appears to be.

She says yes to being pregnant with God by the Holy Ghost, well knowing what that might do to her reputation as an unwed mother. She considered the call of God on her to be paramount.

And Lucy says, Mary also shows that, shows us what active submission of the finite to the infinite looks like in an ordinary human being.

She herself incarnates that obedience in a way that the whole of Christendom celebrates at Christmas. Okay? So, when the angel, so this is an example to us in a way of receiving this joy, entering into it, when the angel came to Mary and announced to her what her part would be, her response was, even though she was scared and confused and didn't know her whole world was turned upside down, but she said yes.

[ 16 : 26 ] She said, let it be to me according to your will. And she didn't really understand that. All that much. But she said yes. And we're going to just show her prayer here, which I know is small, but we're going to read it in a minute.

In a way, her prayer, like it can for us as well at Christmas, it moves from me, my, and I, and it moves down, as it moves down, it moves on to him.

Which, hopefully, it will do for us as well. She says, he who is mighty has done great things for me, and blessed is his name. And she's not worthy, she's not, but she's being honored.

And it's not a sentimental sort of a prayer, but she, Mary, with humility and confidence, because she trusts in the God who's merciful and strong, who lifts up the poor, who can be relied on to keep his promises, even though they were made hundreds of years ago.

She believes in him. And that's this beautiful prayer here. So I've asked Karen Foster, if she would come and read this song to us, and also do another reading that she's prepared for us.

[ 17 : 42 ] I'd like to start with a poem by Lucy Shaw. This is from a book that I've had for years, and kind of forgot about.

It's actually a Christian book, and they're poems and stories by Christian authors, Christian writers. And so this poem is called Announcement by Lucy Shaw.

Yes, we have seen the studies, sepia strokes across yellowed parchment, the fine detail of hand and breast, and the fall of cloth. Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Titian, El Greco, Ruot.

Each complex Madonna position, sketched, enlarged. Each likeness plotted at last on canvas, layered with pigment, like the final draft of a poem after 39 roughs.

But Mary, virgin, had no sittings, no chance to pose her piety, no novitiate for body or for heart. The moment was on her unaware.

[ 18 : 52 ] The angel in the room, the impossible demand, the response without reflection. Only one word of curiosity, echoing Zachariah's how.

Yet innocently voiced, without request for proof. The teen head tilted in light, the hand trembling a little at the throat, the candid eyes wide with acquiescence to shame and glory.

Be it unto me as you have said. And now the Magnificat. And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of humble estate.

[ 20 : 06 ] He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

Thank you, Karen. Another great example that we have of remembering where our joy comes from and stirring it up was Simeon.

Simeon was a faithful follower of God, but he lived at a time when Israel was in desperate situation of chaos and hopelessness. He longed for many years for a Savior, a deliverer.

But he waited and believed that God would send a Savior. And he finally lived to see God's salvation when he recognized Jesus was the Savior, the Redeemer of the world.

And George is going to come and read the song of Simeon for us. Thank you. Thank you. This is the note, the vittis, the song of Simeon.

[ 21 : 17 ] Amen. Lord, I'll put on glasses. Lord, you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. So we have a real joy at Christmas as we remember these trustworthy truths.

What God has done, he became human. He has come near and made himself known to us so that we can have a deeply satisfying, personal, and permanent relationship with him.

Jesus has come into the world. He's kept his promises. He's the Savior of the world. Our eyes have seen his salvation. We've seen that he brings light and life and hope.

[ 22 : 21 ] So at Christmas, we want to recognize him, welcome him, know him, celebrate what he's done for us, joyfully receive what he has done for us, which will set us free to serve him with joy and to wait for his second coming in glory, which we're celebrating today on the third Sunday of Advent.

So we can have wonderful, lots of fun, enjoy all the wonderful things about Christmas and also have a deep-seated Christian joy because we know, as the song says, Hallelujah, he is coming.

Hallelujah, he is here. So I want to wrap up my presentation with a short little hymn that, and we're going to do it in the Mayan tradition, which is we can listen to it first and then the second time, if you want to sing along, we can.

If I can get this to work on my phone here. Thank you.

The speaker's not working, but one more.

[ 24 : 01 ] And then we'll sing it now. The choir's not working, where the choir does seem Okay.

I know the moment's gone and bright Since the dark night must be in the day And only I am thy holy night Okay, so that's our prayer for us.

May we all enjoy a real experience. It's going to repeat it anyway. So... So that's...

May we experience real joy at Christmas and always. And now, Christine, I'll get my phone to shut off.

What did you say to then■nk for? I'll make a pizza for at least two of you. Good one. Where'd you eat the next with me? Oh my God!

[ 25 : 33 ] Thank you.

Okay, so it's Christmas. So, first, I want to say that this is not scientific, it's not scholarly, and it's in no way rocket science.

What it is, is just a small collection of my observations and the resulting thoughts regarding those observations. So just kind of random thoughts. So our topic, Waiting for Christmas.

I should begin, I think, by saying that I did not grow up in Anglican. I grew up in a house where there was no faith at all, and it took a very long time for me to hear God calling.

Which isn't to say that he didn't call, I just didn't hear him. I think in the end he resorted to smacking me over the head with a 2x4 to get my attention, and he did.

[ 27 : 03 ] And so I listened. So fast forward to today. Oops, that wasn't supposed to do that. Let's go back to that one.

So, fast forward to today. I find I reflect on things of God a bit longer. And sometimes questions to myself and my curiosity take me down interesting roads.

For example, one of the things that Traff and I like to do at Christmas is to have a dinner on December 25th for people that don't have a place to go. And, you know, it's not unusual.

Lots of people do it, and we've done it several times, and we've gratefully been the recipients of that very same gift at times. It's a warm, welcoming, and accepting place to be for both parties involved, and I believe everyone has a good time.

One thing that makes it extra special for me is that once I know who's coming, I'll usually go out and buy a stocking for each guest. And then I'll take some felt, and I'll cut out the pieces, the letters, and I'll hand-sew their names on their stocking.

[ 28 : 26 ] Then we'll hang them up on the fireplace beside ours, and I'll put a couple of really small little trinket-type things inside. And then we just wait for the guests to arrive, and we watch their faces when they all of a sudden notice their own stocking hanging with ours.

And it's wonderful to see their faces. It's the joy, the acceptance, the warmth, the family, and that's a blessing to us. It's just a wonderful thing to do.

So the thing that I reflect on about that, besides that warm, fuzzy feeling, is when someone feels welcomed like that, I imagine that while I'm sewing the names on the stockings, I kind of imagine what happens when God puts our names in his book.

Does he take his time and put each little letter in the book? Or does he have his angels do it? And maybe with a sweep of their wings, they just magically, you know, artistically, our names appear beautifully.

So those kind of thoughts roll around in my head. And doing those things, let's see if this works.

[ 29 : 49 ] So, anyway, doing those things, it just brings a real nice feeling for me.

I've also had people tell me that stockings and Christmas trees are not really Christian. They're pagan, and we shouldn't really do those things. Because they're not really of, they're of this world, and not the real one.

So I gave that some thought. And this is the solution I came up with. So this is a stocking that I made for a friend several years ago.

It's, the whole thing was hand done. The only tools I used were the scissors to cut out the pieces and a needle and thread to sew it all together.

But it took a long time to do, and I was, it took so much time that I really had time to contemplate on what I was doing and why I was doing it.

[ 31 : 10 ] And when it was finished, I was quite happy with it. Because it, it sort of blended this world and the real one together.

And it didn't seem to take away from anything. And I think it sort of enhanced Christmas, the real Christmas. So I was quite happy with that. So next thought, waiting for Christmas.

Remember when we were told as children, or perhaps now we're telling other children, how many sleeps there are until Christmas? It's exciting because it means there's going to be something great happening when we wake up in X number of sleeps.

It's something to look forward to with great anticipation. We wake up thinking about whatever that surprise might be. And then I got to thinking about that whole concept.

We sleep at night, get up in the day. But we don't have to. Some of us can really easily sleep in the day. So why do we even have day and night?

[ 32 : 19 ] And I thought about that for a while. And then I thought, you know, I wonder if it's because in God's great plan, we sleep at night because we're supposed to close our eyes to the dark.

And we wake up in the day because we're supposed to open our eyes and see the light. And of course, he's the light. So I was thinking, well, maybe that's his little subtle hint, a little daily reminder of what we're supposed to be doing.

So, I don't know. Just a thought. In the previous slide, the title was Celebrate the Sun, S-O-N.

But the picture was of a magnificent sunrise, S-U-N. The sun emerging from behind the pyramids.

Everything in our solar system revolves around the S-U-N. And without the S-U-N, we die. And so I was thinking about that too.

[ 33 : 34 ] And my question is this. Who named the sun, the S-U-N? And why did they name it the S-U-N?

And then I thought, is it a coincidence that God made his S-O-N the center of our Christian world? Everything in our Christian world revolves around the S-O-N.

And without him, we die. So that was just another thought at Christmas. And then I was thinking, I had another kind of a random light bulb moment.

Do you ever wonder why when we do something wrong, we automatically just kind of drop our shoulders and we hang our heads and we have that look like, oh no.

And it's kind of this look of defeat. Everyone does it. And no matter where in the world we go, people just automatically do that. Even dogs do it.

[ 34 : 40 ] If anyone ever has had a dog, you know that when you discipline your dog, and as long as the dog understands that he's done something wrong, they'll do the same thing.

They hang their head and they look at you like this. It's almost like they're begging for forgiveness. And they give you that. That's where the saying came from. Someone's giving you the dogs. And so I was thinking about that too.

And I thought, you know, is that another one of God's little reminders or hints that when we do something wrong, we're supposed to bow our heads and pray for forgiveness?

Is that something that he's put in our DNA somehow as a daily reminder? Don't know. It was just a thought. And Christmas.

Christmas is a miracle. Christ's birth is a miracle. And there were so many spectacular miracles in centuries past. The burning bush, the parting of the sea, the manna from heaven.

[ 35 : 45 ] It goes on and on and on. And I've heard people say that today we don't have miracles like that. And isn't that too bad? And I think they're so wrong. We have so many amazing miracles in this day and age.

They're not the same miracles. But then, you know, God's more creative than that. He doesn't do the same miracle twice. So with the help of the Internet, and yes, God knew that this day and age we would have technology in the Internet.

And so he uses the computer technology so that many people can witness these things around the world at the same time. For example, the invention of the computer allows us to share information around the globe in the blink of an eye.



He also knew that in this part of the world, at this time, society would become more secular. He knew that we would look for signs and wonders from him and seemingly not find them.

But he also knew that we would be using Google to search for things. And so he provides for those who see. This photograph, I think, is a miracle, a modern-day miracle.

[ 37 : 03 ] There's a tree that's native to the southeastern United States, Florida, Georgia, Alabama. It's called the southern yellow pine. I don't know if anyone's heard of it.

I hadn't until I accidentally found it on Google. Because Google's my friend, right? I find lots of great things on Google. And how accidental it was is anybody's guess.

But each year, a couple of weeks before, or a few weeks before Easter, these trees start their new growth. And if you look at the tops of the pine trees a few weeks before, you'll see the yellow shoots.

As the days get closer to Easter Sunday, the tallest shoot will branch off and form a cross. By the time Easter Sunday comes around, you'll see that most of the pine trees will have small yellow crosses on all the tallest shoots.

So, here we have trees marking the time when our Savior died for our sins. I call that a miracle. And Google helps spread the message to the world so that now big news is not confined locally, as in days of old.

[ 38 : 18 ] I know this is about Easter and not Christmas, but the two are bookended in my mind, so I've included it. And here's another photo of the same type of tree.

Isn't that beautiful? So now, getting to the really cool stuff. Has anybody ever heard of laminin? I hadn't, until recently.

The laminin protein molecule is the major component that makes up the extracellular matrix, which is also called the basement membrane.

These are the sheets of protein that form the substrate of all internal organs. Laminin assists in cell etigen and binds other extracellular matrix components together.

The laminin molecule is shaped like a cross and has four arms that are designed to bind to four other molecules. The three shorter arms are particularly good at binding to other laminin molecules, which is what makes it so great at forming sheets.

[ 39 : 26 ] The long arm is capable of binding to cells, which helps anchor the actual organs to the membrane. Laminin is made up of three separate parts, called the alpha, A, beta, B1, and gamma, B2 chains.

That gives it a total of six ends, which accounts for a lot of its flexibility in connecting up various kinds of molecules. The various laminins are a family of glycoproteins that are an integral part of the structural scaffolding in humans and almost every animal tissue.

Laminin is vital to making sure overall body structures hold together and for the maintenance and survival of tissues. This is a diagram of laminin.

So, that's the diagram and the explanation of it. This is what laminin really looks like.

This photo was taken with an electron microscope, but I'm not sure what the actual magnification was. Pretty cool, hey? And 1 John 4.13 says, By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his spirit.

[ 40 : 48 ] And 1 John 3.24, Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God and God in him, and by this we know that he abides in us by the spirit whom he has given us.

This, I thought, was especially interesting. I can wrap my brain around the idea that he abides in us. I get that. What I find fascinating is that I have millions, probably billions, of tiny little crosses throughout my body.

And so do you. They're literally holding us together. Is that a coincidence? Is it just biology and science working in tandem, following the laws of nature?

Or is it a divine reminder that, like a painter shining his work, our creator has autographed us with his sign? I honestly don't know.

But what food for thought. So here's the miracle. He's inserted these minute clues in us before he made Adam and Eve, so that we could discover them today using modern technology.

[ 42 : 01 ] That's a miracle. Yeah, I thought I was a good planner. So now, to wrap up, we've just seen the tiniest particle of our being.

So small we need an electron microscope. God is in us. He's also out there in the vast universe. Think for a minute about black holes. Science says that gravity is so strong in a black hole that nothing can escape, not even light.

It's incredible. And they're so far away. We can't even imagine the true size of space and what else might be out there. New things are being discovered all the time. Well, here's another modern-day miracle.

Using not the electron microscope to see minuscule things, but instead the opposite, the Hubble Space Telescope, to see clearly out into the vastness of space and the enormous things out there.

Because it's Christmas, I want to show you an angel, as Hubble captured it. I thought that was pretty impressive.

[ 43 : 15 ] This is NASA's Hubble Space Telescope presents a festive holiday greeting that's out of this world. The bipolar star-forming region, called Sharpless 2-106, looks like a soaring celestial snow angel.

The outstretched wings of the nebula record the contrasting imprint of heat and motion against the backdrop of a colder medium. But that makes sense to me.

A heavenly angel. God is quite the artist. The next photo was also taken by Hubble. And before I put the photo up, let me just read the explanation of what we'll be looking at.

This image of the core of the nearby spiral galaxy, M51, taken with the wide-field planetary camera on NASA's Hubble Space Telescope, shows a striking dark X silhouetted across the galaxy's nucleus.

The X is due to absorption by dust and marks the exact position of a black hole, which may have a mass equivalent to 1 million stars like the sun.

[ 44 : 27 ] The darkest bar may be an edge-on-edge dust ring, which is 100 light-years in diameter. The edge-on torus not only hides the black hole and accretion disk from being viewed directly from Earth, but also determines the axis of a jet of high-speed plasma and confirms radiation from the accretion disk to a pair of oppositely directed cones of light, which ionize gas caught in their beam.

The second bar of the X could be a second disk seen edge-on-edge, or possibly rotating gas and dust in M51 intersecting with the jets and ionization cones.

The size of the image is 1,100 light-years. Well, that's the official description and explanation. I can't say that I totally get it, but they say a picture is worth a thousand words.

So, what do you get from it? That's way out there in space.

So, throughout the Bible, it talks about signs in the heavens. It also says how one day we'll all see Jesus when he returns from the heavens. And it says, And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven.

[ 45 : 59 ] It doesn't say when that's going to happen. We don't know if this is going to be the one or not, but that's amazing to me. In the ESV, it says, Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him.

Does this mean that we'll all see him at the same time? I don't know. But after seeing this photo, I can imagine it's possible. Our God is genius.

Merry Christmas and amen. Amen. Thank you. Thank you. God bless you.