

# “You Matter.”

*How Should the Christmas Story Affect Our Actions Today?*

JOANNA WAGNER'S MONTHLY UPDATE



DECEMBER 1, 2012

Dear Friend,

It's Thursday evening.

I've taken my seat at the dinner table with my brother Steve, his wife Rebecca, and their three children. Before digging into a delicious dinner, Steve lights a match. As he puts the flame to a candle's wick in the middle of the table, his four-year-old daughter proclaims enthusiastically:

*"We light this candle..."*

All of us then repeat her words. [We light this candle]

*"...to remind us..."* [to remind us]

*"...that Christ is the light of the world..."* [that Christ is the light of the world]

*"...and we are Christ's light in the world."* [and we are Christ's light in the world]

Reciting this fifteen-second reminder has become one of my favorite family traditions. It places my focus back on Christ as the center of life and keeps my mind on his command to share his hope with others.

The tradition has become especially poignant for me as we approach the celebration of Christ's birth. After all, Christmas is a day not simply for sipping hot chocolate and opening gifts. It's a day to think about how we can actively shine the light of Christ through our lives now.

This November, I spoke briefly with "Chris" at the University of North Texas (UNT). His thoughts echoed the thoughts of countless others I've encountered this fall:

"See, I'm a Christian, so I'm personally pro-life. But, I don't tell other people how they should think. Jesus wouldn't force his morality on people."

This young man, like so many others, wanted to believe in a "Jesus" who said to think what we wish and then to mind our own business. But did *that* Jesus ever exist? As I discussed with Chris, the Jesus of history was nailed to a cross precisely because he proclaimed a very unpopular message. Jesus said,

*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* (John 14:6, ESV)

Jesus not only claimed to know the truth. He claimed to *be* the truth. He claimed to be "the light of the world." Isaiah prophesied about the coming Messiah, long before Jesus' birth:

*But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.* (Isaiah 53:5, ESV)



I love spending time with my nieces.  
This picture was taken around  
Thanksgiving Day.



JUSTICE FOR ALL TRAINS THOUSANDS TO MAKE ABORTION UNTHINKABLE FOR MILLIONS, ONE PERSON AT A TIME.

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Jesus was willing to humble himself, and in doing so, his light shined brightly. He took on our form, experienced human struggle, and proclaimed truth that was unpopular. He even gave his life for us. Therefore, to be Christ's "light in the world" means to sacrifice our time, energy, and – yes – perhaps even reputation for others and for their salvation. That's what Christ did and it's what Scripture calls all of us to do:

*Open your mouth for the mute,  
for the rights of all who are destitute.  
Open your mouth, judge righteously,  
defend the rights of the poor and needy.*  
(Proverbs 31:8-9, ESV)

At UNT, where Chris and I talked, one volunteer alone met fifteen women who had faced crisis pregnancies during their time at school. All of them had obtained abortions. These women had faced some of the hardest circumstances imaginable for a college student. Where were the Christ-followers who could've shared the hope of Christ with them, given them practical resources, and helped them understand the value of their unborn children?

Sadly, perhaps the Christians were just where Chris was when I met him – content to follow a "Christ" who doesn't exist by "letting others think what they want."

Through my work with Justice for All, I am seeking to follow Christ's example by actively reaching out to those most in need of hope and truth. Though at times this can be draining, it is especially fulfilling to see people begin to look at human life and their own lives with fresh eyes. I can't tell you the number of times a

person has expressed to me that she doesn't even believe that *her* life matters. I have the chance to tell her, "I actually think you matter; I believe your life is valuable, and there is good reason for you to believe that, too!"

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level and sacrificing  
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essentially said to us,  
"You matter."**

The God of the universe came to us in the form of a human child, Jesus Christ. By coming down to our level and sacrificing himself for us, he essentially said to us, "You matter." I have the opportunity to bring that same message, the message of Christmas, every time I talk to students on campus. Chris is missing out on this privilege. It's a privilege to startle people with Jesus' view that they have intrinsic value.

What does all of this mean for you?

Those around *you* are also in darkness. So, as you look toward the Christmas holiday, I challenge you to think of a way that you can be "Christ's light in the world." Who is one person in your community who needs to see how God values him (or her)? How will you help to open his eyes? I'd love to hear your ideas and pray for you specifically!

It's your generous support that enables me to help Christians like Chris see how they can be Christ's light to those around them. Thank you.

I pray you have a very merry Christmas!

*Joanna*

This philosophy student, from the University of North Texas, initially talked to me to express discomfort with JFA's use of graphic images. Because I took the time to listen to his concerns, I had the opportunity to talk with him for over two more hours! During that time we discussed moral theory, the existence of God, the nature of God, and the person of Jesus Christ.

