



# 2025 Weekly Devotions

Week of: December 22<sup>nd</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup>

Christmas Themed



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH  
building community ◦ equipping believers ◦ serving Jesus



December 22

**Micah 5:2**

Let me preface this week's devotions by acknowledging two truths. First, our scheduling for the end of the year has gotten rather "cattywampus". I must admit that I had to google how to spell such a fantastic word, but I do believe the term fits better than any other word in my vocabulary! My grandfather used to say that things were "cattywampus" when they got all disheveled and that seems to fit the last few weeks at Smyrna. Due to circumstances beyond our control, the Christmas musical was moved back a week which means that devotions (which are written days in advance) for the musical were released the week before the musical which means that we needed to find a topic for this week's devotions.

Second, this week's devotions won't be based on any sermon or musical. Instead, I have decided to walk through a few Christmas-themed devotions and I want to do so by utilizing a book that one of our church members graciously gifted me. Tom Ascol wrote a marvelous little volume full of Christmas devotions. It has blessed me and this week's devotions are the fruit of that blessing!

Today's text reminds us that Christ was prophesied to be born in Bethlehem. That fact is not all that interesting to most of us. We have grown up hearing the stories of Jesus' birth which makes the town of Bethlehem a well-known locality for believers. Nevertheless, Bethlehem was not a highly esteemed place in antiquity. In fact, in Jesus' day, the town was relatively non-descript and unimportant.

As we consider the implications for this decision, we must be reminded that God's actions are always purposeful and this truth leads us to a question... what was God communicating in sending His Son to be born in such a place? The answer, I believe, is simple. God was showing us the Gospel truth that He is adept at using the simple, out of the way and largely ignored to bring about His redemptive truth plan.

Ascol summarizes this reality quite nicely saying, "Bethlehem was not chosen to be the birthplace of Jesus because it was a great city that had so much going for it. On the contrary, God chose that little town of no great renown so that He might be seen as great. He does the same thing in God. We have nothing to offer Him. The fact that you are a child of God today is a testimony to His grace and mercy... All praise goes to Him and to Him alone."

December 23

**Micah 5:2**

Jesus was born some 2000 years ago. His coming was miraculous and celebrated, but the Person who took on flesh and dwelt among us did not originate in His mother's womb. Instead, texts like John 1 remind us that Jesus existed "in the beginning." This phrasing hearkens the reader all the way back to the book of Genesis when the Bible shares with us that God existed "in the beginning" before all things were made.

The point is unmistakable and mysterious. The Lord was physically born. In the flesh, the Son of God was conceived and brought forth as an infant but, in God's Providence and consistent with His attributes, the Messiah had always been and will always be. This kind of language can be confusing. The church has struggled for years with the way that God's humanity and His enduring Divinity can be both combined and yet distinguished. I don't pretend to think I can reconcile that issue in a page devotion, but I do believe it is important to be reminded that this combination of life at birth and eternity from the beginning is consistent with the biblical witness.

One example would be found in Micah 5, whereby we learn that the Messiah would "come forth (meaning be born or take on human life) from of old, from ancient of days." If you are familiar with biblical terminology, you will immediately recognize the significance of the term "ancient of days". This is a name that is often used of the Lord and, therefore, the reader becomes aware, quite quickly, that the Messiah that is prophesied about in Micah 5 is not simply a prophet, He is God... in the flesh!

Ascol summarizes this truth well writing, "The child would be born a ruler, a king and He is also eternal. His "coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." These two phrases- from of old and from ancient days- point to the antiquity of the coming King. After tracing the ways, they are used in the rest of the Old Testament, Edwards concludes that this is what God is saying to us, 'in Bethlehem shall the Messiah be born of his mother, who is begotten not by any man, but by me only as his Father.'"

What a statement! The One that showed up on that first Christmas morning may have had Mary as His earthly mother, but in reality, He was the only begotten Son of the most High God. What a mystery, what a miracle, what a blessing!

December 24

**Luke 1:26-30**

Mary is an important, but polarizing, figure in the Christmas story. Unfortunately, the Roman Catholic Church has warped the understanding of Mary's significance over the years. Many in that stream have attempted to make her into a demi-god, granting her a significance and even bestowing upon her an intrinsic innocence that denies the biblical revelation of the pervasive sin of ALL mankind (including Mary) and exalts her to a standing that only Christ should enjoy as our Lord and Savior.

Nevertheless, the pendulum can swing too far in the other direction for those who are Protestant. Sometimes, a figure like Mary can be overlooked. She was unassuming and unaware of God's plan. She was young and scared but also blessed and highly favored. The truth is that Mary was given a front row seat to seeing God grow in His humanity.

Can you imagine the stories she could tell? Can you consider what it must have been like to see the One who was long prophesied about at your dinner table? What a joy and honor it must have been and what an undeserved blessing.

We get a glimpse of the grace she enjoyed in Luke 1 when the Angels refer to her as the "favored one". Ascol writes, "There was nothing in her to make her "worthy", but she was favored by God. The word in verse 28 that most reputable translations render "favored one" could be literally translated, "one who has been graced." The idea is not that God somehow noticed fullness of grace in Mary. Rather, God granted her grace; He set His favor on her. She was blessed not because she had accomplished something on her own merit. She was blessed because God- out of sheer grace- blessed her. In this she typifies every child of God!"

Mary is representative of us all in this sense. She received what she did not deserve because God, in His mercy, chose her to be a vessel of salvation. She was not looking for the job, she had nothing on her resume to earn the responsibility, but God gave it anyway because this is what He does. Folks, Mary is like the rest of us. She was a sinner who needed the salvation of the One she would deliver. She was gloriously blessed to be able to walk and talk with Christ but, when He died, He died as much for her sins as He did for the sins of the rest of the world.

December 25

**Luke 1:38**

Merry Christmas to you! I pray that you will have, or have had, a marvelous day of worship and fellowship as we consider the blessing of Christ's coming to Earth. Please know that Pastor Robert and I consider you a great blessing and we are so thankful for God's gift of salvation which is so evident in the lives of our people at Smyrna.

Sometimes, the Lord's plan makes us... uncomfortable! Have you noticed that following Christ inevitably puts you in positions that are hard and trying? If so, then Mary serves as a great encouragement and reminder that there is nothing unusual happening to you! Mary and Joseph presumably had many plans for the way their relationship was going to unfold and the idea of her conceiving a child in her virginity was certainly not on the list! Furthermore, the responsibility and weight of caring for God as He grew must have been overwhelming at times.

This being the case, her response in Luke 1:38 to all of this revelation is nothing short of astounding. When told by the angel of the plans of God, Mary eventually responds saying, "Behold I am the servant of the Lord." What a statement of faith and humility! Ascol writes, "This was a confession of her lowliness before the Lord. The word 'servant' means slave. She accepted that she was not the master of her own destiny. This is true for all of us but is often hard to remember- man plans his course, but the Lord directs. Mary acknowledged that the Lord was in control of her life- she was just a maidservant, but He is the Lord. Not only did she confess her relationship to the Lord, but having done so, she humbly accepted the disruption as God's work saying, 'Let it be to me according to your Word.' She didn't choose it or anticipate it. But when convinced that this was God's design, she embraced it. She did this despite the potential cost and personal loss, and despite many unanswered questions."

What a great example of faith! Mary had many reasons to be nervous or even belligerent, but she accepted the Word of God and the plan of God and resolved to follow Him as God's "servant". How about you? Perhaps this Christmas season takes place in the midst of a time in your life where your plans just aren't working out the way that you thought they might. Perhaps God has opened a door or closed one! Maybe He has called you to something extremely challenging or perhaps you are disappointed and even disillusioned with the way things have worked out in your life lately.

If so, remember the example of Mary! She also had her life turned upside down, but she handled the development with grace and trust and, as such, she stands as a great example for us to emulate in our own times of testing.

December 26

**Luke 1:46-47**

What does it take for you to worship? Do you need every one of your questions answered and all of your fears assuaged before you will exalt the Lord? I fear that many people feel that a prerequisite for their praise is complete and total understanding and comfort. Some people struggle with exaltation when things go sideways. They struggle to exalt the name of the Lord when there are difficulties or quandaries that they cannot seem to overcome. If that is you, consider the response of Mary to this world-changing revelation she received in chapter 1.

Verses 46 and 47 record for us the words of Mary as she begins to ponder the things she had heard from the Lord in her heart. She “rejoices” in what she had heard. Why? Not because she could see how it all would work out. Not because she immediately knew that the struggle was going to subside and not even because she knew how Joseph would take the news! She rejoiced because God had spoken and He had revealed incredible things about His future plans.

Ascol writes, “The word ‘rejoice’ in this passage carries an extra dimension of emotional depth that is not as evident in the other words translated as ‘rejoice’. The Old English word ‘exult’ gets at its meaning. It means to take great delight in something or to make much of someone or something. When Mary tells us that her spirit has rejoiced in God her Savior, she is saying that she has been emotionally overwhelmed by the greatness and goodness of God.”

This idea of being overwhelmed by God’s greatness stands at the very heart of worship. Why do we sing? Why do we marvel and pour out our adoration? Because we have been overwhelmed by Him! We are overwhelmed by His grace, His faithfulness, His matchless wisdom, His goodness and His promises and, catch this, none of those things require that we understand every aspect of His ultimate plan. Mary didn’t know exactly how Jesus’ life would play out. She didn’t understand all of the twists and turns and she knew that this! There were certainly things she didn’t grasp yet, but she was still found rejoicing because she knew enough to know that God had spoken, that He was good and that He had a plan for her.

The same is true today! I don’t know what my future holds entirely but I do know who holds my future. Furthermore, I know what He has done in the past to secure my future for me and that is reason enough to lift Him up in adoration!

December 27

**Luke 1:67**

Zechariah is an interesting figure in the Christmas story. You'll recall that he would become the father of John the Baptist and yet when he was told of the Lord's plan to bring forth the forerunner through Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth, Zechariah laughed! He laughed because he didn't believe the Lord and this lack of faith rendered him mute for 9 months! 9 months is a long time to be silent, yet it evidently did Zechariah a world of good because the Lord untied his tongue in Luke 1 and the result was praise.

Whereas Zechariah was reticent to believe at first, by the time we arrive at the latter portion of Luke 1, he was exalting the Lord in confidence that all that had been promised in and through Christ's arrival would come to pass. The truth is that the 9 months of suffering had born faith in Zechariah's heart and, as such, he stands as a great reminder that hardship can be fruitful for the believer.

Zechariah's response is a classic example of what it looks like to simply believe God. Ascol writes, "While we look back on Christmas, Zechariah is looking forward to that event when he speaks the words of our text. He is speaking of promises, but he is doing so with complete confidence. Think about this: nine months earlier he could not even believe that God would give him a son. Now he is totally confident that God is going to save His people through another Son, yet to be born. This is the way that faith works. It takes the future promises of God and turns them into present certainties. Realities that seem distant and uncertain are brought near and shown to be certain through faith."

Do you have this kind of faith today? Zechariah surely understood the many "challenges" to believing Mary's story and yet he believed anyway. How about us? When we look at the world around us, are we tempted to believe that God's promises of future blessing and restoration are too good to be true? When we consider the challenges in front of us, do we praise the Lord in faith anyway? If not, let Zechariah be an example of a man who praised God in the middle of the journey!

I so desperately want my life to be one of worship. I pray that the Lord would give me faith and sustain me in the middle of difficulties to the degree that I can sing for joy at the knowledge of what is sure to come!

December 28

**Luke 1:68**

There is a famous story from World War II about President Franklin D. Roosevelt secretly visiting the troops during military conflict. The story is recounted through the eyes of those who were on the front lines. They tell of the encouragement and strength his presence gave them and the respect that he garnered by risking his own life to see their plight. His very presence in the battle gave him great credibility as the Commander in Chief because he took the time to live what they lived for a moment, showing that he cared about them and was grateful for their service.

In a very real sense, the Lord Jesus is the preeminent example of this kind of leadership. He is not a God who barks out orders from His throne in paradise without any knowledge of our plight or challenges. Instead, He is a God who took on flesh, dwelt on this fallen planet and endured the suffering and hardship that we experience, in this world, daily.

Jesus came near to us. He entered space and time in order to redeem us. He shows us His love and mercy and faithfulness by becoming one of us so that He could die to secure us for Himself for all eternity. Ascol writes, "In the birth of Christ, God has come near. He visited us and entered our experience by becoming one of us. That is exactly what the prophet Isaiah said would happen seven hundred years before. In Isaiah 7:14 he wrote, 'Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel'... This is what we celebrate at Christmas- that salvation has come through the redeeming presence of God."

Do you celebrate the coming of the Lord for this reason today? I pray that you have taken the time to ponder afresh the joy and beauty of the Gospel of Christ. The very fact that Jesus showed up at all says something remarkable about His love and commitment to us! Just as it would have been easier and safer for FDR to stay in the Oval Office, so it would have been far less demanding and more comfortable for the Lord to stay in glory. Nevertheless, because He loves us, He became "God with us" and because He became God with us, we can spend eternity with Him! Grace upon grace, we are blessed by the coming of the Lord, and this is the reason why the season of Christmas is to be celebrated by followers of Christ.