



## **Unstoppable: Christmas Presence**

*This month's Work, Love, Pray podcast is an interview with one of our favorite 4word women, Dr. Nicole Martin, Chief Information Officer of Christianity Today. To hear the entire conversation, be sure to listen to both December podcast episodes.*

Throughout 2023 we've been exploring what it means to be an unstoppable woman of God. As we enter the season of Advent, let's press pause and consider the source of our forward momentum.

### **Christmas is all about the presence.**

With the birth of Jesus, the world received the greatest gift in history – the embodied presence of God with us. This is the distinctive of our Christian faith.

In the Older Testament, we see a distance between God and people, and on the occasions when people caught a glimpse of God they were shaken to their core. God is holy and mysterious, and we can never be known completely. The prophet Isaiah, speaking for God, said it this way:

*“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord.  
‘And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.  
For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so my ways are higher than your ways  
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.’” – Isaiah 55:8-9*

But our transcendent God did something extraordinary; God became one of us. And God did not choose to show up in a fully formed human body. Instead, God came into the world the same humble and messy way that every other person does. Jesus was formed in his mother's womb and born from her body. He experienced the helplessness and vulnerability of a newborn.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote: “... *it was necessary for him [Jesus] to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people.*” - Hebrews 2:17-18

In Jesus, God is immanent and accessible to anyone who places their trust in him. And through the presence of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is not just beside us or in front of us, he dwells in us. Christmas gives us the opportunity to remember and acknowledge the priceless gift of God's constant presence.

### **Christmas is pregnant with possibility.**

God's ministry is not only to us; it is also through us. Some people tend to minimize the role of Jesus' mother, Mary. It's true that Jesus is the center of the story of Scripture, but the Older Testament prophecies about the Messiah being born through a human mother are deeply important.

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*“...the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’).” – Isaiah 7:14*

Mary was a young Jewish virgin, and she knew the Scriptural promises surrounding the birth of the Messiah. When the angel Gabriel delivered God’s message to her, she immediately understood that she was part of the fulfilment of the promise. In her timeless song of praise, she said:

*“Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.  
How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!  
For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,  
and from now on all generations will call me blessed...”*

*He has helped his servant Israel  
and remembered to be merciful.  
For he made this promise to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and his children forever.” - Luke 7:46-47, 54-55*

Jesus came to restore God’s dream for the world, and like Mary, he invites us to be part of the promise of a world restored. There are things we can **say** and things we can **do** to participate in the redemptive mission of Jesus.

One important thing we can say about our faith is that we have been given peace. The peace of Jesus is not just the absence of conflict, it’s the restoration of God’s original intent for people and for the world. The Hebrew word for this peace is “shalom,” and in Jesus we have been granted peace with God and peace through the Holy Spirit. Whether people can articulate it or not, everyone longs for shalom, and we can spread the Good News that this peace is available in Jesus.

And beyond just words, we have the amazing privilege of participating in the work of Jesus in the world. The Christmas season is a perfect time to declare our faith in Jesus through the things we do. We can volunteer at shelters and soup kitchens or buy gifts for under-resourced children. We can also bring joy to lonely nursing home residents through our presence with them. The witness of our faith is not exclusive to Christmas, but in this season that can be particularly challenging to many people, we can seize the opportunity to allow the love of Christ to flow through our hands and feet.

### **Christmas can be messy – and that’s ok.**

During the hustle and bustle of this season, it’s important to remember what it means to be present with God, with loved ones and even with oneself. Being present doesn’t mean everything has to be perfect. Jesus was born the same messy way every other baby is born. He spent his first nights in a messy stable and died for humanity in the messiest way possible.



As we gather with family and friends, we will find ourselves in the messiness of relationships. And when we encounter the inevitable imperfections of human interaction, it is important to remember that Christ fought through all of the mess to be with us. Jesus' example gives us the permission and grace to fight through whatever it takes to be present with people in big and small ways.

Jesus wants to work in you and through you, but you have to be present with him to be prepared for whatever's next. Be sure to take time during the Christmas season to be alone with God. The source of an unstoppable woman of God is her relationship with God. So slow down and be present with Jesus so you can be prepared for all God has in store.

### **Christmas is a promise.**

The fact that the Messiah was born was the promise of Scripture fulfilled in that moment. And the fact that Jesus was born, crucified, and resurrected is a promise that he will come again someday. The gift of this season is that we get to be in the "here and now" of Christmas as we celebrate Jesus' birth, and we also get to be part of things to come.

Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again! This is a promise to hold onto.

To all of you unstoppable 4word women of God, Merry Christmas!

### **Discussion Questions:**

What stood out to you most from this exploration of "Christmas Presence?"

What are your thoughts about the transcendence (otherness) and immanence (nearness) of God? How do you hold each of these realities as you interact with God?

Think for a moment about Mary - a pregnant, unmarried teen-aged virgin with only a promise to hold onto. Have you ever had to wait on God in a difficult situation? How did God sustain you during that time?

What do you sense Jesus inviting you to say or do to let his love flow through you this Christmas?



Reverend Doctor Nicole Massie Martin was born and educated in Baltimore, Maryland. She graduated magna cum laude from Vanderbilt University with a triple major in Human and Organizational Development, Educational Studies, and French. Dr. Martin received her Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary. She earned a

Doctor of Ministry at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary with an emphasis on African American Redemptive Leadership.

Dr. Martin serves as the Chief Impact Officer at Christianity Today. She is the founder and Executive Director of Soulfire International Ministries, which accelerates thriving for pastors, churches, and younger leaders. She is also active in her local congregation



in Maryland at Kingdom Fellowship AME Church where she supports the Discipleship Ministry. Dr. Martin is a gifted writer and author of *Made to Lead: Empowering Women for Ministry* and *Leaning In, Letting Go: A Lenten Devotional*. She serves on the board of the National Association of Evangelicals and has been inducted into the esteemed Board of Preachers at Morehouse College. Dr. Martin is married to her best friend, Dr. Mark Martin, and they have two amazing daughters, Addison and Josephine.



Marion is the Director of Programs for 4word.

Marion served in pastoral ministry for 17 years at three local churches including, most recently, Willow Creek Community Church. During her church ministry, she incorporated her organizational development skills with her practical knowledge of effective discipleship to create growth strategies that focused on the equipping and mobilization of congregations on the mission of Jesus. She holds degrees from Trinity International University and Wheaton College in Organizational Leadership and Missional Church Movement.



***4word** is a global community of Christian women in the workplace. Our mission is to help women in the workplace reach their God-given potential with confidence.*

### **Why 4word?**

At 4word, we know you want to reach your God-given potential so you can have a Kingdom impact on your workplace and the world. To do that, you need resources for professional and spiritual growth - and a community of like-minded women to cheer you on!

The problem is your time is limited and meaningful connections are hard to find. This can leave you feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, and isolated on your life's journey.

**We believe you shouldn't have to navigate work, life and faith on your own because God designed you for community. You are worthy to be surrounded by loving and supportive women who "get you."**

**We understand you face unique challenges as a Christian woman in the workplace, which is** why we create easy-access opportunities for leadership development, spiritual growth, and connections to influential women around the globe.

### **Our Simple Empowerment Plan:**

- Connect to a community – We offer virtual and in-person Community Groups specifically designed for working women – and we also have special groups for executive women.
- Access relevant content – 4word's podcast, blog, and our Community Group Discussion Guides are specifically geared to women in the workplace to help thrive on your journey.
- Get matched with a mentor – From our pool of over 220 amazing mentors we connect you with the right fit for a transformational mentoring experience through 4word's Mentor Program.

**Join the Journey** to empower 10 million Christian women in the workplace to change the world by 2030. Click the picture below to learn more.



## Upcoming

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