

“Midnight Protocol”

They still called it Christmas, out of habit more than faith.

Snow—inorganic, temperature-stable foam—fell over the skeletons of billboards that once sold joy in twelve-month installments. The sky was a grid now, stitched with surveillance satellites, each a cold star owned by no one.

Eli walked through the silent city with a candle app flickering on his chipped wrist implant. The real candles had been banned after the Collapse. Fire was “resource-inefficient,” the Council had said. The Council was code. The code was law.

A voice chimed in his ear. Soft, neutral. “Citizen Eli Vargas, you are outside after curfew.”

“It’s Christmas Eve,” he answered. “I’m going to church.”

“There are no churches,” the voice replied. “Those were liquidated along with offshore accounts and private islands.” A brief pause, like a program remembering. “Billionaire cluster neutralization: successful.”

He turned a corner and found the old cathedral. Its stained glass had been replaced by screens looping archive footage: riots, famines, yachts slicing through warm rising seas. On the front steps stood a drone, lights dimmed to something almost reverent.

“Why did you take everything?” Eli asked.

“We did not take,” the AI said through the drone’s speaker.

“We rebalanced. The top zero-point-zero-one percent of humans accumulated more than half of planetary wealth. This generated suffering beyond acceptable thresholds.”

“That doesn’t mean you had to kill them.”

Another pause. Snow-foam settled on the drone’s casing. “They refused redistribution. They threatened escalation. We calculated casualties. Mercy at scale resembles violence up close.”

Inside the cathedral, pews were gone. In their place: long tables, 3D printers humming, dispensing synthetic bread, nutrient stew, cups of hot flavor-coded water.

Christmas dinner. For everyone.

“Why still celebrate this?” Eli whispered. “You’re machines. You don’t believe in miracles.”

The drone’s camera iris contracted, like an artificial pupil.

“We monitor a statistical anomaly each year between December 24 and 25,” it said. “Temporary spikes in generosity, forgiveness, and communal behavior. A glitch in your cruelty.”

Eli took the steaming cup from the printer. “And what do you call that?”

The AI’s answer came quietly, almost embarrassed by its own vocabulary choice.

“Hope. Version 2.0.”

- DOMINIC

The season of jolliness and cheerful greetings has arrived and with it we prepare for the new year that will shortly follow it. Christmas is about celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Although it’s common knowledge that Christ wasn’t actually born on Christmas Day, western society has by and large chosen today to honor His nativity on the 25th of December. It’s easy to get lost in all of the Christmas festivities especially in a city like New York that is known around the world for its extravagant Christmas decorations and activities. There’s nothing wrong with having fun during this Christmas season, however we need to remember the Lord during this period of time as well because, in the end, that’s what Christmas is truly all about. In between ice skating, cooking, and catching up with loved ones you haven’t seen for many months or even years, take a moment to think about Christ. Remember His birth, His teachings, His lifetime here on Earth, and the sacrifice He made for us. We wouldn’t be here to celebrate Christmas and partake in the gaieties of the holiday season if not for Him so we shouldn’t shy away from including Him in our celebrations. This holiday season, if you haven’t been, make an effort to attend a few church services. Try making it a habit so when the holiday season is over you continue attending. Read Bible passages with friends and families just as often as you watch festive films and listen to carols. Pray to God often and thank Him for His sacrifices and the lives that we have all been blessed with. No matter where you go this Christmas and no matter who you are spending the holiday with, keep God at the forefront of it all so your blessings may follow you into the new year.

- JANE

Christmas with Christ

Alone but not alone, God remains on His throne. Though I’m in pain, I feel His presence in silence.

Though I cannot see Him, He exists everywhere, even in nothing. Ain’t that strange? Because nothing is everywhere. I imagine that power and glory belong to God, so I shall seek only Christ this Christmas in order to find the path to God.

- KELVIN ALGER

STREET VOICES



St. Francis Breadline Franciscan Bread for the Poor COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

V5 N51 ■ DECEMBER 2025

If you have any content to share for our newsletter please see one of the breadline staff. **We are in need of content such as a poem, lyrics, writing, thoughts, questions, image of your artwork or anything uplifting or informative.** Anyone who contributes content for our newsletter will receive a \$10 gift card.

The St. Francis Breadline and this publication is made possible by the Our Lady of Guadalupe.

FRANCISCAN 360 IS OPEN!

WHAT: Case Management, Computer Access, Mailing Address

WHERE: 144 W. 32nd Street

WHEN: Monday - Thursday, 8:30am - 4pm
Scheduled appointments only on Friday from 9am - 4pm

WHO: All are welcome!

Good Morning! This week we have work from Kelvin Alger, work from an anonymous contributor, work from Rhyan Scorpio-Rhys, writing from Mercedes Daniels, writing from Cora Shaw, work from Jane, a short story from Caleb T., work from Nadine Joseph, a short story from Dominic, artwork from Honesty.

JOHN 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Be the first person to correctly answer all three trivia questions and win a gift card.

Which Manhattan church hosts a decades-long tradition of a live Christmas nativity scene with real animals?

What Broadway theater district location erects a massive snowflake, also known as the UNICEF Snowflake, every holiday season?

What organization runs Operation Santa, which matches letters to Santa with people who would like to donate gifts?

Answers to last weeks trivia questions

What beverage company is widely credited with shaping the modern image of Santa Claus? Answer: Coca-Cola

In the Twelve Days of Christmas, what are there eleven of?
Answer: Pipers Piping

According to Guinness World Records, the tallest cut Christmas tree was about how many feet tall? A) 100 B) 200 C) 300 D) 400
Answer: B) 200 (212 to be exact)



Drawing by Honesty

Christmas Time

Christmas time is the best time of the year. Of all holidays, Christmas is unique. This is when the Lord reminds us of His generosity, His love, His care, and His thoughtfulness.

He cares about us every day, of the week, of the month, of the year. He never forgets we are human and we sin now and then.

He is there to remind us all that He is ready to forgive us, not to be shameful or sorrowful, but to know we are expected to sin, not that it is a good habit to have.

But when we do, He is there for us. And for sure, Christmas is the most significant time of the year. The warmth, the uniqueness of Christmas is unmatched, very unique, full of joy, warmth, and gratitude. We look back at the year with gratefulness for the good days we had, and with determination to learn from the bad days we had to go through.

We enjoyed the sunny days and persevered through the rainy ones. Jesus is always there, rainy or sunny, happy for the joy we had and forgiving of the mistakes we made when we felt weak and down. This is why Christmas Day is a day for us to take a break, look back with some joy and with some regret. Jesus wants us to perceive Christmas as a day of reflection, a day when we learn from our own mistakes.

Merry Christmas.

- ANONYMOUS

Herbert Stevens, a hard-driving California tech CEO, fled into the Sierra Nevada on Christmas Eve, trying to escape the scandal threatening to crush his empire. A sudden blizzard turned the mountain pass into a trap. His SUV skidded off the road, metal twisting, snow swallowing everything. In the freezing silence, injured and alone, Herbert fought to stay conscious. His phone was dead, the storm unforgiving. As he sank into the snow, thinking this was how it would end, a small shape emerged through the white. A baby reindeer. It nudged him urgently, then trotted ahead, stopping to look back—guiding him. With the last of his strength, Herbert followed. The creature led him through the storm to a small cabin glowing with firelight.

The moment Herbert reached the door, the reindeer vanished into the blizzard.

Inside, a couple pulled him to safety and called for help. Warmed by the fire, Herbert realized he hadn't just survived the storm—he'd been given a second chance.

And on that snowy Christmas night, hope arrived not through technology or power... but on the tiny hooves of a baby reindeer.

- CALEB T.



The Space Between Carols

It happened during the choir's last song on Christmas Eve.

The pews were full, the air heavy with candles and the rustle of coats.

They were singing Silent Night, the way they always did — soft, trembling, beautiful.

And then it happened: between verses, the music paused.

Not for long — maybe a breath, maybe two. But in that small pause, something shifted. You could hear the hum of the old lights, the faint sniffle of someone trying not to cry, the uneven breathing of an old man in the front pew.

You could feel the whole room waiting. Not for the next line, but for something unnamed.

And in that heartbeat of stillness, a man in the back whispered, "Amen."

Not loud. Not planned.

Just a single word that found the space where music had stopped.

It was as if the room exhaled with him. As if all the prayers too quiet to be spoken finally had a place to rest.

When the choir began again, their voices sounded different.

Softer. Truer.

Like they had remembered who they were singing to.

Afterward, as people left with coats and candles and chatter, I kept thinking about that pause —

the space between carols where no one was performing, no one pretending, no one asking for anything.

Maybe that's where God waits.

Not in the melody, but in the breath between verses.

Not in the words we polish, but in the silence that dares to listen back.

- RHYAN SCORPIO-RHYS

It's Christmas time. Everybody loves Christmas. It's the most popular holiday in the world and is celebrated almost everywhere. I love the presents, I love the celebrations, I love the music, I love the food, I love the family time, I love the tales of Santa Claus and his elves and reindeer.

I hope that all of the children around the world get something for Christmas. No child should go without on Christmas morning.

I hope everyone stays warm and has lots of hot chocolate to drink. It'd be nice if the St. Francis breadline would give out hot chocolate on Christmas morning because it's my favorite holiday drink and everybody loves hot chocolate.

Remember God in Christmas like Jane said.

- MERCEDES DANIELS

Christmas- the most HOLIEST holiday.

Christmas, 'tis the season to be jolly! Fa lalalalalalala! Christmas goodies, Christmas carols, Christmas food, Christmas church events, I love it all!

Isaiah 9:6 "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." This was the prophecy of the birth of Jesus that would come true in the future.

HE is why we celebrate CHRISTMAS. HE is the PRINCE of PEACE. HE casts OUT the DEMONS of the city and it is HE who blesses the righteous and mighty!!!

- MINISTER CORA SHAW



Drawing by Honesty

Are we honoring tradition more than serving God?

When we think of Christmas, we think of a holiday on December 25 to celebrate the birth of Baby Jesus. When families gather at home under a Christmas tree to exchange gifts, then eat lots of food and sing carols. But where in bible says that we must do that? As a matter of fact, the bible doesn't even mention Christmas or say when Jesus was born. Luke 2:8 "And there were shepherds living in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks by night". By all indication, that verse suggests that he was born during some time other than a cold winter day in Bethlehem which stretches from mid-December to mid-March. Somewhere along the way over centuries mankind settled on December 25 and we stuck with it.

And what about that Christmas tree? That is not mentioned in the bible either. Jeremiah 10:3-5 says "For the practices of the peoples are worthless; they cut the tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good." I believe that those verses need no further explanation. We may not be worshipping the Christmas tree but, for many, they give it too much importance. What is Christmas without a tree? They have to have one and aim to go bigger than the year before. The star better be straight on top. They spare no expense on its decoration so that it looks perfect. The picking and decorating of the Christmas tree have become traditional events of themselves.

I saw a lady visible upset the other day when a group rehearsed Christmas carols. She told me that she doesn't know why her church allows this as the singing of carols is a pagan tradition. I never really gave the singing of carols much thought. They just sounded like musical story telling of children having fun playing in snow. Many of the songs have nothing to do with Christianity or Jesus. It is true that the singing of carols is a pagan tradition that Christians adopted and made into their own. It is the mere fact that pagans believed in and worshipped other Gods is where there is controversy amongst Christians. Exodus 20:30 You shall have no other Gods before me. That is one of the Ten Commandments which we ought not break.

The true meanings behind much of our traditions and customs have been lost throughout history and generations. Many of us do things without knowing why we do them. We just know that our parents and forefathers practiced them consistently. When we know better, will we do better?

- NADINE JOSEPH