

The Christmas Story According To...



A DAILY ADVENT DEVOTION GUIDE BY
PASTOR JEREMY DEGROOT



ADVENT, OR CHRISTMASTIME, IS MY ABSOLUTE FAVORITE TIME OF YEAR. LET ME BE HONEST, AS A KID, IT WAS ALL ABOUT THE GIFTS. AS I GOT OLDER, I BEGAN TO REALIZE THAT THERE WAS MUCH MORE THAT WENT INTO THE MAGIC OF THE SEASON: FAMILY, FRIENDS, PARTIES, THE MUSIC AND SONGS (WHO IS BETTER THAN BING OR NAT?), AND OF COURSE...THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD.

ADVENT REACHES BACK THROUGH THE AGES TO CELEBRATE JESUS' BIRTH. IT ALSO CELEBRATES THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST, WHEN JOHN THE REVELATOR TELLS US THAT JESUS IS COMING, AND HAS COME, TO MAKE ALL THINGS NEW. (REVELATION 21:5)

ADVENT PROCLAIMS THE MYSTERIOUS TRUTH THROUGH GOD'S OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS ABOUT THE MESSIAH, PROMISED THROUGH A VIRGIN WHO WOULD CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL. HE WOULD DIE AND RISE WITH HEALING IN HIS WINGS TO INAUGURATE AN EVERLASTING KINGDOM IN THE LINE OF DAVID. THE KINGSHIP WOULD REST UPON HIS SHOULDERS AS THE WONDERFUL COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD, ETERNAL FATHER, AND PRINCE OF PEACE.

ADVENT HUDDLES US TOGETHER WITH THE FIRST CENTURY BELIEVERS AS THEY SAID GOODBYE TO JESUS AT HIS ASCENSION TO EAGERLY AWAIT HIS PROMISED HOLY SPIRIT. IT CONNECTS US WITH THE SAINTS OF THE MIDDLE AGES WHO GATHERED FOR QUIET EVENING PRAYERS AND CAROLS. WE ARE UNITED WITH OUR FOREBEARS OF THE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES AS THEY SANG OUT IN THE MIDST OF TERRIBLE WARS THAT THE PRINCE OF PEACE HAD COME!

THIS ADVENT SEASON'S DEVOTIONAL IS ENTITLED, "THE CHRISTMAS STORY ACCORDING TO..." THIS PLAYS OFF THE PHRASE, "THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO..." (FILL IN EACH GOSPEL WRITER HERE). EACH WEEK WE WILL FOCUS ON HOW EACH GOSPEL WRITER WAS INSPIRED TO TELL THE STORY OF JESUS' INCARNATION. THE CHRISTMAS STORY IS THE START OF THE GOOD NEWS, BUT DEFINITELY NOT THE END. IN DISCOVERING THE GOSPEL WRITERS' CHRISTMAS STORY, WE ALSO DISCOVER OUR CHRISTMAS STORY. CELEBRATE WITH US THIS ADVENT SEASON AS WE WALK THROUGH THE GOSPEL ACCOUNTS THAT ECHO WITH THE FAMILIAR STRAIN WITH WHICH WE HAVE ALL GROWN FAMILIAR: "JOY TO THE WORLD, THE LORD IS COME! LET EARTH RECEIVE HER KING!"

THE LORD IS WITH US!
PASTOR JEREMY

The Christmas Story According to Matthew

Matthew's account of Jesus' birth doesn't begin with the birth itself, or Joseph, or Mary. It begins with Jesus' lineage, his ancestry. Matthew starts off Jesus' birth with Jesus as the promise of God to bless the world through Abraham's Seed - that seed was Jesus Himself - promised by God, trusted in by Abraham and Moses, foretold by the prophets, and prepared for by John the Baptist. Jesus, according to Matthew, was the long-awaited Messiah that had come to restore Israel. What Matthew hadn't expected was that Jesus had come to clearly define Israel. His gospel account recalls the Jewish prophecies to show his readers, mainly Jews, how Jesus, as God's Messiah, was both a fulfillment of God's promise and his covenant of New Creation. Matthew wants us to connect with Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, who came to bring freedom for the captives and salvation to the lost. This week, celebrate the Son of Yahweh, who always keeps His promises and always fulfills His vows as He transforms you into His new creation.

Monday, November 23rd, 2020

"A Child of Prophecy"

Matthew 1:18-24, Isaiah 7:14

18 This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. **19** Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. **20** As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. **21** And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." **22** All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: **23** "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" **24** When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. **25** But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

What was the Lord's message given by Isaiah, His prophet?

What does it mean to you that God is with us?

Has the Lord ever asked you to do something difficult that you knew you couldn't do without His help? How might the words, "Don't be afraid," be helpful in situations like that?

Tuesday, November 24th, 2020

"Wise Men From the East"

Matthew 2:1-6, Micah 5:1-4

2 Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, **2** "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him." **3** King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. **4** He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?" **5** "In Bethlehem in Judea," they said, "for this is what the prophet wrote: **6** 'And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.'"

What does it tell you about Jesus' story of salvation that the Wise Men, who were not Jews, came to worship Him?

Which famous group of people are missing from Matthew's Christmas story that are found in Luke's (and almost every Nativity scene)? Which words does the prophecy from Micah (Matthew 2:5-6) use to describe Jesus?

How is Jesus both ruler and shepherd? Have you fully surrendered each aspect of your life to be ruled and shepherded by Jesus?

Wednesday, November 25th, 2020

"The Best Gifts are the Ones that Show You Know Them"

Matthew 2:7-12, Psalm 43:3-4

7 Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. **8** Then he told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!" **9** After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! **11** They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

What filled the wise men with joy? What were they expecting to find?

The church father, Origen, famously wrote: "Gold, as to a king; myrrh, as to one who was mortal; and incense, as to a God."

What did he mean in this statement?

Think back to a time when you were given a gift that proved someone really knew you well. What was it and how did it prove this to you?

Thursday, November 26th, 2020

"The Coventry Carol"

Matthew 2:13-18, Jeremiah 31:15

13 After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother," the angel said. "Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." **14** That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, **15** and they stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt." **16** Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men's report of the star's first appearance. **17** Herod's brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: **18** "A cry was heard in Ramah—

weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead.

Who else was called out of Egypt - in the Exodus? Why is it important for Matthew (a Jew) to point out Jesus being called out of Egypt?

The Massacre of the Innocents, is sung about in a very old carol called "The Coventry Carol." Some of the lyrics are:

**Herod the king, in his raging, Chargèd he hath this day
His men of might in his own sight, All young children to slay.**

What other famous Israelite was almost killed as a baby?

What things did this man do that would foreshadow the mission of Jesus?

Why was Herod afraid of this newborn child? Why was his fear misplaced? Why had Jesus come?

Friday, November 27th, 2020

"He Will be Called..."

Matthew 2:19-23, Isaiah 11:1

19 When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. **20** "Get up!" the angel said. "Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead." **21** So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. **22** But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod's son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. **23** So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: "He will be called a Nazarene."

Where was Joseph going to live when they left Egypt? Where did they eventually settle down to live? Why?

This is the third time that God has given instructions to someone in a dream in this Christmas story? What does this tell you about the importance of God's mission through Jesus?

Who do we have today that tells us all we need to know about God's plan for us? Consider it pure joy that we have a God who speaks to us and that He is actively involved in every detail of our lives.

Saturday, November 28th, 2020

"...Even to the end of the age..."

Matthew 28:18-20, Joshua 1:9

18 Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. **19** Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. **20** Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

In the thirty-three years that had passed from Matthew 2 to Matthew 28, much had taken place. How does the beginning of Jesus' story and the end of Matthew's gospel beautifully weave themselves into each other?

Jesus' birth as a man begins His mission to recreate man in His image. What is our part of this mission?

Sunday, November 29th, 2020

"The Christmas Story According to Matthew"

Read Matthew 1 and 2

What parts of Jesus' Christmas story in Matthew speak loudest to you? Why?

Which Christmas Carols come to mind as you read this scripture?

If you had to sum up the importance of Jesus' birth in Matthew in one or two scriptures, which one(s) would you use? Why?

The Christmas Story According to Mark

Mark was not one of the twelve disciples, but he was a disciple of Paul. As one of Paul's traveling companions, he desperately tried to discover the life of Jesus – who He was, who He claimed to be, who He taught, and who He was for mankind. Mark's gospel account is probably the first biographical account of Jesus that was written down. Its style and frantic pace gives credence to the idea that Mark was interested in the action of Jesus' ministry rather than merely writing a theological account of Jesus' teaching and life. Through Mark's writing we see various themes: Jesus as the Son of Man, Jesus as the Son of God, and Jesus and Kingdom of God. Absent in Mark's gospel account is any Christmas story at all. Instead, Mark's gospel starts with "This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God." In order to adequately present Mark's Christmas Story, we must take the entire gospel of Mark under the lens of birth of New Creation. If Matthew's goal was to explain why Jesus came, Mark wants to explain what Jesus did.

Monday, November 30th, 2020

"Baptized"

Mark 1:1-8, Romans 6:1-11

1 This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. It began **2** just as the prophet Isaiah had written: "Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way.

3 He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord's coming! Clear the road for him!'" **4** This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. **5** All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. **6** His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey. **7** John announced: "Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of his sandals. **8** I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!"

What is so "good" about the news of Jesus coming to earth and becoming a man?

What does water baptism (John's baptism) symbolize? What does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit according to Romans 6?

In what ways can you prepare your heart this Advent season to truly celebrate the miraculous work of Christ coming in flesh?

Tuesday, December 1st, 2020

"Beloved"

Mark 1:9-11, Joshua 4:15-18

9 One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. **10** As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. **11** And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy." **What promise was fulfilled by God at the Jordan River in the passage in Joshua?**

What promise was fulfilled by God in Jesus at the Jordan River?

How has God shown you that you are His beloved son/daughter?

Wednesday, December 2nd, 2020

"Believe"

Mark 1:14-15, Isaiah 9:1-7

14 Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. **15** "The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"

According to the prophecy in Isaiah, what are the characteristics of the Kingdom of God?

How is this Good News for both the people of Jesus' day, and ours?

How has Jesus fulfilled this prophecy and promise in your life?

Thursday, December 3rd, 2020

"Everyone Is Looking For You"

Mark 1:35-39, Isaiah 52:7-10

35 Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. **36** Later Simon and the others went out to find him. **37** When they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you." **38** But Jesus replied, "We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came." **39** So he traveled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and casting out demons.

"Everyone is looking for you." It seems to be the statement that best encapsulates Jesus' life. What are ways that you can "look for him" in areas of your life this Advent season? What do you expect to find when you find Him working in your life?

How has Jesus fulfilled this prophecy and promise in your life?

Read the passage in Isaiah, how does this prophecy bring you incredible hope and joy? "Advent" means coming, how has Jesus' coming in flesh given you incredible hope and joy? How about his second coming?

Friday, December 4th, 2020

"House Calls"

Mark 2:15-17, Ezekiel 36:25-27

15 Later, Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. (There were many people of this kind among Jesus' followers.) **16** But when the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with such scum?"

17 When Jesus heard this, he told them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."

According to this passage, why did Jesus come? Why do you think the devotion today is called "House Calls?" Who makes "House Calls?"

Are you a sinner or a saint? Think back to the time when Jesus made the house call to your life and healed your spiritual sickness. Why does He not need to continue making that house call?

Read the passage in Ezekiel and meditate on how the house call in Mark relates to the spiritual heart transplant prophesied in Ezekiel.

Saturday, December 5th, 2020

"Triumphal Birth and Triumphal Entry"

Mark 11:7-10, Zechariah 9:9-10

7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it, and he sat on it.

8 Many in the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others spread leafy branches they had cut in the fields. **9** Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting,

"Praise God! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! **10** Blessings on the coming Kingdom of our ancestor David! Praise God in highest heaven!"

While Mark does not include a triumphal birth account, he refuses to miss the triumphal entry account. What connections can you make between his birth and triumphal entry?

What contrasts can you make between his birth accounts and triumphal entry?

Read the corresponding prophecy in Zechariah. According to this prophecy, was Jesus going to bring peace or war? Did He come to redefine Israel or smash Rome? What "battle" can you give over to Him today? Is there something you are facing now that you can hand over to the "king who will bring peace?"

Sunday, December 6th, 2020

"Everyone Is Looking For You, Part II"

Mark 16:1-7, I Corinthians 15:3-9

Saturday evening, when the Sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went out and purchased burial spices so they could anoint Jesus' body. **2** Very early on Sunday morning, just at sunrise, they went to the tomb. **3** On the way they were asking each other, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" **4** But as they arrived, they looked up and saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled aside. **5** When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a white robe sitting on the right side. The women were shocked, **6** but the angel said, "Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body. **7** Now go and tell his disciples, including Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you before he died."

It's probably strange to read the Easter story on the second Sunday of Advent, right? Look at the "Christmas Story According to Mark" at the top of this section. What was Mark's intention with his gospel, what did he want to explain?

Why is the resurrection of Jesus the exclamation mark at the end of Mark's gospel and his Christmas story?

Read the passage from II Corinthians. This is probably the earliest written creed/statement regarding the resurrection. It was produced roughly ten years prior to Mark's gospel. Jesus is still revealing Himself to His children every day. How have you encountered the Risen Lord recently?

The Christmas Story According to Luke

If Matthew wanted to write about Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, and Mark wanted to share with his readers why Jesus came to us, Luke wanted to paint a picture with his pen of Jesus, the Savior of the world—both Jew and Gentile. Luke's gospel presents to us an account with an eye for detail. Absent from Luke are the Wise Men, instead Luke gives us the shepherds "abiding in the fields by night." The reason is probably because Luke wants us to know that Jesus' birth was not just for the wise and royal, but for the humble and lowly. Jesus' birth is a pronouncement of what God had said He would do all along - rescue the world from their sins and usher in a New Creation through His Messiah. Luke's portrait of Jesus is a wise teacher, loving friend, and Almighty Savior of the World.

Monday, December 7th, 2020

"The Lord is With You!"

Luke 1:26-33, Judges 6:11-16

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, **27** to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. **28** Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!" **29** Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. **30** "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! **31** You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. **32** He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. **33** And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

What are the first words out of the angel's mouth to Mary?

What does it mean that, "The Lord is with you(us)?"

Which statement by the angel gives you the most hope? Why?

Tuesday, December 8th, 2020

"God of the Impossible"

Luke 1:34-38, Psalm 2

34 Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." **35** The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. **36** What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. **37** For the word of God will never fail." (*other translations read-Nothing is impossible with God.*) **38** Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her. (*Italics mine*)
Jesus' virgin birth is paramount doctrine in Christianity. Why is it important that Jesus was born "holy" and of a virgin?

Sing or hum the first lines of "Silent Night." Which themes in this scripture are also found in this Christmas Carol?

How has God made us holy? What is something that seemed impossible, but God made it possible?

Wednesday, December 9th, 2020

"A Magnificent Magnificat"

Luke 1:46-55, Psalm 103

46 Mary responded, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. **47** How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! **48** For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. **49** For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me. **50** He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him. **51** His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. **52** He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. **53** He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands. **54** He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. **55** For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever."

Both Luke 1:46-55 and Psalm 103 could each be considered a Magnificat, or "hymn of praise." What comparisons do you see between the two?

Write your own Magnificat today using this template:

"Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For he took notice of _____ (your name), and from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One is _____ (adjective about God), and he has done great things for me, like _____

_____.
He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him. His mighty arm has done tremendous things! For instance, _____

_____.
For he made this promise to me, to Abraham and his children forever."

Thursday, December 10th, 2020

"For Yonder Breaks a New and Glorious Morn"

Luke 1:67-79, Isaiah 9:2-7

67 Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy: **68** "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and

redeemed his people. **69** He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David, **70** just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago. **71** Now we will be saved from our enemies and from all who hate us. **72** He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant—**73** the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham. **74** We have been rescued from our enemies so we can serve God without fear, **75** in holiness and righteousness for as long as we live. **76** "And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. **77** You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. **78** Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, **79** to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace."

Note the line from "O Holy Night" in the title of this devotion. What was so "new and glorious" about Jesus? How does one find salvation? How is that different from the Old Testament?

Jesus wants to guide us to the path of peace. What are ways that you can reclaim peace during this busy time of Christmas?

Friday, December 11th, 2020

"Yet in thy Dark Streets Shineth the Everlasting Light"

Luke 2:1-7, Jeremiah 23:5-6, I Chronicles 17:11-14

2 At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. **2** (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) **3** All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. **4** And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the

village of Nazareth in Galilee. **5** He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

6 And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. **7** She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

What promise did God make with David? Was God talking only about a temple made of stone? How was this fulfilled in Christ?

seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. **18** All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, **19** but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. **20** The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

Shepherds were poor and lowly, the lowest rung of the social ladder. What does the angels' appearance to lowly shepherds tell us about the Kingdom of God? Who did Matthew include in His Christmas story, and how are they different from these shepherds?

A few lines from "O Little Town of Bethlehem" are: The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." How did Christ not only meet the hopes and fears of the world, but destroy them? How is He doing this in you right now?

What did the Shepherds do after they found Jesus and worshipped Him? How should we reflect this same attitude and action?

Saturday, December 12th, 2020

"Certain Poor Shepherds"

Luke 2:8-20, Isaiah 40:9-11

8 That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. **9** Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, **10** but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. **11** The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! **12** And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." **13** Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, **14** "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased." **15** When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." **16** They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. **17** After

Search the lyrics of "The First Noel" and read the first verse. Notice the idea of shepherds (lowly) being told a king's birth. What was so "lowly" about Jesus' birth, however? How does this fit into Luke's motif of "Jesus-Savior of the World."?

Sunday, December 13th, 2020

"Salvation Sighting"

Luke 2:25-32, Isaiah 40:9-11

25 At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him **26** and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. **27** That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, **28** Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

29 "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. **30** I have seen your salvation, **31** which you have prepared for all people.

32 He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!"

To see Jesus, is to see God. To see God is to see salvation.

How was Jesus coming in flesh (as one of us) important in God revealing Himself to us and helping us understand who He truly is?

Consider these lyrics from "Angels We Have Heard on High: Shepherds why this jubilee?

Why your joyous strains prolong?

Say what may the tidings be

Which inspire your heavenly song?

What inspires your heavenly song? Keep that inspiration in mind as we worship this morning!

According to this passage, who would Jesus' light reveal and to whom? Why is this important to us?

The Christmas Story According to John

We all have traditions at Christmas, so too did the Gospel writers. I love to see a Nativity scene with Wise Men (even though they came much later – when Jesus was around two), Matthew included them in his story. I love the tradition of opening presents, and the action of it all – so did Mark, that's why his Gospel is fast-paced and action packed. I love Christmas Carols that speak of the "Angels from the Realms of Glory" that sang "Gloria, In Excelsis Deo!" just like Luke included in His Christmas story..

John's Christmas tradition is based around two words: "birth" and "love." John has no Wise Men in his story, absent also are the angels, the manger, the inn, the star, and shepherds. But those elements are found in his Gospel: John the Baptist, a very wise man, said that Jesus was far greater than he. You want angels? How about the angels comforting Mary at the tomb? A manger (food trough)? John 6:35 – "I am the Bread of Life!" An inn with no room? "He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him." (John 1:10). Looking for a star in John's Gospel? "I am the light of the world." (John 8:12) No shepherds abiding in the fields? John 10:11 – "I am the Good Shepherd." The Christmas Story of Jesus is found in the entirety of John's Gospel.

Monday, December 14th, 2020

"In the beginning..."

John 1:1-5, 9-14; Ezekiel 37:26-28

1 In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He existed in the beginning with God. **3** God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. **4** The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. **9** The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. **10** He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. **11** He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. **12** But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. **13** They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. **14** So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

Why is the word "Word" capitalized? Of whom does it speak? What was/is the mission of The Word?

Read this passage in Ezekiel. 26 And I will make a covenant of peace with them, an everlasting covenant. I will give them their land and increase their numbers, and I will put my Temple among them forever. 27 I will make my home among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 28 And when my Temple is among them forever, the nations will know that I am the LORD, who makes Israel holy. Why is "Temple" capitalized? Of whom does it speak? What is the mission of The Temple?

John doesn't focus on Jesus' physical birth, on whose birth is he most focused in this passage? What kind of birth would you call it? What part of your Christmas story is most exciting to you in this passage?

Tuesday, December 15th, 2020

"Born to Give them Second Birth"

John 3:1-7, 7:50-51, 19:39; Ezekiel 11:19

3 There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. **2** After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you." **3** Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." **4** "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?" **5** Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. **6** Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life.

John 7:50 Then Nicodemus, the leader who had met with Jesus earlier, spoke up. 51 "Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?" he asked.

John 19:39 39 With him came Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus at night. He brought about seventy-five pounds of perfumed ointment made from myrrh and aloes.

Here we have a "wise man" coming to seek out Jesus? What would you say is Nicodemus' opinion of Jesus in verses 2 and 3? How has it changed in chapter 7? How has it changed in chapter 19? What does this tell you about Nicodemus? (You will want to read the scriptures just before the ones given here for some context)

If someone asked you what "being born again" meant, what would you say?

How do these lyrics from "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!" parallel this scripture in John 3?

**Mild He lays His glory by. Born that man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth. Born to give them second birth
Hark! The herald angels sing. "Glory to the newborn King!"**

Wednesday, December 16th, 2020

"Come to Me!"

John 7:37-46; Isaiah 12:3-6

37 On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! **38** Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'" **39** (When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.) **40** When the crowds heard him say this, some of them declared, "Surely this man is the Prophet we've been expecting." **41** Others said, "He is the Messiah." Still others said, "But he can't be! Will the Messiah come from Galilee? **42** For the Scriptures clearly state that the Messiah will be born of the royal line of David, in Bethlehem, the village where King David was born." **43** So the crowd was divided about him. **44** Some even wanted him arrested, but no one laid a hand on him. **45** When the Temple guards returned without having arrested Jesus, the leading priests and Pharisees demanded, "Why didn't you bring him in?" **46** "We have never heard anyone speak like this!" the guards responded.

What are the differing opinions of the people in the crowd regarding Jesus' identity? How is that similar to the way people view Jesus today? Which of these best describes your view of Jesus?

What is this "living water" that John describes? Based on verses 38-39, will the living water flow from Jesus' heart or from the believer's heart? (Remember where the Spirit dwells)

Drink deep in Him today as streams of living water gush forth from your heart into the lives of others. Take time to send a card, a text, or make a phone call to someone and share with them how you have joy in Christ.

Thursday, December 17th, 2020

"Blinding Light"

John 9:1-7; Isaiah 35:5-7

9 As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. **2** "Rabbi," his disciples asked him, "why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?" **3** "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "This happened so the power of God could be seen in him. **4** We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. **5** But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world." **6** Then he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man's eyes. **7** He told him, "Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam" (Siloam means "sent"). So the man went and washed and came back seeing!

This man was born physically blind, what kind of blindness are we born into? Whose original sin caused our blindness? What parallels do you see between the healing of this man's blindness, and the healing of our "blindness?"

Read the passage in Isaiah again. How has Jesus' coming and ultimate triumph changed mankind forever? In what ways has Jesus changed you?

Celebrate the many ways that Jesus has changed you and is daily making you more and more into His image!

Friday, December 18th, 2020

"The Christmas Story in a Sentence"

John 16:25-33, Zephaniah 3:17

25 "I have spoken of these matters in figures of speech, but soon I will stop speaking figuratively and will tell you plainly all about the Father. **26** Then you will ask in my name. I'm not saying I will ask the Father on your behalf, **27** for the Father himself loves you dearly because you love me and believe that I

came from God. **28** Yes, I came from the Father into the world, and now I will leave the world and return to the Father." **29** Then his disciples said, "At last you are speaking plainly and not figuratively. **30** Now we understand that you know everything, and there's no need to question you. From this we believe that you came from God." **31** Jesus asked, "Do you finally believe? **32** But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when you will be scattered, each one going his own way, leaving me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. **33** I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

Even though John doesn't have a "Christmas" story about Jesus, he does sum up the Christmas story in verse 30. How?

Which part of this passage gives you the most hope? How does Jesus describe the Father? How does Jesus describe Himself?

Read John 16:27 and Zephaniah 3:17 and sit back in awe of our God! Celebrate the "three in oneness" of God today! The one who loves you, died for you, and is dwelling within you!

Saturday, December 19th, 2020

"Jesus Prays for Us"

John 17:17-26; Isaiah 61:1-3

17 Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. **18** Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. **19** And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth. **20** "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. **21** I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. **22** "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. **23** I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. **24** Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began! **25** "O righteous Father, the world doesn't know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. **26** I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them."

Which two groups of people is Jesus praying for? What does He desire for the second group of people?

Read the passage in Isaiah 61. Advent celebrates Jesus' first coming and looks forward to His second. How can you celebrate His work already accomplished, AND look forward to the work He continues to do?

Of the things listed in Isaiah, which is most personal for you? Why? Celebrate His work in you today!

Sunday, December 20th, 2020

"What is Truth?"

John 18:33-39; Proverbs 12:17-22

33 Then Pilate went back into his headquarters and called for Jesus to be brought to him. "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked him. **34** Jesus replied, "Is this your own question, or did others tell you about me?" **35** "Am I a Jew?" Pilate retorted. "Your own people and their leading priests brought you to me for trial. Why? What have you done?" **36** Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world." **37** Pilate said, "So you are a king?" Jesus responded, "You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true." **38** "What is truth?" Pilate asked. Then he went out again to the people and told them, "He is not guilty of any crime. **39** But you have a custom of asking me to release one prisoner each year at Passover. Would you like me to release this 'King of the Jews'?"

What does Jesus say is the reason for His birth? What "title" do you see used over and over again in this passage for Jesus? How does it ring familiar to Matthew's Christmas story regarding the Wise Men and Herod?

What is your definition of "truth?" Can our definition of truth change depending on our circumstances? Why is it so important for us that God's definition of truth never changes?

Consider these lyrics from "Joy to the World:"

"He rules the world, with truth and grace!" Honor the King who rules the world with both His truth about us and His grace extended to us.

The Christmas Story According to Paul

Around 28 percent of the New Testament was written by one man...Paul. Born a zealous and pious Jew, he was known for his persecution of the church and their message. We know how Paul had an encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus and the rest, as they say, is history.

For Paul, his new life was now beating after proclaiming new birth. Paul's writings are rife with New Creation, New Birth, and New Life in Christ. In Christ's birth, Paul found his own. Paul's Christmas story is a deeply personal one. Unlike the Gospel writers, Paul was a violent enemy of Christ and His people. Paul knew the depths of grace because he had seen it played out in his life before his very eyes. He had gone from "Herod" to "Wise Man" in the course of three days.

Paul would spend the rest of his life proclaiming the newborn King like a shepherd and seeking out the King of the New Israel like a Wise Man. Paul's Christmas story may hit a lot closer to home for most of us than any of the Gospel accounts.

Monday, December 21st, 2020

"Good News Told Long Ago"

Romans 1:1-6; Isaiah 40:9-11

1 This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News. **2** God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. **3** The Good News is about his Son. In his earthly life he was born into King David's family line, **4** and he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord. **5** Through Christ, God has given us the privilege and authority as apostles to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey him, bringing glory to his name. **6** And you are included among those Gentiles who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ.

What does it mean when someone makes a promise? What is the difference between God's promises and our promises?

According to the scripture in Isaiah, what would be true of the Good News of the Messiah? Which of the actions of Messiah in Isaiah do you need most right now?

Let the Good News of Christ, not only be that He saved you from your sins, but that He constantly and wonderfully embraces you as His child, fill your heart today.

Tuesday, December 22nd, 2020

"Let Earth Receive Her King"

Galatians 4:4-7; Psalm 96

4 But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. **5** God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. **6** And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." **7** Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

How are we, as Christians, described in this passage? What "rights" are given to us? What "identity" has been taken from us?

Imagine in your mind the conversation between Father and Son before Christ became a man. Using this passage, what do you think the conversation sounded like?

Make the Christmas carol "Joy to the World" come alive for you today. Take time to listen to it with Galatians 4:-7 in mind.

Wednesday, December 23rd, 2020

"The First Christmas Carol"

Philippians 2:6-11; Jeremiah 23:5-6

6 Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,
8 he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.
9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest
honor and gave him the name above all other names,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Why did Jesus not view His "equality with God" as something to cling to? Why did He become a man?

Notice the change in tone from verse 8 to verse 9. How would you describe how the tone of the scripture changes? What had to happen in verse 8 in order for verses 9-11 to become reality?

As you go throughout your day today, find ways to imitate Christ's humility: take on the position of a servant so that God is glorified!

Thursday, December 24th, 2020

"God and Sinners Reconciled"

Colossians 1:15-20; Isaiah 43:10-13

15 Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.
He existed before anything was created and is
supreme over all creation,
16 for through him God created everything
in the heavenly realms and on earth.
He made the things we can see
and the things we can't see—
such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in
the unseen world.
Everything was created through him and for him.
17 He existed before anything else,
and he holds all creation together.
18 Christ is also the head of the church,
which is his body.
He is the beginning,
supreme over all who rise from the dead.
So he is first in everything.
19 For God in all his fullness
was pleased to live in Christ,
20 and through him God reconciled
everything to himself.
He made peace with everything in heaven and on
earth
by means of Christ's blood on the cross.

What is the relationship between the Father and Son?

What do you think this statement means: "Christ is the visible image of the invisible God?" What had to happen in order for this to be true?

What parts of the Christmas story are evident in this passage? If you asked Paul what the Christmas story was all about, which sentence from this passage do you think he'd recite to you?

Think deeply today as you celebrate with friends, family and at Christmas Eve Service tonight about what the statement in "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" means when it says "God and sinners reconciled."

Friday, December 25th, 2020

"The Christmas Story According to God"

Titus 2:11-14; Psalm 67

11 For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. **12** And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, **13** while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. **14** He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds.

Advent points back to Jesus' birth and forward to His second coming. Where do you see these two ideas in this scripture?

Why did Jesus come in flesh according to Paul?

Merry Christmas! My prayer for you today is that you trust that Jesus came to free you from every sin, to cleanse you, and to make you His own! Celebrate the King in the manger, the King on the cross, and King risen from the grave, seated at the right hand of the Father - for that is the Christmas Story according to God.

The Christmas Story According to God

I breathed the breath of life into my most treasured creation. I placed them in a paradise full of every good thing...they lacked for nothing. But because I desired a relationship with them, I gave them the freedom of will. They chose to follow their own path and listen to the Accuser. This brought them shame and suffering, but still I came looking for them.

They continually served their own interests, they worshipped other gods, they failed to listen to my words, they found themselves in slavery in Egypt, but still I came looking for them.

They inherited the land I promised to them, and still they grumbled. They asked for a king, when they knew the consequences. Their kings led them on a path to destruction, even in the midst of my prophets declaring my eternal truths. They were carried off into exile into a foreign land, but still I came looking for them.

They returned to their land, rebuilt a temple, and quickly turned my worship into empty traditions. They lorded over each other their self-righteousness. They refused to love mercy, seek justice, and maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. They were conquered by a powerful empire, but still I came looking for them.

They welcomed me with open arms because I did miracles. They called me hideous names. They ridiculed me as I hung on a cross. They tried to deny my resurrection. They were undeserving of life eternal, but still I came looking for them.

He is the only one worthy of praise and honor. He became like us to save us. He is everything that is good and true in this world. He humbly came in a manger. He worked powerful miracles. He died to save us of our sins, and was raised to life to raise us to life.

Are you like a wise man or shepherd: have you come looking for Him? Find peace this Christmas in Jesus Christ.

FBC Tyrone - 305 Arrowood Rd - Tyrone, GA
Join us for Advent Services each Sunday at 10:45AM