



| **Wednesday, December 19**

Confident Hope

Pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him.

Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

Growing up with my two siblings and two close cousins, Christmas was a very special time for all of us. Led by my cousin, Kyle, the 5 of us would prepare and practice a family Christmas program for weeks leading up to Christmas Eve in our grandparent's basement. We had costumes, lines, and music that we would sing. We didn't have scripts, but I can assure you that the several practices between Thanksgiving and Christmas allowed us to perform our parts to perfection (Kyle made sure of that). As we got older, we would play our musical instruments although, with a quartet of three trumpets and a saxophone, I'm sure that the music was only questionably good.

As Christmas Eve arrived, we would first attend our church service complete with the Nativity scene and lines memorized by all of our classmates. Finally, we would then go to Grandpa Ray and Grandma Dees' house for the Christmas play that we practiced for weeks. We would change into our costumes and perform our show with rave reviews from the audience. Some years it was a repeat of the Nativity story complete with a manger and, in 1976, my brother Matt filling the empty manger at 7 weeks of age.

In all of this preparation, we knew that we needed to patiently accomplish certain things in hope for what is so important in a small child's eyes—the presents. In addition to our Christmas play preparations, we also spent months circling pictures in the Sears and JCPenney catalogs that came to our house. We hoped for great things that surely were not a part of the Christmas budget for our parents. Nonetheless, we all confidently circled our wish list desires and prepared for our family Christmas play.

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Today, life is different, and yet so much the same. Our kids search Amazon and hope for treasures in much the same way. They participate in concerts, recitals, and shows. They wait, they prepare, and they hope just as we did. In many ways, I am still like that young girl from Swanville, knowing the prerequisites that need to be completed before we get to see what's in the brightly colored presents wrapped under the tree. Those prerequisites now require me to bake, to buy gifts, wrap them, and make plans so that, when the celebration is at hand, all is perfect just like our Christmas plays performed in our youth. However, now the preparation and those things that I need to patiently accomplish are so different in my adult eyes. I hope, I pray, and I wait patiently for different things. I hope, pray and wait for the coming of Jesus. This older version of that same girl from Swanville now sits in the front pew at church gazing at the empty manger. I wait for the coming of a baby who changes everything. I pray that his arrival will transform me and my family, and I hang on to the hope of better things that only a baby named Jesus can bring. I pray that your Advent season is filled with the confident hope that only your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ can provide for you and your family.

*Dear Jesus, may we confidently hope in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in the power that will soon fill the empty manger.
Amen.*

- Michelle Dahlberg