



*Life is messy, but Jesus gives hope  
to all who need to be set free  
behind bars of steel  
and walls of bitterness.*

## **Jailhouse Christmas! December 2016 Newsletter**

Christmas! Call to mind your memories of Christmases past. For most of us, that includes smells of fresh trees, cookies, and turkey or ham. It includes hugs from relatives we haven't seen in a long time. We dig out decorations that were made last year, or ten or fifty years ago. And we've already begun some of the rituals we have observed in past years. Advent calendars that our children or grandchildren go to every evening to find a verse or a figurine with Christmas meaning attached to it. Hiking through the hills or tree lots to find the perfect tree, which is then adorned with lights, garlands, and ornaments. What wonderful memories and traditions! How they stir our hearts and emotions!

Now, imagine Christmas without those markers. What kind of longing would fill your heart? How empty would the days feel, as the calendar and TV remind you at every turn that Christmas is indeed coming – but not for you? Why not? Because this year you're spending Christmas in jail! And there are no trees, no cookies, no relatives, no decorations, no children. The smells are of closely packed humanity, some of whom never learned basic hygiene, or are withdrawing from addiction. As in any full house, with people coming and going, coughing and contact spread disease like wildfire. Remember the spats and tensions that sometimes marred your previous Christmases? Multiply that by 100 here! Can you feel the loneliness and despair? Do you begin to have some sense of what it would be like?

I spent last Thursday evening in the Butte County Jail, along with about 50 others who came in to provide a small window of joy and hope for those who are spending the Christmas season here. I was privileged to go into a pod with two men from a local transition house. One of them came in two Christmases ago, and led a man to faith in the Son of God who came to us in our suffering and despair, "God with us," as the prophet Isaiah predicted 700 years BC (7:14).

**Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.  
Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and shall call his name Immanuel (God with us).  
Isaiah 7:14**

God worked in that inmate's life in miraculous and transforming ways, and now he was the other man standing beside me in the pod that evening! What an object lesson! There were even men in the pod who recognized him, and remembered him being there! He told his story of how Jesus had come into his life, freed him from his addictions, and given him hope that life could be different! People can always argue about the Bible, or about this denomination or that doctrine, but the presence of a transformed life is difficult to dismiss!

We discussed the Christmas story, what God had done in the lives of these men, and what God promises to do in the lives of any who come to Him in faith, and then we prayed for the men in the pod, that God would open their hearts to His love, freely and radically demonstrated by the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus. Then we distributed paper bags full of candy, tracts and a printed collection of testimonies of people who had spent time in the Butte County Jail, and found new life in Jesus! Even the bags, decorated with Christmas themes by Sunday School children, proclaimed the coming of Jesus in a way that touched many hearts. In the words of one inmate, who had tears rolling down his tattooed cheeks, "I have a daughter out there, and if she had decorated it, it would have looked a lot like this!"

**Please pray for those in jail this Christmas!**

**May Jesus be born anew into their hearts, and ours, this Christmas season!**

## Thank You, Jesus, for doing what only you can do!

One of the men I meet with has cancer, and became suicidal. Landing in jail, he was confronted by a young man who was assigned by the pod shot caller to beat him up to establish who was in charge. Suddenly, his Christian faith jerked him out of his self-centered depression, and he opened his heart to this young man. The shocked “enforcer” couldn’t do what he had been sent to do, accepted the Lord, and began meeting with his erstwhile victim for Bible study & prayer. The shot caller was released, then returned shortly, withdrawing from heroin addiction. My friend helped him with whatever sugar he could find, and encouraged him however he could. Now, the former shot caller is reading my friend’s study Bible! My friend is leading Bible studies with close to half the 40 inmates in his pod, and the former hit man is training to take over the Bible study when my friend leaves! Please pray for healing from cancer as he approaches his release, and for the anointing of the Holy Spirit on his replacement!

Another inmate I met begged me to visit his mom on the outside, who was expected to die any day from cancer. His little brother, a double amputee, was her primary caregiver. The inmate had surrendered his life to Jesus, and was meeting with other Christians in the pod. I visited his mom, told her he loves her and wishes he could be with her. She was skeptical of his profession of faith, given his past, but I assured her of his participation in the spiritual life of the pod. In describing his faith, I had opportunity to lead her to faith in Jesus, too, and give her a Bible to comfort her in her last days! I met the young man again to pass on her message of love for him and for Jesus, and she had me tell him her dying wish was for him to take Jesus with him when he leaves the jail, and not leave Him behind as so many do! He was released a few days later, shortly after her death, and I had opportunity to spend hours with him, praying for him and helping him through that difficult time. Please pray that he will cling to the comfort and peace of Jesus, who understands his sorrow!



**He came for us.  
Will you go for Him?**

### Prayer Requests:

- Praise God for His work in the hearts of inmates! Only He can transform sinners like us into His children!
- Praise God for those who have expressed interest in joining our Certified Jail Ministers, as they disciple inmates on the glass weekly, and to show them that someone cares about them. Please pray that God would confirm His call in their hearts, and raise up more of them.
- Pray for God to raise up board members who will work to help ARM, guide it, and listen to His voice.
- Pray for God to bring Butte County churches alongside us to reach out to “the least of these, my brothers.”
- Pray for continued donations of Christian books, to help guide those who are spiritual seekers, and those who want to grow in Christ. Pray for continued spiritual revival in the jail!
- Praise God for our donors, who make this faith venture possible. “We thank God on every remembrance of you.”



*Blessings to you all this Christmas season!*

*May His gift be our focus,*

*and may our God give you opportunity*

*to give it away to many this year!*

*Jan and Roxanne Carlisle*

