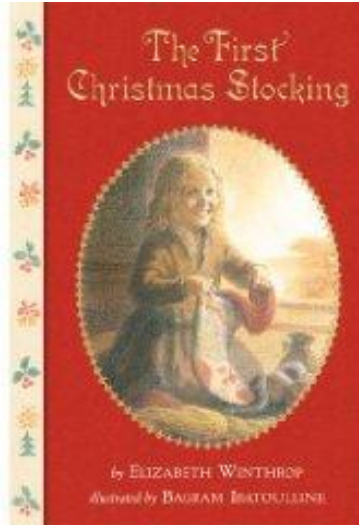


***The First Christmas Stocking***  
**by Elizabeth Winthrop/ Bagram Isbatoulline**  
*Meditative Missive written by Cay Gibson © Advent 2009*



**Get Ready:**

Items you should have on your reading table:

- \* Copy of this study (for writing purposes)
- \* Computer (for quotes & music selections)
- \* Printouts of **stocking**
- \* Christmas Carols
- \* Holiday Binder (to place sheets when done)
- \* Scented Candle & matches (do not light until told to do so)
- \* Pretty gel pen
- \* A copy of **The First Christmas Stocking** by Elizabeth Winthrop/ Illustrated by Bagram Ibatoulline
- \* a pretty Christmas journal
- \* a cup with your favorite holiday brew
- \* a nativity-crèche
- \* a Bible

\* \* \* \* \*



**Poetry Meditation:**

***Mary Today***

If this Christmas finds you burdened,  
With no happy, joyous smile;  
Maybe Mary being weary  
Might rest with you

If in her shelter-seeking,  
From Inn to crowded Inn,  
She meets but greed and battle,  
Hatred, death, and sin.

But finds a humble welcome  
In the dwelling of your heart,  
Though it bring you pain and sorrow,  
Could you ask her to depart?

When submitting, you accept

Her burden with a prayer.....  
Oh the glory of your joy

To find the Christ child there!

Mary McDevitt  
Robert, Cyril. *Our Lady's Praise in Poetry*.  
New York: Marist Press, 1944.



**Theme: Sacrifice**

Write an Acrostic Poem using the letters that make up the word **Sacrifice**:

S \_\_\_\_\_  
A \_\_\_\_\_  
C \_\_\_\_\_  
R \_\_\_\_\_  
I \_\_\_\_\_  
F \_\_\_\_\_  
I \_\_\_\_\_  
C \_\_\_\_\_  
E \_\_\_\_\_

Find a quote on **Sacrifice** that speaks to your heart and write it here. Start looking here: [Brainy Quote](#):

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### **Biblical Presence:**

Reflect on this:

*“All these names---Pontius Pilate, Herod, Annas and Caiaphas---belong in the passion of Christ. So then why do we hear them now before his birth? To remind us of why the Lord was born: ‘Jesus Christ was born to die on the cross’ (Saint Leo the Great). ...This Advent we live the memory that Christ was born to save us. The ‘affection of Christ Jesus’ moves us to embrace every sacrifice that prepares in us the way of the cross. In Christ’s flesh ‘all flesh sees the salvation of God.’ “ ~ Taken from December 2009 Magnificat (December 6 meditation)*

What does this meditation mean to you?

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### **Music Session:**

Listen to MercyMe sing **“Bring the Rain”**

How do you react when Jesus “brings the rain” of suffering into your life? Do you embrace “the Lord God Almighty” and sing “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty”? Do you allow the rain to cleanse you of your sinfulness and selfishness? Or do you put an umbrella over your head and try to block God’s cleansing grace?

When was the last time God brought an outpouring of rain into your life?

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Write down 3 ways God’s grace shone through the rain during that time?

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## Reading Session:

Pick up the book *The First Christmas Stocking*

Read it slowly, silently, to yourself. Don't meditate long on the pictures, only long enough to follow the story. Read and focus on the story for now. We will come back to do a reflective study of the pictures after you have read the story. Think about what you have read.

Come back for the **Picture Study** when you are ready.

## Picture Study:

❄️ **Turn to the first page.** The town is covered in snow. Everything looks cold, desolate and lonely.

Visualize that you are on a road in that town. The harsh wind stings your cheeks. The snow crunches under your feet. You tighten your coat around your neck. Some houses are dark and quiet. Others have a soft light falling out the window into the snow.

Behind some of these windows there are happy voices, happy gatherings, and happy families.

Write the name of one such family whom you know here: \_\_\_\_\_

Pray for them: ***Lord have mercy!***

Behind some of these windows there are lonely individuals, encased in a wintery slumber.

If you know of such an individual, write his/her name here: \_\_\_\_\_

Pray for them: ***Christ have mercy!***

Behind still other windows there are hurtful voices, neglected children, hurting individuals.

If you know of such an individual or family, write their name here: \_\_\_\_\_

Pray for them: ***Lord have mercy!***

❄️ **Turn the page** and meditate on the words of this page:

*"Because the sun rarely found its way to their door, they lived out their days in **eternal dusk**."*

**Eternal Dusk**---what do you think of symbolically when you hear these words? How does eternal dusk creep into our hearts and soul? Are you struggling to make ends meet this year? Are you faced with financial hardship? Are you worried about bills? Are you wondering how you will give your children a storybook Christmas? How do the words "**eternal dusk**" conflict with the message and meaning of Christmas? Of Mary's self-**sacrifice**?

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~ **Light your candle now to dispel the eternal dusk and worries that creeps within your soul.** ~

❄️ Gaze upon the picture of the mother knitting and the child at her feet. What do you think is on the mother's mind? What concerns does she have regarding her child? What concerns do you share with her? Put yourself in her place and think of your child(ren).

In your mother's heart-of-hearts, what do you really want your child(ren) to have this Christmas?

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❄️ **Turn the page.** Reread the paragraph: "*So Claire and her mother knit side by side, day after day, in the deepening darkness.*"

What does "*deepening darkness*" foreshadow? (The mother's death.)

What elements in the story of the nativity foreshadow the death of Christ? (King Herod, the killing of the innocents, and myrrh---ancient embalming oil---given as a gift by one of the Wise Men)



Examine the picture of the mother helping her child knit and (carefully, artistically) rewrite these words in the blank provided:

~ "*Dream your dreams and knit them into the wool.*" ~

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❄️ **Turn the page** and look at the picture. The burning hearth reminds us of warmth. The family meal reminds us of bounty and generosity. The candles on the table remind us of peace. The smiles on the faces of the family remind us of happiness.

How do you dispel the threat of darkness in your home? How do you paint pictures into your child's days? Do you provide good music? Warm food? Sweet drink? Laughter? Do you smile at your child(ren) whenever they walk into a room?

Idealize the moment. Commit it to your memory. Isn't Christmas really an idealized birth? Would any of us really want to give birth in a stable on a wintry night, away from home and family? And place our newborn in a feeding trough?

❄️ **Turn the page** and answer the above thoughts as you look at the picture of the little girl knitting alone. *"...she could feel her mother's warm hands over hers, and she could hear her mother's voice in her ear."*

Write your personal thoughts in your Christmas journal or here:

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❄️ **Turn the page.** How does the woman's face in the picture contrast with her clothing? In what areas of your life are you haughty or arrogant? Self-important?

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❄️ **Turn the page.**

Claire wishes for *"Candles that never burn down."*

Of course that's impossible but with Christ nothing is impossible. We are to be the hands and feet of Christ in this world. Christ is the **"Light of the World."** He is the "candle that will never burn down." How do we reflect this light to others through our actions? Our words? Our compassion? Our example?

❄️ **Turn the page.** Look at all the colorful stockings against a background of white and reread:

*"When she saw for the first time the pictures she had painted with the wool, she clapped her hands in delight. On the stockings, flames flickered and candles burned and light streamed everlastingly through an open window. And here children were dancing around a bonfire, and there a jolly old man was ringing the bells of Christmas, and everybody was smiling and everybody was warm."*

What Christmas scenes and symbols make you smile? Are you brave enough to draw something that makes you feel warm inside? If you are, printout this:

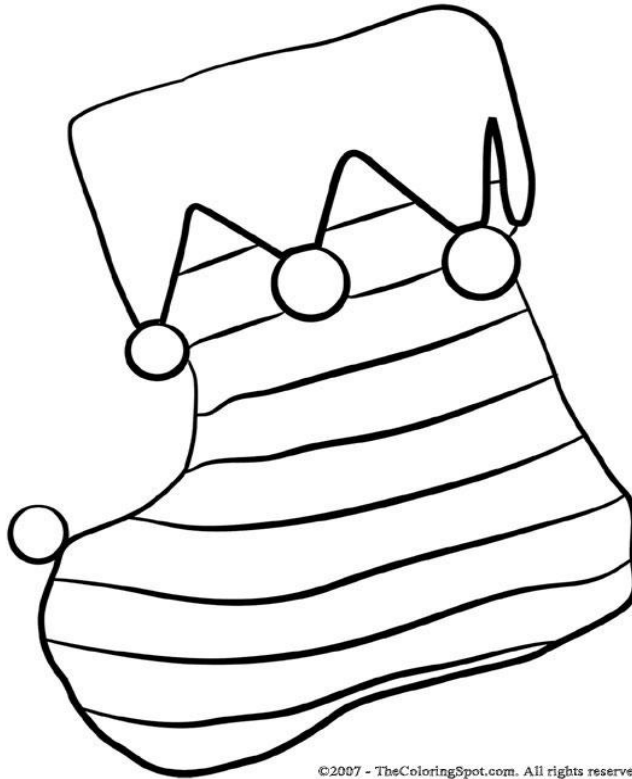
**Stocking Template** (<http://www.first-school.ws/t/pattern/stocking2.htm>)

~ *“Dream your dreams and knit them into the wool.”* ~



<http://christmas-clipart.net/color/stocking.html>

Now inside this stocking write the dreams you wish to knit into the lives of your children. What material, physical pursuits do you want for them? Make sure they are meaningful and realistic.



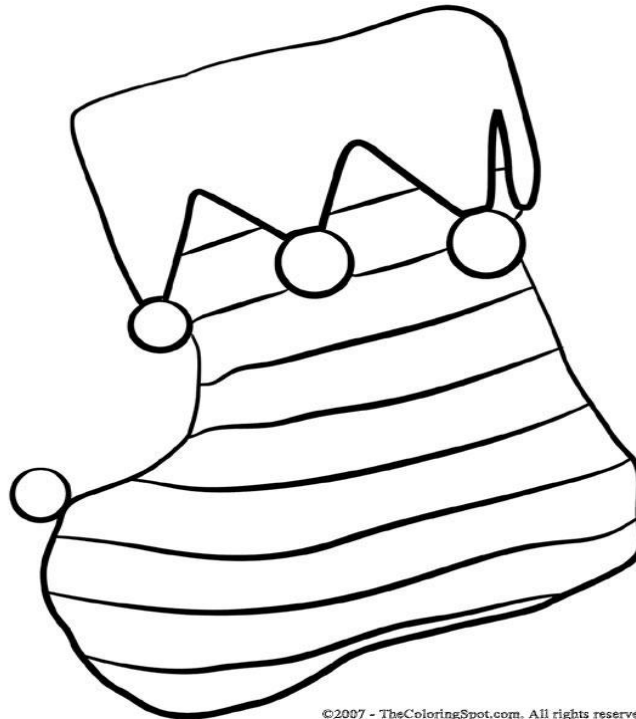
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Now write inside this stocking the virtues you wish to knit into the lives of your children.



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Discuss with your children how we are the hands and feet of Christ to a weak, suffering world. Write inside this stocking how you will be Christ to the poor, the needy, the hungry, the sick, the suffering this Christmas. Will you donate money, clothes or your time to a charity? Will you buy a gift for a needy child? Will you visit a hospital ward or a nursing home? Make sure these goals are meaningful and realistic.



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❄️ **Turn the page** to where the little stocking girl is running to her father with outstretched arms. Meditate again on your lists. Make a personal reflection of how you are the hands and feet of Christ in a suffering world as you listen to Harry Belafonte's musical rendition of Longfellow's ***I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day***. You might choose to watch the video while the songs play. Nice slideshow of Christmas scenes, art, and photos.

❄️ **Turn to the last two pictures.** Compare the smiling group of people to the earlier picture of the mother, father, and daughter at the dinner table. Notice how the family circle has outstretched to their fellowmen (and women) and included them in the soft glow of the candlelight (ie: the light of Christ).



#### **Advent Wreath Focus:**

**THE FIRST CANDLE OF ADVENT: HOPE**  
**THE SECOND CANDLE OF ADVENT: PEACE**



### **Prayer Meditation:**

Look at the baby Jesus in your crèche. Pray to the Infant Jesus for the intentions of all mankind: the homeless, the lonely, the sick, the prisoners, the crippled, the jobless, the faithless, etc.

#### **Prayer to the Infant Jesus**

*O Jesus, Who has said, "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you," through the intercession of Mary, thy most holy Mother, I seek, I knock, I ask that my prayer be granted. ~ (Mention your request.)*

*O Jesus, Who has said, "All that you ask of the Father in My Name, He will grant you," through the intercession of Mary, thy most holy Mother, I humbly and urgently ask Thy Father in Thy Name that my prayer will be granted. ~ (Mention your request.)*

*O Jesus, Who said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away but My word shall not pass," through the intercession of Mary, thy most holy Mother, I feel confident that my prayer will be granted. ~ (Mention your request.)*

**In the mist of preparations this Advent season, keep the theme of sacrifice as your heart's focus this week!**

