

# RISING GENERATIONS

## THE UPPER ROOM

### In The Bleak Midwinter

Sarah Arthur

Christina Rossetti was a nineteenth-century poet who wrote “In the Bleak Midwinter.” Unlike other Christmas carols, full of joy and celebration, this one describes a winter world that at first seems hopeless. Bitter winds, falling snow, frozen earth and water hardly provide a hospitable place for an infant Savior.

Christina struggled with hopelessness. As a teenager, she felt every emotion deeply and suffered a nervous breakdown at the age of fifteen. Her poetry reflects a sense of disconnection from the world and a longing to be reconnected.

*I have no wit, no words, no tears;  
My heart within me like a stone  
Is numb'd too much for hopes or fears;  
Look right, look left, I dwell alone.\**

At the same time, Christina was a devout Christian. She believed that one day God would heal her brokenness and restore the world. Death would not have the last word.

*My life is like a frozen thing,  
No bud nor greenness can I see:  
Yet rise it shall—the sap of Spring;  
O Jesus, rise in me.\**

Even in the dark winter of her soul, Christina knew that Spring was coming. (Notice the capital S indicating something more than just another season.) The winter of sin, sadness, and death does not last forever. Our hope is in the promise of resurrection, that one day we will rise to new life with Jesus, never to die again.

### Hope that Never Fails

We talk a lot about hope during the holidays. “I hope I get the present I’ve been wanting.” “I hope it snows on Christmas Eve.” “I hope my parents get along.” Often our hopes are disappointed. But Christian hope is quite different.

Read Romans 5:3–5. Our hope is not in transient things—weather, relationships, material objects—because they will disappoint us. Rather, our hope is grounded in God’s eternal, unending love, which does not disappoint.

Think of Mary, pregnant and drawing near to her delivery. Delivery, like deliverance, is a kind of salvation. Mary knew that she would be delivered, that all the hard work of pregnancy would end and a child, a new life, would come into the world. But Mary had an even greater hope based on God’s promise: “The Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28b, NRSV). No matter what happened, Mary knew God would be with her; and she put her hope in the promise of God, grounded in God’s love.

Like the promise of spring after a long, dark winter, like the promise of resurrection after death, this hope never fails. How can you put your hope in God's unfailing love this Christmas?

## Dig Deeper

Make two lists, one of wishes, another of hopes. Make a list of what you wish for this Christmas. Do you wish for a new game system, fashionable clothes, a fight-free Christmas dinner with your family? Then make a list of what you hope—for instance: The Apostles' Creed says that we believe in "the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." These statements are hopes based on God's promises and grounded in God's love.

As you pray during this Christmas season, focus on hopes rather than wishes. After all, hope in God's love does not disappoint!

\* from the poem "A Better Resurrection" by Christina Rossetti

Sarah Arthur ([www.saraharthur.com](http://www.saraharthur.com)) is the author of several books about the intersection of faith and literature, including *At The Still Point: A Literary Guide to Prayer in Ordinary Time*.