

Christmas Was the Ultimate Spiritual Breakthrough

Read Time: 3 Minutes 41 Seconds

Have you ever prayed for something for a really long time, with no evidence of an answer? George Mueller, a British man who fed hundreds of orphans in the 1800s, prayed every day for the salvation of five men. The first man was converted after 18 months, and the second surrendered to Jesus after five more years. The third man gave his life to Christ after Mueller had prayed for six more years.

The last two men were still not Christians when Mueller died in 1897, even though he had prayed for them daily for 52 years. But history records that both of them were converted after his death! Mueller's testimony inspires me to be consistent in prayer, even when I feel tempted to give up on a promise from God.

The Christmas story is also a testimony of answered prayer, although few people look at the birth of Jesus that way. One of my favorite scenes in the nativity story occurs when Joseph and Mary bring the baby Jesus to the temple for His dedication. There, they meet Simeon and Anna, two elderly followers of the Lord who have been praying for years for the arrival of the promised Messiah.

Luke's Gospel says of Simeon that "it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (Luke 2:26). We don't know how long this old man had prayed, but it was probably multiple decades. Things didn't look hopeful at that time, especially with Roman armies occupying Israel.

Imagine his joy when he walked into the temple that day. He realized that God had finally answered his consistent

requests. When Simeon saw the baby Jesus, he took Him in his arms and said: "...my eyes have seen Your salvation" (v. 30).

Anna, who was 84, never left the temple because she was praying continually for the arrival of the Messiah. She erupted in joy when she met the baby Jesus and his parents—"and she continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (v. 38). Obviously a faithful remnant of Old Testament believers were praying, groaning and travailing for God's promise to become a reality.

The Christmas story revolves around a joyful birth, but it was also the culmination of a long and painful process. Mary carried the baby Jesus for nine months, but the gestation period for the Messiah took centuries. Ancient prophets, dating back to the time of Moses, had declared that the Messiah was coming. Even in the darkest times of Israel's history, when the Jews were in captivity in Babylon, prayer warriors believed and claimed these promises:

- Isaiah predicted that a child would be born who would be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). He also prophesied hundreds of years before Jesus came that a virgin would miraculously conceive and give birth to the Messiah, and that His name would be called "Immanuel," or "God with us" (Isa. 7:14).
- The prophet Micah prophesied sometime around 700 B.C. that the Messiah would be born in the small town of Bethlehem, and that He would rule over Israel (Micah 5:2).
- Solomon actually predicted that kings of the east would bow down and worship the Messiah and offer him gifts (Ps. 72:10-11). This was fulfilled when the magi visited the baby Jesus, and gave Him gold, frankincense and myrrh.
- Jeremiah prophesied about Herod's horrible slaughter of

babies in Bethlehem, a reminder that the devil would violently oppose the coming of the Savior (Jer. 31:15).

- Hosea predicted that the Messiah would come out of Egypt (Hos. 11:1). This was fulfilled with Joseph and Mary took the baby Jesus to Egypt for a short time while Herod was plotting to kill him.

The Christmas story is the culmination of a long and agonizing travail. It was a victorious shout of joy after centuries of barrenness. It was the ultimate spiritual breakthrough. No wonder a bright star appeared over the manger where Jesus lay. No wonder a multitude of angels gave glory to God on the night of His birth. Darkness was overcome by Light, and gladness chased away all gloom.

When the Messiah came in human flesh, He entered this world “in the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4). He didn’t come on our schedule, but His timing was perfect. To us, God’s promises may seem slow in coming—but He is never late.

As you celebrate the coming of Jesus, I pray you will also remember that all of God’s promises are guaranteed. Don’t stop praying. Don’t look at dark circumstances and lose hope. Be patient and press through the pain. Keep on asking, seeking and knocking until the breakthrough comes. Merry Christmas!

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J. Lee Grady was editor of *Charisma* for 11 years and now serves as senior contributing editor. He directs the *Mordecai Project* ([MordecaiProject.org](#)), an international ministry that protects women and girls from gender-based violence. His latest books are “Follow Me” and “Let’s Go Deeper”(Charisma House).