



Partners

December 2024
Volume 56, No. 4
Part 1 for December 1

Without Murmuring by Francis Avery Patton

I opened the van door. “Bye, Mom,” I said quickly. Mom smiled at me. “Are you going to tell the other girls today?”

I nodded. I was so excited I was almost bubbling over. Then I was off and running for the school door. I was the first student in my classroom, which didn’t happen often. I guess being excited helped me get ready faster.

“Good morning, Rachel,” said Mr. Weaver.

“Good morning. Mr. Weaver, guess what? We’re going to have a campfire at our house Friday night. We’re going to grill hamburgers and hot dogs, and I’m going to invite all the girls. And I hope Dad and Mom’s friends talk a long time, because then we can stay up late.”

Mr. Weaver smiled. “That sounds like fun. If you’re staying up late, you might see a falling star.

There’s going to be a meteor shower from Friday night through Monday morning.”

Before long, everybody arrived. I told them about the campfire. “We’re not having a sleepover, but Dad and Mom said we can set up a tent. We can go in there and talk.”

“That sounds like a *lot* of fun,” Angie said, and the others agreed.

Math class. Fractions. Mr. Weaver had his back turned when I saw Angie write something on a piece of paper. She folded it, dropped it on the floor, and pushed it over to Justina. Last year, Angie never passed notes. This year she did, but so far she hadn’t gotten caught.

Next time I peeked Mr. Weaver was explaining something at Angie’s desk. Angie grabbed an eraser and scrubbed out her work. When Mr. Weaver



walked away, Angie shot me a look. She wasn't whispering, but her look said, "Come on!"

At lunchtime, Angie slid in beside me. "Did you see what Mr. Weaver did in math class?" she asked, keeping her voice low. "He made me erase my work. For one of them, I even had the right answer. But he said I didn't do it right, and he made me do it over again."

I didn't like Angie talking that way about Mr. Weaver. It made me feel guilty. And besides, if people just followed the rules, they wouldn't get into trouble. I changed the subject. "Do you think we should hang a lantern in the tent?"

"We can. I told Justina she should bring her binoculars," Angie said.

"Is that what you wrote in the note you gave her?"

"Shh!" Angie hissed, looking at Mr. Weaver.

"We're not supposed to pass notes. You could have waited till now to tell her."

Angie raised her eyebrows and made a face that said louder than words, *Oh, yeah? Well, I can if I want to.* It bothered me, and I didn't feel quite as cheerful as I headed out to the playground.

I was a lot quieter when I climbed into the van at three o'clock. Mom noticed right away. "How did school go, Rachel?" she asked.

"All right. But Angie was upset at Mr. Weaver today because he made her redo some math problems. And she passed a note to Justina during class, but Mr. Weaver didn't see her. At lunchtime I told her that she shouldn't, but she's been doing a lot of things like that lately. Then she tells me about it and wants me to take her side."

"I'm glad you told her," Mom encouraged me. "Dad and I want you to let us know when things like this happen. We don't want you joining in with her."

Friday after school, I ran to the backyard and found Dad getting the campfire wood ready. "Dad, may I help you set up the tent next?"

"Sure. Why don't you lay out the tent poles and stakes?" He spread the tent out on the grass.

"I'm so excited," I told Dad. "Tonight is a meteor shower, and the best time to see them is late at night. You and Mom can talk a long time if you want, so we can stay up later."

"Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king."
— 1 Peter 2:17

Dad chuckled. "We'll see what we can do. By the way, Mom told me about what's happening at school. You're doing the right thing not to join in. You need to listen to Mr. Weaver and not do things behind his back. It's okay to be friendly to Angie, but we don't want her to change the way you act."

"Thanks, Dad," I said. "Don't worry, everything's going to be fine with Angie tonight." *I hope.*

But it didn't turn out quite that way. After supper, we girls headed to the tent. Laughter and campfire smoke drifted across the yard from where the adults were talking. We talked and laughed too. Sue Ellen's marshmallow had caught on fire while she was roasting it, and now she laughed about it until she almost cried.

Then Angie said, "Let's play a game. I'll say a word, and everybody else say the first thing you think of. The winner gets to say the next word. *Hot!*"

"Dog! Pizza!" said two girls.

"Chocolate," I said.

"Marshmallow," said Sue Ellen, sending us into gales of laughter again.

"You go next," I said to Sue Ellen.

Sue Ellen tried to stop laughing. "Um . . . annoying."

"Mosquitoes," I said.

"Tests," said Justina.

"The teacher," said Angie.

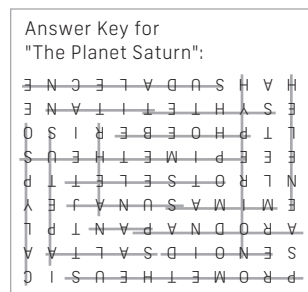
I looked at her quickly. Everybody was silly and laughing again. I didn't feel like laughing.

"Here's the most annoying thing," Angie said. "Mr. Weaver insists that everything has to be just exactly right. If it's even a little bit wrong, you have to do it again. I don't really even care."

"Yeah, anyway . . ." Justina started to say.

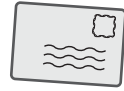
I was just tired of hearing about it. Why couldn't we have a good old-fashioned girls' conversation where everybody just behaved?

"We shouldn't be talking like that about Mr. Weaver," I said,





Pen Partners



looking squarely at Angie. “It’s not being respectful. You can keep playing the game if you want. I’m going to go sit by the campfire.”

I slipped out of the tent and listened for a second. Somebody inside giggled quietly. I went and sat next to Mom. The campfire shone warm and bright. “Are you okay, Rachel?” Mom asked.

“Uh-huh. I just want to sit here awhile.”

Soon Amanda came and sat next to me. “I’m glad you said something,” she whispered. “I didn’t really like what Angie said either, but I laughed because it caught me off guard.”

I smiled at her. “Thanks, Amanda,” I said.

“Hey, look!” someone said. “There’s a shooting star!” A meteor traced a frosty white path across the night sky. It lasted several seconds.

“That was a big one,” I said to Amanda. Dad stood up and threw another log onto the coals. Yellow and gold and orange sparks flew up like hundreds of tiny meteors.

And then the other girls were there too. “Did you see that big meteor?” I asked them. Justina nodded, her binoculars hanging around her neck.

“We saw it,” said Sue Ellen. “And I saw a little one right before that.”

Angie came over and whispered to me, “I’m sorry I said that. Let’s do something else, okay? It was a dumb game anyway.”

“Okay,” I said. I felt a little better.

Dad got out some songbooks. Someone started to sing. We all joined in. I looked at my friends singing around the campfire. They looked happy and warm in the firelight. *Help us to always stay this way, I prayed. I don’t want us to be disrespectful anymore.*

Dad and Mom have explained we all have choices to make. I’m not sure what Angie will choose. Tonight she chose to say, “I’m sorry.” I’m praying she’ll decide to be more respectful too. I’m glad I said something instead of going along with the others. I just hope Angie feels the same way.

The Planet Saturn

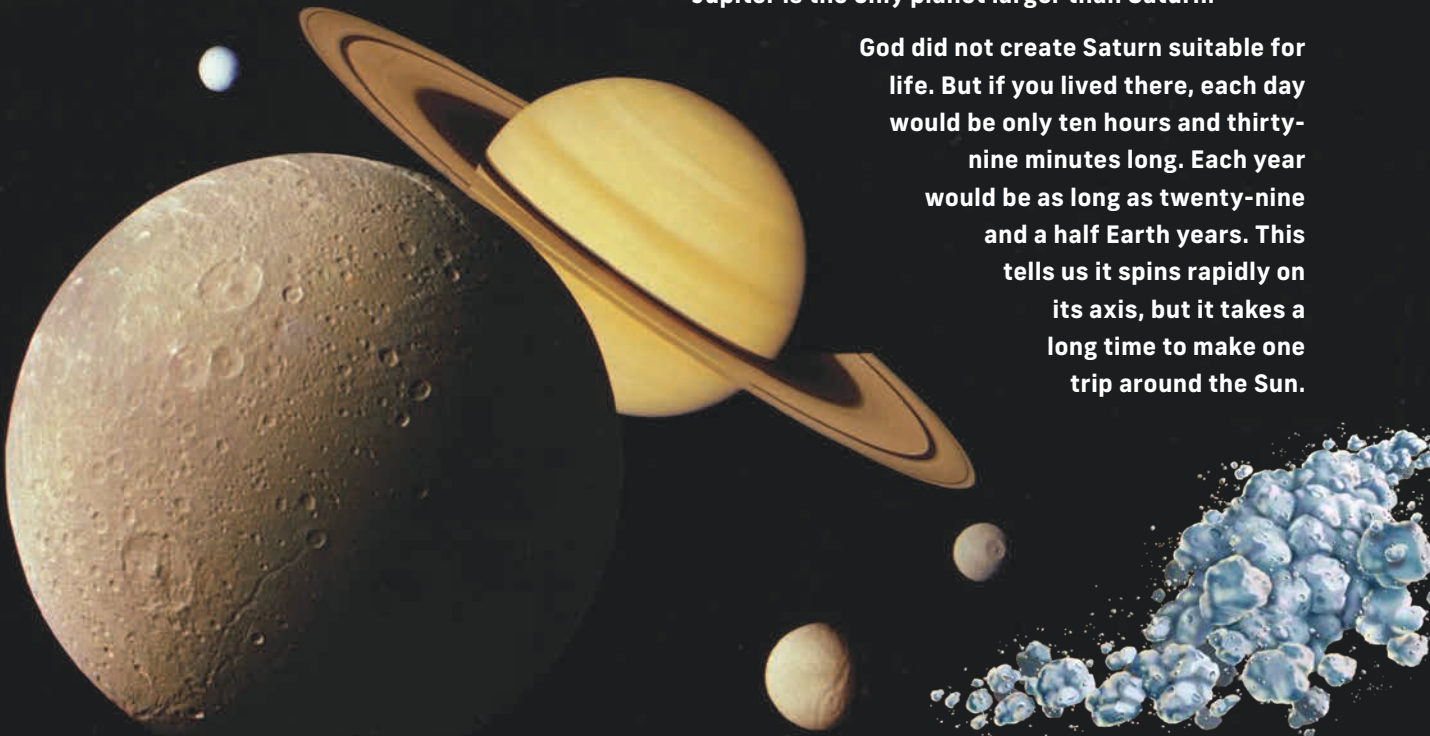
*"The heaven, even the heavens,
are the LORD'S." – Psalm 115:16*

Research by Crystal Shank

Saturn is the sixth planet from the Sun, and about nine and a half times farther from the Sun than Earth. It is the most distant planet men discovered before the time of high-powered telescopes.

Saturn is about ninety-five times larger than Earth. Jupiter is the only planet larger than Saturn.

God did not create Saturn suitable for life. But if you lived there, each day would be only ten hours and thirty-nine minutes long. Each year would be as long as twenty-nine and a half Earth years. This tells us it spins rapidly on its axis, but it takes a long time to make one trip around the Sun.



Saturn is recognized as the planet with rings. Those rings are made of billions of pieces of ice orbiting the planet. Some particles are the size of dust and some are much larger.

Wikimedia Commons

Saturn has many moons. Eighteen moons were discovered between 1671 and 1990. Many more have been discovered since. Of those first eighteen, Pan is the smallest at twelve miles in diameter and Titan is the largest at thirty-two hundred miles. Find the eighteen moon names in the puzzle.

ATLAS	HYPERION	PHOEBE
CALYPSO	IAPETUS	PROMETHEUS
DIONE	JANUS	RHEA
ENCELADUS	MIMAS	TELESTO
EPIMETHEUS	PAN	TETHYS
HELENE	PANDORA	TITAN

P	R	O	M	E	T	H	E	U	S	I	C
S	E	N	O	I	D	S	A	L	T	A	A
A	R	O	D	N	A	P	A	N	T	P	L
E	M	I	M	A	S	U	N	A	J	E	Y
N	L	R	O	T	S	E	L	E	T	T	P
E	E	E	P	I	M	E	T	H	E	U	S
L	T	P	H	O	E	B	E	R	I	S	O
E	S	Y	H	T	E	T	I	T	A	N	E
H	A	H	S	U	D	A	L	E	C	N	E



Partners

December 2024
Volume 56, No. 4
Part 2 for December 8

My Neighbor by Abigail Metzler Parks

“Last one,” I called, hefting the last box from the bed of Dad’s pickup truck.

“Just in time,” my cousin Isaiah said. “I heard something about pizza.”

I carried the box into the house and followed the scent of pizza to the kitchen. My mouth watered and my stomach growled; I was clearly hungry after moving boxes all day.

“Do you know anything about your neighbors?” Isaiah asked between mouthfuls.

“I haven’t met any of them,” I said. “Which ones do you mean?”

Isaiah gestured toward the property on the west. “That dump,” he said.

I could easily see why he called it that. Although it was December, leaves still coated the yard, topped with sticks brought down from last week’s storm.

And that wasn’t all the backyard had to offer. Two worn-out lawn mowers, random patio furniture, and a run-down swing set finished off the messy scene. “I don’t think anyone lives there,” I said.

“There’s a car in the driveway,” Isaiah pointed out. “And I saw a lady in the yard this morning.”

“I haven’t met them,” I said. “But it’s not hard to imagine what kind of people live in a place like that.”

Isaiah nodded. “It sure doesn’t look like they care about appearances.”

Later, after all the others had gone home and we were arranging tools in the garage, I asked Dad about them.

“No, I haven’t met any of the neighbors yet,” he said. “We’ll have to do that soon.”

“Well, it looks like the ones in the brown house aren’t worth knowing,” I said.



Who Am I? by Delphine Ramer

I lived in Thessalonica, which is north of the Aegean Sea. When Paul preached there, I received him into my home.

Unbelieving Jews assaulted my house and took me to the rulers of the city. They cried, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also."

I was released after the rulers had taken security of me. Look in Acts 17:6 to find my name. I am _____.

Dad looked up from the shelf he was organizing. His eyes did the talking.

"I mean, their place is so trashy," I tried to defend myself. "It looks like they don't take care of anything. They probably drink and are drug addicts too." Even as I said the words, I knew Dad wouldn't accept that defense.

"You can never tell who anyone is by their property," Dad said. "They might have addictions, but maybe they are disabled and unable to work."

Probably just lazy, I thought, but I didn't speak my thoughts this time.

Dad placed his wrench set on a shelf. "You know," he said. "Jesus came for all people—not just for the ones who seem to have their lives together."

I nodded, remembering how Jesus ate with Zacchaeus and talked to the woman at the well and healed lepers. I guessed Jesus really did love people like our neighbors with the messy yard.

"Would you like to ride along to the hardware store?" Dad asked me the following day.

I hopped in the truck, and we drove to town. Inside the store, I pushed the shopping cart while Dad located the light bulbs and doorknobs we needed.

A cashier in a wheelchair greeted us at the register. "Do you have a rewards card?" he asked.

"No," Dad said. "We just moved to the area."

"Welcome to the neighborhood," he said.

Dad pulled out his wallet. "We're only a couple minutes away, so I'm sure we'll be back again."

"Say," the man said, "you didn't move onto Westpoint Road, did you?"

Dad nodded. "We moved into the white house with blue shutters."

"Well, then you're my sister's neighbors," he said. "I noticed someone moving in next door when I stopped to visit her yesterday." He handed Dad the bag. "She lives in the brown house. You know, the one with all the junk in the backyard."

I stifled a laugh. *Why, even her own brother admits her yard is messy!*

"It's more than she can handle," the cashier went on. "Her husband had cancer for two years, and he just passed away this fall. And now she's struggling with depression." He shook his head.

I thought about what I had said about the brown house and its owner, and I wished I hadn't spoken so quickly, so unkindly.

I thought about it some more as we drove home. I waited to see if Dad would say anything about our widow neighbor, reminding me that I'd been too quick to judge, too slow to care. He didn't.

As we pulled into the driveway though, we both found ourselves looking at the neighbor's backyard. Suddenly, I had an idea. "Do you think I could offer to clean up her leaves?"

Dad smiled. "That's a good idea," he agreed.

A week later, after we were finally settled into our new home, I headed to the front door on the brown house. Mom came along, wanting to meet our new neighbor lady. We rang the doorbell and waited. No one answered. We knocked and waited. *Is she ignoring us?* I wondered. The car in the carport suggested that someone was home.

Just then, a gray-haired woman opened the front door hesitantly. "I'm sorry if I kept you waiting," she said. "I should have the doorbell fixed. I'm Bella," she added, inviting us in.

I tried not to breathe too deeply, the pet odor threatening to overtake my nostrils. But somehow, once we were seated, the smell became less obvious.

Answer for "Mercy":
"He that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor" (Proverbs 14:31).

Answer for "Forgiveness":
"Father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14).

Answer for "Who Am I?":
Jason.

Answer for "Oysters":
Heaven, merchant, goodly pearls, pearl, price, sold, bought (Matthew 13:45, 46).

PARTNERS (ISSN 0031-2568) A Bible-centered paper for Junior/Intermediate boys and girls

Editor: Anita Lee

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Forgiveness

by William Schlegl

A = 1

E = 5

I = 9

O = 15

U = 21

Use the number code to learn what the Bible says about forgiveness.

“
 $\overline{6} \overline{15} \overline{18} \quad \overline{9} \overline{6} \quad \overline{25} \overline{5} \quad \overline{6} \overline{15} \overline{18} \overline{7} \overline{9} \overline{22} \overline{5} \quad \overline{13} \overline{5} \overline{14}$
 $\overline{20} \overline{8} \overline{5} \overline{9} \overline{18} \quad \overline{20} \overline{18} \overline{5} \overline{19} \overline{16} \overline{1} \overline{19} \overline{19} \overline{5} \overline{19}$, $\overline{25} \overline{15} \overline{21} \overline{18}$
 $\overline{8} \overline{5} \overline{1} \overline{22} \overline{5} \overline{14} \overline{12} \overline{25} \quad \overline{6} \overline{1} \overline{20} \overline{8} \overline{5} \overline{18} \quad \overline{23} \overline{9} \overline{12} \overline{12}$
 $\overline{1} \overline{12} \overline{19} \overline{15} \quad \overline{6} \overline{15} \overline{18} \overline{7} \overline{9} \overline{22} \overline{5} \quad \overline{25} \overline{15} \overline{21}$.”

Bella offered us tea. “So you have a family?” she asked Mom while she poured her tea.

“Yes,” Mom said. “We have three boys and a girl.”

“Oh, that’s nice.” Bella stared out the window.

“I only have one son, and he doesn’t talk to me anymore.”

“I met your brother,” I offered. “At the hardware store.”

Her smile returned. “So you met Vincent,” she said. “I don’t know what I’d do without him. He’s the only family I have left.”

After a bit, I brought up my offer. “Would you like me to clean up your yard? I’d be happy to rake leaves and pick up the sticks.”

Bella hesitated. “It’s kind of you to ask. It does need to be done.” She sipped her tea. “How much were you thinking?”

I shook my head. “Oh, no,” I said. “I don’t expect to be paid.”

She gratefully accepted my offer.

I spent the afternoon gathering sticks and raking piles of leaves. My hands formed blisters, my arms grew tired, and my back began to ache, but Bella’s gratitude turned out to be a better motivator for finishing the job than cash would have been.

“Oh, it looks so much better!” Bella exclaimed after I had finished. “Thank you!”

“You’re welcome,” I said, smiling sheepishly as I turned to go. After stowing the rake in the garage, I headed to my bedroom. Before changing my clothes speckled with lawn dirt, I peeked through the gap in the curtains and looked out at Bella’s yard.

The swing set looked as dilapidated as ever. *Why does a widow living alone even have a swing set?* The clutter of the broken-down lawn mowers and castaway furniture was still there. But the leaves and sticks were gone, and compassion had replaced judgment of my neighbor.

Mercy

by Cynthia Grabill

Solve the math problems. Then match the letters to the blanks below.

$$\begin{array}{r} 17 \\ +42 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

A

$$\begin{array}{r} 12 \\ +14 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

Y

$$\begin{array}{r} 63 \\ +36 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

C

“
 $\overline{61} \overline{43} \quad \overline{55} \overline{61} \overline{59} \overline{55} \quad \overline{61} \overline{34} \overline{30} \overline{34} \overline{79} \overline{24} \overline{43} \overline{55} \overline{61} \quad \overline{61} \overline{68} \overline{18}$
 $\overline{61} \overline{59} \overline{55} \overline{61} \quad \overline{18} \overline{43} \overline{24} \overline{99} \overline{26} \quad \overline{34} \overline{30} \quad \overline{55} \overline{61} \overline{43} \quad \overline{9} \overline{34} \overline{34} \overline{24}$.”

$$\begin{array}{r} 74 \\ -31 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

E

$$\begin{array}{r} 72 \\ -11 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

H

$$\begin{array}{r} 16 \\ +52 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

I

$$\begin{array}{r} 74 \\ -56 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

M

$$\begin{array}{r} 15 \\ +15 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

N

$$\begin{array}{r} 16 \\ +18 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

O

$$\begin{array}{r} 18 \\ -9 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

P

$$\begin{array}{r} 10 \\ +14 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

R

$$\begin{array}{r} 72 \\ -17 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

T

$$\begin{array}{r} 33 \\ +46 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

U



Wikimedia Commons



Oysters are considered a delicacy and are enjoyed by people all over the world. There are over two hundred species of oysters, ranging in size from about two to thirteen inches. They can live for up to twenty years.

Oysters feed by filtering algae out of the water. They may filter up to fifty gallons of water a day. They also filter pollutants from the water, which helps improve water quality.

Oysters breathe through gills like fish. They live in both fresh water and salt water.

The Chesapeake Bay holds the record for producing the most oysters. In 2020, there were an estimated four hundred million oysters in the Bay.

Oysters are well-known for producing pearls. They have a thin layer of tissue called a *mantle* that lines the inside of the shell. When a foreign substance gets trapped between the shell and mantle, the oyster covers the irritant with a layer of *nacre*, which is the white interior of the oyster's shell. A pearl is formed as the layers build. It may take around two years to form a pearl five millimeters in size.

It is commonly believed that pearls are formed around a grain of sand. This is not exactly true because oysters have the ability to expel sand and similar irritants. Most pearls are formed around some kind of parasitic intruder.



Fill in the Blanks

Use words from the Word Bank to complete these verses.

"Again, the kingdom of _____ is like unto a _____ man, seeking _____ : who, when he had found one _____ of great _____, went and _____ all that he had, and _____ it."

BOUGHT	PEARL
GOODLY	PEARLS
HEAVEN	PRICE
MERCHANT	SOLD



Partners

December 2024
Volume 56, No. 4
Part 3 for December 15

Serena's Safety Song by Darletta Martin

“Serena, I need some empty bags from the granary.” Dad motioned toward the overflowing trash barrel in the corner of the milking parlor. “Could you please run after them?”

“Okay.” Serena left the warm, well-lit parlor and crunched across the snowy lane toward the ancient bank barn that housed the dry cows and heifers. Why didn’t Dad ever think of giving her this job in the daylight? She hated going into the dark barn early in the morning. Of course, she would never admit to Dad that she was scared; he would probably say it was her overactive imagination.

Serena wasn’t afraid of the barn in the evening when she fed the animals. Somehow it was different when the light of day was just fading. No one would hide in the barn in the daytime; they would come at night. Great-Grandpap often told them about

tramps who hopped off train cars on the nearby railroad track and slept in the barn when he was a boy. Once he had gone to shut the barn door after dark and nearly tripped over a sleeping tramp. What if she did the same?

“Stop it!” she commanded herself. “Think about something else.” A song they had sung at school popped into her head. As she reached the barn door, she began to sing loudly, “Death shall not destroy my comfort, Christ shall guide me through the gloom; down He’ll send some angel convoy to convey my spirit home.”

She jerked the barn door open, reached inside, and flipped the light switch that activated the only bulb high on the center beam. As she burst into the chorus, “Soon with angels I’ll be marching . . .” she lifted the latch on the granary door and grabbed



God Provides for Us

by Jean Knabbe

Look forward, backward, up, down, and diagonally to find each of the words in Psalm 23:6.

SURELY	THE	IN THE
GOODNESS	DAYS	HOUSE
AND	OF MY	OF THE
MERCY	LIFE:	LORD
SHALL	AND I	FOR
FOLLOW ME	WILL	EVER.
ALL	DWELL	

F	L	L	A	H	S	P	R	C	K
G	O	O	D	N	E	S	S	P	L
Y	L	L	I	W	D	N	A	O	I
M	J	L	L	A	C	I	R	N	F
F	E	S	U	O	H	D	T	Q	E
O	Q	R	F	J	W	H	K	H	V
W	O	T	C	E	E	M	T	K	E
F	H	C	L	Y	R	P	E	X	R
E	Y	L	E	R	U	S	Y	A	D

several bags from the pile beside the feed bin.

“With bright glory on my brow . . .” she continued as she turned off the light and slammed the door. Marching back to the milking parlor, she basked in the safety of her song. Who would dare hurt her if she was unafraid of death? Who could stop her when angels marched beside her?

When summer came, it was Serena’s job to collect the cows from the pasture before milking. She loved the walk to the woody corner of the farm in the shimmering late afternoon sunshine, but the gloom of early morning gave her shivers. Time for her safety song again.

“Death shall not destroy my comfort . . .” She sang the first verse and the chorus over and over for several mornings.

Then one afternoon while she folded laundry, she propped the *Church and Sunday School Hymnal* against her stack of towels and memorized the second verse. “Jordan’s streams shall not o’erflow me, while my Saviour’s by my side . . .”

The next morning, she shouted two verses and the chorus into the thickets around the pasture. If any hoodlums were lurking there, they would surely flee from the bold girl who feared not death.

During the next several weeks, Serena memorized the third and fourth verses of her song. She sang it regularly and rejoiced in the courage

it gave her.

Then came the day when she faced real terror. She and her cousins were playing Beckon at Uncle John’s place. The most unique aspect of Uncle John’s property was the old feed mill across the road from the barn. When the mill went out of business, he had purchased it as a place to store his corn and grain.

Looking for a good hiding place, Serena darted into the office room of the mill. Through its one dusty, cobwebby window, she could see the pear tree designated as base. *This should be a perfect place to give beckons.*

One by one she watched the others arrive at the pear tree. But no matter how many times she waved at the window, no one ever noticed her. *Maybe this isn’t such a smart place to hide after all. Maybe Uncle John’s children consider it out-of-bounds.*

Serena decided to slip out of the office and hide somewhere else. She went to the door. *What? Where’s the doorknob? It must have fallen out, and Uncle John has never replaced it since he doesn’t use the office.* She had pushed the door open to come in and shoved it shut behind her without noticing the missing knob. Now it was stuck without any way to pull it open.

Panic rose in Serena’s throat. Her chest felt tight. Outside, dusk was falling. *What if I have to stay in here all night?* She ran back to the window and tried

to clean it with her hand. The cousins were walking away from the base, heading toward the house. They had forgotten her! She pounded on the glass until she thought it would crack, but they were talking and never heard.

“I’m in here! Hey, come get me out!” she yelled. But their voices drifted away, and they disappeared from sight.

Serena was terrified. Tears ran down her cheeks as she imagined spending dark hours in this lonely room until somebody finally noticed that she was missing. When they did start looking for her, who would think of the mill? She thought of all the times she had been afraid and decided this was the worst situation of all. *What if no one finds me before I die?*

The thought of death instantly brought her safety song to her mind. Maybe singing it would

keep her from panicking. In a quavering voice Serena began, “Death shall not destroy my comfort, Christ shall guide me through the gloom . . .” If she had to die, this song would be her brave testimony. “Soon with angels I’ll be marching . . .” She imagined them surrounding her as they had stood by Daniel in the lions’ den.

Her voice grew stronger and more confident as she sang through each verse followed by the chorus. She was partway through the second round when she heard footsteps. With a mighty thump against the door, Dad and Uncle John burst into the room, shining a flashlight on her face.

“There you are! Clever of you to sing so loudly. That made it easy to find you.”

Serena almost shrieked with relief. Her safety song had saved her after all!

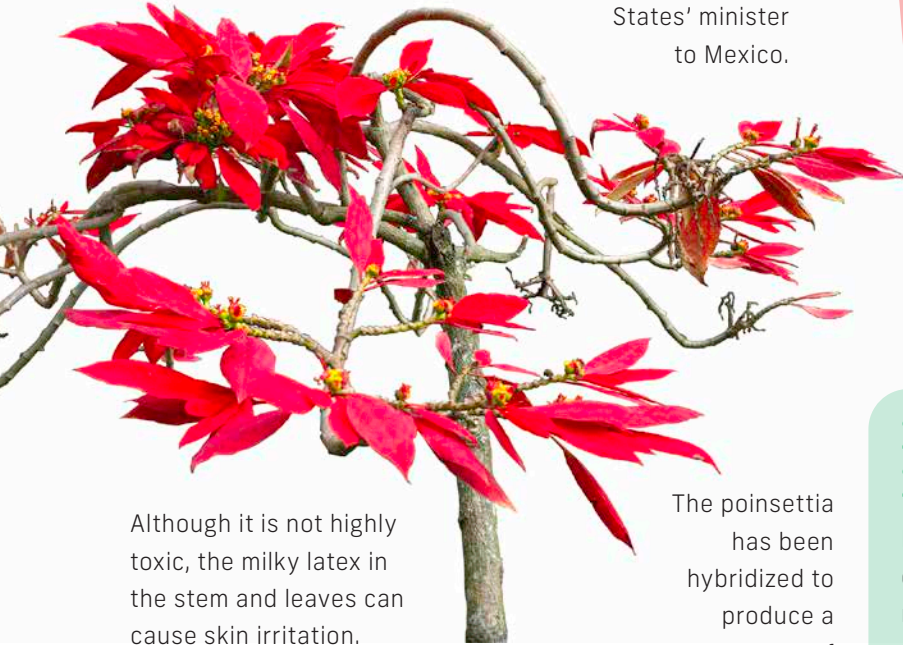




Research by Angela Burkholder

The poinsettia is native to Mexico and Central America. In its natural habitat, it grows to a height of ten feet.

It was named for Joel R. Poinsett, who served from 1825–1829 as the United States' minister to Mexico.



Although it is not highly toxic, the milky latex in the stem and leaves can cause skin irritation.

The poinsettia has been hybridized to produce a spectrum of shades—white, pink, yellow, salmon, and burgundy varieties are often sold alongside the traditional scarlet option.

What Do You Think?

Make your best guess; then check the answer. Are you right?

- Which of these is *not* another name for the poinsettia?
 - Flower of Christmas Eve
 - Mexican flameleaf
 - Lobster flower
 - Christmas star
 - Cardinal flower
- Which state grows the most poinsettias?
 - Virginia
 - Texas
 - California
 - Kentucky
 - New York

Look closely in the middle of a poinsettia's colored "leaves," which are called *bracts*, and you'll see the actual blossoms. These tiny yellow flowers are called *cyathia*, which comes from the Greek word for "cup."



How to Choose a Healthy Poinsettia

Look at the tiny yellow flowers in the center of the colored bracts. Are they tipped with red or green? This indicates that the plant is still fresh.

Avoid plants that are dropping or wilted. This can be caused by underwatering or overwatering.

Choose a plant with bracts that are colored out to the edges.

If you must temporarily expose your poinsettia to temperatures below 50°F, be sure it is protected by a sleeve or other covering.



Poinsettias can be kept as houseplants through the year, although coaxing them to rebloom requires a careful routine of regulated watering, temperature, and light.



Partners

December 2024
Volume 56, No. 4
Part 4 for December 22

The Look-Alike Madness Challenge by Joanna Horning

“I was so mad!”

Analyn giggled at her friend’s annoyed expression. The Christmas party had become rather lively with Krissi telling stories about washing windows for her aunt only to find, a few minutes later, that the three-year-old was glazing the glass with a stick of butter.

“And the other lady I work for is so particular, she *actually sweeps* her garden. And I have to dust her furniture in a certain order—the piano first, so I don’t scratch the finish with dust on my rag from the other stuff. And then I have to dust the inside of her china hutch. Every week! And I can’t rattle the silverware when I do the dishes ’cause it irritates her dog. It makes me so mad!”

There! She said it again. Analyn wished she could tell stories like Krissi did. It would be kind of cute

to end them all with “It made me so mad!”

“And, oh, I almost forgot,” Krissi gushed on while the three listeners tuned in eagerly. “Guess what she makes me wash the floor with.”

Laurel giggled. “What?”

“Old sweatshirts! Probably ones her husband played tennis in. And it takes half an hour to ring the water out of them. Then I scrub her floor on my hands and knees, and I can hardly keep from gagging.” Krissi sighed and, of course, the predicted words came next: “It makes me so mad!”

The expression ran through Analyn’s head as she got ready for bed that evening. *I wonder if she’s ever not mad.*

She grinned as she opened a dresser drawer. Laurel had given her a set of picture frames as a Christmas gift, and they were exactly what she



needed to fill up the empty wall above her bed. Someday soon she would print out some pictures and arrange the frames on the wall. But for now, they would wait in her drawer.

But now, as Analyn looked into her drawer, she sighed. Someone had been digging. *Probably Little Sis. It seems she always digs in my drawers when I'm away.*

Analyn straightened a stack of tablets and set up a mug of pens that had been knocked over. And—*oh, no! There's a chocolate wrapper.* Analyn looked up and made a face at the mirror. “This makes me so mad!” she fussed, trying to mimic Krissi.

The next morning, Mom asked Analyn to bake some cookies for Christmas caroling that evening.

“May I make the ones with peanut butter cups on the top?”

“That would be fine. There are probably enough peanut butter cups in the bag of chocolates from PopPop.” Mom grabbed her purse and a left-behind lunch box, and hurried after the children to do the school run and grocery shopping. “Elliot can have more medicine at nine if he needs it,” she called over her shoulder.

Analyn glanced at her younger brother stretched out on the sofa. He could be a nuisance around her elbows on normal days, but he would probably be okay today since he was sick. She found the recipe card and studied the ingredients, subconsciously scratching at the dried-on remnants of last year's cookies. *Thirty-six peanut butter cups*, she thought, opening the pantry door.

Analyn was so engrossed in making cookies that nine o'clock passed without her even thinking to check on her brother. When the dough was made, she set up an assembly line workstation at the end of their old drop leaf kitchen table. First the dough, then the egg whites, then the chopped nuts, and the peanut butter cups. Elliot was far from her mind as she focused on making perfectly round cookies.

Suddenly, the table creaked, and Analyn's whole work area hopped a little, dropped a fraction of an inch, and lurched back up into place. Analyn screamed as her bowl of cookie dough wobbled and egg whites splashed onto the pile of peanut butter cups.

Scowling, she bent to look under the table, and met the offender face-to-face. She had never heard Elliot leave the sofa and crawl beneath the table where he had released the drop leaf latch.

“Elliot Brandt! What ails you?” Analyn demanded, tugging at his collar and pulling him up to eye level. He snickered, his sparkling eyes challenging Analyn's stern ones.

“You know better,” she said, and silently added, *You make me so mad!* In disgust, she turned back to shaping cookies.

That evening, the church gathered for Christmas caroling. Analyn took her cookies to the kitchen before joining her

friends in the corner.

“Hey, Analyn, guess what?” Laurel greeted her excitedly. “Mom's taking me shopping at the mall next Tuesday, and she said I may invite all you girls to go along! And we're stopping at Snip-n-Tuck, and we thought maybe we could get matching dresses. And we're eating out for lunch. Do you think you can go? All the others already asked, and they may go.”

“Oh, that sounds like fun! I'll have to ask Mom.” Analyn shared the excited mood.

“Do! Right now!” her friends urged.

Analyn did, only to have her bubble of excitement ruthlessly popped. “Tuesday's the day we have to provide lunch for the work crew at Uncle Devon's,” Mom reminded her.

What If?

by Lucy A. Martin

I cannot use a shovel
To clear the walks of snow
Unless I find a shovel
That is ready when I go.
God uses only people
Who are ready to be used.
Imagine! What if Mary . . .
What if Joseph had refused?

Answer for "Christmas":
"For unto you is born this day
in the city of David a Saviour,
which is Christ the Lord"
(Luke 2:11)

Answer for "Why?":
Matthew 1:21
save, people, sins,
name, Jesus, shall,
four, which is Christ the Lord

Answers for
"The Christmas
Road":
1. c, 2. a, 3.
d, 4. b.

Christmas by William Schlegl

Write the letter that comes five letters after the letter given. You will learn why we celebrate Christmas.

“
A J M P I O J T J P D N W J M I O C D N
Y V T D I O C Z X D O T J A Y V Q D Y
V N V Q D J P M , R C D X C D N X C M D N O
O C Z G J M Y .”
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

“Awww!” Analyn’s shoulders drooped. “Can’t I just skip out? I’ll probably never have this opportunity again!”

“I’m sorry,” Mom sympathized. “But I don’t think I can spare you. We need to do most of the food on Tuesday morning.”

“Can’t we do it on Monday? I’ll work extra hard,” Analyn suggested, half hopeful.

“Not nearly all of it,” Mom replied. “I wish I could let you go, but I just don’t think I can.”

Analyn played with her sweater zipper, searching her brain for more ideas.

“You’ll have fun at Uncle Devon’s too. I’m sure some of the cousins will be there,” Mom said.

“I guess.” Analyn turned and went to tell her friends the verdict. A cry of disappointment rose while Analyn boiled inside. They could sympathize with her, but that wouldn’t keep them from going off and having fun without her. There she’d be, slaving away, making chickenetti for the work crew while her friends were shopping. “It makes me so mad,” she muttered.

“You sound like Krissi!” Laurel laughed, and suddenly Analyn realized what she had said. Coming from Krissi, it sounded like a joke, but from her own mouth it sounded nasty.

“I shouldn’t have said it,” Analyn said sheepishly.

“It’s okay,” Laurel said. “I’d be disappointed too.”

“But getting mad isn’t the right thing to do, even if I feel like it.”

“You’re right,” Krissi agreed. “Maybe we need a Madness Challenge.”

“Yeah—like if you’re mad about something between now and Tuesday, you’ll have to skip the shopping trip,” Analyn teased.

“Oops.” Krissi laughed. “No, we need something more positive; like if we all stay sweet until Christmas, then we can get look-alikes.”

“Hey, yes!” Analyn agreed.

“If all our moms let us,” Laurel inserted.

“And if they don’t . . .” Krissi started.

“We’ll be sweet anyway,” Analyn decided. “I’m actually feeling happier about the whole thing already!”

Why? by Eugenie Daniels

Do you know why Jesus was born? Unscramble the words to discover the answer.

“And she _____ (HALSL) bring _____ (TOFRH) a _____ (SNO),

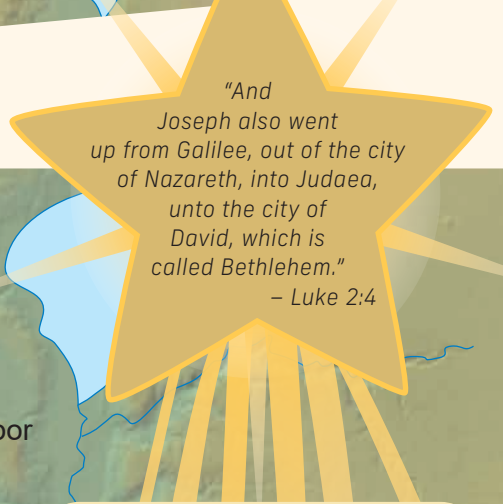
and thou shalt _____ (LCLA) his _____ (MNEA) _____ (SSUEJ): for he

_____ (LAHLS) _____ (ESVA) his _____ (EPLOPE) from their _____ (NSSI).”

The Christmas Road

Research by Frieda Thiessen

Shortly before Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a distance of sixty to seventy-five miles or more. This map shows one of the routes they could have taken.



Nazareth
The hills in Nazareth are about one thousand feet high. Palms and walnut trees flourish here.

Mount Tabor
This mountain is around 1,900 feet high. Many Christians believe this is where Jesus was transfigured (Mark 9:2).

Mount Gilboa
Mount Gilboa is a ridge, not a single mountain. Here King Saul was wounded by the Philistines (1 Samuel 31:1-4).

Jericho Road
This was likely the most difficult and dangerous part of the journey. The road ascended 4,000 feet through the rocky Judean Desert.



Bethlehem
Jesus was born in Bethlehem, about five miles from Jerusalem.

Quiz Study the map and read the text to find the answers.

1. Nazareth is in ____ .	a. Jezreel Valley
2. Mt. Tabor is in the ____ .	b. Mount Gilboa
3. The ____ Road is a steep lonely road.	c. Southern Galilee
4. King Saul was killed on ____ .	d. Jericho



Worrywart Ida Mae Horst

Rosemary tossed in bed as the dusk-to-dawn light at the shop shone through the blinds, casting a faint hue into the room. *What if I get stage fright and start to cry?*

She turned the opposite way and watched the spots of light on the wall. The Christmas program was three days away. Her heart pounded as she envisioned the disgrace it would be if she shed tears at the program. *Twelve-year-olds don't cry in public over silly things like getting stuck while reciting a long poem, do they? Why did the teacher ever ask me to do it? Why did I ever accept it? I wish memory work didn't come so easy for me. Then she would have chosen someone else for that poem. Why did I ever agree to do it?*

She wasn't worried about failing to remember her poem; no, it wasn't that. The issue was that all

alone, she would have to traipse to the front of the room to recite the poem. *What if my shoestrings comes untied, and I trip? Or . . .* Rosemary's heart lurched. *What if I go at the wrong time and take someone else's spot?*

The avalanche of things that could happen and just *might* happen made Rosemary shiver. She glanced at the alarm clock and turned away, irritated. It was eleven o'clock already. *Why can't I just sleep?*

"Take it to the Lord in prayer." Like a breath of spring air, the words of the song they had sung in family devotions that night whispered over her. "Take it to the Lord in prayer."

Rosemary slipped out of bed and knelt on the cold floor. "Dear Lord," she prayed. "I am so scared about the program. So very scared that I will do



something dumb. Please be with me and help me relax and sleep now. Amen.”

Rosemary snuggled into bed. She yawned. *Ah, tomorrow morning will come soon enough.* She closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep.

Beep, beep! The alarm jarred her awake, and reaching over, she snapped it off. How could it be morning already? Her eyes felt grainy, like sand running through her fingers. She remembered the beginning of the night and how she had worried about the program. Now in the bright morning light, it seemed like an insignificant thing to be agitated over, and she felt a little sheepish.

Before dressing, Rosemary knelt beside her bed to pray about the day and for her family. Then she said, “Thank You, God, thank You! Thank You for helping me sleep last night and for all the things You have given me.” The peace that she felt put a smile on her face.

* * * * *

“Let’s go canoeing!” Rosemary’s brother Marvin cheered. It was still December, but the supper table conversation had been about a family outing for the coming summer.

Rosemary felt a stab of panic at the chorus of approval over Marvin’s suggestion. She certainly did not support that idea at all. Didn’t Marvin think about all that could go wrong? Flipped canoes, people drowning—why Rosemary could think of many things that could go amiss. Surely,

Who Am I?

by Delphine Ramer

I spent many years living in a tent.
I respected and obeyed my husband.
When visitors came, I quickly made
cakes upon a hearth for them.
My son Isaac was born when I was
ninety years old.
Look in Genesis 17:19 to find my name.
I am _____ .

Why Worry?

by Lucy A. Martin

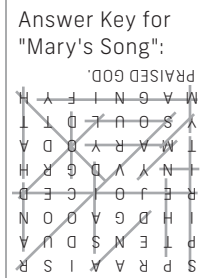
There isn't any sense at all
In fearing that the house might fall.
If earthquakes come or hurricanes
With wind and house-destroying
rains,
My God can keep me just the same
As if the trouble never came.
To waste what could be happy days
In fretting and complaining ways,
I might as well have told the Lord,
“I do not think You can afford
To keep me safe from hurt and
harm.”
It doubts the power of His arm.
To fret and worry is a shame
That underestimates His name.

someone could come up with a more practical, less dangerous option. But she doubted anyone would listen to her protests. The unanimous cry of agreement was strong enough that she’d not try to buck it.

When the family left the table to finish the chores for the evening, Rosemary grabbed a tea towel. Her job was to dry dishes this evening. Maybe that would soothe her thoughts.

But her mind spun, envisioning the losses, the pain. She didn’t have much experience with canoes, and she would probably be the one who would tip. Already, she could imagine the water rushing over her as she tried to stay afloat. Her heart pounded. How could the family

Answer for "The Reason":
"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32).



be anticipating such a ride?

Aimlessly she wiped the dishes, around and around, get the next dish, around and around.

Mom touched her shoulder. "Come." She beckoned with her finger.

In the laundry room, Mom asked, "Is something bothering you?" She looked into Rosemary's eyes.

Rosemary twirled her braid around her finger. She bit her lip. "What if something happens on that canoeing trip?"

Mom said, "I thought maybe that was the problem. Did you remember to pray?"

Rosemary blushed. "No. Will you help me, Mom?"

In answer, Mom bowed her head; Rosemary did too. "Dear Father, we come to You this evening and ask that You would please give Rosemary peace. Help her remember to pray and trust You to take care of us. In Jesus' name. Amen."

Mom finished the prayer and added, "Remember. God never promised to protect us from everything we consider bad. But He did promise to always be with us and provide strength to face the hard things in life."

Rosemary shifted her feet, a smile on her face. "Thank you, Mom!"

They returned to the kitchen. Rosemary picked up her tea towel from beside the dish rack and began drying dishes again.

Beside her, Lois splashed the dishes through the rinse water. "Let's sing!" she said, placing another dish in the dish rack. Without waiting for consent, she burst into song.

Rosemary joined in, singing soprano, while Lois switched to a beautiful alto.

The girls finished the chorus, and Rosemary sighed. Ah, Mom was right. God would be with them on the canoeing trip as He was every day.

Mary's Song

by Jane Meyers

Look forward, up, down, and diagonally to find the words from Luke 1:46, 47. Then place the unused letters (in the order given) on the lines to see an example of Mary's life that we should follow.

AND	MAGNIFY	HATH
MARY	THE	REJOICED
SAID,	LORD,	IN
MY	AND	GOD
SOUL	MY	MY
DOETH	SPIRIT	SAVIOUR.

S P R A A I S R
P T E N S D U A
I H D G A O O N
R E J O I C E D
I N Y V D G R H
T M A R Y O D A
Y S O U L D T T
M A G N I F Y H

Mary _____

Answers for "Nazareth":

1. Good Shepherd, 2. vine husbandman, 3. lost sheep, 4. city on a hill.

Answer for "Who Am I?": Sarah.

The Reason by William Schlegl

Write the letter that comes between the two letters given. You will learn why Jesus came to the world.

" HJ BD ZB LN DF MO NP SU SU NP BD ZB KM KM SU GI DF

QS HJ FH GI SU DF NP TV RT , AC TV SU RT HJ MO MO DF QS RT SU NP

" QS DF OQ DF MO SU ZB MO BD DF .

Research by Frieda Thiessen

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a small town in Galilee situated not far from Cana. It was built partly in a valley, and partly on the side of a hill. In Jesus' time, there were probably about two dozen families living in Nazareth.

Some houses were cut into the rocky hillside, and others were built with stone and mortar.

Some people lived in caves. There was a town well. Olive and almond trees, vineyards, and barley grew on the terraced hillsides around Nazareth. Sheep grazed there.

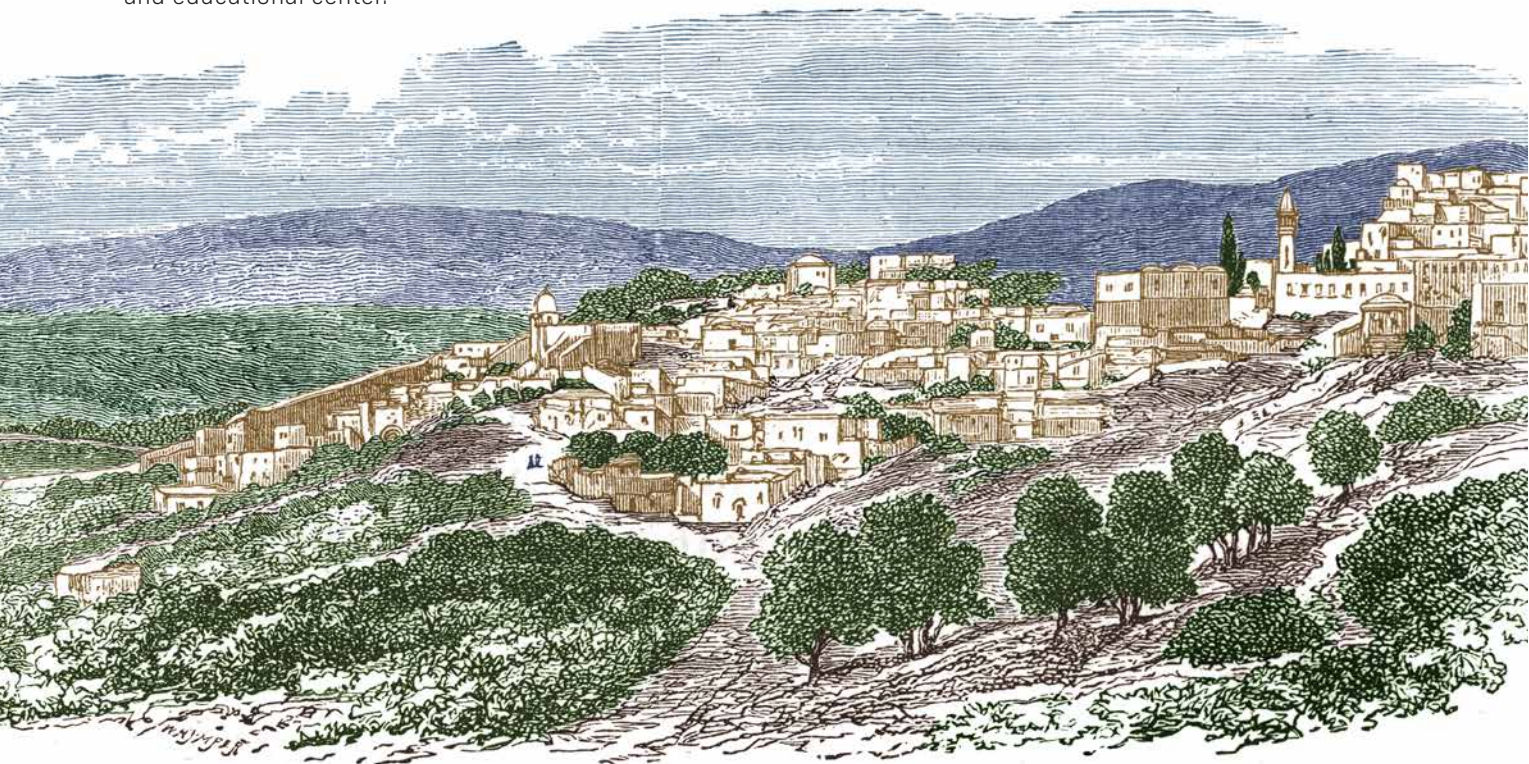
Nazareth had a synagogue. It served as a house of prayer, teaching, and worship, as well as a community and educational center.

Nazareth was an agricultural community. The common village resident was employed in some form of agriculture or a trade—making pottery or tools, weaving, baking, construction, or medicine. One part of the house was often set apart for their trade.

The area had deposits of chalk stone out of which stone vessels were made.

The village streets were narrow and were either made of dirt or covered with small stones.

For most people in that era, daily life normally involved many hours of work, little play, and perhaps only two meals a day.



Unscramble

When teaching, Jesus used illustrations of things He knew well from growing up in Nazareth. Unscramble the words to discover some of them.

1. _____ – John 10:11
DGOO DEEHHPRS

3. _____ – Luke 15:6
TSOL EEHPS

2. _____ – John 15:1
EINV AABDHMNSU

4. _____ – Matthew 5:14
YTIC NO A LIHL