

THE WELL CHURCH RESOURCES

Good News of Great Joy

25 day advent devotional

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How to use this Devotional

Advent means “arrival.” So the season of Advent is a celebration of the arrival of Jesus. This is what Christmas is all about. For followers of Jesus, Christmas is about more than gifts and Christmas trees. Those things are wonderful. But Christmas is all about remembering the arrival of our Savior and looking forward to when he comes again. That is why we created this Advent Devotional. It is our hope that this resource will help you and your family or friends to remember that Jesus has come and is coming again!

So we hope this will be helpful to you this Advent season. For best use of this devotional, here are a few suggestions.

1. Spend time praying before and after you read each day.
2. At the end of each devotional, there are italicized questions for your consideration. The goal is not perfect answers as much as good conversation about the passage you read. Whether you are with family, friends, or going through the devotional alone, these questions are intended to help you think deeper about how to apply the truth of God’s Word.
3. If you are going through this with your children, don’t be discouraged if they don’t seem all that interested. If you can only get through the reading of the passage, you’ve done a great job!
4. Try to read the devotional at the same time each day. Maybe around the dinner table. Maybe right before bedtime. Whenever that is for you and your family/friends, try to be consistent.
5. Remember, have fun! If you are reading with your children, sing a Christmas carol and let them dance. Let them act out the passage. Let them be silly. The story of Jesus’ arrival is good news of great joy! If you are reading with friends, encourage each other, laugh with each other and let social media go without your presence for a few minutes. If you are going through it by yourself, remember that the Spirit of God is in you. He is making you more and more like Jesus each day, so rejoice!

December 1

Christmas Starts at the Beginning

Genesis 1-3

Every year ends with the anticipation of Christmas. Like the perfect ending to a story, Christmas is the perfect ending to the year.

But the story of Christmas doesn't come to us as an ending. We may celebrate Christmas at the end of the year, but when we understand what Christmas is all about—A loving God taking steps towards sinful people—we see the promises of Christmas all throughout the Bible.

In fact, Christmas doesn't start when the angel told Mary she would have a son. It doesn't start when the heavenly host visit the shepherds watching their flock by night. It doesn't even start when Jesus was born. Christmas starts at the beginning.

According to Genesis, God created everything in the beginning. He created the heavens and the earth. He created light. He created the sky, the oceans, the mountains, the caves and forests and every other incredible thing we see on Earth. Every star, every animal, every plant, every molecule was created by God and for God.

But it wasn't just that God created everything. It's that he created everything and called it *good*. There was no mistake in all of his creation. It was all good. The light, the water, the animals, the trees, all of it was good. And here's the point: **God is a good God.**

And the crowning achievement of God's creation: people!

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27

Human beings are important to God because they are His image bearers. Every human being matters. But every human being also has a problem.

In the garden, Adam and Eve were blessed by God and had everything they could want or need because their relationship with God was perfect. However, God gave them only one rule, to not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told them not to eat of that tree because if they did, they would surely die. God was protecting them.

Sadly, man and woman were tricked by the serpent who twisted God's words and got them to believe a lie rather than God's truth. So Adam and Eve ate the fruit and broke God's rule and God's heart. They sinned. And the penalty of sin was death.

When Adam and Eve sinned, the whole universe felt the blow of sin. Everything was affected. Even you. Even now. But that's not the end of the story.

See, Christmas is more than presents and lights. Christmas is about a promise. A promise God made to send a rescuer!

Listen to what God says to the serpent:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; **he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.**”

Adam and Eve sinned against God because the serpent convinced them that God was holding out from them. They believed the lie of the enemy rather than the truth of God. And because of that, sin entered the world and now we need a savior. And that is exactly what God promised!

The offspring that God is talking about is Jesus! And when God says that “he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel” he is giving us a glimpse of what Jesus will do at the cross. Jesus will give the enemy a death blow by taking our death for us. He will crush the head of the enemy, and the enemy will bruise his heel. Jesus came to take our sin to the cross. He came to die in our place. The enemy thought he won. But just as he tricked Adam and Eve into believing a lie, he tricked himself into believing the lie that he defeated Jesus.

Jesus rose again in victory—bringing life and rescue to all who trust in Him! This is what Christmas is all about. It’s about a Savior being born for a purpose. And that purpose was to rescue sinners and bring them back to God.

And all the way back at the beginning of the story, God promised us this Savior, who would be born in Bethlehem to a woman named Mary in a humble stable. Jesus is the offspring who came to crush the enemy.

Christmas is about a promise—and God always keeps his. He promised a savior in Genesis 3, at the beginning of the story. And this savior came and to make all things good again, just like it was in the beginning.

What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

Does the enemy still tell us lies? What lies do you tend to believe?

What promises of God’s Word help us believe truth instead of lies?

December 2

Abraham and God's Gift for the Nations

Genesis 17:1-8

When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, 2 that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." 3 Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, 4 "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

God is a promise maker and a promise keeper. This is a characteristic about God we see over and over again in the Bible. God makes promises to his people according to his plan of redemption and God **always** comes through.

That's what Christmas is all about. Christmas is about God keeping his promises. And what this story tells us is that God made a promise, called a covenant, with Abraham. Abraham was old and didn't have any children. By all standards, having children at this point in his life was not going to happen. It was impossible. But another truth about God we see in the Bible is that *nothing* is impossible with God!

So God made a promise to Abraham that not only would he have a child, but that he would be the father of a multitude of nations. That means that Abraham wouldn't just have a child, but he would have a really big family tree that makes up multiple nations. This old, obscure man was going to have kings come from his family.

Having kings in your family tree is great. But having THE KING come from your family is greater. When God promised a covenant with Abraham, it wasn't just any covenant, it was an eternal covenant. When God promised land for his family, it wasn't just any land, it was an everlasting possession. But what could this mean? Abraham died. So did his kids and grandkids and great-great-great-great grandkids. What did God mean by an everlasting covenant and an everlasting possession?

The fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham was Jesus! Jesus was the offspring that would be a blessing to the nations. Jesus was the offspring that would mediate an everlasting covenant between God and us. When God made a promise to Abraham he intended to keep it. And God kept his promise when Jesus came into the world. Jesus came to save people from every tribe, tongue and nation. Jesus is God's gift to the nations.

How does the fact that God keeps his promises affect your life?

What is something that seems impossible to you but is possible with God?

December 3

A Deliverer is Born

Exodus 2:1-10

Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. ² The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. ³ When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. ⁴ And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. ⁵ Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. ⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." ⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" ⁸ And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹ And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. ¹⁰ When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

The birth of Moses came at a very dark time in the world. Just before Moses' birth, the Pharaoh who was the king of Egypt, made a decree that all the newborn Israelite boys should be killed. He was afraid that the people of Israel would grow too might and overthrow the Egyptians.

This king was oppressive. He enslaved God's people and forced them to do hard labor for him. And then, he doubled down on his decree—"Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live." Exodus 1:22

The people of Israel were in a bad spot. And things were only going to get worse. They needed a rescuer. They needed a deliverer. So, God provided one.

When Moses, a son of a Hebrew, was born it was not likely that he would live. The decree had already gone out that sons should be destroyed. But God had a plan and so did Moses' mom. She hid her son for 3 months and then she put Moses in a basket and placed it in the river. She didn't know what would happen to her son, but she knew she had to do something. *Fortunately, God knew exactly what he was doing.*

Pharaoh's daughter found Moses and adopted him into her family. She named him Moses because she drew him out of the water.

As the story of Moses continues, God raises him up to be a deliverer for the people of Israel. God heard his people cry out for help. God knew. Moses led his people out of slavery. He went before Pharaoh, risking his own life on behalf of his people to deliver them. God made a way and rescued his people.

What does any of this have to do with Christmas?

Just as Moses was born into less than ideal circumstances, so too, was Jesus. When Jesus was born the king made a decree to kill male children 2 years or younger.

There are other similarities, but the most important one is that Jesus was born to be a deliverer, just like Moses.

Moses was given a position and a name in the household of the King of Egypt after he was drawn up out of the waters of the Nile. God had put him there for the purpose of saving his own people. Jesus' position and name in the household of the king of the universe was affirmed when he was drawn up out of the waters of the Jordan river at his baptism. When Moses was drawn out, Pharaoh's daughter said, "this is my son." When Jesus was drawn out, God said, "This is my son, with whom I am well pleased."

When Moses was born, a deliverer was born. But he was also a sign of the true deliverer to come—Jesus. Jesus came to rescue his people out of slavery to sin. Death was our taskmaster. Sin was reigning over us. We were hopelessly oppressed and in need of a rescue.

When Jesus was born, a deliverer was born. That's what Christmas is all about.

God provides for his people when they are in need. What is one way God has provided for you in your time of need?

In your own words, explain why we need a deliverer. How is Jesus our deliverer?

December 4

An Established Throne

2 Samuel 7:4-17

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, 5 “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? 6 I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. 7 In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?” 8 Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. 9 And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, 11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. 12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” 17 In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

One of the wonderful things about God is that he always wants to be with his people. In the Garden of Eden, God was with Adam and Eve. In the desert, God was with Moses and the people of Israel. He is not a distant, uncaring God. He is big. He cannot be contained. But he is near and present to us.

This is what God is reminding David. David wanted to build God a house to live in, but God doesn't live in houses made by man. God created the universe. He created everything we would use to build houses, so it is silly to think he needs anything from us, especially a place to live.

But God promised that he would build David a house. He promises David a son and he will be the one to build this house. And this son will have an established kingdom forever and ever. This is a big promise.

David did have a son. His name was Solomon. And Solomon did build a house just like God promised. But here's the problem. God said that David's son would have a kingdom that

never ended. He said that he would have an established throne forever and ever. But Solomon died. He is not the king any longer. So what gives?

One of the best inventions ever was the Double-stuffed Oreo. You get DOUBLE the goodness. What a great idea!

That's kind of the idea here. God's promise was double stuffed. When he told David he would have a son, he was talking about Solomon. But he was talking ultimately about another King who was to come.

When He told David that his son would build a house, he was referring to Solomon and the temple he would build. But he was ultimately referring to another who would come to build a house, not of brick or mortar, but of God's people, the church.

When he told David that his son would have an established throne forever, he wasn't talking about Solomon, who would be king for just a short time and then die. He was talking about another who would die and then become King forever.

He was talking about Jesus! Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises to David. Jesus is God's son that will have the ever abiding, steadfast love of God. Jesus never committed sin (Solomon did), but Jesus took on the sin of his people at the cross where he died.

Yet, Jesus rose again in power and full authority over the cosmos! He is the King forever. God has established the throne of Jesus forever!

Christmas reminds us that God sent his Son to be the King that he promised to David.

Christmas reminds us of the King. **It's all about Jesus.**

Since Jesus is on his throne right now, how should we live every day as his people?

What does it mean for the church to be the house of God?

December 5

A Child is Born

Isaiah 9

2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness. **3** You have enlarged the nation and increased its joy. The people have rejoiced before you as they rejoice at harvest time and as they rejoice when dividing spoils. **4** For you have shattered their oppressive yoke and the rod on their shoulders, the staff of their oppressor, just as you did on the day of Midian. **5** For every trampling boot of battle and the bloodied garments of war will be burned as fuel for the fire. **6** For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. **7** The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the Lord of Armies will accomplish this.

The announcement of Jesus' birth is sent very early. Normally we may have a few months heads-up for a baby shower but the prophet Isaiah announced Jesus' birth 700 years before he was actually born. The reason for this is it gave an increased sense of anticipation. Also, it is not just any birth Isaiah is announcing. It's a royal birth! When the prophet writes, "the government will be upon his shoulders", he conveys the idea that though a baby, he is yet a king. The baby also has multiple names which each tell of one of his attributes he will be a "Wonderful Counselor" meaning he will be wise, as well as present with us. He will be a Mighty God, and Eternal Father. He will also be a Prince of Peace. That means that he will rule but his rule brings peace, not chaos.

Just as the people of Israel expected the birth of this baby, in this season let's cultivate an attitude of expectation for God. In this season of busyness let's not be distracted by the traditions of our culture that we forget to remember that this season points not only to Jesus' first coming, but teaches us to anticipate his second. Let's also behold who Jesus is this season: He is a Wonderful Counselor, an Eternal Father, and the Prince of Peace. Let us focus on ways that we can be present with and peaceable to our those around us.

How can we cultivate attitudes of expectation for God each day?

What does it mean that Jesus is the Prince of peace?

December 6

Prepare the Way of the Lord

Luke 1:5-17

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah,^[a] of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. **6** And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. **7** But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. **8** Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, **9** according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. **10** And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. **11** And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. **12** And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. **13** But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. **14** And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, **15** for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. **16** And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, **17** and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

This passage is about how John the Baptist, was born. John the Baptist ultimately prepared the way for Jesus, by preaching repentance and baptizing those who had turned from their sin. What John the Baptist did for Israel, Advent can do for us. Don't let Christmas find you unprepared. I mean spiritually unprepared. Its joy and impact will be so much greater if you are ready!

Like the old song says "let every heart prepare him room" parents let your kids see you prepare your heart for Christmas, kids prepare your hearts by realizing that any gift you receive for Christmas ultimately points to and is given because we have all received the Gift of Jesus Christ through faith.

What are some ways that you can prepare your heart for Christmas?

How can we recognize that the gifts we give, are ultimately pointing to the best gift giver, God the Father, and the best gift that has been given salvation through God the Son?

December 7

Favor Found with God

Luke 1:26-33

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, **27** to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. **28** And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" **29** But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. **30** And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. **31** And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, **33** and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

In these verses, the angel Gabriel brings Mary an unbelievable message: Mary will have a baby, the son of God, and he will become king and his kingdom will have no end. What overwhelming news! But Mary gets hung up on the first words the angel says to her. When Gabriel calls Mary "O favored one" and declares "the Lord is with you," she is greatly troubled. Perhaps she wondered what she had done to catch God's attention, or why he had chosen her when she was so flawed and sinful. Perhaps she struggled to see how she had managed to earn God's favor at all, much less his presence.

The truth is, Mary did nothing to earn God's favor. God chose her because he chose her. Not because she was the best behaved or the purest or the kindest, but because he chose her. We are in the same boat as Mary in this respect: We have done nothing to earn God's grace, yet he has chosen us. And not only that, he has given us his presence! When the angel told Mary "the Lord is with you," he didn't just mean in some mystical sense, but the physical person of God the Son would soon be with Mary in the form of Jesus. When God gifted Mary with Jesus, Immanuel, God with us, He also gave Jesus to us. The angel's prophecy came true, and Jesus' forever kingdom is reigning in our hearts even now.

How do you think Mary felt when she first saw the angel?

How do you feel knowing God chooses who he chooses, instead of choosing who is "deserving?" Why do you think you feel this way?

How do we experience the presence of God?

December 8

Nothing is Impossible with God

Luke 1:34-38

34 And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

35 And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. **36** And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. **37** For nothing will be impossible with God.” **38** And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

When Mary hears this prophecy about her conceiving and bearing the Son of God, her first question is not necessarily one of doubt, but one of logistics: “Okay...but how?” Mary was pledged to marry Joseph, but she wasn’t married yet. Mary knew that God could do what he promised, but she also didn’t see how this was possible. Thankfully, the angel responds to Mary’s question with an explanation and an example. How would God do this impossible thing? By the Holy Spirit and the power of God. And for proof that God can do the impossible, the angel shares good news about Elizabeth; she is old and she was barren, but God has given her a child. Nothing is impossible with God.

The Christmas story shows us many things about God’s character, but this particular section emphasizes his power. Humans can do amazing things. We break records and make discoveries that are incredible. But still we are limited. God, however, is not. Though some things are impossible for humans, nothing is impossible for God. He can do immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine, and that’s exactly what he has done here with Mary: He miraculously sends his Son, fully God and fully man, to live on earth with us and to save us. Nothing is impossible with God!

Have you ever seen God do something that seemed impossible?

How did Mary respond to Gabriel’s explanation?

Why do you think she responded this way?

December 9

Leaping for Joy

Luke 1:39-45

39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, **40** and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. **41** And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, **42** and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! **43** And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? **44** For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. **45** And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

After Mary heard the prophecy and then became pregnant, she did the first thing we all do when we receive good news: she shared it! Mary ran to see her relative Elizabeth, who was also miraculously pregnant, to tell her the good news and share her joy (and maybe even some fears). When Mary arrived, she had barely said hello when Elizabeth's baby began leaping in her womb. Even before his birth, Elizabeth's baby, John the Baptist, was testifying about Jesus. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke a blessing over Mary, laughing and rejoicing to be in the presence of the Lord. If Mary had any doubts regarding the angel's prophecy, Elizabeth's words of confirmation quieted them.

For Elizabeth, there was no question whether the promises of God should be believed. She was experiencing in her own body the fulfillment of one of his promises. So when she saw Mary, who was likely nervous and excited and scared, she encouraged her, calling Mary blessed because she believed and because of the precious Son she carried. We can trust God's promises. We can believe what he says. Just as God fulfilled his promises to Mary and Elizabeth and they rejoiced, we can rejoice now knowing he has kept and will keep his promises.

What examples do we see in scripture of God keeping his promises?

How can we still rejoice even when we are waiting on God to fulfill his promises?

Have two people from your family act out this scene between Mary and Elizabeth, then laugh and rejoice together knowing that God keeps his promises.

December 10

Mary's Song of Praise

Luke 1:46-56

46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, **47** and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, **48** for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; **49** for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. **50** And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. **51** He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; **52** he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; **53** he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. **54** He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, **55** as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." **56** And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

At this point in the story of Jesus' birth, life has been a whirlwind for Mary. She was visited by an angel, called "O favored one" by God, informed of a prophecy about the Son of God (to whom she would give birth), and reassured that God could do the impossible (including make a virgin woman and a barren woman pregnant). She saw Elizabeth's womb leap with joy at the presence of her unborn Son and was reassured of God's promise to her. Overwhelmed by the Spirit, Mary does the only thing she can do: she turns to the Lord in praise.

Mary thanks God for his holiness, his mercy, and his salvation. She praises him for seeing and saving her and for remembering and redeeming his people. Mary's song of praise acknowledges that the miracle God has done by sending Jesus is not only a blessing to her, but a blessing to all people. In Jesus, God is not only fulfilling the prophecy of the angel Gabriel, but he is keeping his covenant with the people of Israel. As we think about how God's fulfilled promises bring good to us and to all his people, we too should turn to him in praise.

What are some things Mary thanks God for in these verses?

What makes you want to sing a song of praise to God?

Pray a prayer of thanksgiving to God.

December 11

Prophecy and the Way of Peace

Luke 1:67-80

*And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, **68** “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people **69** and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, **70** as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, **71** that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; **72** to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, **73** the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us **74** that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, **75** in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. **76** And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, **77** to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, **78** because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high **79** to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” **80** And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.*

Zechariah is praising God for being a covenant keeping God, a God that will follow through on the promises he has made. God does this by raising “up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David”. Zechariah is speaking of Jesus, who is yet to be born, who will be the fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abraham to save his people. Jesus was the Messiah the people of Israel had long waited for, Jesus was the redemption promised, and Zechariah is heralding his coming. Zechariah is also heralding the future work of his own son, John, who will go before Jesus, preparing God’s people for his message of salvation. The Gospel message of Jesus, which will “guide our feet into the way of peace”.

Zechariah is the same man who doubted that God could provide a son for him. Now he is faithfully heralding God’s promise of salvation through the coming Messiah, Jesus. Zechariah is speaking with great joyful expectation that the Messiah will undoubtedly come and make all things new, bringing redemption and peace to His people. We can live with the same joyful expectation of coming peace. As followers of Jesus we have the guarantee that redemption, healing, and peace are coming. Jesus is coming back to make all things new, to heal every broken heart, and to redeem every hopeless situation. That is glorious news.

How does knowing Jesus will return to redeem all things change how you view your circumstances?

What do you feel freedom from knowing God will fulfill his promise of salvation for those in Christ?

December 12

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

Luke 2:1-7

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The first five verses of this passage may seem like inconsequential political history, but there is something significant going on here. We are seeing an omnipotent sovereign God at work. God is orchestrating everything from the location of Joseph's residence to the political activities of kings and kingdoms and even the over crowding of the Inn. God is in control and intimately involved in the lives of people. As we continue in the passage we come to point where the Messiah arrives, the God of the universe shows up fulfilling ancient prophecies. He doesn't do so with the procession of a king or accompanied by an army, but rather in the body of a helpless baby sleeping in a barn.

Have you ever felt small or inconsequential? Remember that our Holy Lord Jesus came into this earth as a lowly infant who had no place to lay his head. It is not earthly power or stature that we should be trying to attain, but rather to give up power, lay down our lives, pick up our cross and follow Jesus. God is intimately involved in your ordinary life, and cares for you deeply. Submit your life to following Jesus and trust that God is working in your life to bring glory to his name and the good of those around you.

How does the sovereignty of God, the fact that he is in control of all things, affect the way you perceive your daily life, your neighbors, your family, your job, etc.?

What does it say about God that he came as a crying baby and not a king or general?

December 13

Good News of Great Joy

Luke 2:8-14

8 *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,*
14 *"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"*

The birth of Jesus brought the good news of great joy for all people. The Messiah, Jesus, was bringing with him the forgiveness of sin and the promise of salvation. This is incredibly good news for all people. The passage ends with the angels glorifying God and on earth, peace for those with whom he is pleased. So, the good news of Jesus and his Gospel message is for every person, but the peace of God is will be among those with whom he is pleased. Why the difference?

The Gospel of Jesus is for all people. The forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus Christ is available to anyone who would confess with their mouth and believe in their heart that Jesus is Lord. The Christmas story is very good news for those who have chosen to follow Jesus. It is those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ that will experience the peace of God on earth. It is those who have believed that God is pleased.

The birth of Jesus is an incredible gift from God. What is it about the life of Jesus and his Gospel message that make it such a great gift and such good news?

The peace of God transcends all understanding. Do your best to explain the peace which comes from knowing and being saved by the work of Jesus on the Cross.

December 14

Seeing Heaven's Treasure

Luke 2:15-21

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." **16** And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. **17** And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. **18** And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

21 And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

The shepherds hastily come to witness the Messiah. They tell everyone what God had told them about the coming of Jesus and the good news of great joy that he brought. The word of God then says that Mary, the mother of Jesus, "treasured up all of these things", The Message translation says she "held them dear, deep within herself." The shepherds too were deeply changed. They came to witness the Messiah and the left glorifying God, and testifying to the truth that is Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the treasure. As Christmas comes, it is so easy to become distracted by the trappings of the Christmas season. Family, gifts, traveling can easily take center focus in our lives. Let us not forget that Jesus is the true treasure we should be seeking. He is the ultimate gift from God. This Christmas season, enjoy time with family, eating, blessing people with gifts, but do so all to the glory of God. Do so remembering and speaking of the greatness of Jesus and his supremacy to all other things in this world.

What is about the Christmas season that we as a culture love so much?

In what ways have your focus around Christmas been diverted to lesser things?

How can you and/or your family bring Jesus into the center of your Christmas worship?

December 15

A Gift for the Nations

Luke 2:25-33

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. **26** And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. **27** And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, **28** he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, **29** "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; **30** for my eyes have seen your salvation **31** that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, **32** a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." **33** And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

A hallmark of Christmas is the giving and receiving of gifts. In your own house, you have certain traditions that come with the Christmas holiday. In some variation, you wake up on Christmas morning, you run to the living room where the Christmas tree is set up and you gaze with wonder at the gifts and stockings stuffed with goodies.

Christmas is a wonderful time to give gifts. Not because we need more stuff per se, but because when we give gifts to one another, we are reflecting our heavenly Father who has given the greatest gift of all— His Son Jesus.

And in this passage, we see a man named Simeon who loved God, believed God and was waiting to see the gift God was going to give. Finally, when it was time for Jesus to go to the temple to do what was customary in that time, Simeon got to hold this gift in his arms.

Think about a present you've always wanted. Think about your Christmas list this year. Is there something on it that you just can't wait to receive? Simeon felt this way, except Simeon didn't want *something*. Simeon wanted *someone*.

But what's interesting is that when Simeon finally held Jesus in his arms, he blessed God. And when he blessed God, he referred to this little baby as "salvation." Now, the people of Israel believed that God was going to send a Messiah, a savior for them. But what was so amazing about what Simeon said, is that Jesus wasn't just a savior for the people of Israel, but for the Gentiles as well.

The Gentiles are people who are not Jews. So, most likely, everyone in your family. And what Simeon said when he held Jesus is that Jesus is God's salvation! He came to restore

all that is broken. He came to save us from sin, and death, and the enemy. Not only that, but Jesus was going to make the world perfect again and someday, we would all rise up out of our graves (little Jesus did) and enjoy God's perfect world together.

And this isn't for just a specific group of people. This is a gift for the nations! Not just the people of Israel, but for all peoples. That means that Jesus came for people in Asia, the Middle East, America, Mexico, Africa, Australia and any other place you can think of!

God is the greatest gift giver there ever was. But his gift didn't come wrapped in shiny paper with a pretty ribbon on top. His gift came wrapped in swaddling cloths. His gift came for the nations, so that all the peoples of the earth could hear of this great God and be saved.

So when you open presents on Christmas day, remember Jesus, the greatest gift of all. And remember that there are people all over the world that Jesus came to love and came to rescue. God didn't just give us the gift. He gave it to the nations.

What a great God.

What is the best gift you've ever received?

Spend some time praying for people in other countries, that they would see Jesus as the greatest gift of all.

Pray for two church planters that our church supports:

- 1. Sihle Xulu who is planting a church in Johannesburg, South Africa*
- 2. Sujith Jacob who is planting a church in Mumbai, India*

Pray that the Lord would save many people in those countries and that Jesus would be loved in those cities.

December 16

Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh

Matthew 2:1-12

*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, **2** saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." **3** When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; **4** and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. **5** They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:*

6

*"And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."*

***7** Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. **8** And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." **9** After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. **11** And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. **12** And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.*

Have you ever wondered why we give gifts to each other at Christmas? Simply put, we do it as a reminder of the gifts brought to Jesus by the the wise men. These gifts seem strange don't they? Gold and frankincense and myrrh. Why did these wise men feel that these were appropriate gifts to bring a baby? There are a lot of explanations out there, but the simplest idea is that these gifts were chosen intentionally to point to Christ's divinity. In choosing these three gifts, the wise men were recognizing Jesus as God in the flesh. But these gifts were not all they gave to Jesus. Upon seeing him they fell to their knees and worshiped him. You see, the very sight of the Christ Child brought these men to their knees. They recognized Jesus for who He was and they gave him there allegiance.

And over 2000 years later we still celebrate this precious moment in which men from afar came to worship Jesus and offer up fine gifts to the Messiah. And this Christmas as you exchange gifts with loved ones, remember, that the tiny baby whom the wise men found lying with his mother is still the Messiah. He is alive. And he sits enthroned as our King.

My prayer for you this Christmas season is that you would have a new vision of Christ, that He would reveal himself to you in new and unexpected ways. And just as the wise men fell to their knees upon seeing Jesus, may you too posture yourself in worship as you reflect on the birth, and life, and death of Christ.

And while we are not asked to bring him gold, or frankincense, or myrrh, we *are* called to give our talents, our careers, even our very lives as an offering to Christ as we bow in reverence and declare that he is our King, our Messiah.

Spend some time discussing how you can use the gifts God has given you to give back to him in worship.

How can we posture ourselves in worship throughout our lives?

December 17

A Light Born into Darkness

Matthew 2:13-18

13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." **14** And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt **15** and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

18 "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

It is hard to imagine the hurt and despair felt across Bethlehem as Herod displayed his wrath and poured out such hatred. When we think of the Christmas story, I think we all get a very similar picture; a quiet starlit night. Jesus lying quietly in the manger. All is peaceful. All is calm. And yet, this quiet moment will soon give way to a midnight escape to Egypt as a vengeful king seeks to murder the tiny baby who threatened his throne. It was a dark time. And yet, in the midst of darkness we see hope in the form of a tiny baby. He was the light, born into darkness.

This drastic contrast between the darkness in men's hearts and the light of Christ is purposeful. It reminds us that in the midst of the darkest of nights, God's plan shines out. Later in his life Jesus would put this into simple yet profound words. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Jesus did not come as a triumphant war hero or charismatic politician. Instead he came as a helpless babe, full of innocence and purity. And unlike the rest of us, Christ's innocence did not become blemished as he grew into a man. No, it was his light and purity that shined out the brighter as he walked the hill toward Calvary. His blamelessness was God's glory on display for all to see.

The crazy part in all of this, is that Jesus now calls us to carry this light of God's glory. He now says to us, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden." Today may we all pause to thank God for his gift of light and life in the midst of darkness. And may we all strive to carry his light until the day of his appearing.

How can we carry the light of God's glory?

What are practical ways we can be the light in the darkness?

December 18

A Righteous Deliverer

Matthew 3:13-17

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. **14** John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” **15** But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. **16** And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; **17** and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Why in the world did Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, need to be baptized? It seems absurd at first glance. But if we pause to take a deeper look at this amazing moment in history, we realize that Jesus’ baptism was absolutely necessary.

The key to this seemingly strange event lies in understanding one man, John. You see, John was much more than the cousin of Jesus. John was Christ’s forerunner, the “voice crying in the wilderness” that had been prophesied by Isaiah. This was the moment that the world had been waiting for, the moment in which the prophet would declare the coming of the Messiah.

And when John the Baptist baptizes Jesus it is as though he is saying, “Attention everyone! Make no mistake! Here is your deliverer. Our God, wrapped in our flesh, come to walk among us!” This is a bold declaration, a powerful phrase that would set in motion a chain of events that would eventually lead to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

So make no mistake. Jesus was not simply a good teacher or a wise man of faith. He was and is the Son of God, our Righteous Deliverer. When Jesus came up out of the water, he set his shoulders toward Calvary. Every conversation, every act of kindness, every healing would have one purpose; to turn our eyes to the Glory of the Father.

Jesus was fully God, and fully man. A tension that we cannot possibly comprehend. In his short time on earth Jesus accomplished what humanity had been striving after for centuries. He lived the sinless life we could not. He fulfilled the law where we were unable. And he died as a perfect, spotless sacrifice. His life should have served as our death sentence. But he did not come as our judge. He came as our righteous deliverer. “Forgive them father,” he uttered from the cross.

Today may we remember that Christ's death on the cross would have had no power to save and no power to bind Satan had he not also lived a perfect, sinless life in our place. And may we strive daily to live our lives in a way that reflects what he did for us. May we seek a life of holiness until the day we see Jesus again, not because we are trying to earn the favor of a scornful judge, but because we have been granted freedom at the hands of a righteous deliverer.

What does the word "righteous" mean and why is it important?

What did the baptism of Jesus communicate to the world?

December 19

Why Jesus Came

1 Timothy 1:12-17

12 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, **13** though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, **14** and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. **15** The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. **16** But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. **17** To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

It's easy to forget why we celebrate Christmas. There is so much going on during this time of year that it is easy to get caught up in all the hustle and bustle of the season. There are last minute gifts to purchase, the house needs to be cleaned before family and friends arrive, the decorations need to be put out, food needs to be cooked, and on and on the list could go!

But the most important thing that we can do at Christmas is remember *why* we celebrate it in the first place. We celebrate Christmas because Jesus came into the world!

But why did Jesus come into the world? Jesus came to save sinners, which is really good news because we are all sinners. The apostle Paul even calls himself the WORST sinner. Paul was a wonderful man. He was a great preacher, a gifted evangelist and one of the best missionaries the world has ever known. But he needed a Savior because he was a sinner.

That is true of every person. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God Romans 3:23 tells us. And the bad news is that the wages of sin is death! Because of our sin, we deserve to be punished and cut off from God. We *really* needed help. We *really* needed a savior.

That's why we celebrate Christmas! Because Christmas is about the good news that Jesus came into the world for the purpose of saving sinners!

And when Jesus grew up, he lived a perfect life that we couldn't live. He died the death we deserved and paid the price for our sin. But He also rose again, which means that we, too, will rise again if we trust in Jesus! The enemy wanted to keep us dead. Jesus came to make us alive. That's why we celebrate Christmas.

How should we respond to the news that Jesus came to save sinners?

Who in your life needs to know the real reason Jesus came?

December 20

Christmas and the Cross

Matthew 27:45-54

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. **46** And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” **47** And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.” **48** And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. **49** But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” **50** And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

51 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. **52** The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, **53** and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. **54** When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

When Jesus was born, he cried out the way any baby cries out when they first come into the world. But Jesus’ cries weren’t just about him being hungry or cold or dirty or the many other reasons babies tend to cry. Jesus’ cries were war cries signaling the beginning of the end for the enemy. That’s because when Jesus was born, he was born for a purpose: The Cross.

At the cross, Jesus cried out again, not as a baby, but as a man enduring the wrath of God we deserved because of sin. He experienced incredible pain, emotional torment and separation from his father. And right before he died, he cried out again.

These cries sounded like the cries of a defeated man. The enemy, Satan, thought he had won. The cries of the Messiah in the manger filled Satan with fear. But perhaps these cries meant that Jesus has been defeated. Satan was wrong.

When Jesus cried out on the cross and breathed his last breath, the curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. That meant that the separation between man and God had been removed. Jesus’ paid the price on the cross, and his cries before his death were cries that brought us life!

Christmas is about the cross. Yes, it’s about a baby in a manger and a new mother and father trying to figure out how to be parents. And yes, it’s about gifts and joy and love. But it’s ultimately about the cross. Just as Jesus was wrapped in swaddling cloths as a baby, one day he would be wrapped in grave cloths as our substitute. He died so that we may live. We celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas. But Christmas points to Calvary. And at

Calvary, Jesus took our sin and gave us his righteousness, so that we would never experience what he experienced on our behalf.

What a wonderful Savior.

What sorts of thoughts or feelings do you have when you read about Jesus' death?

How should we live our lives in light of the cross?

December 21

An Empty Grave and a Risen Christ

Luke 24:1-12

1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. **2** And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, **3** but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. **4** While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. **5** And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? **6** He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, **7** that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” **8** And they remembered his words, **9** and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. **10** Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, **11** but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. **12** But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

For me, the magic of Christmas is the anticipation. It’s the act of waiting, all the while knowing: *it’s coming*. I find myself looking at the tree and counting down the days (hours, minutes) until the morning we get to open the gifts underneath our Christmas tree.

But this story is not a story like that.

The morning mentioned in Luke 24 was not a special morning. No one had been counting down the days or marking the calendar. In the minds of the people in this story, this was just an ordinary morning.

Despite all that Jesus had done during His time on earth, no one intended to find an empty grave that morning. But they did. Despite the things that Jesus had said, no one anticipated that the Man they watched die would live again. But He does.

Some day—maybe some very ordinary morning—Jesus is going to come again. He won’t be dressed in swaddling clothes and He won’t be wearing burial garments. Instead, the clouds will part and the Lord will descend in robes of righteousness shining like the sun.

Until that day, this is our prayer: Lord, teach our hearts not to look for the living among the dead. Help us to marvel at these things as we longingly anticipate the day when we shall truly live with You.

As we think about Christmas, Where are you placing your hope? What are you anticipating?

December 22

Christmas Mission

Matthew 28:16-20

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. **17** And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. **18** And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

In the midst of a busy season of family gatherings and shopping and decorating and gift giving, it's easy to forget the purpose behind why we celebrate in the first place. We celebrate the purpose of Jesus. We celebrate the fact that God came down to be with us and to save us from our sin. We celebrate this season because he came to give his life for us so that we might have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

Want another reason to celebrate this season? 2 Corinthians 5:19 says that God has committed the message of this reconciliation to us. This amazing assignment reveals how good and gracious our God truly is. This God, who rules the world, sovereign over everything, this God who "holds everything together by the word of his power," Hebrews 1:3 has entrusted to us a ministry of reconciliation. What grace! Not only has he transferred us from the domain of darkness and into the kingdom of his Son he loves, but he has invited us into sharing this good news, making us "ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us." 2 Corinthians 5:20

Not only has he done this but he tells us in Matthew 28:19-20 that "all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." This is not a hopeless mission, this is a commission given by God who has all authority, on heaven and on earth. So we celebrate this season that God came, he became like us and has died in our place to make peace between us and God so that we may be with him forever. What joy we have in declaring this good news to the world! But we are not left alone in this. God is with us. He is Emmanuel. This is what Christmas is all about. This is the purpose of Jesus. So, as family gathers, as you eat, and share gifts, memories, and time with each other, remember why we celebrate, and remember that you are an ambassador for Christ, "and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (vs. 20)

Why should we join God in the mission of telling others about Jesus?

How is Jesus with us to the end of the age?

December 23

The Greatest Gift of All

Romans 5:6-11

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. **7** For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— **8** but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. **9** Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. **10** For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. **11** More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Christmas is just two days away. Just two days until our living rooms are covered with wrapping paper that was once neatly wrapped around the gifts and perfectly placed under the tree. It is so much fun to watch someone open a gift that you gave them and see the surprise and happiness happen upon their face.

Every Christmas gift we've received points to the greatest gift of all. Even the best gift pales in comparison to the gift we've been given by our heavenly Father. The greatest gift of all is, of course, Jesus his Son.

The reason Jesus is the greatest gift of all is because of what he came to accomplish. Paul makes it clear what Jesus came to do: Christ died for the ungodly. He died for us! And because of his death on the cross, we have been made right before God. Once we were enemies of God, but now we are his children because of the work of Jesus.

This is the good news of the gospel— Jesus lived a perfect life because we couldn't, He took the punishment we deserved because of our sin, and then he rose again on the third day defeating the dominion of sin and death and offering to us life and joy.

This is the greatest gift of all! And what's so incredible is that we never asked for it. It wasn't on our wish list, and we never deserved it. This gift was given out of God's love and grace for us. In fact, this passage teaches us that we were still rebelling against God and he *still* sent his Son Jesus to us. God is so kind and generous.

As you open your Christmas gifts in a couple of days, remember the gift you've been given by your heavenly Father. Jesus came to give his life, so that we could be saved! That is the greatest gift of all!

Why do we give gifts to each other at Christmas?

Did God have to send his Son Jesus to save us? Why did he?

December 24

Come, Lord Jesus

Revelation 22:20-21

20 *He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.*

Advent means "arrival." When we talk about the season of Advent, we are talking about the arrival of Jesus when he came in human form as a baby. But the season of Advent also reminds us that Jesus is coming again. The gospel story told in its fullest form includes the good news that Jesus is coming back to make all things new. When he returns, there will be no more pain, sorrow, sin and brokenness. He will make all the sad things come untrue.

The season of advent is a season of waiting. Just like we wait with anticipation for the sun to dawn tomorrow morning marking the arrival of Christmas day, with all the fun and joy it brings, we wait with eager longing and anticipation for the Son of God to come again.

And Jesus tells us he is coming soon. We don't know when exactly, and we don't need to. We can just trust that Jesus keeps his promises. And we don't have to be afraid. If we have been covered by the blood of Jesus, then his return is a joy-filled thing.

So, what do we do in the meantime? What should we do as we wait? We should tell others about Jesus! We should tell others that He has come and he is coming again. As we pray with John who wrote Revelation, "Come, Lord Jesus", we should also be inviting our friends, family and neighbors who don't have the hope Christ to come to the Lord Jesus.

And as we live with eager anticipation of his return and as well tell others of the joy of Christ, we can trust that "the grace of the Lord Jesus" will be with us.

Tomorrow is Christmas. But it's just a shadow of what's to come. The true and better Christmas morning, where our faith will be sight, and our savior will be our delight forever more.

"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

What thoughts come into your mind when you think about Jesus coming again?

Who are people that you love that you need to tell about Christ?

December 25

Cradle, Cross and Crown

Philippians 2:1-11

1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, **2** complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. **3** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. **4** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. **5** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **9** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Over the past 25 days you have seen how the story of Christmas fits inside the larger narrative of Scripture. Jesus was promised from the beginning, he came, he died, he rose again and one day he will return to make all things new.

Hopefully, you have seen how the story of Christmas and the larger story of Scripture all point to Jesus! It's all about Christ! Every gift, every promise, every word leads us to see that Jesus truly is the Son of God who has come to take away the sin of the world!

He came first in a cradle, as a baby. He humbly took on human form and was born just like all of us. He knows what it means to be human. He walked as a human being among human beings and experienced pain, sorrow, joy, laughter, and was even tempted, though without sin.

Jesus was resolute in his purpose. He came to die. He came to give his life as a sacrifice. Jesus' life was always marked by obedience, so much so, that he was obedient to the point of death on a cross. The cross communicated the curse. Jesus took our curse, our death, so that we could have the favor of God.

But Jesus didn't stay dead. he arose on the third day, defeating sin and death and securing a resurrection for all who would follow him. Because Jesus was obedient and because he was victorious, God has highly exalted him and given him the name about every name. Jesus is and will be worshipped because Jesus is and will always be the King. The crown of thorns has been turned into a Kings crown, because Jesus rules over the cosmos!

And that is good news because Jesus is a good King. His law is love and his gospel is peace. And if you belong to this King, you are a co-heir with him. He doesn't look upon you as a worthless subject, but a beloved member of the royal household.

Jesus came in a cradle. He endured the cross. And He is the crowned King.

Spend some time thanking God for Jesus as the greatest gift you've been given.

What has been your favorite part of the Christmas story?

How does the story of our lives fit into the story of Christ?