

## **ANCHOR FOR THE SOUL - WINGS TO SOAR**

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When best selling author and journalist Mitch Albom and his wife Janine first encountered Chika Juene, they were not prepared for the ride they were about to take. Chika had been born three days before the 2010 Haiti earthquake, and her mother later died. Orphaned, Chika came to live at the "Have Faith Haiti Mission & Orphanage" where Mitch and Janine would meet her when she was three years old. Two years later Chika was diagnosed with a rare brain tumor. Mitch and Janine took Chika into their own home so she would have access to treatment in the US. Mitch tells the story in "Finding Chika: A Little Girl, an Earthquake, and the Making of a Family." It is a heartwarming, heart rending story of two years of searching in vain for a cure, while in the process being taught how to live by a little girl.

In reflecting on what Chika brought to their lives, Mitch writes: "A child is both an anchor and a set of wings. My old way of doing things was gone." His insight leapt out at me. I remembered how my own children changed me. I am in awe as I watch Cathy's grandchildren transform their families. And I can't help thinking that Albom has given us a wonderful metaphor for what happened with a birth in Bethlehem - an anchor and wings!

An anchor is something that steadies a ship, holding it in place, keeping it from drifting, for a season, until it is equipped and ready to move on. A set of wings is the capacity to fly, to soar, to be borne on the winds to exhilarating heights. Spirits soar in the same way.

Scripture reminds us that hope is 'a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.' [Hebrews 6:19] Isaiah teaches us that "...those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." [Isaiah 40:31]

In the Gospel narratives of Matthew and Luke, the birth of Jesus is anchored in the lineage of David, in the practice of faith, and in the secular history of the time. The genealogies of Jesus connect him to a line of significant and ordinary people which testifies to his humanity. The faithfulness of Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, and Joseph unite Jesus with a holy history and a long line of people of faith. The reference to Caesar anchors Jesus in time and in the world around him. This child, anchored as he is in time and faith, will become our hope - a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.

For all the travails of his birth, Jesus is greeted and celebrated by a heavenly chorus, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven!" The shepherds who heard them, were transformed by all they had heard and seen. When Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple, they encountered Simeon who was convinced that he had seen the Lord's Messiah, and proclaimed that "...this child is destined for the rising and falling of many." And his spirit soared. When he began his ministry, this child, now become a man, announced: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." This child, who was destined to soar, would teach the world to renew its strength, to mount up with wings like eagles, to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint.

As Chika taught the Alboms: A child is both an anchor and a set of wings. In the presence of a child, our old way of doing things is gone. That's the story of Christmas: the powerful are brought down from their thrones and the rich are sent away empty; the lowly are lifted up and the hungry are filled with good things. Let us treasure these things in our hearts, for in Christ we have received an anchor for our souls and wings to make us soar. Alleluia!