

Review: The Gifts of Christmas

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The Gifts of Christmas: 25 Joy-Filled Devotions for Advent

By Sheila Walsh (Baker)

Finding a fresh Christmas devotional book each December can be  challenging, but Sheila Walsh has met that challenge in *The Gifts of Christmas: 25 Joy-filled Devotions for Advent* as she offers new ways of sensing the joy and seeing God's gracious gifts of the season. With an introduction that sets the stage, the recording artist and television host travels from her childhood in Scotland to her adopted home in Dallas and various places in-between, evoking memories and encouraging readers "to exchange weariness for wonder and heartache for hope."

The volume naturally divides into six parts describing God's gifts of expectancy, wonder, joy, grace, peace and hope. The sections contain devotionals built around familiar images of that first Christmas or meaningful aspects of celebrations today such as angels, Bethlehem, the manger, Christmas crackers, candy canes and family photos. Most begin with Scripture, though others start with carols.

The best-selling author fleshes out the devotionals with biblical truths, illustrations and commentary, historical notes and personal stories ranging from humorous to bittersweet. Of particular note are gleanings from Old Testament history by Rabbi Jason Sobel and Alfred Edersheim. Each of the daily readings offers opportunities to remember past Christmases while reflecting on the present and anticipating the future. The 25 days close

with “The Real Gift of Christmas,” the author’s recollection of reading C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* for the first time, the story of Zacchaeus and the carol “Joy to the World.”

Available as an audiobook and in hardcover, each has advantages. Listening to Sheila Walsh read brings Scottish flavor while the print contains lovely illustrations of kraft-paper-wrapped packages, red striped string and gold ornaments with subtle changes in each section’s art to reinforce the theme. Consider purchasing both—one to enjoy and one to joyfully gift a friend. That’s what I did.

Kathy Robinson Hillman, former president

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