

# RISING GENERATIONS

## THE UPPER ROOM

### The Christmas Miracle by Melody Davis

Leah's mom stopped in front of the church.

"I don't really want to do this, Mom," Leah said.

"You'll be fine, honey. Jack and Grandma and Grandpa and I will be back for the service. We can't wait to hear you sing."

"I don't feel like singing," Leah muttered. But her mom just smiled and waved and drove off.

Leah walked slowly up the stairs of the church, thinking about what happened four days ago. Mom had taken Leah and her little brother, Jack, to the store to buy food for the feast they had planned for Dad's return. After a long deployment, Dad would be home on leave for his first Christmas with the family in two years!

Leah and Jack had raced through the store finding items on their list: cocoa, tiny marshmallows, Christmas cookies from the bakery, and the ingredients to make fudge and peanut brittle.

But shortly after they got home, Leah heard a loud "Oh, no!" from the family room. Mom sat in front of the computer with tears streaming down her face. Leah could still hear her words: "Your dad's leave has been denied. He hasn't given up, but he says it will take a miracle to bring him home for Christmas. We need to pray for a Christmas miracle, Leah!"

Leah felt crushed with disappointment and anger. She ran out of the room, screaming, "There are no miracles. Christmas is ruined!"

Now Leah passed women placing luminaries along the sidewalk going into the church. She tried to return their smiles, but she couldn't. She didn't want to be here. Christmas was ruined.

Suddenly, she felt something cold hit her face. She looked up and saw fat flakes flying toward her. It was snowing! But even Christmas Eve snow couldn't brighten her mood.

In the choir room, Mrs. Portman, the choir director, gave her a big hug. "I'm so sorry about your dad not being able to come home," she said.

"Me, too," Leah said. "Christmas is ruined."

"I know it's a terrible disappointment, but we have to remember what this night is really about," Mrs. Portman said.

Leah nodded. Easy for you to say! she thought.

Leah was the youngest member of the youth choir. She had been chosen to sing a small solo for the Christmas Eve service. But in practice, she could barely get the words out.

Mrs. Portman talked to her after practice. “Are you going to be able to do this?”

“I promise I’ll do better during the service,” Leah said.

As time for the service approached, the adult and youth choirs took their seats in front of the church. The Christmas Eve service was always lit only by candles. The organist played by the glow of several candles, the pastor preached without notes, and the choirs had to memorize their music. But it was worth it. The church was beautiful.

Leah stared at the stained glass window closest to her. She could see pictures of the nativity in the candlelight. She thought about what Mrs. Portman had said. “We have to remember what this night is really about.”

She felt her sadness lifting a little as she thought about that first Christmas. She had told her mom there were no miracles. But she knew it wasn’t true. Jesus was the miracle of Christmas!

The organist began playing quietly as people filed into the church. In the dim light, Leah could see only the shapes of people as they silently took their seats. She wondered if her family was there yet.



The minister stood and began to read the Christmas story from the Gospel of Luke. Leah felt goose bumps when he said, “And she brought forth her first born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in the manger...”

The choir sang “Away in a Manger.” Leah’s voice grew stronger as she sang the familiar words.

When it was time for her solo, Leah felt a lightness she hadn’t felt in days. Her clear voice filled the room and echoed back to her. When she finished, Mrs. Portman gave her a thumbs-up. Leah smiled, feeling truly happy.

She missed her dad terribly. Christmas wouldn’t be what they had planned for this year. It wouldn’t be perfect, but it would still be Christmas.

At the end of the service, the minister lit a small candle from the Christ candle on the altar and started “passing the light.” Candles were lit from person to person, starting with the two choirs.

The light slowly spread through the congregation, and Leah recognized people as their candles were lit.

She saw Helen Kirk, who had cancer earlier this year but was healthy now. She recognized Lucy and Eduardo Sanchez, whose baby had survived a serious heart surgery. She saw the Millers, the family the church had helped find a new house when their old place burned down.

Then she saw her grandmother’s face, her grandfather’s, Jack’s, and finally her mom’s. Mom looked like she had been crying, but she was smiling now.

Leah saw her mom reach up to light the candle next to hers. It took Leah a few seconds to recognize the face the candle revealed.

It was her dad! A huge grin spread over his face as he looked over his candle at Leah.

At first, Leah thought she might be dreaming, but this was a dream come true. Her dad was home for Christmas!

When all of the candles in the church were lit, the choirs led the congregation in the singing of the last hymn. “Joy to the World!” Leah sang loudly. She looked at her dad and Helen Kirk and Lucy and Eduardo and the Millers, and she thought about the snow falling outside. Then she focused on the nativity scene in the stained glass window. No miracles? She had been so wrong. She was surrounded by miracles!