

It was three weeks before Christmas. JoAnne had a million things on her to-do list. But they wouldn't get done on this Saturday. She was spending the day at the Fisher House. Until it closed earlier this year, Fisher was a rehab center in Washington D.C. It was a place where injured soldiers would go while they readjusted to civilian life. JoAnne had been volunteering there for about six months.

On this Saturday, JoAnne had arranged for her church choir to give a Christmas concert for the soldiers and their families. There wasn't much room, but they managed to squeeze in microphones and music stands and a few rows of folding chairs. Staff and volunteers had been talking about the concert with the soldiers all week. But the crowd they expected never showed up. Nearly all of the families took their soldiers away from Fisher that day.

Just when it looked like no one would come, a troop of cub scouts wandered in bearing gifts for the soldiers. The kids looked so disappointed when they realized no soldiers were there. So JoAnne asked if they wanted to hear a few songs. They shrugged and sat down. As the choir started *Jingle Bells*, one young soldier and his mother walked into Fisher House. JoAnne recognized the man – his name was Ed.

Ed didn't look like most of the other Fisher House residents. No prosthetic arm, no artificial leg. Ed's wounds were on the inside. He'd been serving in Baghdad when a suicide bomber blew up the room he was in. The blast had killed Ed's best friend, and shattered his psyche. He'd spent months curled up in the dark, avoiding the world. During his time at Fisher, he'd made some progress, but he still became nervous at noise and unfamiliar crowds. This Saturday was no different. He looked over the singers, and the scouts, and hurried away down the hall.

After a few minutes, JoAnne went to his room to say hello. Maybe he'd just like to listen to the music? She could crack the door a bit. He wouldn't have to come down. Ed sat still for a minute, but said okay. JoAnne asked the director if they could sing gentle songs, and do them quietly. And the singers started a Christmas concert for one soldier who was listening down the hall.

After a couple of songs, Ed appeared in the doorway, then moved to a chair at the edge of the empty room. The group kept singing: *O Little Town of Bethlehem, White*

*Christmas*. The director asked: Would you like to come closer? Tentatively Ed got up, and moved to the second row. *O Come All Ye Faithful, Sleigh Ride*. The singers did *The First Noel*, and Ed said, "I liked that." And then a quiet *Silent Night*, and the concert was over. The scouts gathered their things and left. The musicians put away their instruments. And still, Ed sat, in the second row of empty chairs. And then, slowly, hesitantly, he began to clap. Everyone stopped. "Thank you," he said quietly. "I never expected a concert for just one person ... a concert just for me."

There was a concert for one given on a cold winter night near Bethlehem so long ago. As the lights in the city went dark, as the shepherds kept watch in the fields, a gentle voice filled the air. It sang of peace, and pure, sweet joy. Come closer, it called. Come and see what God has done. Where once was only darkness, now there is light. Where once there was death, now there is life. Hark, the herald angels sing. Glory to the newborn king!

Yes, the angels sang for one tiny baby. But the miracle of Christmas isn't that the concert is for Jesus, but that it is for you. You are the one this baby was born for. You are the reason God sent his only son to the world. When word becomes flesh, heaven joins earth in a symphony like no other. It's a song of hope and joy, a song of promise and peace. It's a song for every Ed who is curled up in pain, and for every JoAnne who is trying to help him. That song calls us to the manger. It reminds us that the baby lying there – the light of the world, the savior of all people – was born out of love. God's love, for you.

Did you come here today because you heard the singing? We don't always expect to hear God calling us. We're not always ready to listen. A million things fill our to-do lists. But if you take the time to be still, you can hear that gentle voice. It sings of peace, and pure, sweet joy. There's a baby in the manger. It's the long-awaited savior. God's love made flesh for you and for me.

There were no shepherds left when dawn broke in Bethlehem. No angel chorus proclaiming the savior's birth. There was just a proud papa, and a weary mama, and a baby needing to be fed. But that baby's tiny cries are a concert, just for you. They sing of life and love and light. Hark, the herald angels sing. Come closer, and join the song.