

Advent & Christmas Reflections Inspired by Matthew 1 & 2

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O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.

O come, thou Wisdom from on high,
And order all things far and nigh'
To us the path of knowledge show
And cause us in her ways to go.

O come, O come, great Lord of might,
Who to thy tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times once gave the law
In cloud and majesty and awe.

O come, thou Root of Jesse's tree,
An ensign of thy people be;
Before thee rulers silent fall;
All peoples on thy mercy call.

O come, thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home.
The captives from their prison free,
And conquer death's deep misery.

O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by thy justice here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.

O come, Desire of nations bind
All peoples in one heart and mind.
From dust thou brought us forth to life;
Deliver us from earthly strife.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

December 1-7



THE GENERATIONAL MESS
Families can be complicated; both nurturing and neglectful, passing unhealthy choices from generation to generation. Jesus' lineage includes individuals with flawed, even traumatic, stories.

Pain-full, imperfect people and situations do not limit God's redeeming work through Christ's coming.

The Glory of Your Saving Love

This is the glory of your saving love:
you don't just bless us, heal us,
guard and guide us.

you don't just forgive us, redeem us,
save and sanctify us.

For you, that is too light a thing.

You make a place for us in your saving work.
You call us and empower us, each of us.

You make a place for us in your family and a place for us in your plan
so we may experience your power and the wielding of that power,
so we may experience the fullness of you with us.

The glory of your saving love is
your hope and your hope made real in the world,
your love and your love in action.

Glory to you, Most Blessed Savior!
Glory to you, Lord of Mercy and Light!
Glory to you and to the fulfillment of Your Kin-dom in us and in all!
Amen!

Reflection

Scriptures for Reflection: Matthew 1:1-17; Isaiah 11:1-5

How has your family inspired your faith? How have they made it difficult?

How is following Christ bringing healing to your generational challenges or trauma?

Tree of Life

Wonder... Marvel... at God's constancy.
Steadfast... Unwavering... across the ages.
Remembering... Gathering... a covenant people.
Remembering... Fulfilling... a covenant promise.
Patiently...
Tending a tree of life.

Glory Be

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever!

– Ephesians 3:20-21

Glory be to the Blessed One,
opening our lips in blessing, with power to make new.

Glory be to the Blessed One,
opening our hands in blessing, with power to make whole.

Glory be to the Blessed One,
opening our hearts in blessing,
so the grace poured in by Christ would overflow,
generation to generation to generation,
an endless procession to all, in all, and through all. Amen.

December 8-14



THE UNEXPECTED MESS

Sometimes our mess is expected, the consequence of our own choices. Sometimes the mess surprises us, coming from a direction we never expected. How did Joseph feel when Mary revealed her pregnancy? Confusion? Betrayal? Skepticism? heartbreak? Joseph chooses a gracious response, a righteous response, taking Mary's scandal on himself.

As Our Brother Joseph

Emmanuel,
God with us and for us and in us.

You are there when the plans and promises
detonate and disappear.
You are there in the confusion, the pain,
the unexpected and unthinkable.

You are there when the dream dies.

Help us cling to you as our brother Joseph did,
who laid down the stones to walk your quiet path,
dignity over publicity,
courage over convention,
solidarity over scorn.

Speak in our sleep.
Awaken us
to righteousness, obedience, restraint,
to trusting your ways
and you.

Reflection

Scriptures for Reflection: Matthew 1:18-19; Deteronomy 22:20-24

When have you done the hard but right thing?

How is following Christ bringing healing to a betrayal or heartbreak?

An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." - Matthew 1:20-21

The Son

Jesus, You are the Son of Mary
Beloved... Wanted... Offered... Vulnerable...
Long-awaited Child of Promise.

Jesus, You are the Son of David
born to
  a specific people,
  a specific culture,
  a specific time and place,
  a specific covenant fulfilled for them and for all.

Jesus, You are the Son of God
  Eternal Word made flesh.
  Fully Human, Fully Divine.
  Humble servant, King of kings.
  The marvelous mystery of God's
    Unending, Unrelenting, Unconditional Love.

Keep me open to the grace of your invitations,
  the grace of your saving ways,
  the grace of you near. Amen.

December 15-21



THE MISSIONAL MESS
Joseph chose a gracious response to Mary's pregnancy, yet God invites him to an even more gracious response. Through a dream, God brings Joseph assurance, clarity, and a mission to raise a child not his own. Not just any child, the Messiah. Joseph accepts the great risks and responsibilities of this crucial calling.

You Are Near

Holy Comforter,
You are near the brokenhearted.
Thank you for a new dream
and a future beyond my imagining.

Maker of Miracle,
You are near when I cannot see your will.
When a good choice, even a merciful choice,
is not your choice.
Thank you for correction and clarity.

Divine One,
You are near when I dismiss the holy.
When I say no to your call.
Thank you for your patience,
your persevering grace, and second chances.

O come, O come Emmanuel,
strengthen me with the promise
of your steadfast presence and saving love.
Set my heart and step to your righteousness end. Amen.

Reflection

Scriptures for Reflection: Matthew 1:18-25; Isaiah 7:14

How do you best hear from God- in stillness, in scripture, through others, in dreams, or by some other way?

What is your mission from God in this season of your life?

Come

Come, O Come Emmanuel,
you who are flesh,
  vulnerable and lowly and small.

Come, O Come Emmanuel,
you who are great,
  holy and powerful and forever.

Come, O Come Emmanuel.
the Fullness of God with Us,
  make your home in my heart,
  carve the stone into your throne.

Come, O Come Emmanuel.
Save us.
Ransom us.
Heal us and raise us.

Come... Come... Come...



Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, "God is with us." - Matthew 1:23

December 22-25



THE MANDATORY MESS
The Roman census mandates Joseph return to Bethlehem. Mary might have stayed in Nazareth, but she comes as well, even though she's very pregnant. Imagine the difficulty of the journey (70 miles over probably 9 days) and the chaos of far too many people in tiny Bethlehem. The birth of Christ tells us so much about God with us in the mess.

Listen & Act

Joseph is silent.
He listens and acts.

Help us listen.
Still the noise around us and in us.
Still the urgency and anxiety.
Still the destruction and falsehood.

Help us listen.
Break through with your still, small voice,
with your calm and clarity,
with your leading and light.

You reveal the needed next steps.
You provide all we need to make the journey.

Help us listen and help us act.

Reflection

Scriptures for Reflection: Luke 2:1-7; Isaiah 40:28-31

What helps you experience God in the stress and messiness of life?

How does the promise of “God with us” encourage your faith and trust in God?

Making Room

No room in the inn. I can understand this.
There’s only so much space and it’s already taken. It’s simple, factual.
But your blessed Word says more. No room *for them* in the inn.
Them. Joseph and Mary are *them*.
Unlike me and mine, suspicious strangers with complicated needs.

I can’t bring *them* in. No time. No room.
I won’t bring *them* in.
Give *them* access to all I have. All I’ve worked for. All I love.
It isn’t wise. It isn’t safe.

The stable is for them. Stay there, over there,
that hidden place, that place in the back, that place for animals,
away from where I live with me and mine.

But, I want Jesus and Jesus is *them*.
There’s no room for him if there’s no room for them.

That’s who Jesus is. That’s what Jesus does. He makes room.
Born in a stable making room for the humble and the homeless.
King of kings making room for the rich and the royal.
An outsider making room for those who’ve been
turned away, targeted, forgotten, isolated, labeled less than.
An insider making room for the distinguished and established.
Way Truth Life, making room.
A laborer, making room. A migrant, a refugee, making room.

Making room, making room, always making room.
That’s who Jesus is. That’s what Jesus does. He makes room.

You’ve even made room for me. Now make room in me to make room.

December 26-29



THE JOYFUL MESS
The lowly, night-shift shepherds were not expecting to be the first to hear the news of the birth of the Messiah, much less from heavenly messengers.

Embrace their enthusiasm and excitement.
Join them in wonder and praise.

Receive and Rejoice

Receive and Rejoice!
Rejoice with an indescribable joy.
Inexpressible. Unspeakable.
A joy greater than words.
A great and glorious joy.
Loose. Liberated. Boundless.

Receive and Rejoice!
A joy worthy of new birth, of a living hope.
A joy anchored in The Imperishable, The Eternal.
Undefiled and Unfading.

Receive and Rejoice!
This joy was chosen for you.
Destined for you.
Sanctified, sprinkled, and saved for you
by the Merciful One.
The One Who is With You.

Receive and Rejoice!

Reflection

Scriptures for Reflection:Luke 2:1-20

What would it look like for you to rejoice in God's promises and presence with enthusiasm and excitement?

What would it feel like for you to be fully in the presence of Jesus?

With Us

Jesus, we welcome you.
God with us, in us, amongst us, through us.

Jesus, we need you.
God with us, in us, amongst us, through us.

Jesus, we rejoice in you.
God with us, in us, amongst us, through us.

Jesus, we receive you.
God with us, in us, amongst us, through us.

Make Me Your Love

Rabbi Jesus, Promised Messiah,
Son of the One, True, Living God,
Fill me with your Spirit. Make me your love.

It is your command. It is your way. It is your gift.
It is You and your work.

Yes, make me your witness,
and yes, make me your will.
But first and always, make me your love.

Open your hands. Take a breath. Pause in silence to receive.

December 30-January 2



THE DANGEROUS MESS
Sometimes the mess comes from getting caught in the backwash of other people's evil, destructive choices. Herod the Great uses his privilege and power to destroy, thinking this will protect his position.

Compare Herod with Pharoah.
Compare Herod with Joseph.
What drives them? What drives us?

What drives God?
Vulnerability. Compassion. Deliverance. Solidarity.

Far From Home

Like Mary and Joseph,
circumstances beyond my imagining,
beyond my control,
take me far from home.

Like the Magi,
quests for wisdom and direction,
a truth I can trust,
take me far from home.

Like King Herod
my desire for security, pleasure, and power,
lead me down destructive paths,
take me far from home.

Jesus, you are with me... with us.
Turn us.
Turn us toward you.
Turn us toward each other.
Help us all home.

Reflection

Scriptures for Reflection: Matt. 2:13-18; Micah 5:2, 4; Jeremiah 31:15; Hosea 11:1

How do you use your privilege and power to harm? To protect and bless?

What most drives your choices?

Have Mercy

Long-awaited Messiah, Lord of Hope, have mercy.

Long-awaited Messiah, Defender of Compassion, have mercy.

Long-awaited Messiah, Provider, Protector, Liberator, have mercy.

Release us from the chains of this moment,
born of imprisoned hearts,
the distractions and false calls of those who will not help.

Release us from the blindness of our complicity, frailty, and poverty,
the apathy and fear keeping us from seeing, speaking, and caring.

Release us from the weight of needs stealing our courage to try,
the slowness of change chipping away at our enduring.

Have mercy on us.
Help us listen, love, and serve.

Have mercy on us.
Finish your good and generous work. Amen.

Let your steadfast love become my comfort
according to your promise to your servant.
Let your mercy come to me, that I may live.
Psalms 119:76-77

January 3-6



THE MOTIVATED MESS
Consider the challenges and obstacles faced by the Wise Ones. Discerning what the star meant. Gathering the gifts. Funding the trip. Organizing the caravan. Traveling long distances (1200 miles over at least 60 days). Herod's schemes, plus crossing barriers of culture and religion. Through it all, the Wise Ones persevere, staying true to their mission and open to God's steadfast direction. They make the Holy Family's escape possible.

Brought to Light

Radiant One, give us direction,
to know when to wait and when to act,
to know what to pick up and what to leave behind.

The hidden will be brought to light-
hidden words,
hidden thoughts,
hidden actions of our hands,
hidden motives of our hearts.

Radiant One, in your mercy, guide us.

Grant us humility, openness, and wisdom,
to stand trusting all will be revealed,
to bow knowing all will be revealed,
to go believing all will be revealed,
to give confident all will be revealed,

to travel a different road, changed by the gift of you.

Reflection

Scriptures for Reflection: Matthew 2:1-15; Isaiah 60:1-6

How are you allowing God's light to shine in you?

Who are you protecting and empowering with your presence and resources?

Help Us Shine

Come Glorious One, Lord of Life and Light!
Dawn in us a new day.
Your light makes us light.
What a gift to be made in your image,
reflecting your goodness and hope,
your power and peacemaking.

You bathe us in the light of your grace,
so we may be grace.
You fill us with the light of your truth
so we may be truth.
You flood us with the light of your love
so we may be love.

Hallelujah! Help us shine!

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