

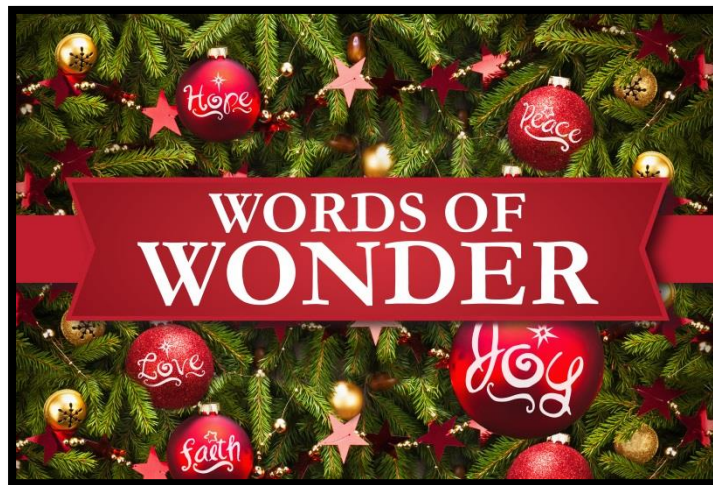
Words of Wonder

Christmas 2015

Written By

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December 13, 2015



Hope is in short supply this Christmas season. Why? Philosophical systems, like naturalism, have eroded man's desire to hope by definition of their tenuous tenets. Consider how we've digressed to a point of the scarcity of hope, hope in this life and hope in our sinful world finding and securing peace, hope for our cluttered consciences, hope for our brokenness and bent nature, hope for a world to come wherein dwells true peace, and hope in an afterlife spent in the presence of a loving, caring God.

Many Christmases ago we, as a nation, embraced, to varying degrees, the teachings of Judeo-Christianity, teachings which supported a wide array of spiritual concepts:

- General belief in the transcendence and greatness of God.
- General belief in the immanence and personal nature of God
- General belief in a complex and mysterious God who exists in a Trinitarian form
- General belief in the creation of our cause/effect world out of nothing by God who is now actively involved in His creation
- General belief in the wonderful creation of man and woman in the likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27; 5:3; 9:6)

- General belief that man, by nature, is in his spiritually fallen state restless, as Pascal wrote, until he fills the vacuous nature of his heart with a relationship with the living God
- General belief the understanding that it is logical to believe this great God can, did, and does communicate with His creation by means of general and special revelation (prophets, Scripture, etc.)
- General belief that only God's Son, Jesus, had the sole capacity and ability to come to earth as the God-man to redeem us from our sin.

This has all changed, as you can readily see in the renewed attacks this Christmas to even say the word because of what it religiously connotes. The Microsoft Corporation's decision to excise God's name from their commercial featuring the age-old song *Let There Be Peace On Earth* is one illustration of many we can present to validate the premise that we've drifted far from our original cultural and Christian roots as a people.¹

The story of our drift can readily be tied to our cultural embrace of philosophical positions like naturalism. The tenets of this belief system run diametrically counter to those of theism:

- Matter is all there is and God does not exist.² With God out of the way, the cosmos is eternal, or so it is argued contrary to scientific evidences to the contrary.
- The cosmos is closed to any outside influence. The fact we have a high degree of complexity woven throughout our cosmos is just a stroke of really good fortune because there is no divine Being guiding the creative process.
- Man is merely a complex machine, composed, not of an inner spirit and soul, but of very good mind and intellect.
- The death of man is merely the instant and permanent eradication of his personality and individuality, followed by nothing else. As the Humanist Manifesto II articulates emphatically, "As far as we know, the total personality is a function of the biological organism transacting in a social and cultural context. There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body."³
- History is just a meaningless progression of events with no real, foundation, over-arching purpose(s).

Can you feel the hopelessness of this system which is alive and well on our university campuses, which is woven in the warp and woof of countless companies, and which serves as the bedrock of belief for many whom easily jump on the bandwagon of Christophobia this Christmas? I can.

There are many philosophical and logical problems with the theory of naturalism, and it is not my intention to discuss those in this study. Suffice it to say that this pervasive worldview robs millions of people of true, lasting hope for living life to the fullest. By definition, it cannot

¹ "Microsoft banishes God From Christmas Song," *World Net Daily*, December 8, 2015, accessed December 10, 2015, <http://www.wnd.com/2015/12/microsoft-banishes-god-from-christmas-song>.

² Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), 4.

³ *Humanist Manifestos*, I and II, p. 17.

breed hope in life because it is wrapped tightly in arguing illogically against the Creator who fashioned them and desires a relationship with them. Further, it leaves man as the measure of his existence and this is a small, warped measure at best. On the contrary, lasting hope can only come in and through a belief in a personal God who really did send his Son 2,000 years ago to be our Savior. Do you have this hope this Christmas? If your soul is adrift on the endless, tossing and turning sea of naturalism, I challenge you to stop and consider the real, lasting, enduring hope the historical Christmas story gives us.

In order to address this subject, I will couch it in the form of a short question:

What Is The Nature Of Our Hope This Christmas?

Hope In The Forgiveness Of Sin

No matter how educated you become, how well you do on SATs or GREs, how high your IQ, or how well you do in this life workwise, there is no getting away from the inner feeling that something must be done about the guilt you feel and sense. You can keep yourself busy in a variety of ways, but in the middle of the night there is that thought, “Something just not right with my life. I’ve done well but there is something missing, there’s a peace which eludes me. There’s also a darkness I see in my character but can’t quite get a handle on.”

My friend, the only solution to your naturalistic, I-oppose-all-religious-beliefs thinking (and especially Christianity), is to consider the evidences for the person and work of Jesus, the Christ of Christmas. God’s inspired Scripture is clear about why He came to earth and what He, and He alone, is capable of doing for you, spiritually speaking. Consider the counsel from a pivotal biblical text from Paul’s pen:

²⁰ and through Him (Jesus) to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven. ²¹ And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds, ²² yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— (Colossians 1).

Your problem is your relationship with God is unreconciled because of your genetic relation to Adam and Eve. And because your relationship with God is non-existent, your mind is, by default, hostile, covertly and overtly, to Him and even devises new ways of opposing or shielding yourself from seeking Him. Your solution to your inner restlessness and lack of true hope is denoted by the prepositional phrase of verse 20: “*to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of the His cross ...*” Peace is what you lack, peace with your Creator who lives in an open system so He could invade that sinful system to die for your sin and rise the third day victorious over sin and death. Should you bow in faith before Him this day, hope will rush into your life like a mighty river, filling every dry, dusty riverbed of false belief.

And please, don’t be duped by your own accomplishments and prideful thinking. You will not gain this divine reconciliation through your efforts. Michael Bloomberg, the former Mayor of New York city thinks so.

During an interview before his 50th college reunion, former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg confessed that his mortality has started dawning on

him, at 72. He also said that he's been sobered by how many of his former classmates have passed away. But the author of the interview concluded, "But if [Bloomberg] senses that he may not have as much time left as he would like, he has little doubt about what would await him at a Judgment Day. Pointing to his work on gun safety, obesity and smoking cessation, he said with a grin: 'I am telling you if there is a God, when I get to heaven I'm not stopping to be interviewed. I am heading straight in. I have earned my place in heaven. It's not even close.'"⁴

He should reconsider his untenable, self-oriented premise sooner rather than later because only Christ's saving work is capable of redeeming a sinner and giving them real hope.

Hope. It's what Christians have because of Christ. Hope is why we sing ...

O holy night! The stars are brightly shinning;
 it is the night of the dear Savior's birth.
 Long lay the world in sin and error pinning,
 till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
 A thrill of hope—[did you get that?] the weary world rejoices,
 for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!
 Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!
 O night divine, O night when Christ was born!
 O night, O holy night, O night divine!⁵

Jesus waits now for you, the wanderer, to fall on your knees in faith and accept His give of forgives and true, lasting hope. What will you do?

A second hope Christians have is this:

Hope In A Heavenly Body

For the naturalist, you have a birthday and a death-day and then that's it. It's over. All you studied is gone. All you experienced in life is vaporized. All your accomplishments are left to hang in wooden frames on walls. Talk about hopelessness. Like the ancient Epicureans you are left, now, with the notion of living life to the fullest in between these two points, knowing the true brevity of your lifespan.

If you are thinking, however, you should realize the concept of eternity is not only built by the Creator into your soul (Ecclesiastes 3:11; "*He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*" NIV), but He has lovingly given you general proofs of its logical reality. Consider Pi for a moment. Pi is used in math and geometry to measure circles, and as we all know, a circle represents completeness, or a concept of infinity. Pi, mathematically speaking is the ratio of the circumference to the diameter of a circle (or, the circumference is divided by the diameter). Since the time of Archimedes, mathematicians have sought to discover if there is a final computation of Pi. In 2010, Nicholas Sze, from the tech firm Yahoo, smashed all former records by using 1,000 computers to take Pi to the two-quadrillionth digit ... but that is, mostly likely

⁴ Jeremy W. Peters, "Bloomberg Plans a \$50 Million Challenge to the N.R.A.," *The New York Times*, April 15, 2014.

⁵ Adolphe Adam, *O Holy Night!*

not the end of the number crunching.⁶ For all intents and purposes, Pi seems to be an eternal number, and for good reason. If there is a personal Creator, a great Mind of minds, you would expect He'd give us, as thinking, analytical creatures, clues, not only of His existence, but of the real possibility of infinity and eternity.

Paul, a mentally gifted man in his day, laid down his false belief system at the feet of the risen Savior, Jesus, and followed him until Nero executed him. Listen to what this great man had to say about why lies ahead for those who embrace Jesus by faith:

¹ For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For indeed in this *house* we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, ³ inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. ⁴ For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. ⁶ Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord— (2 Corinthians 5).

Jaw-dropping words, wouldn't you agree?

In order to appreciate Paul's words here, you must tap into his previous words in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

- ¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4).

Paul's ministry was tough. Read his books and you'll see what I mean. Sometimes his churches, like the one in Corinth attacked him, and at other times crowds of polytheists in coliseums wanted to tear him apart for challenging their belief system. But no matter how rough the road got, Paul kept his hope by focusing on the eternal. He didn't place his hope on earthly things which by nature are temporal. No, he kept his eyes focused on what God had waiting for him. I'm sure he did this in prayer, meditation, and Bible study, and so can you.

Turning now to chapter five, he excitedly and candidly speaks about the body which awaits us. Mark this well. He's not speaking about our eternal home, as promised by Jesus, the master carpenter (John 14:1-6), but our eternal body, fitted for the glories of the heavenly sphere and dimension. His words are simply breath-taking, for he clearly states that our heavenly body is as qualitatively different from and superior to our earthly body, and he establishes the contrast by speaking about the difference between a heavenly temple made by God versus an old, worn-out, and tattered tent.

⁶ Jason Palmer, "Pi Record Smashed As Team Finds Two-Quadrillionth Digit," *BCC News*, September 16, 2010, accessed December 10, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-11313194>.

I find this discussion simply illuminating, exciting, and hopeful. Consider the practical import of Paul's statement, please. Think first about a tent:

- A tent breaks down with use.
- A tent doesn't cost all that much.
- A tent isn't all that complex. A few poles, ropes, stakes, and cloth and you're good to go.
- A tent needs occasional maintenance to keep it usable.
- A tent doesn't stay up indefinitely.
- A tent will be taken down quickly.
- A tent will become worn out and ultimately be discarded.

Amazing. Paul likens the complex body we now possess to a tent. A tent?

Our bodies contain eleven highly complex, intricate, and sometimes delicate systems:

- *Integumentary System*: Forms external body covering and protects deeper tissue from injury e.g. hair, skin & nails.
- *Nervous System*: Fast acting control system of the body, it responds to internal and external changes by activating appropriate muscles and glands. Brain, nerves & spinal cord.
- *Skeletal System*: Protects and supports body organs, and provides a framework the muscles use to cause movement. Blood cells are formed within bones.
- *Endocrine System*: Glands secrete hormones that regulate processes such as growth, reproduction, and nutrient use by body cells. Glands e.g. adrenal gland, pineal gland, ovary.
- *Muscular System*: Allows manipulation of the environment, locomotion, and facial expression. Maintains posture & produces heat.
- *Cardiovascular System*: Blood vessels transport blood, which carries oxygen, carbon dioxide, nutrients, wastes, etc. The heart pumps blood.
- *Lymphatic System*: Picks up fluid leaked from blood vessels and returns it to blood. Disposes of debris in the lymphatic stream. Houses white blood cells involved in immunity.
- *Respiratory System*: Keeps blood constantly supplied with oxygen and removes carbon dioxide.
- *Urinary System*: Eliminates nitrogenous wastes from the body.
- *Reproductive System*: Overall function is the production of offspring.
- *Digestive System*: Breaks down food into absorbable units that enter the blood for distribution to blood cells.⁷

And my naturalistic culture wants me to believe it is logical to conclude all these inter-dependent systems happened to evolve to their current complexity over billions of years. Right.

⁷ "11 Systems of the Human Body," *Quizlet*, accessed December 10, 2015, <https://quizlet.com/6106972/11-systems-of-the-human-body-flash-cards/>

Further, they want me to believe all this complexity originated by pure blind chance. Right. Looks like a master designer, viz., God, crafted this complexity.

The very nature of the blood vessels in our hearts reveals God's fingerprint:

Blood vessels are not just straight-through tubes, like water pipes, as was thought. Scientists at Imperial College, London, found that blood vessels have a slight twist to them—they are helical. Colin Caro and Spencer Sherwin showed that the gentle corkscrewing makes the blood flow more evenly compared to straight vessels. They found that, with helical vessels, damage from turbulent flow was much less likely, especially at T-junctions. Smooth flow also encourages the production of health-promoting protective substances. This could be very important in bypass surgery where veins from a patient's leg are used to replace sections of clogged arteries around the heart. If surgeons were to give the replacement a slight twist, it could result in a longer time before the vessels clog again.⁸

How utterly interesting. How utterly powerful for it is yet another clear evidence for a personal Designer, God, who made us.

But what is most amusing is Paul likens our functionally sophisticated bodies to TENTS. Maybe you need to read that through one more time so it sinks into the academic, intellectual hardened soil of your mind. It is the argument from the lesser to the greater, isn't it? If our earthly bodies are this amazing in their complex capabilities, what shall our heavenly body be like? Our minds are left crunching the concept like those 1,000 computers trying to church out a final Pi approximation. Yes, what will THAT heavenly body be like? What will it be able to do?

We, by nature place a premium value on things made by hand. Cruising around the website for Scully & Scully recently, a site which specializes in fine items made by hand, I couldn't help but notice the price tags applied to the wonderful creations. A handcrafted and beautiful walnut and yew small dining table \$4,750. Yes, you read that right. A handcrafted wooden Christmas candle holder, replete with a spinning fan once the candles are lit, goes for a whopping \$295.00. Should you continue browsing the site you'll readily conclude that handcrafted items are, indeed, quite costly.

All of this makes me ask the question: Since really beautiful, intricate, and costly items are hand made on earth, what will your spiritual body be like which isn't made by earthly hands, but is lovingly and carefully fashioned and suited for heaven by God himself? Obviously, there will be no comparison between the two. If you have lost a loved one who used to walk with Christ and this Christmas is a hard, lonely one (I've been there and done that, too), take heart and have hope. The "building" they



⁸ Joseph Paturi, "The Human Body-God's Masterpiece," Creation Ministries International, accessed December 10, 2015, <http://creation.com/the-human-body-gods-masterpiece>.

possess now cannot even be described with human words, and the capabilities of that body are, well, off-the-charts, which is another study altogether.

Currently, though, as Paul states, we groan in our current tent. Boy, do we. What do we groan about?

- Can't read without bifocals anymore.
- Can't read with bifocals anymore (Again, been there and done that).
- Takes a few minutes to get up off the floor once you get down there.
- Your once massive weight-lifting chest is not around your waistline.
- "Eh" has become a knee-jerk response when you see people talking in your direction.
- Pain you used to play through in your teens now causes you to stop and wonder, "What's that? Could it be something major, medically speaking?"
- You spend a lot of your off-time walking around looking for your stuff because you can't seem to remember where you placed it.
- Gums start receding and teeth get more brittle.
- Skin thins out and become less elastic and more fragile (which means it starts sagging). Hits you used to walk away from in footballs which left no bruises, now would take you out. Why, even small bumps leave off-colored purplish marks on your skin. How did that happen?
- Stretching is always painful and you never seem to get really limber.
- Things grow on your once perfect, smooth skin. The doctors really comfort you by calling them barnacles. Thanks, doc. That really helps.

I could go on, but you get the painful, honest picture. We do groan in these terrestrial, temporal, decay-oriented bodies, but we don't groan without hope because we know this body will be ramped up to a level in God's presence adjectives couldn't even come close to describing.

In 2015, *GQ Magazine* interviewed Nick Nolte, the once muscular gruff speaking, hard-living actor from countless movies. To read the interview is to validate Paul's words about groaning and to underscore how those who don't walk with the Savior, by faith, lack real, lasting hope no matter how much they are worth.

When asked "When was the last time you cried?" Nolte said: Today. I cry every day. ... I cry when I try to get out of bed, because I'm in my 70s and my body hurts like hell. Once my joints are moving, I'm all right, but those are my first tears in the morning, wondering if the pain is going to get worse or get better ... At my age, a lot of your friends start dying, and that'll always bring on a good cry. Last summer, it was [screenwriter and director] Paul Mazursky. He had internal organ failure. ... His wake was classic. I saw faces I hadn't seen in years. Mel Brooks. Richard Dreyfuss, who I hadn't seen since we filmed *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*. It was a great wake, but then you can't help but think about your own funeral and what that might be like.⁹

⁹ Davy Rothbart, "The GQ+A: Nick Nolte Cries Every Day, Thinks About His Own Funeral" *GQ* (1-28-15).

Hope escapes him, doesn't it? Groaning, on the other hand, captivates him. If he would but embrace the Christ-child of Christmas, he'd find a hope in the groaning which could only come from God. Yes, he'd find a hope, as Paul did, which would help him really live each day without feeling like throwing in the towel.

Paul, who had his own personal reasons for writing about groaning in this human body, lived differently than Nick because he had that abiding faith in what God has promised those who know Him. As he confidently writes in verses five and six:

⁵ Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. ⁶ Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—

At the moment of conversion, God gives you His Holy Spirit as an engagement ring, promising you that on the day you are absent from your body you will immediately be in the Lord's presence ... with that new body to end all bodies. Can you imagine what that day will be like? No wonder Christians are full of hope this Christmas. They know what's coming.

All of this is why I've always loved the old hymn *What A Day That Will Be*:

There'll be no sorrow there, no more burdens to bear,
 No more sickness, no pain, no more parting over there.
 And forever I will be with the One who died for me.
 What a day, glorious day that will be!
 What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see,
 And I look upon His face-the One who saved me by His grace.
 When He takes me by the hand and leads me thro' the Promised Land;
 What a day, glorious day that will be.¹⁰

¹⁰ Jim Hill, *What A Day That Will Be*.