



Merry Christmas

Lindsey Sterling

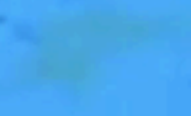


Merry Christmas



VERY SPECIAL

CHRISTMAS



The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Come, follow me."
44 Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter's hometown. 45 Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, "We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth."
46 "Nazareth!" exclaimed Nathanael. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" "Come and see for yourself," Philip replied. John 1:43-46



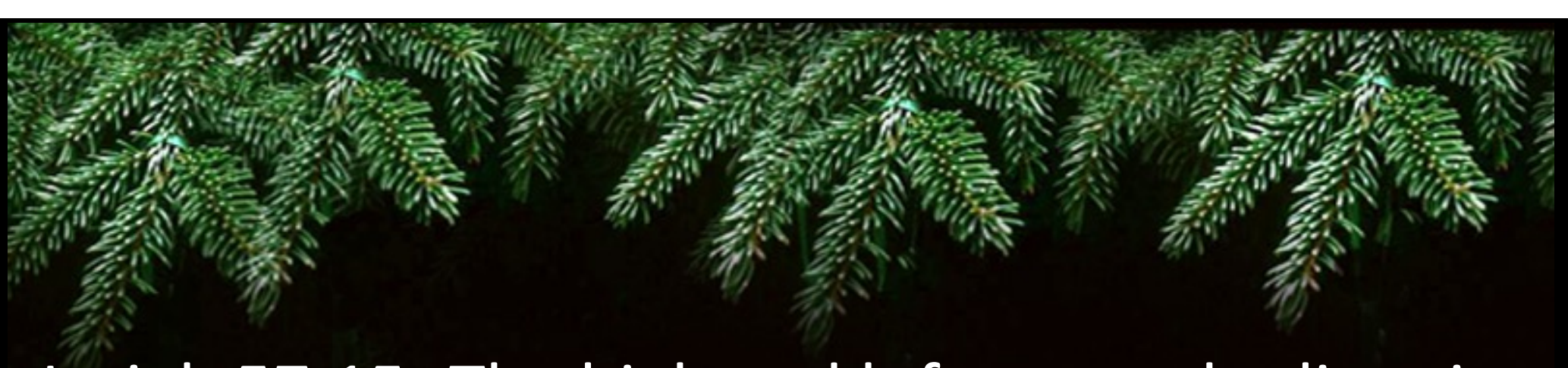
As they approached, Jesus said, “Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.”⁴⁸ “How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.”⁴⁹ Then Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!”⁵⁰ Jesus asked him, “Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.”

John 1:47-50



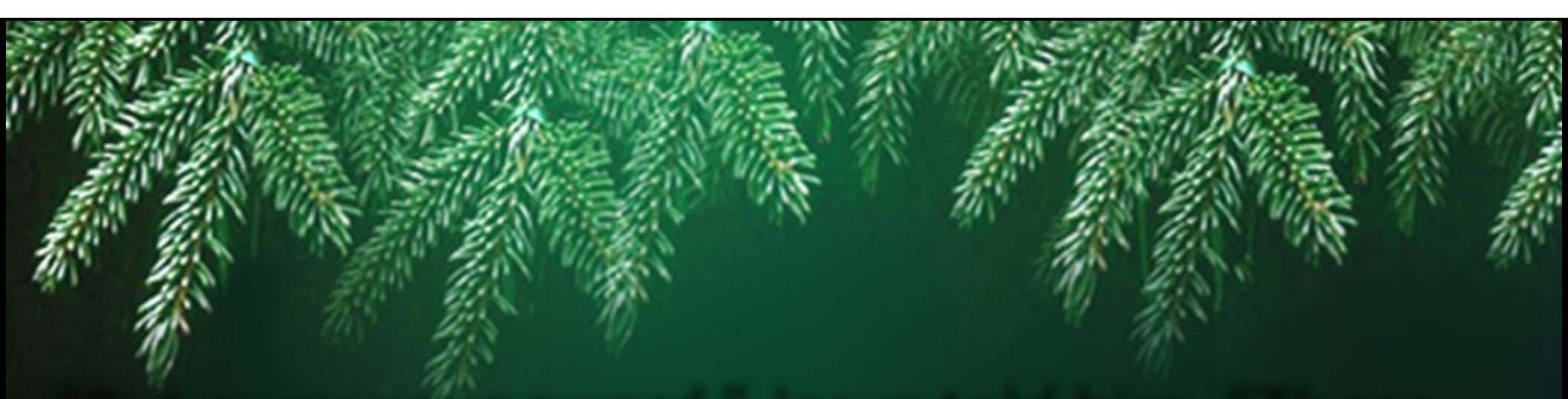
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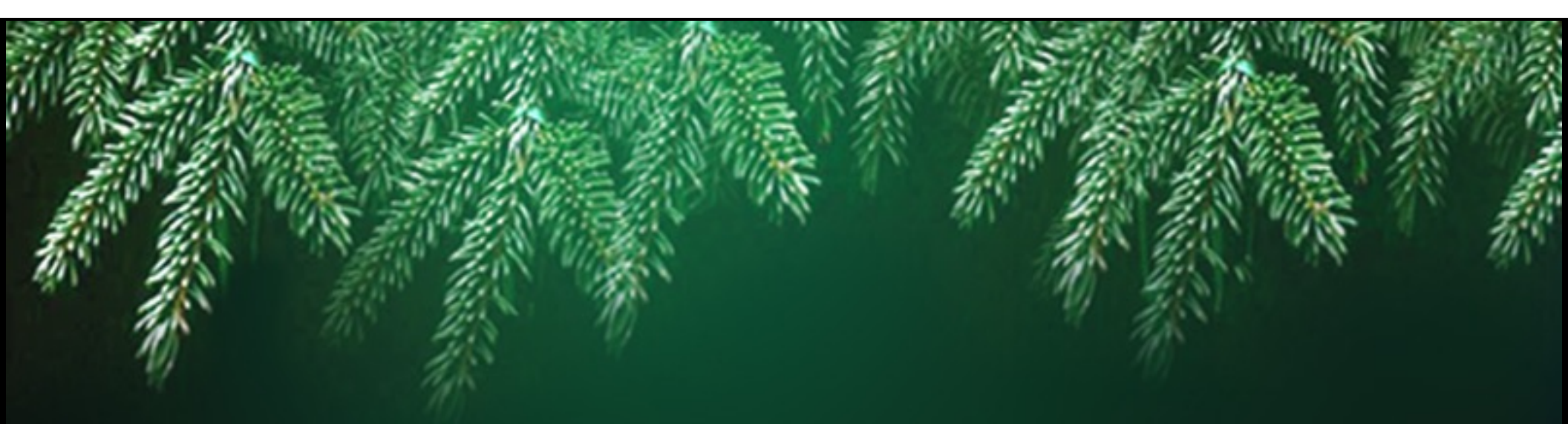


Isaiah 57:15 The high and lofty one who lives in eternity, the Holy One, says this: “I live in the high and holy place (but also) with those whose spirits are contrite and humble. I restore the crushed spirit of the humble and revive the courage of those with repentant hearts.

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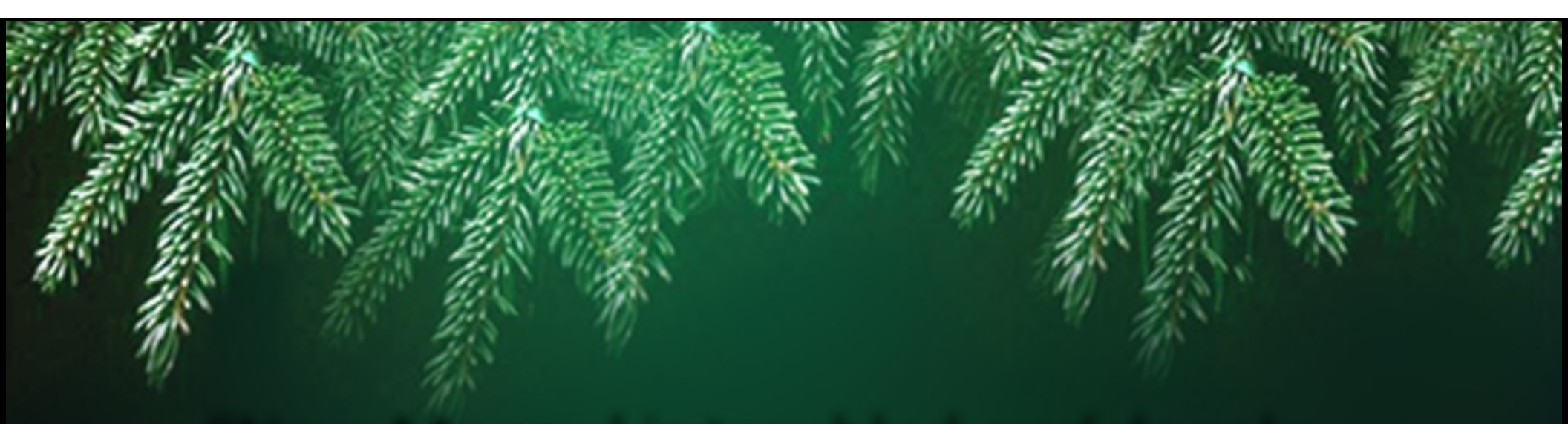


“Put away your sword,” Jesus told him. “Those who use the sword will die by the sword.
53 Don’t you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? 54 But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?” Matthew 26:52-54



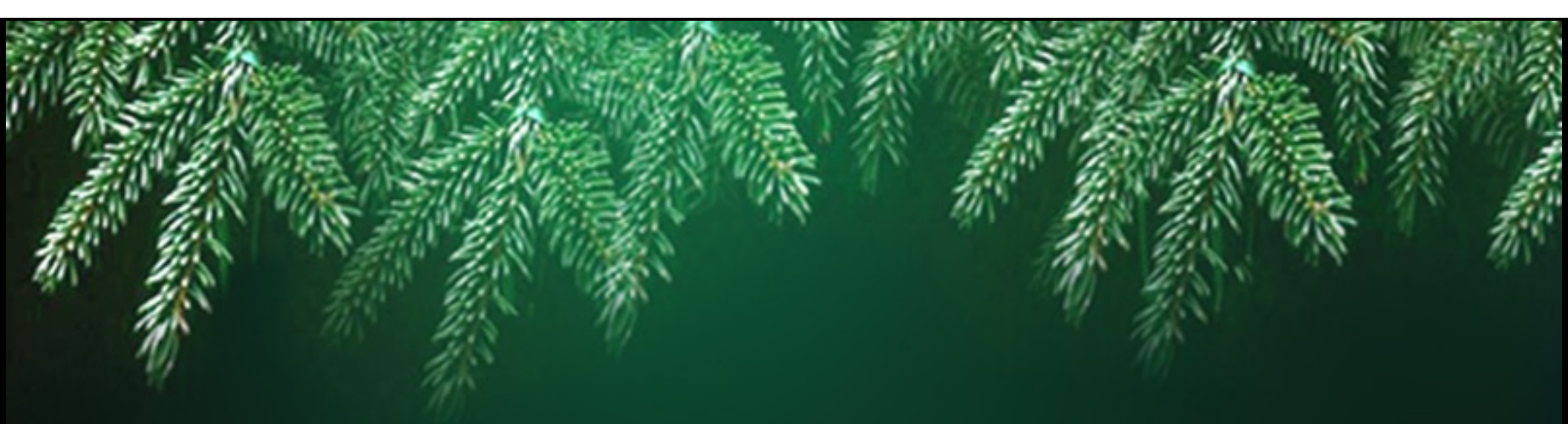
No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded.” John 10:18



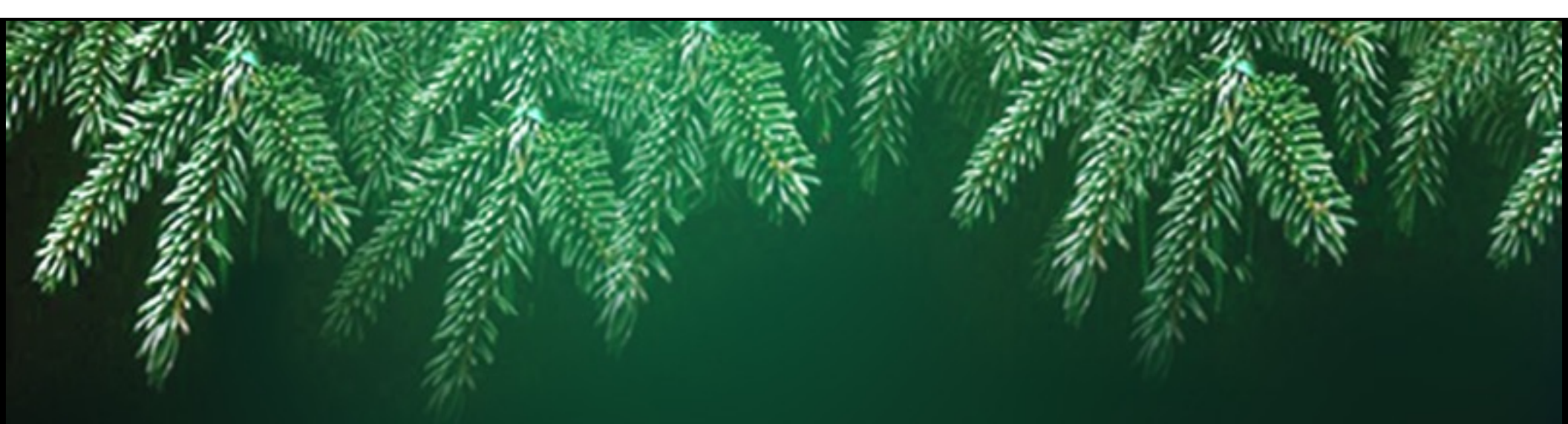


“Now My soul is troubled *and* deeply distressed; what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour of trial and agony’? But it is for **this very purpose** that I have come to this hour.

John 12:27



God made him
who had no sin
to be
sin for us,



...so that in him we might become
the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21





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By the time I was in my thirties I found the idea of religion, and particularly Christianity, utterly preposterous. I had moved from Washington to New York, and my professional and social lives were rooted in Democratic politics. I didn't know anyone who wasn't liberal, and the majority of my friends and colleagues were atheists."



A few months into the relationship my boyfriend confronted me with a question I didn't expect to get from any person I knew: "Do you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior?" "Of course not!" I answered. It was ridiculous. *Who says things like this?* I wondered.



My boyfriend then explained that he saw a future for us, but that he couldn't marry someone who didn't accept Jesus as their Savior. But then he told me something that I had never heard: "If you can keep an open mind," he said, "God can reveal Himself to you."



This didn't sound right to me, but I had so much respect for this man that I didn't feel I could dismiss his claim out of hand. But I warned him that even though I was willing to show up at church from time to time, the chances of me becoming a Christian were less than zero.



About a year into this unlikely journey I came to the conclusion that the weight of evidence was on the side of Christianity being true. Shortly after arriving at that conclusion, I went on a business trip to Taiwan. During the travel I prayed fervently that God would reveal Himself to me, though I didn't really understand what I was asking for.



And then one morning I awoke from a dream in which Jesus had come to me and said, “Here I am.” I was overwhelmed and frightened because the experience was so real. I called my boyfriend, half a world away, but before I had a chance to tell him (about my dream), he broke up with me.



I ended up reaching out to a Christian I had met through my (now ex-) boyfriend and ... (he) insisted that I needed to join a Bible study. So I took a breath and headed to the Upper East Side Bible study my friend had suggested. I wish I could remember exactly what was said that first day, because as I stepped out onto the sidewalk after the meeting I was overwhelmed by the truth of the Gospels.



God didn't just condescend to come to earth as a human. He came as a helpless infant. The King of Kings was born amid barnyard animals and piles of hay after His lowly parents were turned away from better lodgings. When the Magi came to see the Lord, there was no security on hand to judge whether they were worthy. The Messiah was approachable.



He was both one of us, and at the same time, “God with us.” He was flesh. He would hunger, He would bleed, He would love, He would thirst, and He would die. None of this could have happened had He not been born fully human.



At every turn in the story of Christmas we witness unquestioning obedience to God. A young virgin is told she will conceive a son by the Holy Spirit. How will she explain this to her husband-to-be? What if he refuses to marry her and she's left to bear a son out of wedlock?



These were not minor concerns in the time in which she lived. Still, her response to the angel Gabriel is profound in its simplicity. “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary says. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” How many of us are slower to respond to God’s prompting over much smaller matters?



Joseph was just as quick to ignore his worldly concerns and acquiesce to the call of God. Upon learning the news of Mary's pregnancy, he decided to quietly end the engagement so as to not expose her to public disgrace.



But mercifully, he, too, had a dream. An angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him to “not be afraid” to take Mary as his wife. He obeyed. And then he and Mary joined in their obedience to welcome into the world the Light of all mankind.



Christmas is a day to remember all of this; to ponder the mystery and the wonder of a birth like no other. What a gift! It's one I won't take for granted again.





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