



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 174 The True Miracle of Christmas

Elisa Morgan & Eryn Eddy

Elisa: All this took place in verse 22 to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means God with us."

Vivian: You're listening to *God Hears Her*, a podcast for women where we explore the stunning truth that God hears you. Join our community of encouraging one another and learning to lean on God through Scripture, story, and conversation at godhearsher.org. God hears her. Seek and she will find.

Eryn: Before we get into the episode, we have an announcement to make about a new film by Our Daily Bread Ministries. Every year, people all around the world sing songs to celebrate the birth of Christ. But have you ever wondered where these beloved Christmas carols come from? Christian musical artists, Drew and Ellie Holcomb have teamed up with Michael W. Smith, CeCe Winans, and Our Daily Bread Ministries to explore the history and meanings behind the most classic songs of Christmas. Join them and some of your other favorite Christian artists for *The Carols of Christmas* presented by Our Daily Bread Ministries. You can find a link to watch it in our show notes.

Elisa: Y'all, can we just kind of like roll back the pretend? Let's roll back the fake, and let's just be super real. Have you had a rotten moment in the last week in your life, anybody?

Eryn: Oh, yes.

Elisa: Oh, yeah.

Eryn: Moment, phone call, people.

Vivian: Yeah. I think there...

Elisa: Hour? Minutes?

Vivian: ...there have been hard things without and within just this last week. So walking with a close friend through a really difficult marriage situation and then obviously dealing with my own life and stuff. So yeah, it's...it's...



Elisa: Yeah.

Vivian: ...it's weekly.

Elisa: It is.

Vivian: The challenges are weekly

Elisa: Yeah, I...I'm remembering a phone call that I received that didn't go the way I had been praying and begging and pleading with God that it would go. And okay, I threw the phone across the room. And there's still a dent right below the oven in the kitchen where it landed. And I just...I just, I mean, yeah, it was external rotten news. But it was internal rotten Elisa. So I know this is kind of a plunge, but you know, once we roll it back, we can so identify with that rotten part of us.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Cause it's just there and it pops out in the least lovely moments. And you know, I just want to continue on the keeping it real theme here. When rotten happens at Christmas [sound effect] I don't know, for me, it's even more dramatic, sometimes unexpected. So you'd be listening to Christmas music on your phone, and out comes Rotten Elisa. And I just think it's so...such a contrast to the season that we're trying to celebrate.

Vivian: I think it's the combination. It's been said that you have expectations, and my hand is lifted high in the air right now, and then you have reality, which is low. In that middle space between your expectations and reality is disappointment.

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: And I think the holidays in particular are high, even higher than normal expectations of family, togetherness...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: ...gifts, abundance...

Eryn: Joy.



Vivian: ...joy...

Eryn: Laughter.

Vivian: ...laughter.

Elisa: Hallmark movies.

Vivian: Yes, and even the...

Elisa: Everything perfect.

Vivian: ...and the commercials. So everybody, every scene in the house is clean. There's no laundry. There's no...

Eryn: The presents are wrapped perfectly.

Vivian: Yes, the tree is lit.

Elisa: Color-coordinated.

Vivian: And unfortunately, even in social media, we can curate our little...

Elisa: Gosh, yes.

Vivian: ...squares so that it does block out the messy kitchen and the Cheerios that are smooshed into the carpet or whatever. And that one little picture of my Christmas mug with the coffee in it with the little like background that's a little bit hazy of the Christmas tree can make it look as if my little Christmas world matches the fake outside world. But honestly, I think the...the disappointment piece is amplified...

Elisa: Yeah.

Vivian: ...during Christmas.

Eryn: And in the midst of that disappointment, I think there's a lot of loneliness that people feel, myself included. I have felt so surrounded during the holiday season and yet so lonely internally.



Elisa: Yes.

Eryn: Which I think that's the space in between that you're talking about, Vivian. And I think...

Elisa: The expectation of reality thing.

Eryn: And I think social media is a huge proponent of that, creating an environment, a feeling that's whole and happy and joy filled, like you're saying. And then you look at your reality of your circumstance and it may not be that way.

Elisa: You know, I think too, Eryn, you're making me think back. I think sometimes our expectations come from childhood. You know, that we're raised on Christmas, and we're raised with the magical fantasy world of Santa and Christmas and all the...everybody gets along, and everything's happy. And we struggle then to watch reality, you know, whether it's okay, now I see my parents as they really are. Or now I see the world as it really is or these kinds of things. And so Christmas is often the intersection of what we were hoping for as children versus what is. I want to just ask you to tee up in your mind a specific memory, as specific as you can make it, you know, with the colors, the smells, the noises, the feels, the sights, of a rotten Christmas moment. Let's see if you can come up with one. And I'll go first. My rotten Christmas moment was a different phone call than the one I started out with. But it was a phone call we had been waiting for four and a half years for a child through adoption. And I had set up what we called the "hope for the baby" tree at Christmas, where I stopped every day and prayed. And the phone call came on December 21st. Elisa, you're not going to receive a baby by Christmas, which had been my prayer.

Vivian: Wow.

Elisa: And I just collapsed to the ground. I felt like...I felt like I'd just been wounded mortally. And I was...I'm happy for the rest of my family. They all have their kids and everything's...but it just felt so empty, so empty. And that's a strong rotten memory for me. Anybody else? What comes to y'all's mind?

Vivian: When I was a little girl, my parents had so much conflict and they threatened divorce all the time. And for whatever reason, holidays forever just amplified whatever the conflict was and the threat of divorce and the slammed doors and the silence. And I remember it was days before Christmas, and there were no presents under the tree. And my sister and I went, and we bought everybody's Christmas gifts. We wrapped them. Like, this is from so and so, to so and so. I mean, we covered all the bases. We decorated the tree, you know. We...we did all the decorating...we did to try to create the sense of



external Christmas memories and togetherness. But to me, it still is like a painful place in my heart of just remembering. You know, as a young child, like this, I'm trying to...I'm trying to do my best to try to recreate something. But this should have been what my parents were doing...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: ...for the kids, but it's that reverse role...

Elisa: When a child has to be the parent. That's super painful.

Vivian: Yeah, so I remember that as a Christmas memory.

Eryn: Christmas was...every other year, almost there was a lot of sorrow. It was after my mom's mother passed away. My mom had a really hard time celebrating Christmas. So some years it would be full of joy, and then other years we'd be setting up a tree, you know, two days before Christmas and it's bare. It was dependent on the level of grief that my mom was experiencing. And I never harbored any sort of resentment towards that, but it was just the reality that every other year Christmas came with maybe sorrow.

Elisa: Yeah. You know, I think these examples are so rich because we're really expressing an external rottenness that came into our world, but it came into our world as a result of an internal rottenness out there. You know, whether it was from your parents, Vivian, or your mom as she grieved, or me with a system that, you know, wouldn't provide a child when I wanted a child. You know, and...and I don't want this to be like major downer. We're all going to go into our closets, and you know, be depressed for the rest of the week. But, you know, we have a hard time at Christmas sometimes because we don't have a very realistic view of it. We expect it to be something magical rather than truly divinely miraculous. And when we understand the miracle of Christmas, it changes our rotten, whether it's an external rotten we're experiencing or an internal rottenness that's erupting from within. And it's one word that changes it. And it's a surprising word, but it's a word from Scripture and it's the word, Immanuel. And that word means God with us. The first Christmas, think about it, came to a rotten world. I mean, what was going on during that first century? Can you remember some of the things that were bubbling up and in the lovely world of Israel and Rome?

Vivian: Roman occupation, yeah.

Eryn: Yeah.



Elisa: Say that again.

Vivian: Yeah, Roman occupation. God's people were oppressed. And it was set up in an unfair way, yeah.

Elisa: Yes.

Eryn: Yeah, a lot of darkness.

Vivian: A lot of darkness.

Elisa: So a lot of rottenness from without, like we're talking about from the external world. Here's Mary, and what do we know about Mary?

Eryn: She's a virgin.

Elisa: She was a virgin, yeah.

Vivian: Engaged.

Eryn: Engaged.

Vivian: Just [inaudible].

Elisa: But has never had...

Eryn: Sex.

Elisa: Right, so for her to be pregnant, the angel coming to her and say, you're going to become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. And your husband to be, but in New Testament culture, if you're a betrothed, it was the first part of actually being married. So here's Mary and she's like, barely through puberty. She's so young. And she responded beautifully when the angel comes to her and says, you're going to be with child. And she's awestruck at the miracle. She believed in the miracle of Christmas. But that's a scary thing.

Eryn: I mean, I just think about who she was, to have peace...



Elisa: Yes.

Eryn: ...amidst knowing...not knowing what's going to be on the other side of her sharing that she's pregnant.

Vivian: Right.

Eryn: And the...

Vivian: There's no hiding that after a certain point.

Elisa: That's right.

Eryn: No, exactly.

Vivian: And then just the gossip and...

Eryn: Yes.

Vivian: ...people, people's opinions. I keep thinking about the closeness that she had with Elizabeth as...

Elisa: Cousins, yeah.

Vivian: ...as they were cousins. And so to have an Elizabeth in her life to have had such a strong faith, I...I know she must have drawn so much strength from the godliness of her cousin and how much in the midst of something so horrible that there was a safe spot to land. And I...I think we need that in our lives, too. In the midst of the really hard, I can't see miraculous unless I'm with like God with skin on sometimes too. And I wonder if Elizabeth played that...

Elisa: That's beautiful.

Vivian: ...in Mary's life.

Eryn: That's a great perspective I actually never really thought about that or heard that part of the story. Would you share a little bit about who Elizabeth was exactly...



Vivian: Oh yeah.

Eryn: ...or that...what their relationship was?

Vivian: Yes.

Eryn: I just think somebody listening would be like, oh wait, I didn't know about Elizabeth either.

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: In the Gospel of Luke, after the angel comes to Mary and tells her she's gonna have the Messiah, Mary goes and visits Elizabeth. This is in Luke chapter 1, verse 39 or so down in there. And what's so beautiful about it, she is her cousin. And what's so beautiful about it is that when Elizabeth, this is verse 41, heard Mary's greeting; the baby in *her* womb leaped. So that's John the Baptist.

Vivian: John, yes.

Elisa: And it's like as if John the Baptist, who was always heralding Jesus, knew in the second that the baby was within Mary's womb...

Vivian: Yeah, yeah.

Eryn: Oh, I love that.

Elisa: ...and began to herald him. So, and...and she spends like six months with Elizabeth, which is a mentor relationship, which I think is gorgeous. So the...the context we're talking about is, you know, we've got Mary so young, innocent, devout.

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: But just naturally terrified.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Joseph, her husband, what do we know about him? He has a rotten world that he's living in too. What's going on in his world?



Vivian: Well, he's betrothed. And he has a really great reputation.

Elisa: Yes, he does.

Vivian: So to have a pregnant...

Eryn: Right.

Vivian: ...fiancée is...

Eryn: And to say that it's not his.

Vivian: Right, so I think that even in an honorable way, he's trying to divorce Mary.

Elisa: Quietly, it says.

Vivian: Quietly.

Elisa: This is in Matthew.

Vivian: So it's not like, yeah, so it's not to bring shame on her. But he also has this relationship with God.

Eryn: It's such an internal struggle.

Vivian: Yeah, that God is able to meet him through dreams several times. But Joseph is such an interesting character because he has such strength, but we never hear him say anything. Like he doesn't actually have words that are recorded by any of the people that write the gospel.

Elisa: That's good.

Vivian: Just his actions.

Eryn: Right.



Elisa: That's really good. And we're told in...in Matthew 1, I think this is like 18 to 19. Because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. So his rotten, if you will, just imagine he's a man of great integrity.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: And he doesn't know quite yet that it's God who is causing this to happen. He just knows that she's pregnant. And he's like, oh my gosh. I mean, imagine the turmoil that he went through. But he goes on and the Lord appears to him, as you were saying, Viv, you know, he had dreams. And...and this...this is the verse that really catches me. "All this took place" in verse 22 "to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means God with us." As we look at the arc of the story of the Bible, you know, starting out from when God created us in His image to be in relationship with Him and then we fell away and became so rotten. And then we see God redeeming us and rescuing us and purifying us. That whole story of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, as we root down in there and hear this concept of Immanuel illustrated, it blows me away to see how careful God has planted the miracle of Christmas in His story. In fact, we're going to hear this phrase over and over again, Immanuel, I will be with you, as we look at the Old Testament. So I just want to give out some assignments that we can go around and read these Scriptures, starting with Genesis 26, verse 3. Viv, would you get that?

Vivian: Sure.

Elisa: And then Eryn, Genesis 31:3. I'll do Exodus 3:12, and then I'll hand out some more. Okay, starting off, Genesis 26:3. This is God's promise. I will be with you to Isaac confirming his promise to Abraham.

Vivian: So it says, "Stay in this land as an alien, and I'll be with you and bless you. For I will give all the lands to you and your offspring. And I'll confirm the oath that I swore to your father, Abraham."

Elisa: Okay, good. And then to Jacob, God says in Genesis 31:3, Eryn.

Eryn: "The Lord said to him, go back to the land of your ancestors and to your family, and I will be with you."

Elisa: And then to Moses right before the Exodus. This is in Exodus 3, verse 12. And God said, "I will be with you and this will be the sign to you. That is I who have sent you. When you've brought the people out



of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.” Okay, a couple of more. Viv, can you grab Joshua 1:5? And Eryn, Isaiah 41:10, and then I'll grab Isaiah 43:2.

Vivian: So Joshua 1:5 says, “No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. I will be with you just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or abandon you.”

Elisa: Okay. So that's God speaking to Joshua as he begins to lead Israel. Okay. And they're going into the Promised Land. Then Eryn in Isaiah 41. This is God speaking to Isaiah. As Israel's going into captivity.

Eryn: It says, “Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

Elisa: Okay, and then they're in captivity in Isaiah 43:2. “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you pass the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned. The flames will not set you ablaze for I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One, the Savior of Israel.” And then in Jeremiah 1:8. One more Viv, would you grab that one?

Vivian: Sure.

Elisa: This is speaking again, what's going to happen in captivity.

Vivian: “Do not be afraid of anyone for I will be with you to rescue you. This is the Lord's declaration.”

Elisa: What hits you about that? I mean, there's obviously rottenness going on externally in their world. But what do we know about Israel's long history of obedience and disobedience and about the rottenness going on inside their hearts as well as we hear all of these, you know, whether it's to Isaac or to Jacob or to Moses? Or to Joshua or to Isaiah or Jeremiah?

Vivian: I just see God continually coming after us. The Hebrew *Shalom* is more than just peace. It's actually this idea of integrity and wholeness and being good with one another, being good with God, being good with the land. And this picture of what was meant to be in Genesis, where God walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day, like there was this [with-ness] that was part of creation that we were never meant to be severed from. And this beautiful picture of just the reminder, I will be with you. I'll be with you. He will never leave us or forsake us.



Eryn: Yeah, no matter the circumstance of what we're going through.

Elisa: So taking this back to our specific explicit memories in our past of rotten Christmas moments, what does it do to you to think about, you know, with it's you, Viv, and your parents are fighting. Or it's you, Eryn, with the unexpectedness year to year of what's Christmas going to look like? Or it's me with the unending wait for a baby out of my control? What if we put God with us into those moments? And...and I want to give us two really practical takeaways as we allow this Christmas season to not just be magical, but to truly be about the miracle. And...and that's two things. First, is to practice God's presence. And I think of another Scripture I want to go to. And this one's probably pretty familiar and we forget about it though. I do. And this is from Matthew 28, at the very end of the book of Matthew, in verse 20. The very last words of Jesus in the book of Matthew, He talks about "Go forth and make disciples. And baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Wow. What does that do to me? And...and let's...let's think about that practicing Immanuel, practicing God with us in those rotten Christmas moments. You know, what does it do to you to go back and think about that as you shared your example?

Eryn: It gives me rest, honestly, in my circumstance. No matter the unpredictable Christmas that I will get, I can rest in knowing that the Lord is going to carry me through, be there for me. I'm not alone in the pain of it. There's other ways to rejoice. There's other ways to find joy. I think we can put this burden on ourselves. We talked about this in the beginning, that it has to be a certain way, look a certain way. We have to perform a certain way. And when we actually look at the realness, like the miracle of what Christmas is, it alleviates all the performance for me. It alleviates any pressure that I'm going to put on myself. It refocuses me into just allowing what happens, happens, but knowing that the Lord is with me in it.

Elisa: Yep. Not alone in it, which is so huge.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: And I think about that too. It's been 20, 30, no, 40 years now since...since that...that phone call came on that Christmas, 40 years now. And I've lived 40 years with my daughter and 38 years with my son. And there've been ups and downs, Christmases still, but the Immanuel God, the God with us God is what gives meaning to...to the Christmases. It's not the presence or the absence of somebody I adore. It is the God with us.



Vivian: It's just hitting me now, as I'm reflecting on the story, that that rotten Christmas, I was a girl trying to create Christmas magic externally. And the truth is, that Christmas isn't about the externals. It's really a Person, the Person of Jesus, Jesus Immanuel. And as I look back now, little did I know that God was putting in place the people and the circumstances so that I would sit next to just the right person in high school in math class who would share the gospel with me and that I would actually meet Jesus to understand the significance of Christmas. I remember my first Christmas as a believer singing the Christmas carols with tears streaming down my face, because I finally knew who I was singing about. And so this whole rotten Christmas, I realize now recognizing that Immanuel is with us was that He was there, and He knew that I would be knowing Him at a later point in time. And that is a real grace

Elisa: In...in a way, whatever you're struggling with, whatever rotten external or internal, you know, we're going through right now; if we pause to recognize Immanuel, the presence of God with us right now, you know, as you're having a rotten moment or whatever, right now, to just recognize the presence of Immanuel. That gives Christmas an immediacy and a right now-ness that really helps us strengthen for whatever we're facing. And there's one other suggestion I want to offer. And that's to pray God's prayers. So practicing His presence, but to pray His prayers. And by that, I think about, well, a couple of things. You know, in Romans 8, Paul talks about that the Spirit will give us the ability to pray when we don't have any words. You know, I think about times when I've been tongue-tied, and I can't even say anything to God. And...and Scripture says that when you can't pray, let the Holy Spirit form the prayer within you. And I...I love that. You know, let Him help you. In fact, it's the same word, let Him help you, that Martha uses of Jesus to request that Mary get up and help her when they're sitting there in John 11. And Martha says, I'm doing everything, you know, tell my sister to help me. That word is the word in Romans that Paul says to us, when you don't know what to pray, ask the Spirit to pray for you. Ask the Spirit to help you. So whatever we're doing right now, you know, in our Christmas moments, you know. It's whatever you're struggling with, whatever you don't know how to make peace over, wherever you're at a loss for how to experience Immanuel, let's ask the Holy Spirit to help us, to get up and help us, because we don't know what to do. And I hope that there is some peace and joy, pure joy, when we just stop long enough, when we pause long enough, to imagine this God of the universe is our Immanuel God, you know. He wants to have His presence in us. I will be with you. And when we don't know how to experience that, He promises His Spirit will help us ask for what we need.

[music]

Elisa: So those are my Christmas gifts to myself and to each other and to all who are listening right now. In your rotten moments this Christmas, external rottenness or internal rottenness, let's remember our Immanuel, God, the miracle, not the magic, the miracle of Christmas is God with us.



[music]

Vivian: We hope that you feel the presence of the Lord with you this Christmas season. He is with us.

Eryn: Merry Christmas. Well, before we go, be sure to check out our show notes for a link to *The Carols of Christmas* to watch the show. Find that and more at godhearsher.org. That's godhearsher.org.

Elisa: And if you like this episode, or you've been listening to the show for a bit, well then please leave us a rating and review wherever you listen to your podcast. We'd love to hear from you. And make sure to share your favorite episodes with a friend.

Vivian: Thank you for joining us. And don't forget, God hears you, He sees you, and He loves you because You Are His.

[music]

Eryn: Today's episode was engineered by Ann Stevens and produced by Jade Gustman and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank John and Matt for all their help and support. Thanks everyone.

Elisa: Our Daily Bread Ministries is a donor-supported, non-profit ministry dedicated to making the life-changing wisdom and stories of the Bible come alive for all people around the world.

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