



Finding Christmas: Stories of Startling Joy and Perfect Peace

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A gift. The baby. The pageant. The parties. The worship. The afterglow. The story. These are the elements of almost every Christmas. In Finding Christmas, award-winning author James Calvin Schaap takes a look at each of these elements through seven stories that show how imperfect people can find joy and grace in an imperfect world.

His eyes turn on an outgoing bus driver, a passionate mother, a daughter reluctant to return to church, and even his own assumed-mediocre performance at a Christmas pageant. Along the way, readers see how the amazing message of Christmas can be found in the oddest of places. This heartwarming read is both moving and magical and will help readers usher in a joyful Christmas season even amidst the howling winds of winter

Finding Christmas: Stories of Startling Joy and Perfect Peace Details

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Author : James Calvin Schaap

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From Reader Review Finding Christmas: Stories of Startling Joy and Perfect Peace for online ebook

Jenny T. says

A small collection of 7 short stories capturing that Christmas spirit in unexpected ways. A quiet read that makes one look beyond the commercialism of the holidays.

Elishia says

1.5

TheReadingKnitter/ Kasey says

A gift. The baby. The pageant. The parties. The worship. The afterglow. The story. These are the elements of almost every Christmas. In Finding Christmas, award-winning author James Calvin Schaap takes a look at each of these elements through seven stories that show how imperfect people can find joy and grace in an imperfect world. His eyes turn on an outgoing bus driver, a passionate mother, a daughter reluctant to return to church, and even his own assumed-mediocre performance at a Christmas pageant. Along the way, readers see how the amazing message of Christmas can be found in the oddest of places. This heartwarming read is both moving and magical and will help readers usher in a joyful Christmas season even amidst the howling winds of winter.

My Review - This book wasn't what I expected it to be. With each story I expected a little more. Sad to say but this was a let down for me. I can't quiet explain what more I wanted but with each story I'd think at the beginning oh this is going to get good. But before it could get good it just kind of fizzled out. Definitely glad it was a free nook book on Herbie.

Arlena says

Title: Finding Christmas: Stories of Startling Joy and Perfect Peace

Author: James Calvin Schaap

Published: Fleming H. Revell Company

Age Recommended: New Adult - Adult

Reviewed By: Arlena Dean

Rating: 5

Review:

"Finding Christmas: Stories of Startling Joy and Perfect Peace" by James Calvin Schaap was quite some holiday read. This author did a wonderful job with presenting the reader with seven elements that are generally found in ones Christmas: 'A gift, The Baby, The pageant, The parties, The Worship, The afterglow and The story' where you will find that each story are very different and will leave you with some thoughts of how we have come to think of that day. These short stories really are there to inspire any Christmas

holiday read to really see and know what this holiday is all about...yes the real meaning of Christmas. These reads give you a little of it all...happiness, humor, raw and real emotions, fear, laughing out loud, sadness and maybe even crying. Be ready all the emotions are there in the reads. What I found most unusual was how the author says in 'A Foreword..... Most of the stories in this book end at beginnings.' Now what that means I will just say you must pick up the amazing read to find out. The characters all seemed very believable and so real...just like someone you may even know. If you are looking for a quick read that will definitely remind you the real reason for the season, you have come to the right place and I would recommend to you this novel: "Finding Christmas: Stories of Startling Joy and Perfect Peace" as a good read.

Faith says

Christmas

I read one story every night before Christmas and my only wish is that there were more stories to read

Jim Toner says

Schaap gives us some different views of the Christmas from different people's perspectives. Even among Christians, the Christmas season isn't always happy.

Lorraine says

SUMMARY: Christmas is everywhere . . . even where you least expect it.

Join award-winning author and storyteller James Calvin Schaap as he uncovers the grace, joy, and love of the season through seven heartwarming tales of miracle moments in a messy world. This beautiful and inspiring collection of contemporary Christmas stories will remind you what grace looks like--and where to find it.

REVIEW: This book was a group of stories from every day people telling about their Christmas experiences. I found some of the stories interesting and others did not capture my attention as well.

FAVORITE QUOTES: I have never denied my need for God. I have, like many, forgotten him for considerable portions of my life, but He has not forgotten me."

"He's (God) come to us for us. He's come--amazing, shockingly--because He love's us. That's the startling joy of Christmas."

Eustacia Tan says

Rather than a feel-good Christmas story, Find Christmas is a collection of short stories, without much of a happy ending. There might be some hope, some glimpse of the light, but there isn't much in the way of the traditional happy ending we've come to expect.

The book has seven chapters and one preface, all of them short, unrelated stories. And like the book says in the foreword "most of the stories in this book end at beginnings". If you're the sort that likes everything wrapped up neatly by the end, this might frustrate you a little. But think about it this way, you've been given the chance to dream of the ending yourself.

In all of these stories, you can see characters that are real. They might be annoying, with how flawed they are, but after a while, you realise your annoyance is because they're relatable. I've definitely felt like some of the characters some time or the other.

And with each of their stories, you see them just as they get a glimpse of the true meaning of Christmas. Most of the time, this glimpse is limited to them, others remained unchanged. But that's how changes come about. They start with one person. And the characters all learn a different lesson, so put the pieces together, and you might start too see a greater glimpse.

My favourite passage comes from the last story "The Snow Fall".

"He came for those who need him, not because they are poor or slovenly or unable to care for themselves. He came for all those who need him, even some like me, the elitists, self-satisfied with the arrogance that insists they really need nothing at all. He came for me because I too - in my annoyance and pride - am very much among the needy."

This is a fairly short book, but there's not way you can call it shallow.

First posted at Inside the mind of a Bibliophile

Teresa says

Good stories

I liked the variety of the stories. Finding Christmas is a collection of moving stories where various individuals "find Christmas" in amazing ways.

Mary says

Very interesting read capturing the true spirit of Christmas in each of the seven stories -Thank-you!

Melissa says

I enjoyed reading "Finding Christmas: Stories of Startling Joy and Perfect Peace" by James Schaap. A book filled with short stories about the meaning of Christmas. Some stories were really good and others were okay. Each story had a different view of Christmas and how we have come to view different aspects of the season of Christmas. The first story was about an outgoing bus driver who refuses to get married. The second story was about a girl who is in the 8th grade who was sent out to find a doll to play baby Jesus on Christmas Eve program. The third story was about a grandmother who bought her granddaughter gifts for the last 8 years, the granddaughter doesn't know who the gifts are from because the mother has no relationship with the

father of the child, in the end the granddaughter makes the grandmother happy by playing the piano. The fourth story is about a teenage girl who is pregnant and wants to keep the baby, her parents aren't sure about their daughter keeping the baby until the mom is at the airport to pick up her other daughter Amy, to see a baby from Korea placed in the arms of the adopted parents. The fifth story is about a passionate mother and a daughter who is reluctant to return to church, her granddaughter wanted to see Jesus, so the grandmother decided to take her to church so that her granddaughter could see Jesus. The sixth story is about the Christmas pageant practice that included manure on the manger, the shepherds, and all over the church. The seventh story was about an orphanage that two women started and they take in homeless children. The eighth story is about a woman who attends Deer Valley Church and was asked to narrate their Christmas program.

Elizabeth says

This book wins the prize for being the most offensive Christmas book I have ever read. It's worse in some respects than even *The Christmas Shoes*. At least that novel showed a few people with offensive attitudes. This book is just one guy (the author) demonstrating offensive attitudes and holding them up as some higher moral "truth." I almost didn't add it to Goodreads because I'm ashamed to have read it. I am embarrassed. I hope my friends who don't read many Christmas books won't judge the whole genre by this one item. But if you are looking for something Christmassy to read, don't pick this. Read my review, and you'll get the Cliffs notes version of everything this book has to offer. And then some.

[This book has a forward, a preface, and seven short stories.]

THE FORWARD: The forward is the only part of the book that's worth reading. The book's cover proclaims, "Forward by Walter Wangerin Jr.," and that's probably a big part of why I chose to read this book in the first place. I'd read and enjoyed some of Wangerin's other stuff, and he doesn't disappoint here. His forward describes the structure of the stories to come, which will tell of various characters in various situations as they each reach an epiphany of startling joy that changes their whole perspective on life. The forward is beautifully written and uplifting.

THE PREFACE: I could never quite decide if the preface is supposed to be a short story, or whether it's the author describing an epiphany in his own life, presumably the inspiration for the stories that follow. I think the preface is supposed to be an anecdote, likely an exaggerated anecdote, from the author's own life. It is THE single most offensive part of the entire book. The author, I assume, is Christian in the technical sense of the word, because he gets all preachy. However, his extreme view do not represent any form of Christianity I have ever encountered. Also, he calls Jesus a parasite.

So, it's wintertime, and the preface's narrator is riding the bus. He is offended by the bus driver, who talks to him while she drives. And she's fat. And she's middle aged. And she's dating. And did I mention she's fat? Seriously, he goes on and on about how she's fat, and not pretty, and fat, and he checks out her bum and reports that it's larger than the seat, and he checks out her boobs and reports and that no one would care to check out her boobs, and also she's fat. And she's talking to him, which is clearly a mortal sin. Now I admit, it's probably a little unnerving to have a total stranger initiate a long conversation while you're stuck on a bus together, but when you start asking her questions to prolong the conversation, you've more or less waived your right to be offended when she answers you. She wasn't going on and on about politics or war or something even borderline offensive. No, she tells him to watch his step climbing on. (Gosh, no wonder he was offended. Sheesh!) She tells him it's easy to fall and get hurt. Then she gets slightly more personal, I admit, and mentions that her daughter slipped off a curb and is in a lot of pain from a torn ligament. And she

talks a bit about her family, and he asks about her family, and she answers. As he leaves the bus, he realizes that even though she is offensive to him, others (namely God) might still care for her. Meanwhile, he is "the distinguished professor," "arrogant" and "sophisticat[ed]"; Christ came to earth for him and for all people, and he realizes that all people includes her too. He counts her sins, "overweight, obnoxious, promiscuous, over-the-hill," and realizes that Christ might "work in her," but of course, he would have to reach her by using someone else who is "saintly." And therefore, in a back-handed way, God cares for her anyway, even though she's fat. And that's a Christmas miracle.

STORY NO. 1: It's a Christmas pageant, and ~~the little match girl~~ a teenager who plays Mary has left the church; she is out in the snow with no coat holding a doll. She realizes that without the doll, there's no pageant, since the doll is Jesus, and she can take time to reach some spiritual epiphany since no one can do the play without her and the baby. So she stays outside in the snow with no coat until she sees Jesus in the doll.

STORY NO. 2: There's a poor old woman who never gets to visit her granddaughter. The child's mother uses the girl as leverage against the grandmother, and the little girl doesn't know that the old lady she passes every day is family. Meanwhile, grandma buys presents for the child from a catalogue, and the mom pretends that they're from Santa. In this story, some of the grandmother's friends arrange for the grandmother and the girl to have some time together for Christmas carols. In exchange for this, they make the grandmother promise never to send gifts again or to contact the granddaughter in any way. And the little girl still doesn't know they're related. But the grandmother knows it's worth it, sacrificing any future relationship for the sake of two anonymous hours. Oh joy.

STORY NO. 3: A woman has never been able to have kids, so she and her husband adopted two girls. Now one of them is in high-school and pregnant, and the mother is jealous of her daughter for being able to be pregnant. The daughter resents the mother for being so envious in the first place. Then the mom realizes there is still joy in the holiday - she still has another daughter, in college, who is easy to love. So she goes to see her instead.

STORY NO. 4: This is probably the second most offensive portion of the book. In fact, it's a toss-up between the preface and this story. The Bible says to pray without ceasing, so the lady in this story, who prays once a day, never says "Amen." She figures that by picking up the same prayer the next evening, she is praying without ceasing. And what does she pray for? Why, sinners, of course! Those poor successful, rich, sinners, (specifically her daughter and son-in-law) who don't go to church. Yes, I tell you, her prayers revolve around these heinous sinners who live miles and miles away and never bother her. But she calls them up to remind them to go to church. And yet, even though she is ever so holy and wise, they don't listen to her. So this one Christmas, she goes to visit her daughter, son-in-law, and grandkids. And she looks out the window, is distracted by the beauty of the mountainside, and says, "Oh, my God." Her little granddaughter asks her what she sees, and she says, "Jesus. He's [. . .] there." She looks and can't see anyone. She asks where he is, and the grandmother tells her to look at the mountains. Of course, there's no one there. The granddaughter is frustrated at this peculiar game of hide-and-seek, and she says that she can't see Jesus. She wants to see him. Well, the grandmother takes this as a sign, as the answer to her prayers. Now, she can take the granddaughter to church, secretly, and it won't be a sin because she asked to see Jesus. Control issues aside, it's a little disturbing to read about an adult playing mind games with a child and insulting her intelligence, all at the same time. And talk about entrapment! She could have said, Look at the blue jay? --Where? --It just flew behind the mountain! --I want to see it! and declared that her granddaughter was destined for a life of ornithology. And good grief, if the grandmother is that controlling/judgmental/manipulative/crazy-religious, it's no wonder the daughter moved so far away.

STORY 5: A pre-teen gets a horse for Christmas, but it arrives several weeks before the actual holiday. So on Christmas morning, when there are a few things to unwrap but not many, she throws a hissy fit. Her father excuses her because she is at that awkward age between childhood and adulthood, and because she is starting to get boobs. Seriously, what is with this author writing about women as though they were a piece of meat? Some animal has been killing their chickens but not eating them, and the daughter is upset because of the waste. When she and her father learn that the marauding animal is a mink, they realize it's okay because it's just so beautiful an animal. That is, the daughter decides there is good in everything. She is able to forgive the mink because it's just so cute. If it had been an ugly animal, there would be absolutely no story here at all.

STORY 6: A woman is worried about a little girl whose father promised to visit for Christmas but never showed up. Turns out, the little girl doesn't have any feeling for her father, is completely indifferent to him, and is therefore protected from any emotional pain. She becomes excited by a new year's party, and she doesn't care about her dad at all. The woman is relieved by such a wonderful blessing befalling so young a child.

STORY 7: This story is told in the first person from a judgmental man who openly admits to being "not nice" and "unabashedly elitist." He puts on a performance, a dramatic reading of Scripture at a church, and even though he doesn't think much of his own artistic merit -- he'd been having a bad night, from an acting perspective -- someone still told him afterward how great he was. Somehow, this leads the elitist actor to some kind of spiritual epiphany.

IN CONCLUSION

This book is dreadful. It's even worse than it seems here. But it does have some redeeming qualities. 1) Some of the characters are nuanced and interesting. Some are flat, and some are over-the-top, but some are really well-designed and might, in the hands of a different author, offer worthwhile reading. 2) His stories have plots. I have read several short stories that just give a detailed look at one character in an extreme situation and end before anything actually happens. Not Schaap. He, at the very least, offers stories. Person A encounters Person B under C circumstances and D happens. I finished reading this book, and I felt upset and offended, but at least it felt like finishing an actual book.

Victoria says

I received this book for free on a Kindle deal.

Overall, I found the text to be a delightful series of Christian Christmastime tales. Each of the seven stories focuses on the quotidian aspects of several individuals' lives as they partake in Christmas festivities, whether it's a church's Christmas play, a return line, or the simple act of getting together with family. The stories highlight how we can find Christ's grace in everyday situations, and from that perspective, this book is an excellent reminder of the joy that is Christ entering the world.

The stories were also well-written; I would not say the writing struck me as beautiful, but it does not distract in any way from the stories. Overall, however, I found the book forgettable. While it was a pleasant Christmastime read and certainly better than many of the other Christmas-themed feel-good books that come out this time of year, I did not find the book particularly thought-provoking. The repetitiveness of the stories

(with the characters always coming to realize one of the many ways God pours out his grace into their everyday life) eventually detracted from the point, making some of the stories seem formulaic or trite.

I recommend this book for someone wanting light, but Christ-centered, Christmas reading. I would also recommend reading this book more slowly than I did, at perhaps a story a week over December and the first weeks of January, so the repetitiveness might not be a detraction from the text.

J says

I'm still looking for Christmas after reading this book of short stories.

Nancy Holte says

An okay book, but nothing to write home about. It's filled with short little stories that bring back Christmas memories.
