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- *Prayers of gratitude*
- *Christmas and the nature of Jesus*
- *Organize messages by subject*

God is with all of you and us, and rejoices in the strong light of your faith.

You turn to God with prayers of thanksgiving. You reach to God as children reach to a parent when they experience something joyful. This is such an important part of prayer, and yet it is so seldom a part of your lives. You tend to search for God when you need answers, when you need a helping hand, when you need to be lifted above problems which pull you down and dull your vision of God. But prayers of thanks, of gratitude, are also important to the development of your souls, for they form a sign of recognition of God's presence in your lives. You become stronger as you recognize God, just as you achieve strength when you pray for help. God must be a part of your lives always, not only in your supplications, in your agonies, but in your joys and in your prayers for the joys of others. It is fitting to thank God when another experiences great joy, for again you are recognizing God's presence in the life of another. You are sharing in that joy and you are moving forward with that spirit because you are a part of that joy and of that recognition of God.

Frequently we have said that you grow toward God only as all of you grow toward God, that sharing of growth encompasses all spiritual activity. It belongs to that for which you ask. Sharing with another is being at one with another. It is a joining of spiritual force. The combined light intensifies.

We feel that as you approach the season of celebrating Christmas, it is important to focus your attention on that which you celebrate, the presence of Christ, a power and teaching in your lives. It is said that Jesus was not an ordinary man, and that is true, but it is also said by many that none had the power that he exercised. While such a belief may help to focus your thoughts on his teachings, it is not altogether true. Jesus was many things. He was a great teacher. He was blessed with an enormous capacity to heal physically and spiritually. But the power that he exercised as a teacher or healer is not unique in the history of humanity on earth. There have been many others, and numerous religions have focused their attention on those teachers, those healers. When you feel that the teachings of Jesus are the only truly correct teachings, that they are the only signposts to follow, you are missing the point of his life. His real strength was his ability to focus attention on God, not merely himself.

Those who were healed through his touch were healed by their faith, not by his touch. His gift was to serve as a vehicle for bringing others closer in thought and awareness to God. In this capacity he was divine. You say he was perfect. In fact, he was human. He experienced human fears, temptations, desires, joys and sadness. To

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the extent that you consider him perfect when recognizing those facts, you yourselves share in that perfection, for each of you is divine also.

Divinity was not the sole proprietorship belonging to Jesus. You are divine and he was divine. Each of you has a gift, something bestowed by God which makes you unique and important, vital to life. He also had a gift, and his gift was to focus your faith on God. His was a service clarifying God to a greatly troubled world. The Christian religion has been a continual effort to understand the glimpses of God provided through Jesus. Jesus, therefore, was divine, as you are, but his gift separated him from you because of his perception of God. There are others in your world who have worked the same function in life, before Jesus and after. We do not wish to diminish the importance of Jesus the Christ in your lives, but to emphasize the true value of his life as it relates to yours. These messages also provide a glimpse of God and are important because they focus your attention on God.

As you draw closer to Christmas, it is important to consider that this time of year for you is a time of opportunity. It is a potential for great growth in each of you. It serves as both a reminder and a challenge. It is a reminder of an intense perception of God's meaning in life, and it is a challenge for each of you to achieve your own deeper perception of God in your lives. It is not merely the celebration of the birth of a teacher. It is a celebration of the birth of a greater understanding of God. That understanding continues to grow. It evolves. It is never fully achieved, but it develops and enriches and deepens your lives. Christmas, therefore, takes on a meaning greater than just the celebration of the church. It provides a symbol which can help each of you to focus on a clearer understanding. It is not the only symbol which calls you to find God, but it is an important one.

For many it is a time of crisis, a time of trial, of questioning, of guilt, and for many a time of peace and for hope. For each, however, it should be a time of reaching, a time for looking, a time for listening and a time for response. When you feel God's presence in your life, you feel the urge to respond. The form of this response has many different characters or shapes or directions, but respond you must. If you feel God's presence strongly during this season, try to interpret that sense in such a way that your first response is peace, a spiritual peace, a conviction that God is with you and that you are strong and are growing.

Having achieved a sense of peace, it will be easier for each of you to reach outward in love. Without peace within, it is nearly impossible to respond in love. Peace comes first and love will follow naturally. This then is a time for you to achieve a real peace. By doing so, your lives will have a sense of order, of priorities, and an understanding of the true meaning of what you call Christmas.

It is difficult for all to feel this peace. You may feel it now, but you may feel that it is weakened in the days ahead. Think back then to God and to a life which was devoted to clarifying an image of God that all might see, and pray for peace and you shall have it

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and you shall sense the peace in others. As you radiate love, it will be reflected back, and you will find new meaning to this important part of the year for your church, but more important is this opportunity for the development of your souls.

We are so happy when you gather together like this. There is so much to share and to explain and clarify. It is only through viewing God's teachings as a group or succession of teachings that you will come to fully understand the picture which we present to you. If it were possible to organize the content of these messages in particular areas or subjects, you might find that it is easier to see the truth, that it is easier to eventually piece together this puzzle, this vision of God as you come to understand it. Review is important, and although you may feel it is difficult both to fully comprehend and to carry out these teachings, the efforts which you make will always bear fruit.

Your souls grow by the very experience of listening to God, but they will grow so much faster as you apply what you hear. Find opportunities for study and reflection. Seek ways of quieting yourselves, or centering in on your ability to achieve peace. Open yourselves with a sense of wonder to receive the presence of God into your souls. Pray that God's light is visible to each of you. It is a warm light, one that gives strength and comfort. It is available to all. With your peace, go forward and reach out with love and touch another soul.

God blesses you. God gives you peace for the asking. You have God's strength for the asking. God surrounds all those for whom you pray and supports them and gives them strength and faith. Rejoice in your knowledge of God! However small it may be, your awareness is constantly expanding. You share in a great miracle. It is an opportunity with tremendous responsibility. Rejoice that you can serve God!

Amen.