

It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year
Week 1: Enjoy the Magic, Live the Miracle
December 1, 2013

Welcome/introduction stuff

Hope you had a good Thanksgiving and thanks for joining us this first week of Advent

For Christmas we thought we'd change it up a bit and do something a little more topical as we get ready over the season of Advent

So we came up with this series that we'll be unpacking "Enjoy the Magic Live the Miracle"

And the idea here is this: Christmas is magical.

It's one of my favorite times of year, and I buy into the whole thing—the lights, the music, the presents, the anticipation, the wonder, Charlie Brown, all of it

So Christmas is great and I'm all for us digging in and enjoying this season as deeply as we possibly can

But it gets a little confusing for us as we enter into this season and all the magic of it, and the confusion is summed up for us brilliantly by the great 20th century philosopher and poet, Neil Diamond.

Sometime in the 70's Neil Diamond penned the Christmas Classic: Have yourself a Merry Little Christmas.

And here's how the song starts:

Christmas future is far away
Christmas past is past
Christmas present is here today
Bringing joy that will last

Now, pause right there and notice something—within three lines of lyrics, old Neil dismisses Christmas past as past—don't live in the past, that's over! Leave that behind!

But Christmas present is here today, and somehow TODAY's Christmas joy is going to actually last

Even though I just encouraged you to dismiss Christmas past as in the past!

See, there's this magic this time of year that we so love and so wish would stay present forever.

But at some point after Christmas it all goes back in the box and the magic of it is over

There's this thing about Christmas that in many of us awakens a deep longing for something bigger and greater than Christmas can provide.

The reality is that magic is by nature temporary. All magic turns on something like sleight of hand, a bit of trickery.

Making it look like something happened that can't and didn't really happen.

And that's why a magician never gives away their secrets—it's all about keeping the secret to the trick a secret or else the whole thing is kind of exposed

So magic can be fun and great—I remember watching as a kid a magician named David Copperfield sawing people in half

How awesome is that!?!

But you attempt to move that magic out of its place and make serious life decisions around something that isn't real, it has tragic consequences

When magic gathers up our dreams and becomes a destination for mis-placed hopes, it no longer functions in a healthy way in our lives

Magic is seeing something incredible that doesn't really happen: the lady doesn't really get sawed in half

But when we start to talk about a miracle, we're shifting into a whole different category

A miracle is seeing something incredible ***that actually happens.***

Something that wasn't before, now is; there's a permanence to the miracle that takes the illusion of the magic and actually delivers on it.

So there's Christmas ***magic*** which is a ton of fun to enjoy and play with—it LOOKS like the world it will bring a joy that will last

But at the end of the holiday season, it all goes back in the box.

What we really want and what we really need is a Christmas ***miracle***: something with the power and the ability to deliver real transformation to our world that outlasts the decorations

Something permanent that you can bank on the other eleven months of the year.

So this Christmas, we want to highlight some of the ways that Christmas magic which is great fun to enjoy in its right place

Points us to our longing for a Christmas miracle
and how our longings for a Christmas miracle are met by the gift of God sending his Son into the world to bring that lasting and permanent transformation.

What I want to propose to you is that if we're rooted, deeply rooted in the miracle of Christmas, we can enjoy and appreciate the magic without the let-down on the other side!

we can properly enjoy the magic because we haven't put our hope in that magic to bring real and lasting change in our lives

The miracle is what we're hoping in, and that frees us up to appreciate and enjoy the magic

without mistakenly putting our hope in the magic that will only and always let us down if we take it too seriously

And one of the ways we're going to highlight that Christmas magic is by highlighting some of the ways that the songs that Christmas has inspired over the years

And today, I'm pulling one of my favorite songs out and getting us started: "it's the most wonderful time of the year."

Today we're going to talk about wonder and I want to give you a little warning before we get too far into this

Some of you are really practical, pragmatic, "so what" people. It needs to be concrete and clear and specific.

Today's going to be what I would call "a growth opportunity" for you

What we're going to talk about today is wonder, and that's going to involve being a little bit dreamy, a little bit conceptual and abstract

If you're annoyed by the dreaminess of it or it gets too abstract or if I just lose you at some point

come on back because at the end I'm going to do what I can to help all of us walk out of here with some specifics of what it means to live it out practically

But this matters because the wonder of Christmas is something that really captivates many of us, isn't it?

And what I want to propose to you is that the difference between GETTING Christmas ENTIRELY and MISSING Christmas ENTIRELY

for many of us has everything to do with where our center of wonder is.

And not only is the difference between really getting Christmas or missing Christmas all about where our center of wonder is

Our experience of life on the OTHER SIDE of Christmas is all about where our center of wonder is.

If we want a Christmas day that really WILL bring a joy that will last, then we've got to get our center of wonder rooted in the right place

or we'll keep running this Groundhog Day experience where we keep living Christmas the same way year after year

and it never has the lasting impact that we want for it to have all because we've misplaced our wonder.

So we're going to camp out on wonder a bit today, I hope you'll stick with me as we dream a little bit.

Let me give you a Christmas picture that captures for me the most wonder-filled Christmas moment of my life:

Two years ago, we flew up to my in-laws house in Indiana the day before Christmas.

They have a beautiful house set in a small neighborhood with lots of trees and a beautiful back yard

and the back of their house is almost entirely glass so you can soak it all in

Christmas morning, we wake up, and it's snowing these huge, glorious flakes of beautiful snow. They have a puppy that's just a couple of months old.

And there's a fire in the fireplace, the tree is lit, presents have just been opened, my 4, 6, and 8 year old kids are outside rolling with the puppy in the perfect snow on Christmas morning

and I'm just like "This is wonderful" I just want to pause everything, bottle this moment, and live in it forever

I want to be absorbed into it, enter into the fullness of it, spend countless hours enjoying and fully appreciating each part of the wonder of that scene

Christmas. Is. Wonderful.

And for many of us that wonder of Christmas and the desire to experience and enter into it and be caught up in it is transformational

it brings us to an entirely new space transporting us from the minutia of small annoyances and problems in our lives

into something that's so much bigger and grander and beautiful and captivating to our souls that we just want to bottle it, enter into it

There's something about the wonder of Christmas: the decorations, the music, the gifts wrapped, and of course the tree

Now, of course, the Christmas tree can be a point of contention in families and sometimes between couples

How many of you are white light people? How many of you are colored light people?

See, there's hours of marriage and family therapy waiting to happen right there.

But when I was growing up, my family had for most of my life an artificial tree—I realize that's the unforgivable sin for some of you, but here's my confession.

We had an artificial tree, which for some of you is bad enough

But we also had colored lights. And not just colored lights, they were randomly blinking, colored lights

And not just randomly blinking colored lights, but the BIG FAT BULBS randomly blinking colored lights

And we didn't sell out and go corporate and uniform on the rest of the decorations, either—no standard red balls hanging across our tree

We had all home-made kids crafty kind of decorations, lots of kids-crafts we had made at like age 4
and lots of little silver tinsel that we hung up on the fake branches

Now for some of you, I've just described your worst nightmare. But for me and my family, we loved this tree; in fact, I remember one Christmas I was home from college

And I'd had a hard semester at college and for a couple of nights I just slept on the couch in front of the Christmas tree with the lights all plugged in just because I loved it so.

I just wanted to escape from my semester into the wonder of Christmas and falling asleep in front of the tree was a way for me to do that.

Now maybe the fake tree with big colored blinking lights just doesn't do it for you, but part of the power of Christmas for most of us is the feeling of wonder

See, we were MADE to experience wonder! We WANT wonder!

There's something about Christmas that taps into that wonder-want!

A few of you here are maybe grumpy or cynical about Christmas, but all cynicism is the over-correction and over-reaction on the other side of a painful disappointment

Cynicism toward Christmas is simply the emotional push-back of not wanting to hope too much that something will be wonderful when it's let you down previously

But all of us actually want wonder.

We want wonder in our lives, and Christmas is the time that as a culture we sort of rally together and express and embrace this desire that's in our hearts and souls

And what we actually want in the middle of all this Christmas wonder is permanent wonder.

There are all kinds of songs around Christmas time that talk about longings for the wonder of this time of year to spill out for the rest of the year, aren't there?

We would love for our lives and our world to be marked with beauty and grace and wonder all year long

But two things inhibit wonder:

1. all things are passing and corruptible

Everything wonderful in this world keeps moving.

Christmas gives way to New Year's and beyond

Everything in this world is passing and corruptible—it doesn't last and it's spoilable, can be tainted

The second reality that inhibits our ability to experience the wonder that we were made for year-round

2. our capacity for wonder is limited

Two weeks ago my in-laws generously paid for an all-expenses trip of a lifetime as we flew down to Florida and for five days we did a different theme park every day:

Legoland Monday, Seaworld Tuesday, Animal Kingdom Wednesday, Magic Kingdom Thursday, and Epcot on Friday

It was incredible, really was a once-in-a-lifetime trip for us and our kids, great ages, all that

But about mid-week, Kelly commented that we were running out of capacity for WOW

We had experienced and seen so much been so impressed with so many rides and incredible shows, that we were experiencing wonder-fatigue

What was actually pretty wonderful and amazing could no longer be experienced as such because we were hitting our limit of how amazed and awed we could be.

So these two inhibitors keep us from experiencing all the wonder that we were actually made to experience

And the core of both of these issues is rooted in the Biblical understanding of sin.

Sin is just broken relationship—because our world exists in a state of broken relationship with God, it's like a computer that has a virus

Things just don't work as well as they're supposed to; some things don't work at all, but even the things that are working aren't working to the capacity that they were made to run on

The Biblical story says that when we were first created, we were put in a place called Eden and our lives were fueled by wonder on two fronts:

1. we were in a place that was stunningly beautiful—wow was everywhere
2. we were in an un-hindered relationship with a God who is infinitely good and loving and wonder-full

When we sinned we introduced the virus to the system that would have all kinds of wonder-inhibiting ramifications:

1. cut us off from God—the source of tens of billions of wonders, and tens of billions more on top of that
2. we were kicked out of paradise
3. that virus we introduced would undermine and un-do wonder all around us in the natural world: death and decay
4. sin capped our ability to experience all the wonder available to us—we are wonder-handicapped, wow-inhibited people who cannot enter into all the wonders available to us because sin has capped our ability to experience it

But the Scripture speak of a day when this will not always be so.

The Scriptures speak of a day when everything shall be made new and wonderful again

everything around us will be made wonderful and we will have the renewed capacity to experience and embrace and enter into the fullness of that wonder

And it speaks of someone who was to come who will inaugurate this new season,
who will turn the tide

Someone is coming who will take this world that was made for wonder and do a
new work to overcome sin

And one of the places where that promise of permanent wonder and the one who
was to establish it is given to us is in an unlikely place: in the old testament book of
Isaiah

Isaiah was a prophet several hundred years before Jesus, and most of what he has to
tell the people of Israel is not good news

God is not pleased with Israel, no one is seeking the Lord or honoring their neighbor
they are exploiting and killing one another, they are worshiping other gods,
and God is going to judge them and discipline them by sending other nations to
pillage them

The bulk of the book of Isaiah is not the kind of material you'd use for a warm-fuzzy
Christmas story for the kids

But sprinkled throughout Isaiah are these glorious promises and prophecies of one
who was to come who would make all things right and new

And many of these promises and prophecies have been gathered up into Christian
hymns and songs and clung to as signs and promises of the birth of Jesus

And this morning we're going to look one of those passages that promise the
eventual triumph of wonder that is finally permanent

Isaiah 9

***² The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned...***

See, in the midst of promises from God that judgment is coming, in the midst of the
darkness of their own foolishness and sin, there's a hope coming, light is coming

And here comes that promise of the one who is to come who will inaugurate the
wonder-permanence we all long for:

***⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.***

And he will be called [HERE COMES OUR WORD]

***Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.***

***⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.***

***He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.***

***The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.***

When I was in junior high, basketball was king in our school

And we would play pick-up games all the time. But there was one guy who was head and shoulders above everyone and his name was Robert Weeks

And Robert Weeks was so much better than the rest of us he hardly played with us, but whenever he lowered himself to join us on the court, he would just destroy everyone

And if you were mid-game and Robert Weeks came into the gym wanting to play, the team that was losing always got Robert Weeks and he changed everything

No matter how bad you were losing, Robert Weeks could come in and turn everything around—he was a complete game-changer

In the midst of Isaiah's prophecy that is mostly gloom and doom, he introduces hope by way of a game-changer

A child is going to be born. A son will be given

And the government will be upon his shoulders—there were all kinds of sons of kings in the history of Israel who simply took over whenever their dad died—one was 7 years old, others were in their teens or twenties

And as you can imagine, it seldom turned out well. Give a teenager the keys to the good car, you're asking for a speeding ticket

Give a teenager the keys to a whole kingdom, and there's no telling what might happen.

But this child will have the government upon their shoulders

And unlike the government at the time which was corrupt and mostly a disaster

This governor, this king, this child will be faithful, he'll be called all sorts of things: firstly, wonderful

And the word used for “wonderful” there is a noun, not an adjective—remember from elementary school, a noun is a person, place or thing.

So his name will be called Wonderful. and also Counselor.

He's not a counselor who happens to be wonderful. His NAME IS WONDERFUL.

This son who will be born, he *will be* wonderful, full of wonders.

In our world currently, wonder is passing and fading

But this child, this son who was to be born, was coming in order to re-establish wonder-permanence

Look at all the words in this text that are all about the permanent establishment of this Son:

***Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.***

***⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.***

***He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.***

***The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.***

There's a son coming who will establish a permanent kingdom that will never fade and never end and his name will be called Wonderful.

And he is coming to establish peace and justice and righteousness and a holy and gracious and great kingdom that will never, ever end.

And all of this is not our idea, it's not our doing, it's the work of the God of the universe.

The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this

God is so passionate for his people and his creation, he's so emphatic about giving us wonder and re-establishing all of his creation as he originally intended it that he will give his Son to accomplish it

He will do whatever it takes to expel the virus and re-establish his name and his creation with wonder right at the center of it.

And it will be done with a child whose name shall be called Wonderful.

And the point of all of this is that this Son will come and establish a permanent, lasting kingdom that will never fade or pass and his people will live under His rule FOREVER

And endless hallelujah, forever enjoying the endless wonder of his justice and peace and love and joy.

This idea in Isaiah of God doing a new thing through the birth of a child is not an isolated event

all throughout the Bible, God delights in doing new things and miraculous things through the promised birth of a child

And one of the earliest stories we get of this in the Bible is from Genesis, the first book of the Bible, and the story of Abraham and his wife Sarah.

Abraham and Sarah are old and they have no children, she's barren and they've been unable to have any children

this is a tremendous source of heartache for them as it is for those of you who have been through that struggle.

And they're way, way, way past child-having years but angels appear to Abraham and they promise Abraham that Sarah will have a baby

Sarah's just outside the tent where they're talking and she laughs sort of a bitter and cynical laugh

she declares to herself that she and Abraham are both too old to have this pleasure

And the angel knows what she's thinking and the angel says this: ***"Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" -Genesis 18:14***

In the next year, Sarah's pregnant and Isaac is born, exactly as promised.

Fast forward a couple thousand years, and you've got Mary. She's extremely unlikely to have a child for a different reason than Sarah, she's a virgin.

But she's also got a relative Elizabeth, who is old and barren, just like Sarah was in Abraham and Sarah's story several thousand years earlier.

And the angel of God appears to Mary and declares that Mary will have a baby—when Mary objects that this is impossible, just like Sarah did:

35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. 36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God."

I had a pastor once who took these passages and said that these two angels are basically saying the same thing:

“Is anything too wonderful for God” is just the other side of the same coin as “Nothing will be impossible with God.”

My friends, this Christmas, as we head into the most wonderful time of the year, hear these two wonder-filled sides of the same coin loud and clear, a word for you this Christmas season:

“Is anything too wonderful for God?”
“Nothing will be impossible with God.”

“Is anything too wonderful for God?”
Nothing will be impossible with God.

Is anything too wonderful for God?
Nothing will be impossible with God.

There’s a son promised in Isaiah, whose kingdom will never end and who is called wonderful. counselor. Almighty God. The everlasting Father. The Prince of Peace

His promised coming is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, God come in the flesh, for nothing will be impossible with God.

Here is the epicenter of the wonder of Christmas: God puts on flesh and comes to get us.

Here is wonder—the infinite God clothes himself with finite, everyday flesh for you and for me

Here’s an old prayer that I’ve updated a little bit that invites us into the full-out wonder of Christmas:

***What shall I give to you, o God, for the gift of gifts,
Your own dear Son, begotten, not created,
my Redeemer, my Representative, my Confidence, my Substitute,
His self-emptying is incomprehensible,
His infinity of love is beyond the heart’s grasp.***

*Here is wonder of wonders:
He came below to raise me above,
He was born like me that I might become like Him.*

*Here is love;
when I cannot rise to God He draws near on wings of grace,
to raise me to Himself.*

*Here is power;
when God and humanity were infinitely apart
He united them in permanent unity, the uncreated God and the created flesh.*

*Here is God's wisdom;
when I was undone, with no ability to return to Him,
and no intellect to save myself,
He came, God-incarnate, to save me to the very end,
He came as a man to die my death,
to shed satisfying blood on my behalf,
to work out a perfect righteousness for me.*

*O God, take me in spirit to the watchful shepherds,
and enlarge my mind;
let me hear good tidings of great joy,
and hearing, believe, rejoice, praise, adore,
my conscience bathed in an ocean of rest,
my eyes uplifted to a reconciled Father,
place me with ox, donkey, camel, goat,
to look with them upon my Redeemer's face,
and in Him know that I am delivered from sin;
let me with Simeon clasp the new-born Child to my heart,
embrace Him with undying faith,
exulting that He is mine and I am His.*

In Jesus Christ God has given so much that the infinite storehouses of heaven can give no more.

When we talk about the wonder of Christmas, the epicenter of the wonder of Christmas is right there:

in Jesus Christ, God has given so much that the infinite storehouses of heaven can give nothing more

That's the true wonder-center of Christmas.

This is why it's the most wonderful time of the year.

And in the midst of all the magic and wonder that this season offers, the invitation from God is to anchor our souls into the wonder of God becoming flesh

And it takes a little work, to press past the glitz and the sights and the noise of the holiday season to peer into the wonder of God giving us so much that he can give no more

But if we're looking for a wonder that will last, a joy that will last, it requires something more than just window dressing on the outside

If we're looking for a wonder and a joy that will really last, we've got to get to the root of what it is that's BLOCKING our experience of wonder and joy

That's the sin problem we talked about earlier—that sin that's the computer virus that runs deep and has tainted and corrupted the whole system

And if our real problem is that pervasive, that all-encompassing, if it's literally touched and tainted and every single part of our existence

Then it can be overwhelming to engage and deal with it, to even think about it.

I mean, if every single second of every single day every single part of our world and our lives is tainted by sin

If sin is that pervasive, if it's that systemic it'd be the most overwhelming problem or issue that could ever be tackled or dealt with in the history of humanity

I mean, it would take a miracle to be delivered from something that all-encompassing, that's that bad on that many levels

And the wonder of Christmas is the best news that we could possibly imagine has happened: the miracle of God himself coming to deal with this all-pervasive issue

The sin problem that threatens to completely undo us and rob us of all permanent and lasting joy and wonder is dealt with in this little baby born in Bethlehem

There's a great cosmic battle between good and evil at work in our world all throughout history

and this baby has come to be the decisive player in that cosmic battle to defeat your greatest enemies and mine

If you know anything about World War 2, you know about Normandy and the allied invasion at Normandy is the turning point of the entire war.

There are two things that are true on the other side of Normandy:

1. there was plenty of fighting still left to be done on the European front, still lots of work to do

2. but the war was essentially won

The wonder of Jesus' coming as a baby in Bethlehem is like the turning of the tide of this great spiritual war.

There is plenty of work and battle left

But the war is essentially won here. Permanent wonder that was our state to begin with is essentially bought back for us in a stable in Bethlehem.

The baby born in Bethlehem is God's audacious assault on the darkness and on the sin and evil that has unjustly attempted to claim what is rightfully his

And His coming is kick-off event of this kingdom that will never end

Is anything too wonderful for God?

My friends, God is a God of billions upon billions of wonders.

In the beginning, we were made for wonder and made in wonder, made wonderful and set in a space that was wonder-full to relate to a God who is wonderful

We gave much of that wonder away when we introduced sin into the system

But our hearts crave, ache, and long for wonder still.

And God promised long ago to send a son whose name would be called wonderful to re-claim all that was his

And Christmas is the celebration of the greatest wonder to occur in all of history: the coming of God in the flesh to rescue us and deliver us

In Jesus Christ, heaven has given so much that heaven can give no more

Christmas is God's D-day landing at Bethlehem

when the tide in the great battle turns and victory is secured and assured

And one day the king whose kingdom shall never end and who now reigns victoriously over all things

will return to finish the work that is already secured in his death and resurrection

And when that is done, when everything is made new and we're at home in the new earth with God himself as our God living and reigning among us, present with us as our light by day and without any night or tears or pain

We will be restored to our original intent as people who are absorbed in, captivated by, and living united with the infinite wonders and beauties all around us.

Okay, SO WHAT? If I lost you with all the dreamy stuff, now's the time to tune back in and engage a little bit.

1. Enjoy the magic!

There's so much to enjoy all around us this Christmas season
and some of us just need the freedom to enjoy and appreciate the season and all the ways that our culture wholeheartedly throws itself into the wonder of the Christmas season

2. Cultivate heart-wonder at the miracle.

One of my favorite speakers talks about the difference between something being on audio versus on video.

If you've got two different things happening around you and one's on video and you can see it and the other one is just on audio
which one are you most likely to pay attention to? Video, for most of us

The problem for most of us is that the culture's version of the magic of Christmas is what's on video while the miracle of Christmas and what Jesus has done is on audio.

That's what's getting the vast majority of our attention and our affection in our hearts

What I want to call us to is to switch those: to put the miracle on video and put the magic on audio.

That the centerpiece of Christmas is the miracle of Christ, that's what's on video. And the magic of Christmas, while it's there, it's on audio, it's around the edges, it's enjoyable but not the main thing of what we're about

Find some good Advent or Christmas devotionals to read over the next several weeks

find time over these next couple of weeks to do little things along the way to keep you rooted and grounded in the miracle of Christmas

3. The real wonder of Christmas changes everything—how do I need to live differently as a result?

I want to invite you as you consider the wonder of the Christmas story, and as you put that on video as the centerpiece of Christmas

To consider quite simply that if God has done this, it changes everything.

The miracle of God becoming human to rescue us changes everything—and one of the questions I want to invite you to ask God is simply this:

where does the wonder of Christmas need to do its work to change or challenge me?

One thing that's been rattling around in my heart this week:

If it's true that in Jesus Christ heaven has given so much that heaven can give no more, where would that same Jesus call me to be more generous?

For me, specifically, I'm decently generous with my money but I'm very possessive of my time.

If God is a self-giving God, where would he have me to be more free in my own self-giving?

One other one:

If I'm going to live in this son's kingdom forever and ever, if I'm secure under the great king who is enthroned as Lord over the universe forever, how do I need to live more freely and less anxiously here?

How does the wonders of Jesus' coming and the future he's secured for me for an eternity free me up to

love people more faithfully, live more playfully, deal with conflicts more graciously, be more attentive to others and a little less self-absorbed because God has taken care of me so extravagantly

In what specific way does the wonder of Christmas challenge you or call you to living more like Christ in this world during this season?

4. How is God inviting me to be a part of his wonder-making in this world?

God delights to create all kinds of wonders—the earth, the sky, the seas, all populated with all kinds of wonders

As men and women made in God's image, he invites each of us to be a part of wonder-making, wonder-creating.

You have been gifted and empowered by God as his image-bearer to be an agent and an instrument of wonder

that could be at work, at home, with your kids or grandkids
or with a hobby like photography or art or writing
or something like wood-working, building, learning a craft

Part of what it means to fully bear and express God's image in us is that we were made to be sub-creators of wonder.

How might God be awakening you and calling you into participating in his wonder-working this Christmas and beyond?

This Christmas, I invite you to go into the season with eyes wide-open to the wonders available to you—enjoy the wonder of Christmas 2013.

But as you do so, let this all be a sign or a pointer to you of a greater hunger and a greater wonder

Some day in the not too distant future, Christmas 2013 will be back in the box and will be one of those Christmas pasts that has passed

But the real miracle of Christmas, the one whose name is called Wonderful
he's got an eternal kingdom that will never end

And his righteousness and peace and goodness and wonder are eternal and fixed and not going anywhere.

That's the true wonder of Christmas.

One of the things that's challenging for us in the spiritual journey is that we don't quite know what it will be like at the end, what it is we're fighting for.

We don't know what it would be like to have a kingdom and an existence where permanent wonder was the norm

But we get glimpses of it from the last pages of the New Testament
a brief and shadowy glimpse at the wonder that awaits us on the other side of
the king who returns to finish off his victory
that he secured at a barn in Bethlehem and a cross and empty tomb in
Jerusalem

And this is the writer John's attempts at describing the vision he saw of the future—the wonder that is awaiting all those who follow and trust in Jesus

This is what waits for us on the other side of this great cosmic battle—do me and you a favor, close your eyes and attempt to enter into this picture and all the wonders it describes as I read it:

Rev. 21: Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"

⁹ One of the seven angels ...said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.¹¹ It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.¹² It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates.

¹⁸ The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.¹⁹ The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald,²⁰ the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.²¹ The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.

²² I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.²⁶ The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

22: Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.