

“The stockings were hung by the chimney with care”  
Christmas Eve, December 24, 2022  
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Tell me if you have heard this before?

*’Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house  
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;  
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,  
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there...*

That well-known and oft recited poem was written by Clement Clarke Moore in 1823. I don’t think I am spoiling things by telling you that in the poem, the hopes are well-founded. Santa Claus, or St. Nicholas, arrives. The stockings hung by the chimney with care were not hung in vain.

Something about that one line from the classic Christmas poem has been rattling around in my mind this year. What is entailed in hanging a stocking by the chimney with care.

- Maybe Clement Clarke Moore was simply looking for a line that would rhyme with the hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there.
- Perhaps the author had an eye for detail. Each stocking had to be in just the right spot. The task required symmetry, balance, spacing, even something hinting at color coordination.
- I wonder if the care that went into hanging those stockings was a care long in the making. Were the stockings hastily purchased off the shelf of a store. Or did someone, some person with a warm, kind, sensitive and caring heart make each stocking. I know in our home, when Julie sets to making something for others, in particular our children and grandchildren, every single thing she creates is made with a generous helping of care. She wants it to be just right. In fact, when it comes to something like stockings that are hung with care, she wants each one to be unique, to reflect something about the person for whom the stocking was made.
- Which leads to one other matter involved in stockings being hung by the chimney with care. The stocking has to have a name on it!

Obviously. How else will you know which stocking is yours. How else will each stocking be unique.

I can get real sentimental revisiting how the stockings have been hung by the chimney with care when it comes to our one little family. Christmas 1982, the stockings hung by the chimney with care said Wayne and Julie. Two stockings for the two newlyweds. Same thing in 1983. But come 1984, the mantle held a little more. Jacob was born into our life on December 20, 1984. He came home from the hospital on December 24, 1984. Wow. What a Christmas blessing. His little stocking was hung by the chimney, and I can assure you, that precious little stocking was hung with care. Thirty-eight years later, our needs in terms of the size of a chimney just keep expanding. Hayley, Carlee, Alex...and then all four kids got married, Jonathan, Bridget, Tay, Nate, and then...oh my, and then our grandchildren...Clara, Paul, and Blake. Julie is a true lover of all things living, and so I know for sure we have had a stocking for Bullseye, our beloved dog, and I'm pretty sure Joe the Boxer and Sugar, the little dachshund, they too had stockings that were hung by the chimney with care.

All of this sets the stage for what is really on my mind this Christmas Eve. If we as humans can get so invested in hanging stockings by the chimney with care, eyeballing them for their perfect placement, mixing and matching the arrangements so the colors are just right, knitting, sewing, stitching, all because our hearts are itching to let someone know they matter to us, they mean the world to us, what kind of a mantle does God have? I hope you notice the subtlety of my transition. I did not credit God with having a chimney. Chimneys are for burning fires, and frankly, that is the work of the bad guy who is not even worthy of mention during this season of love. So instead of a chimney, God gets a mantle. Imagine God's mantle, where all of the stockings are hung with care.

The size of the mantle is daunting. You see, it is currently estimated there are 8 billion people on the earth right now. With our four children, their spouses, our grandchildren, and old Ebby and Bubba, our family is up to 13. Thirteen that makes for a crowded mantle. Some of you with even larger families know what I am talking about. How in the

world is God ever going to find space for 8 billion stockings? Not to worry! God is not limited to this world. God is the maker of all the heavens and the earth. And although from our perspective the idea of 8 billion stockings is overwhelming, God is able to handle this amazingly vast universe that is measured not by billions of stockings, but by billions of stars and planets and suns and moons. Whenever anything on this earth seems too big for God, we do well to remember the psalmist who prayed with wonder and awe, “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what are we as human beings that you care for us?”

You see, the question is not really whether God *can* make a mantle big enough for 8 billion stockings?” The question is, “*Would* God make a mantle big enough for 8 billion stockings?” Is the Holy One we worship the type of God who would do something like personally making a stocking for each and every one of the 8 billion human beings who live on the earth. Does the God we worship have that kind of interest in human life, in all of human life, in every human life? There are universes and galaxies out there that boggle the mind. Wouldn't a God big enough to rule that kind of a creation have better things to do than to sit at a sewing machine or busy himself with knitting one and purling two as stocking after stocking were made, each one special, each one handcrafted, each one unique, each one made with love?

The same psalmist who asked the question of God, “What are we as human beings that you care for us?” came to the amazing realization that even though we as humans are extremely small in the scope of this expansive universe, “Yet you have made us as humans a little lower than angels...you have crowned us, (small and seemingly insignificant creatures in a seemingly infinite creation), you have crowned us with glory and honor.” In other words, it would not be a big surprise at all to find out that God does have a really big mantle, at least something that would seem big to us little humans, and that on that mantle there is a stocking for each and every one of God's precious children.

Which means if there is a stocking for each and every person, for all 8 billion people that inhabit the earth, then there is a stocking for you. There is a stocking just for you.

We might be tempted to say, “How would God know what kind of a stocking suits me?” The God we are talking about is the God who searches each and every one of us out. He knows when we sit down. He knows when we rise. He knows our thoughts, our hopes, our dreams, our fears, our failures, our past, our present, our future, our deepest longings and our most heartfelt desires. It is not that jolly man in a red suit who sees us when we’re sleeping and who knows when we’re awake...it is the creator of the heavens and the earth. God sees you when you’re sleeping. God knows when you’re awake. God gave his Son for you, so trust him for Jesus’ sake.

Can God make a stocking suited just for you? God knit you together in your mother’s womb. God knows you. God loves you. God not only makes a stocking just for you. The stocking God made for you has your name on it. God spoke words we need to hear over and over again. In Isaiah the Lord said, “I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.” We are right there, engraved on the palm of God’s hand. Our faces, our lives, our hopes, our dreams, they are all written, engraved, right there on the palms of the hand of the one who created us in his very own image. In other words, our names are written on the palms of God’s hands. And if we need more assurance, Jesus tells us he is the Good Shepherd, and the Good Shepherd knows each of his sheep by name. Not only does Jesus, our Good Shepherd, know us by name, he lays down his life for us. If Jesus goes so far as to lay down his life for us, is it really too hard to believe that God has a mantle filled with stockings that he has hung with care, stockings bearing the name of each and every one of his precious children. And one of those stockings has your name on it. One of those stockings was made just for you.

Although the stocking is made just for you, that stocking is filled with gifts and promises that God wants each and every one of his children to have. What I am saying is that God’s word gives gifts and promises that God intends for each of us to hold close to our hearts. Start pulling God’s blessings out of your stocking and you will find the greatest treasures.

- Like Jacob, there is a ladder just for you.

- You will find a Lego set courtesy of Joshua and that wall of Jericho just for you
- There is a firefighter's outfit worthy of those faithful men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego just for you
- Snow will spill from your stocking because God wants you to know that though our sins are like scarlet, he makes our sins as white as snow. The gift of forgiveness is just for you
- Hold in your hands a Yeti filled to the top that invites you to redeem the water in the Yeti for some wonderful wine when you attend the wedding in Cana
- There is a whole stack of McJerusalem gift cards, enough gift cards to feed you and 5,000 of your closest friends.
- Because the life of faith is a life of adventure, you even get a slingshot. Tell all those giants to watch out! God has stuffed your stocking with all kinds of goodies, all kinds of goodies that are just for you

There is a little deck of cards. Each card has a saying. Each saying is a wonderful treasure.

- One card simply says NEVER. I hope when you see that word NEVER you will realize how many times God has given this powerful promise to his children, to all of his children, to each one of his children. "I will never leave you and I will never forsake you." NEVER.
- Another card has a picture of that ladder we mentioned earlier, a picture with these words that are not just for Jacob. "I am with you. I will watch over you wherever you go."
- There is a card that bears the image of a shepherd's staff. "The Lord is my shepherd." God wants you to claim that promise in a personal way. God wants you to say, "The Lord is MY shepherd."
- This deck of cards numbers way more than 52, but there is one card in particular that God does not want us ever to forget. That card of such great importance shows a hill. On that hill, much like the hill far away that we sing about, on that hill far away sits an old rugged cross. Written on that card that bears a cross, written with

the hands that were pierced by nails, we read, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life.”

Isn't that really more than we could ask, more than we could ever imagine. All of this is for us? All of this is for me? Some people find it too hard to believe. They don't feel worthy of such great love. They shake their head and say, “Maybe for someone else, but not for me.” They set the stocking down and they slowly walk away. How many of the 8 billion people who populate planet earth will shake their heads tonight and say, “Maybe for someone else, but not for me.” What else can God do? God knit the stocking. God is busy sewing and stitching because God's heart is itching for his children to know just how much he loves them. And yet so many walk away saying, “Maybe for someone else, but not for me.” What else can God do?

What else can God do? He can call your name. He can call your name, the name that is written on the palms of his hands, the name that is on the lips of the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for you, the name that was given to you when God knit you together in your mother's womb. God can call your name. And he does. Tonight, listen for his voice. Tonight, if you hear his voice, don't walk away. Tonight, if you hear his voice, turn around. Turn around and look at the stocking he is holding in his precious hands, the stocking he is holding just for you. How do you know the stocking is just for you? Look closely at that stocking, and you will see the most amazing and beautiful thing. You will see your name, stitched so carefully, so lovingly, right across the top of the stocking that God made just for you. Friends, believe the good news. When God hangs a stocking on his mantle, he hangs it with care. He hangs that stocking with care and with kindness. And he hangs it just for you.