

Good NEWS OF GREAT Joy



THE GOSPEL IN 25 WORDS FOR ADVENT

"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.
FOR UNTO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY IN
THE CITY OF DAVID A SAVIOR,
WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD.'"

LUKE 2:10-11

The angel announced to the shepherds good news of great joy, and we are going to spend the first 25 days of December unpacking exactly what this good news is all about. And each day, we are going to use one word to tell part of the gospel story.

We pray you will make it your daily priority this Advent to gather your family or household along with the rest of the church family to use this small book to help you better understand and remember the great joy of the great news of Christmas. Whether you are a child, teen, single adult, married adult, parent with children at home, empty nester, or senior, we encourage you to set aside time each day to go over a page in this booklet and worship Jesus.

If you have other people in your home, gather with them and go through this book together. For those already accustomed to worshipping together on a regular basis, we hope these devotions will help enrich this time. For those not currently in the practice of having daily Family Worship, we pray this will be an easy starting place and model for you to continue with your family even after Christmas.

Good NEWS OF GREAT Joy

THE GOSPEL IN 25 WORDS

Racine Bible Church Advent 2023

For Kids

GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY PUZZLE KIT

In addition to our advent booklet this year, each child is encouraged to pick up a Good News of Great Joy Puzzle kit from the church lobby or the table in the Crosswalk hallway. If you'd like to print it yourself, you can download all puzzle pieces from our Advent page: www.racinebible.org/advent.

Before your family reads the Scripture and devotion each day, each child should find the puzzle piece with the word for that day on it (each piece is also numbered with the day of the month). While the Advent devotion is read, each child can color or decorate that day's puzzle piece. When the singing and prayer time is complete, cut out the puzzle piece and tape it to the previous day's piece (Hint: the thick lines on the pieces are the border to the puzzle). At the end of the month, all 25 pieces together will reveal a shape representing the good news of great joy we've been talking about all month.

We'd love to see your puzzle when it is finished! If you are able, take a picture with your puzzle and email it to: buthe@racinebible.org by December 30 so we can share it with the church family via social media and on the big screens before a service!

READ ALOUD VIDEOS

While the Puzzle Kit is to be used daily, we have also put together three read aloud videos for families to use at any point during Advent. These are three of our favorite Christmas books for kids, and we've turned them into read aloud videos so your child can experience the truth and beauty of the Christmas story in a variety of ways.

READ ALOUD #1:

The Christmas Promise
by Alison Mitchell



READ ALOUD #2:

The Night Before Christmas
by Oliver Lancaster



READ ALOUD #3:

The Kingdom of God Bible Storybook
New Testament, Chapter 1
by Tyler Van Halteren



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK:

(Please read this page before you begin.)

Each day you will be asked to do four things: read, discuss, sing, and pray.

READ

1. Read in your Bible the portion of Scripture listed in this booklet.
2. Read the short devotion that follows.

*If you desire to access this booklet electronically, you can view and/or download the entire PDF on the church website at: www.racinebible.org/advent

DISCUSS

1. Discuss the questions provided each day with your family/household.
2. If the questions provided for each day do not generate discussion, come up with additional questions in response to the text read.

SING

(Don't skip this part even if you don't normally sing at home!)

1. Each day, you will sing a song directly related to the Scripture you read and discussed.
2. Over the course of the twenty-five days, we will be singing eight different songs (each song is sung three-four days) to help those unfamiliar with some of these Christmas songs learn them.
3. We have recorded a lyric video of each of the songs used in this booklet and put a QR code on each page so you can easily access each day's video. These recordings were created to help aid your family in singing, and the lyrics on the screen will change as you sing along. The accompaniment and vocal part has been intentionally kept simple to not distract from your singing. This was not recorded or produced with the intent that it would just be listened to. In addition to the QR code, all videos can be viewed on the RBC website's Advent page (www.racinebible.org/advent).
4. You may choose to sing without accompaniment or have someone in your home accompany the singing on an instrument if you have someone willing and able to play, so all of the lyrics to the songs are printed in the back of this book. Additional copies can be viewed, downloaded, and printed on the RBC website: www.racinebible.org/advent.

PRAY

1. Spend time in prayer each day at the close of this time of worship. There are specific prayer prompts written at the bottom of each page.
2. Be creative with this. Have one person in your family pray, assign each person in your family a different day of the week to pray, have everyone pray each night, use a combination of these ideas, or any other way that is helpful to your family/household. Prayer is a gift of God's grace to us, so try and help those you pray with see prayer is a great privilege to communicate with the Father.

DECEMBER 1: CURSE

Curse refers to the fact that God inflicted terrible consequences upon our world as a price for human rebellion.

"And to Adam He said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life.'"
Genesis 3:17

READ: GENESIS 3:1-24

Have you ever wondered why so many people complain about their jobs? Or why life seems to be so hard sometimes? Do you ever think about what it would be like if we never had to worry about natural disasters or disease or pain?

The fact is that we live in a world that has been cursed. The curse on our world was placed there by God Himself, in response to the sin of the first man. It was Adam who broke the law of God, but it was the earth that God cursed. Because of that curse, justly placed on the earth as a consequence for man's disobedience, all of us experience frustrations, disappointments, and grief in this life. No one is immune from the pain of the curse. The truth is that there is no place in our universe that hasn't been touched by the destruction caused by human sin.

And yet, just as it was the Lord God who placed the curse on our world due to sin, it was also the Lord God who saw to it that the curse would be reversed. The Bible is essentially one long story of how the Lord has gone about rescuing mankind from the curse of sin. There needed to be a way for the curse to be "spent up," so to speak. And so the Lord determined to exhaust the curse of sin by becoming a curse for us.

In our sin, we have all broken God's law. Yet "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us- for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'" (Galatians 3:13). God sent His Son Jesus into the world to die on a cross for the sins of the world. Now all of those who know Christ can sing with Isaac Watts:

No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground.
He comes to make His blessings known, far as the curse is found.

DISCUSS

Read Revelation 21:1-4. What does this passage have to do with reversing the curse of sin? What do you most look forward to about living in a world where there is no more curse?

SING

Joy to the World



PRAY

Worship the Lord Jesus Christ because, though He had no sin of His own, He willingly took the curse of sin upon Himself. Pray that your heart would be full of gratitude for Christ this year at Christmas.

DECEMBER 2: SUBSTITUTION

Substitution refers to something or someone standing in the place of something or someone else.

"But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed."

Isaiah 53:5

READ: ISAIAH 53:1-12

The word for today is substitution, and this is a word we most likely readily understand. Some of the words we will look at this Advent season will be words primarily used in the context of doctrinal conversations, but substitution is a word we probably use more in everyday life situations. We understand that a substitute teacher is one who steps in for a teacher when that main teacher is sick or on vacation. We know substitution from the world of sports when one player does something in the place of another player. When it comes to cooking, we often will substitute one ingredient for another when we run out of the original ingredient or want to replace it with a healthier choice.

Sometimes substitutions are made out of necessity like when a teacher is gone or you run out of a particular ingredient in a recipe. Sometimes substitutions are made for a strategic reason or benefit like often in sports or when wanting to use a healthier ingredient in cooking.

When we speak of Jesus as our substitute, we are speaking about a substitution for necessity and benefit. Isaiah describes in many ways how Jesus stood in our place receiving the deadly consequences of our sin while He was without sin. Jesus needed to be our substitute, because no one else could. No one else was sinless. And we get the benefits of this substitution. If God the holy Father looked down on us without Jesus as our substitute, we would be the recipients of His wrath. Instead, our Substitute stood in our place, and God the holy Father sees our sin has been dealt with because He was pierced and crushed for our transgressions and iniquities.

DISCUSS

How does it make you feel to read Isaiah 53 and see all of the things you deserved because of your sin happening to Jesus? Who is someone you can tell this week about the good news that Jesus died in their place?

SING

What Child is This?



PRAY

Thank God the Father for Jesus, our perfect Substitute. Thank Him that you don't have to experience the crushing consequences Jesus took in your place. Ask Him to help you remember that without Jesus as your Substitute you would be crushed by God the holy Father.

DECEMBER 3: PROPHECY

Prophecy refers to telling about something that is going to happen before it has happened. There are many prophecies in the Old and New Testaments. But none of them are more important than the prophecies about Jesus Christ coming to earth for our salvation.

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.”

1 Peter 1:10-11

READ: 1 PETER 1:3-12

Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. What a thing to say!

We all know the feeling of having a family member or a friend leave us for a time. Maybe for something fun like a long vacation or maybe something serious like a soldier leaving for boot camp. In that experience we have seen our friend or family member, we just don't see them right now. That is kind of like Peter's experience. He had seen Jesus but he did not see Him right now.

But Peter's words here are bigger. He is talking to Christians who became Christians after Jesus rose from the dead and went back up to Heaven. They have never seen Him. And then, surprisingly, from talking to the people he is writing to in the present, he flips back to the past and says that everyone who wrote in the Old Testament had also never seen Jesus. But they all wrote about the salvation and the grace that Jesus would bring.

It is good for us to remember this Advent that all of Scripture in the Old Testament looked forward to the coming of Jesus, and all of Scripture in the New Testament looks back to the coming of Jesus. And now we look forward to Him coming again!

DISCUSS

Peter says in verse 8 that though you don't see Him, you believe in Him, love Him, and rejoice in Him. What does it mean to believe in Jesus? How do you show your love for Him? How do you rejoice in Him?

SING

O Come, All Ye Faithful
(His Name Shall Be)



PRAY

Praise Jesus for appearing to Peter and the other apostles during His life and after His resurrection. Praise Jesus for leading the prophets to write about Him so long before He appeared on this earth. Ask God to help give you faith and love for Jesus even though you have not seen Him yet.

DECEMBER 4: SACRIFICE

Sacrifice means giving up something for someone else. Jesus shed His blood and gave up His life for the salvation of sinners.

"But as it is, He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

Hebrews 9:26b

READ: HEBREWS 9:11-28

Almost all of the key words in this passage come from the Old Testament. High priest, tent, holy place, blood, bulls, goats, and other key words. In the Old Testament, God instituted the sacrificial system. Why? To show us that sin brings death (v. 23). To show us that He was always making a way for our sins to be forgiven by a substitute. To point us forward to Jesus Christ (v. 11 and v. 12).

One really important phrase in this passage is "how much more" in verse 14. What are bulls, goats, calves, and lambs when we compare them to Jesus Christ? How much more is He?

Another important difference is that Jesus offered to sacrifice Himself willingly for us. Because He loved us. It is sad to imagine a lamb or a goat going to be sacrificed. But, in your imagination, you probably shouldn't imagine them going willingly. They probably bleated and kicked and had to be pushed and dragged toward the killing place. But Jesus went willingly. What a Savior!

DISCUSS

Has someone ever made a sacrifice for you? What was it? How did it make you feel? What words of response do you have today (thoughts, emotions, etc.) as you think about the sacrifice Jesus made for you?

SING

He Who is Mighty



PRAY

Praise Jesus for the "how much more" in verse 14. Thank God for "eternal redemption" (v. 12), and for "eternal inheritance" (v. 15). Praise God for salvation that does not have to be "repeated" but that instead is "once for all" (v. 26). Finally, in prayer, look forward to the promised return of verse 28.

DECEMBER 5: HUMILITY

Humility is a modest or low view of one's own importance.

"And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Philippians 2:8

READ: PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

Have you ever noticed that when you see yourself in a group photograph posted on social media, you quickly scan to see how you look in the picture? It doesn't matter if the lighting is perfect, the background is flawless and all your friends and family in the shot looks great, if your eyes happen to be closed or you don't look flattering, you don't like the picture. This is a silly example that shows how human beings always seem to be thinking of themselves and how life revolves around them. Jesus, however, calls His followers to a different mindset.

In today's reading, God commands us to "in humility count others as more significant than ourselves." Now that seems impossible! The good news is that our Heavenly Father knows we are incapable of living that way in our own strength, but as we draw near to Jesus in His Word, as well as asking Him for help in prayer, the Holy Spirit enables us as His followers to live this way.

It has been said that humility is not thinking less of yourself, rather thinking of yourself less. This Christmas season, instead of falling into the all too common rut of desiring the world and people to revolve around you and your needs, try focusing on Jesus and "consider others more significant than yourself." This Sunday at church, attempt to live this truth out in your ABF class. Before and after class, don't wait for people to come up to you, seek them out, ask them good questions and maybe even pray for them and watch how the Lord meets you in that moment of self-forgetfulness. You will find that God does in fact give grace to the humble!

DISCUSS

What are some other practical ways you can attempt to imitate Jesus this Christmas by "counting others more significant than yourself"?

SING

Away in a Manger
(Forever Amen)



PRAY

Pray that God would help you to be more interested in people. Ask Him to help you learn and practice self-forgetfulness.

DECEMBER 6: BELIEF

Belief is trust or confidence in a Person.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. "

John 3:16

READ: JOHN 3:1-21

Have you ever known someone who at one time claimed to believe in Jesus, attended church with you, and possibly even was baptized and joined the church as a member? But after the passing of time, they were nowhere to be found. If you are someone who loves Jesus, this is most likely unsettling and even upsetting. It is helpful to remember that this often happened with people who claimed to believe in Jesus when He was on earth and still happens sometimes today.

In the verses leading up to today's reading, John 2:23 says that many "believed in His name when they saw the signs He was doing." The next verse, however, states "but Jesus did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all people, and needed no one to bear witness about man, for He Himself knew what was in man." Here God is showing all of us that mere intellectual belief and a positive profession of faith is not enough to save someone. God's supernatural intervention is necessary. You must be born again. Only Jesus can change a human heart.

Only the Holy Spirit has the power and authority to make someone come alive and truly trust and believe savingly in Jesus. Jesus went on to say in John 3 that, "The wind blows wherever it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Although much like the wind, God's Holy Spirit cannot be seen or explained satisfactorily, we can see the effects in a person's changed life.

It is exciting to see when someone becomes born again because everything about that person changes and becomes new, especially their lifestyle. Ultimately, true belief always results in action, as the Bible declares in James 2:26, "faith apart from works is dead." It has also been said, if your faith hasn't changed you, it probably hasn't saved you. Has your faith and trust in Jesus changed you?

DISCUSS

Romans 13:14 says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh." Is there evidence in your personal life that you have saving faith in Jesus Christ? Have you "put on the Lord Jesus" like a skydiver puts on a parachute or like a deep sea diver puts on scuba gear? Do you trust Him today like you would trust a parachute while skydiving or scuba gear while deep sea diving?

SING

Hark, the Herald Angels Sing



PRAY

Pray like the father in Mark 9:24 who said, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!"

DECEMBER 7: JUSTIFICATION

Justification is a legal term which amounts to a declaration that a person is righteous or just. It is essentially a “not guilty” verdict.

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

Romans 3:23-24

READ: ROMANS 3:21-31

Imagine you watch a movie where a man committed a crime. An investigation is undertaken. The detectives work night and day to solve the crime. All of the evidence points to the suspect, an evil and unlikable man. There is a dramatic court scene at the end of the movie, and all the signs point to a guilty verdict. But in the end, the criminal goes free. As it turns out, the man was wealthy and had paid the judge to dismiss the case.

What would you think of such a judge? He is unjust. Wicked. Corrupt.

Our God is a judge, but he is just, holy, and pure. His judgments are always true and always right. And He has judged mankind and found us all guilty. We are sinners because we sin, and we sin because we are sinners. “None is righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). God cannot and will not ignore sin; He will not let the guilty go unpunished. And our punishment is eternal death: “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

If a just God absolutely must punish the guilty, what hope do we sinners have? Our only hope is to have our sin taken away; to be found “not guilty.” This is the glory and the wonder and the mystery of justification: that sinners could be declared righteous and just by a holy God, who knows everything we have ever done and said and thought. How can this be?

This is the reason that Jesus came: to take away our sins by His death on the cross. He didn’t just take our punishment; He took our sins upon Himself. We could never be declared righteous on our own merit, but we have been declared righteous through faith in Jesus Christ. Everyone who belongs to Christ can celebrate Christmas knowing that they are fully and eternally declared: not guilty!

DISCUSS

How do you feel if you do something wrong but don’t get caught? How is justification different than merely getting away with sin?

SING

Come, Thou
Long-Expected Jesus



PRAY

Praise God for the gift of justification. Pray that the Lord would help you to live as one who is no longer gripped by the power of sin and no longer guilty before God.

DECEMBER 8: MERCY

Mercy is compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish.

"...He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit..."

Titus 3:5

READ: TITUS 3:1-11

What's so great about mercy? It doesn't really mean much to someone until they realize that they desperately need it! That's why Paul takes the time to remind Titus and the Christians who would read this letter of who they actually are without Jesus and His saving work. Unfortunately once we are saved by His wonderful mercy, we sometimes drift away from that mercy and tend to think much more highly of ourselves and our meager efforts than we ought. As a result, Titus 1:3 states, "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another." Not a very flattering list of who we really are, but a truthful and helpful one for sure.

Paul writes this to remind every follower of Jesus how necessary and wonderful God's mercy really is no matter who we are or what we have attained.

Have you forgotten what bad shape you were in before Jesus saved you, or who you actually are apart from God's mercy? Forgetting or neglecting God's mercy can cause a Christian's heart to become hard and judgmental towards other sinners. May we not forget this Christmas season how much it cost God to personally grant us mercy. "For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13).

DISCUSS

What did it cost God to grant you mercy? Are you thankful for the mercy you have received?

SING

He Who is Mighty



PRAY

Pray like the humble tax collector in Luke 18:13, "Have mercy on me, a sinner!"

DECEMBER 9: LIGHT

Light is the natural agent that stimulates sight and makes things visible.

**"I have come into the world as Light, so that whoever believes
in Me may not remain in darkness."**

John 12:46

READ: JOHN 12:27-50

In the 1989 baseball fantasy movie *Field of Dreams*, the lead character Ray Kinsella is a crop farmer played by Kevin Costner who hears a voice that he cannot ignore. The voice tells Ray to plow up his crop, build a baseball field on it, and famous baseball players who have died will come back and play on the field. Ray heeds the voice and at great financial cost, builds the field. And the players do come, however, only Ray and a select few can see the players. Ray's chief antagonist is his brother-in-law who also remains in the dark and cannot see the players until at the climatic moment in the movie when he finally sees the light.

Much like the aforementioned movie, today's Scripture passage shows Jesus crying out, "I have come in the world as Light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness."

Each of us personally know and love many people who have not yet believed in Jesus, and as a result we realize that they are still in the dark. Much like the brother-in-law in *Field of Dreams*, these people will adamantly profess that they are not in the dark at all, but as those in the light, we know better.

Jesus is the light of the world. Each born again Christian who has received Jesus as Lord has experienced His light entering us at the moment of our conversion, and as a result we do not remain in darkness. May this truth cause you to rejoice in the God of your salvation and break your heart over those who are still stumbling around in the dark.

DISCUSS

Where would you be if the Light of the World did not have mercy on you?
How can you let your light shine in this dark world?

SING

Silent Night



PRAY

Pray that God would remind you of your life before He saved you, and ask Him to make you more loving and prayerful for those still in the dark.

DECEMBER 10: REIGN

Reign means to rule as a king.

"For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder..."

Isaiah 9:6a

READ: ISAIAH 9:1-7

Reign means to rule as a king. The king who reigns poorly does so selfishly so that the people under his care suffer with needs unmet and injustices unaddressed. But the king who reigns rightly reigns with a selfless, sacrificial care and concern for his people. The people's needs being met and the people's lives being guarded and guided by righteousness and justice—these are his main concerns.

You can probably all think of a teacher or a coach or a leader who reigned poorly. You suffered because they did not rule and lead well. Maybe they were selfish to the point of being criminals, stealing for themselves what should have been given to others. Maybe they were just lazy and uncaring, so that they did not lift a hand to help others who were suffering. Maybe they were deceitful so that darkness and lies grew larger and larger while the truth was nowhere to be found. How did this make you feel? How did it affect other people around you?

Now you can read this beautiful description of Jesus and see the absolute opposite of the situation you just thought about. Read through this passage and list out everything it says about how Jesus rules and also everything it says about how that affects His people.

Notice, in the end of verse 7, how everything that has just been described is accomplished. By what power? The Lord does it. Jesus saves sinners who cannot save themselves. Jesus is the wise ruler who provides for His people what they could never provide for themselves. Jesus is the King who wins the victory for His people that they could never win for themselves.

DISCUSS

What is one of your favorite aspects of Jesus as King mentioned in the portion of Scripture read today? How does knowing that Jesus reigns over all help you joyfully endure when earthly leaders fail?

SING

O Come, All Ye Faithful
(His Name Shall Be)



PRAY

Pray using the four names listed in verse 6. Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor, so admit to Him that you do not know what you need to know. Ask Him to give you the counsel and guidance that you need. Jesus is the Mighty God, so tell Him that you rely on His power and strength. There are many things that He will call you to, but you can only do them by relying on your Mighty God and Savior. Jesus is the Everlasting Father. This means that you belong to Him and are welcomed into His family of love. Praise and thank Him for this blessing of belonging. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. We did not have peace with God, but in Jesus, now we do. Praise Him and rest in the peace He provides.

DECEMBER 11: PREPARATION

Preparation means to make ready.

“...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.”

Luke 1:17

READ: LUKE 1:5-25

Is your Christmas tree up? When did you put it up? Are you an after Thanksgiving family or are you part of the ever-growing November 1 decorators? Whether you fall into one of these groups or another, everyone does something to prepare for Christmas. Some go all out with decorations and lights. Some spend most of the month in the kitchen preparing food. Some spend hours upon hours cleaning before guests arrive. Some start buying presents in November (or earlier). Some even save money all year long for Christmas, setting a little bit aside every month starting at the beginning of each new year. Whoever you are, however you do it, everyone spends time preparing for Christmas. If you are reading this book, you are preparing for Christmas, because the purpose of this book is to get you spiritually prepared for Christmas.

And we see in today's verses that this was the primary role of John the Baptist- to help get people ready for Jesus. No, he didn't bake Christmas cookies or wrap presents- John's preparation wasn't outward, it was inward. Luke 1:17 (above) identifies the way John helped the people prepare for Jesus- by helping them deal with their hearts so their hearts would be ready for Jesus. Can you imagine having a bunch of guest show up for a Christmas meal and you had forgotten to get the meal ready? Or can you imagine sitting by the Christmas tree to open presents only to realize no one remembered to buy them? As alarming as these situations would be, imagine how horrific it would be if Jesus came to earth and no one's heart was ready?

John had an important job to do through the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15), and today's encouragement is for you to make sure your heart is prepared for Jesus to work in you and through you this Advent. Don't be so busy with all of the other preparations that you miss preparing the most important thing for Christmas: your heart.

DISCUSS

Why is it important to have your heart prepared for Christmas? How can you help prepare your heart for Christmas? Who can help you with this preparation? Who can you help prepare in this way?

SING

Joy to the World



PRAY

Thank God for His work in your heart, and ask Him to continue to work in your heart this month. Ask Him to help you see and seize opportunities to fix your heart and eyes on Him.

DECEMBER 12: FAVOR

Favor refers to God's unmerited grace, goodness, or blessing.

"And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary,
for you have found favor with God.'"

Luke 1:30

READ: LUKE 1:26-45

Two times in our reading today the angel Gabriel mentioned God's favor on Mary. He greets her as the "favored one" (v. 28) and tells her to not be afraid because she has found favor with God (v. 30). What exactly does this mean? Does this mean that Mary achieved some level of sinless perfection to earn God's favor as if we too might be viewed by God with such esteem if we try hard enough? You can probably tell by the way that last sentence was worded that the answer to that question is a resounding "no!" God's favor is only a result of His holiness, wisdom, and love.

About two months ago, we covered the life of Noah in our ABFs, and the same is said about Noah in Genesis 6:8. He found favor in the eyes of the Lord. This verse is given in contrast to the preceding verses where it is identified that God is going to kill every human and animal because of sin. The favor on Noah refers to God's willingness to spare Noah and his family by His grace. Yes, Noah walked with God (Genesis 6:9), and his "talk matched his walk," but Noah was not perfect.

In the same way, Mary wasn't perfect, and she knew it. In fact, she was troubled and confused in verse 29 by Gabriel's greeting. If God's favor on Mary was dependent on Mary's performance as a sinless person, then Mary would have every reason to be fearful. But the beauty and peace of what Gabriel declared to Mary was that what he was about to tell her was not because she was good, but because God is.

And we will see Mary's recognition of this tomorrow in her song of praise which basically takes on a "why me?" posture. Why has God been so good to me? We see this not only with Mary, but throughout the Christmas story in Scripture. We see it in today's reading with Elizabeth in verse 44 when she says, "Why am I so blessed to have the mother of my Lord come to visit me?"

If you are a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ, it isn't because you are perfect or deserving of salvation. It is God's favor to you. May this season be a great time of reflection as you ponder "why me?" Why has the Lord been so good to me?

DISCUSS

How has the Lord been good to you even when you haven't deserved it? What does God's favor show us about His holiness, wisdom, and love?

SING

What Child is This?



PRAY

Thank God for His abundant and undeserved goodness to you. Ask Him to forgive you for times when you have been forgetful and ungrateful for His goodness.

DECEMBER 13: MAGNIFICATION

Magnification refers to seeing something larger than you normally see it for the purpose of seeing it more clearly and accurately.

*"And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...'"*

Luke 1:46-47

READ: LUKE 1:46-56

What was the last thing you looked at through a magnifying glass? Maybe it was a bug as a kid or maybe when older, it was the small print of a book that was hard to read. Whatever the case may be, when magnifying something, you saw it as larger than you normally would and this helped you to see it more accurately. When looking at something in nature through a magnifying glass, we are able to see better the individual parts that make it up, whether the spots on a bug or the lines in a blade of grass. When using it on small print, magnifying it helps you to read it more quickly, easily, and accurately.

When it comes to the Lord, magnifying Him doesn't mean that we have the power to make Him bigger. But it does mean that we see Him bigger than we normally do. God's greatness is infinite, so we can't magnify Him enough. There will always be more details of His greatness that we will see when we magnify Him, and this will help us see Him more accurately. This is one of the primary reasons we worship- to see His greatness as greater than we have before, allowing us to see Him more accurately. And again, this is something we can't complete or exhaust on this side of heaven.

When Mary says in Luke 1:46, "My soul magnifies the Lord," this isn't just a catchy or clever way to start her song, she is defining the purpose of every line in her song. What follows in verses 47-55 is what she sees about the Lord as she magnifies Him. As you sing "He Who is Mighty" today, and as you sing with the church family on Sunday, take note of the words you sing. What specific words do you see about who God is and what He has done? These are just some of the things you can see about God as you magnify Him. Don't stop looking. There's more there than you will ever see here on earth.

DISCUSS

Change the order of "Discuss" & "Sing" today. First sing "He Who is Mighty," and as you do, think about what the song is telling you about the character and work of the Lord. Share these things together after you sing.

SING

He Who is Mighty



PRAY

Use the words describing the character and work of God from Luke 1 and the song "He Who Is Mighty" that you just discussed as the content of your prayers of thanks and praise to Him.

DECEMBER 14: REDEMPTION

Redemption is an action of freeing someone from bondage in exchange for a payment or clearing a debt.

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people..."
Luke 1:68

READ: LUKE 1:57-80

Some soda bottles and cans come printed with a notice of a "redemption price" for certain states. That is the amount of money (usually 5 or 10 cents) that you could receive if you turned the can or bottle into a recycling redemption center. For a handful of pennies, a bottle could be redeemed from ending up on a trash heap and instead be reclaimed and recycled into something new.

The Lord God is a redeeming God. He is very much in the business of rescuing and reclaiming what is broken, dirty, corrupt, and seemingly worthless. The most formative and significant event in the Old Testament was the redemption of Israel from Egypt. Time and again the Old Testament refers back to this event where God redeemed Israel out of her slavery and made her into His own precious people. In all of the centuries since the Exodus, the Jewish people would continue to celebrate this redemption.

But this act of redeeming Israel, as important as it was, was but a pale foreshadowing of the greater redemption that all of Israel longed for and prayed for. By the time Jesus was born, the Jewish people had set their hopes on the expectation that their long-awaited Messiah would come and redeem them from their sin, their misery, and their oppression.

This is what Zechariah was referring to when he blessed God in our verse above. It is true that many Jews had an expectation of redemption that was focused on the defeat of their political enemies rather than their own need of cleansing and forgiveness. Yet our text reveals that in the coming of Christ, the Lord had "raised up a horn of salvation" for His people (v. 69), bringing "knowledge of salvation" and "forgiveness of sins" (v. 77). God the Father sent His Son to redeem His people from the condemnation that their sins deserved. No longer would humans need to be slaves to their sin and in bondage to their guilt, for the Lord would pay the redemption price for all of His children with the blood of His dear Son.

DISCUSS

Imagine what it would feel like to be enslaved by a cruel and harsh master, with no prospect of ever gaining your freedom. What thoughts and feelings would dominate your mind and heart? Now imagine that you suddenly were not just given your freedom, but also elevated to a status of great wealth and privilege. How would you feel? What would you be thinking? How does this connect to our own status as those who had been slaves to sin and condemned to eternal death but have now been redeemed and set free?

SING

Away in a Manger
(Forever Amen)



PRAY

Thank God for the redemption that we have in Christ. Thank Jesus for His willingness to pay the redemption price with His own blood. Ask the Lord to help you live as one who is no longer enslaved to sin.

DECEMBER 15: EXPECTATION

Expectation is knowing that something is going to happen and adjusting how you live your life accordingly.

"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."

Luke 2:25

READ: LUKE 2:22-38

We talked about preparation a few days ago, and our word for today, expectation, is closely related. Expectation is the thing that comes before preparation. If there was no expectation, there would be no need for preparation. In other words, if you weren't expecting company for dinner, you would not need to prepare any more food than you would normally make for dinner. Another way of looking at it is that expectation should always lead to preparation. In other words, if you were expecting company for dinner, but didn't make any preparations, you would quickly find yourself with a problem on your hands.

Think about it regarding the weather. If you are expecting it to snow today, but you don't prepare for it and instead put on your shorts and T-shirt when it's time to leave the house, you would quickly regret that decision. Or if the forecast has no snow in it, why would you bundle up in your snow pants and snow boots?

In our verses today, Simeon and Anna show us what expectation and preparation should look like together. They didn't just occasionally talk about the coming of the Messiah, they devoted their entire lives to His coming. Simeon lived in righteousness (v. 25) waiting so expectantly for Jesus that when he finally saw Christ, his response was, "now I can die in peace" (v. 29). Anna did not depart from the temple and worshiped with fasting and prayer night and day (v. 37). And don't read verse 38 as if Anna, who was "advanced in years," just gave a calm and reserved "thank you" to God when she finally saw Christ. Luke says she thanked God and told ALL who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. Picture an elderly woman exuberantly running around telling everyone she could.

The greater the expectation and preparation, the greater the joy when what you are expecting and preparing for actually happens! May your expectation today not be only for December 25 which will come and go every year, but for the day Christ will return and we will be with Him for eternity!

DISCUSS

Does your life show you are expecting Jesus to come again? Why or why not? How can you become more expectant for Christ's return?

SING

Come, Thou
Long-Expected Jesus



PRAY

Thank the Lord for being faithful to His promises. Thank Him that you can trust in His promise to return. Ask Him to help you live expectantly for His return. Ask Him to help you live in such a way that this expectation is evident to those around you.

DECEMBER 16: RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation refers to a change in relationship between two people, from a state of enmity and division to a state of friendship and harmony.

"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."

Romans 5:10

READ: ROMANS 5:1-11

There is a story in the Bible about the twin brothers Jacob and Esau. To say the two were at odds with one another was quite an understatement. Esau hated Jacob and wanted to kill him, because Jacob had deceived their father Isaac into giving him the blessings that were supposed to go to the firstborn Esau. The situation was so dangerous that Jacob had fled from home to live with his uncle. What would happen when they saw each other again for the first time? Would it be cold shoulders and icy stares? A fistfight? Murder?

When they finally met after years apart, Jacob was the picture of humility and repentance. Esau, meanwhile, was exemplary in the way that he forgave his brother. The two embraced and wept tears of joy for being together again (Genesis 33:4). What a feeling of relief and happiness the two must have felt that night!

These two brothers were both sinners; Jacob may have played the greater part in their feud by his deceitful scheming, but Esau was not blameless in this situation. They both needed to soften their hearts toward one another and move in the other's direction in order to be reconciled to brotherly friendship once again.

The Bible teaches that we are all born as enemies of God. Our relationship with God is broken, and we are at odds with our Creator. But the fault lies only on one side. God has never wronged us; it is our sin that has caused our relationship with the Lord to be broken. As disappointing and frustrating it is to be at odds with a brother or sister or former friend, it is absolutely terrifying and depressing to be at odds with the God of the universe! And we have no one to blame for our situation but ourselves.

When we could not bridge the gap or make the peace with God because of our sin, God Himself took the initiative to reconcile us to Himself. This is why Jesus came: to die for God's enemies so that we could be transformed into God's friends. For those who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we now find ourselves "on God's side," and we have nothing to fear. If God was willing to give His Son to reconcile us to Himself, we can be guaranteed that we will experience eternal life with Him!

DISCUSS

Have you ever been in a disagreement or conflict with a friend? How did it feel to go through that? How did it feel to reconcile and forgive each other? Do you truly believe that you are fully reconciled to God? How does it feel to know that the God of the universe is on your side for eternity?

SING

Hark, the Herald Angels Sing



PRAY

Praise God for the privilege of being His friend. Worship Him in joy, realizing that God will not cast off those who belong to Him, and He will always work for the good of those who are His friends.

DECEMBER 17: GRACE

Grace is God's goodness toward those who do not deserve it. Grace is getting good blessings that you have not earned. Grace is one of the most important words in the Bible. We are saved by grace through faith.

"For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ."
Romans 5:17

READ: ROMANS 5:12-21

Verses 12-14 talk about sin and death. Sin deserves death. When sinners die, they get what they deserve. Grace is about getting what you don't deserve.

Verses 15-17 change everything when it talks about "the free gift" and "grace."

The contrast between sin and death, which are earned and deserved, and the free gift and grace, which are unearned, undeserved, and freely given, is one of the biggest contrasts in the whole Bible. And yet, in the middle of the contrast, there is a similarity. Both come from only one man, one representative who stood in the place of all people: Adam for sin and death, Jesus for justification and life and righteousness and the reign of grace.

If Adam, who was created perfect, fell into sin when he trusted himself and did not listen to God, what chance would any of us have if we trust ourselves and don't listen to God? Our only hope is to believe in Jesus and be saved by His grace.

DISCUSS

Can you think of a time when someone was gracious to you- when they blessed you when you didn't deserve it? How can you be gracious to someone today?

SING

Silent Night



PRAY

Confess that we are sinners and we need God's grace. Confess that, just like Adam, we often trust ourselves instead of listening to and obeying God. Since the gift of salvation is free, confess to God that you don't want to try to earn it. Tell Him you do not want to replace His grace with your own works. Humble yourself before the abundance of His grace.

DECEMBER 18: LOVE

Love is taking the worst for someone, so they get the best.

**"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us
and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."**

1 John 4:10

READ: 1 JOHN 4:7-21

What are some things that you love? What kinds of things come to your mind? Maybe you love pizza, Christmas presents, or holiday lights. Or maybe, when you think about love, you think about how you love your parents, your siblings, or your church family. God has given us so many things to enjoy, and it's great that we love so much of what He has given to us.

But, God's love goes deeper than our affection for pizza or even family. The kind of love that God talks about in the Bible is the deepest kind of love. His love is ultimate love. What is this ultimate kind of love that God has given to us? Jesus explained it like this: The greatest kind of love is giving up your life for your friends (John 15:13). This kind of love takes the worst for yourself and gives someone else the best. This is what ultimate love looks like.

True love like this means taking the hard chore for yourself, while giving someone else in your home the easier job. True love like this means listening to someone else and picking their preference, instead of getting to do what you want to do. True love like this means you help and serve others, rather than being the center of attention. This is so hard to do. In fact, it's impossible! How can we love others like this?

It is impossible unless we've first seen that this is exactly how Jesus has loved us. He took the worst for Himself. He took the whips, the nails, the cross, and the hell for us, because He loved us. He did this so we could get the best. Now, if we receive Him, we get the best- a relationship with God, forgiveness, a new heart, and eternal life. He took the worst for Himself, so we could get the best. That's true love!

Now, when you've been loved like that, you can begin to take the worst on yourself for others, so they can get the best. That's how Jesus' love changes us.

DISCUSS

How have you received this true biblical love (taking the worst so someone else gets the best) from someone other than God? Who can you show love to today? How are you going to do this?

SING

Joy to the World



PRAY

Thank God for sending Jesus, the ultimate example of love. Ask God to help you better understand and grasp how much Jesus truly loves you. Ask Him to help you better love your family and friends today by taking the worst, so they get the best.

DECEMBER 19: ADOPTION

Adoption is the act of leaving one's own natural family and entering into the privileges and responsibilities of another.

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

Galatians 4:4-5

READ: GALATIANS 4:1-7

Most people know something about the story of Annie, which was made into a Broadway musical and has had several movie adaptations. Annie's parents had died, and she lived in an orphanage run by the despicable Miss Hannigan. After meeting and spending a few days with the millionaire Oliver Warbucks, she eventually wins over his heart. After a number of shenanigans and dangerous plot twists, Annie is eventually adopted by "Daddy" Warbucks, and her life would never be the same. A life filled with dreary hard labor and a lack of familial love was replaced with a life of hope and a loving family.

Christians have a heart for adoption, praying for and supporting those who adopt, if not actually adopting children ourselves. This is because every Christian knows something of what it means to be adopted. We were all born into our natural families, but no Christian has ever remained a member only of a natural family. Whether our parents were Christians or not, whether we grew up in loving homes or not, none of us can be saved by being born into the right kind of family.

Contrary to what some in our world might think, none of us are naturally a part of God's family. We are born as slaves, not sons. Slaves had none of the rights and privileges that belonged to members of the family. It is only through Christ that we can lose our status as slaves and gain a new status as God's children.

And what a status that is! We no longer have to approach God in trembling fear and dread. Since we belong to Him as His children, we can call Him "Father" (v. 6). As a member of His family and as His dear child, He invites us to come to Him, never fearing His condemnation or rejection. Despite our ongoing failures and sins, we belong to Him securely forever. He will not cast aside any of His children, for "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Nothing will separate any one of His children from the love of Christ (Romans 8:38-39).

DISCUSS

What is the best thing about being part of a family? What is the best thing about being a part of God's family? What are some of the privileges we receive as God's children? What are some of the responsibilities we have as members of God's family?

SING

Hark, the Herald Angels Sing



PRAY

Praise the Lord for the privilege of being His child. Ask Him to remind you often that you are a beloved child of God. Pray for the grace to live like a child of God, reflecting your Father in all you do and say.

DECEMBER 20: SAVIOR

Jesus is the Savior means He saves us from our sins.

*"She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus,
for He will save His people from their sins."*

Matthew 1:21

READ: MATTHEW 1:18-25

Everybody loves watching a movie where, in the end, the hero saves the day. In these movies, villains capture a helpless person who cries out to be saved. They can't save themselves, so they call out to the superhero to save them. And, just in the nick of time, the superhero flies in, defeats the villain, and saves the helpless person. We love seeing the hero save people.

This verse in Matthew 1 tells us that, in a way, this was Jesus' whole mission in coming to earth. He came to save people. In fact, that's why Jesus got the name Jesus. The name "Jesus" means "God saves." Jesus came to save us from our sins. What does it mean that He saves us from our sins? Three things:

First, Jesus came to save us from the penalty of sin. Our sins had earned us something bad. Our wrong and sinful actions had earned us something incredibly bad- eternal punishment. We had no way of avoiding hell, because we are too sinful to fix ourselves. So Jesus came to save us from hell. When Jesus saves us, He saves us from ever having to go to hell. If you are saved, you are saved from hell by Jesus.

Secondly, Jesus came to save us from the power of sin. Sin affects everything we do. We want to stop sinning, but find it so hard to not sin. But Jesus came to save us from sin's power. If you are saved, no longer do you have to keep sinning. Sin does not have a hold on you anymore. Because Jesus has saved you, you are free from sin's powerful grip.

Thirdly, Jesus came to save us from the presence of sin. While we don't experience it yet, one day, we will live in a world where there is no sin. Just like astronauts in outer space experience life without gravity, those who are saved by Jesus will one day experience life where sin and the curse of sin is no longer around. One day, we'll live in a world with no sin, no sickness, no tears, no pain, and no death, because Jesus came to save His people from their sins!

DISCUSS

Do you have a favorite superhero? What is it about that superhero that makes him or her your favorite? Other than the three reasons mentioned above, how is Jesus better than that superhero and any other we read about in a book or watch on a screen?

SING

Away in a Manger
(Forever Amen)



PRAY

Thank Jesus that we no longer have to go to hell because Jesus saves us from our sins.

Thank Jesus that we no longer have to keep sinning because Jesus saves us from our sins.

Ask Him to help you remember each day that He is the only true Savior.

DECEMBER 21: WORSHIP

Worship means to show reverence and adoration to a divine being, to give our deepest affections and highest praise to Him.

"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."

Matthew 2:11

READ: MATTHEW 2:1-12

In today's reading we notice the wise men from the east travel a great distance simply because they saw a sign, the star. In their effort to see what the star was pointing them to, the King of the Jews, they traveled on foot to Jerusalem a distance estimated at one thousand miles. That would be the equivalent of walking from Racine to Dallas, Texas. Compelled by their desire to worship and see Jesus, despite a great personal cost, they left everything they knew to seek Him.

Contrast that to King Herod, who through the good teaching of all the chief priests and scribes he found out that God's Word told through the prophecy of Micah 5:2 exactly where Jesus was to be born. It was fairly close to where he lived, right down the road in Bethlehem. Although Herod knew much more about Jesus than the wise men did, he did not pursue Jesus. He decided that it wasn't worth the small price to go see and worship Jesus.

The wise men, however, seized their opportunity and pressed on and continued their quest to Bethlehem to see and worship Jesus. "And going into the house they saw the child with Mary, His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him." These wise men were rewarded with overwhelming joy as well as being some of the first humans to worship God's greatest gift, His Son.

DISCUSS

How about you? Maybe you, like the scribes and teachers of the Law, can quote with great accuracy much of what the Bible teaches. Does your life give evidence that your deepest affections and highest praise go to Jesus? If not, what is keeping you from Him?

SING

What Child is This?



PRAY

Ask God to help you make the changes necessary to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

DECEMBER 22: PROVIDENCE

Providence is God's care for us in every part of life.

"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.'"

Matthew 2:13

READ: MATTHEW 2:13-23

Are you looking forward to Christmas? It's almost here! In our story today, we get a peek at one of God's best gifts to His children: providence. What is providence? Providence is God's care for us in every part of our life. God loves His children and is always looking out for His children by protecting us, providing for us, and blessing us with good. Today's text shows us one example of God's caring providence.

In the story, Herod is threatened by the birth of Jesus and, in a rage, sends out soldiers to execute the baby boys in Bethlehem. While it was true, Herod was king and Herod could make any rule or law he wanted, Herod didn't know about God's providence. God, not Herod, is in total control of every part of life. Though Herod was powerful on earth, Herod's power was nothing compared to God's. So, in God's providence (meaning, in God's care for Jesus in every part of life), God protected Mary and Joseph and Jesus and warned Joseph in a dream to leave the area before Herod's soldiers came. In the story, we see God's care even when His children are threatened by powerful people.

God's providence (His care for us in every part of life) still guides us today. He watches over us and protects us. He makes sure we have all we need. He brings opportunities along in our life to pray, to worship, to serve, and to love others. In every way (and in many ways we don't even notice), God's care and blessing fills our life.

What about when bad things happen: when we get sick or hurt or trouble strikes or when someone we love dies? Does God's providence sometimes not work? No, God's care is always with us, even in bad times. In those times, God nudges us toward greater faith in Him, that even though we don't know how those bad times can work for good, He does. And even if we don't understand why God does what He does in those bad times, we trust He knows best. And as we trust, we reach out to Him for help and usually find a deeper relationship with Him grows, especially in those bad times.

DISCUSS

Where have you seen God's providence in your life or in the life of your family during times of joy and happiness? Where have you seen God's providence in your life or in the life of your family during times of difficulty and sadness?

SING

Come, Thou
Long-Expected Jesus



PRAY

Thank God for three things He has given you that you can see in the room right now. Thank God that He works all things (even bad things) for good. Ask God to prompt you to pray when life seems hard and confusing and ask that He would use these times to deepen your relationship with Him.

DECEMBER 23: INCARNATION

Incarnation means that Jesus became human.

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

John 1:14

READ: JOHN 1:1-18

This verse is so great! Read it again! Do you hear it? Listen to what God did for us! Jesus (who is God) became flesh. Jesus was incarnated, meaning He became human for us. Jesus was perfectly happy, living in the perfect glory of heaven, being worshiped by angels, and yet Jesus left heaven and took on humanity to come and rescue us. What love Jesus has for us!

Jesus is still God and man. He isn't like a transformer that's half car and half robot. Jesus is one hundred percent human and one hundred percent God. Why did Jesus need to become human? Here are three reasons:

1. Jesus became human so that He could die for our sins. When people in the Old Testament sinned, an animal needed to be sacrificed. Something had to take the punishment for sin. But even animals couldn't really cover sin. Eventually, Someone else would have to come to truly take away sin. Someone who wasn't an animal, would need to be sacrificed and have their blood shed for our sin. Because He was fully human, Jesus could be sacrificed for sin.
2. Jesus became human so that He could perfectly obey the Bible. Not only did Jesus need to die for our sin, He first had to perfectly obey every single command in the Bible. People back then thought there were 613 laws in the Old Testament and Jesus obeyed every command perfectly. For Jesus to be the perfect sacrifice for sin, He needed to be perfect, and He was. Now, when you believe in Jesus, a trade happens: He took your sin and you get His perfect obedience. God now sees you as perfect!
3. Jesus became human so that He could relate to us. As a human, Jesus knows what it is like to be tempted but never sin (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus knows what it's like to be tired, hungry, thirsty, and weak. Because Jesus became a man, He can sympathize with us in our need. How great to have a Friend who knows all we've been through, yet was perfect through it all!

DISCUSS

There are a lot of things to be thankful for regarding the incarnation of Jesus. What are you most thankful for after reading today's devotion?

SING

O Come, All Ye Faithful
(His Name Shall Be)



PRAY

Thank Jesus that because He was perfect, God now sees you as perfect, and you can enter heaven. Thank Jesus that because He was human, He gave His life so you could have life. Talk to Jesus about whatever you are going through today. He took on humanity, so He knows what it's like to experience what you are going through.

DECEMBER 24: JOY

Joy is the uncontainable, unstoppable, bubbling over, ever louder, smiling and singing and shouting about good news.

"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.'"

Luke 2:10

READ: LUKE 2:1-12

Christmas comes every year. Like all sorts of things that come around regularly (our birthday, summer vacation, hunting season, Fourth of July parade) we grow to expect it and get sort of used to it. That is part of why God created us with minds and memories, so that we could think about things repeatedly and expect them to come in their seasons.

As you expect Christmas to come around again this year and read the familiar stories of Jesus, it is okay to admit if you have heard them before. In Luke's telling of the story, he talks about very normal things that come around repeatedly and regularly (like taxes and feeding sheep). That is how life is. God designed it that way. And God's Word shows us that the good news of the great joy of salvation is so good that it is worth reading and singing and celebrating every year for as long as we can.

Don't let the familiarity of the season keep you from experiencing the joy of Christmas. Flip through this book for a few minutes today to remember all of the words of the gospel we've covered this month, and let the beauty and power of the gospel cause you to have great joy like you had when you first understood the good news!

DISCUSS

Nothing is more contradictory than a joyless Christian. Do you know someone who lives in the joy of the gospel even when it's not Christmas? How can you ensure that this Christmas won't just be another day on the calendar, but that you will celebrate it with great joy?

SING

Joy to the World



PRAY

Verses 1-5 provide specific historic details to show that this is not a fairytale. Take time in prayer to praise God that Jesus actually, physically came to this world of real people and places. The story is also filled with angels and fulfilled prophecies and miracles. Take time in prayer to praise God that He does things in supernatural and totally unexpected ways. Ask God to give you a response to Jesus like the responses recorded here by the shepherds and the angels.

DECEMBER 25: GLORY

Glory means that God is great and beautiful and important.

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!'"

Luke 2:13-14

READ: LUKE 2:13-21

What makes you say "Wow!"? Is it a beautiful sunset? Is it seeing a baby take their first steps? Is it opening up that new toy from under the tree? Is it a fantastically grilled steak? Is it a spectacular athletic play, a perfectly sung tune, or a gripping movie? The things that make us say "wow" are things that we find glory in. This means that we find these things, in some way, great and beautiful and important. They captivate our attention and our hearts. We have to stop scrolling on our phones and stare at them. The glory stops us in our tracks.

Because God made everything, every single thing in the universe has traces of glory in it. There are hints of glory in every part of creation. But all those created things with glory are meant to point us back to the Glorious One who is Himself full of glory. Looking out at the Grand Canyon should make us think, "Wow, this Grand Canyon is glorious! How much more glory must God have since He made all this!"

Too often, though, we are blind to the glory of God. We miss it. Our worldly eyes and our selfish hearts are captivated by the smaller glories of money and YouTube, and we miss the greater glory of the baby Boy born two thousand years ago. The angels in our story today should wake us up to the reality of who is really great and beautiful and important. The angels remind us that Jesus alone is Glory "in the highest."

Jesus is great, greater than any part of creation. He made it all, He's in charge of it, He holds the world in the palm of His hand. That's real glory. He is more beautiful than all. If you could see Him at this moment, every sunset, beauty pageant, and ocean vista would look like a garbage dump in comparison. That's real glory. Jesus is more important than anything else in creation. Every political leader, every athlete, every celebrity will one day bow their knee to one Man and one Man alone- Jesus. That's real glory. That's who we worship today- the Glorious One to whom belongs glory in the highest.

DISCUSS

What are some things you see the glory of God in not mentioned in the devotion above? What things keep you from seeing the glory of God all around you? What can you do to help you become more aware of God's glory?

SING

Silent Night



PRAY

Thank God for one part of His creation that makes you say: "Wow!" Ask God to help you, in 2024, better grasp His greatness, beauty, and importance. Ask God to purify your heart so that you see Jesus as more worthy than anything else in your life.

Good NEWS OF GREAT Joy

SONGS OF ADVENT

AWAY IN A MANGER (FOREVER AMEN)

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head;
The stars in the sky look down where He lay,
the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
the dawn of salvation beginning to break;
I love Thee, Lord Jesus, oh, gift from above.
The King of the heavens, forever with us.

I worship You, Jesus, for all of my days.
The highest of praises be unto Your name.
My God and my Savior, my King and my friend,
Yours is the glory, forever amen.
Yours is the glory, forever amen.
Yours is the glory, forever amen.

COME, THOU LONG-EXPECTED JESUS

Come Thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,
born a Child and yet a King.
Born to reign in us forever,
now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to Thy glorious throne.

By Thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to Thy glorious throne.

HARK, THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations, rise, join the triumph of the skies;
With angelic hosts proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."

Christ, by highest heav'n adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of the virgin's womb:
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate Deity;
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."

Hail, the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings, ris'n with healing in His wings.
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."
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."

HE WHO IS MIGHTY

Oh, the mercy our God has shone to those who sit in death's shadow.
The sun on high pierced the night; Born was the Cornerstone.
Unto us a Son is given, unto us a Child is born.

He who is mighty has done a great thing;
Taken on flesh, conquered death's sting,
shattered the darkness and lifted our shame. Holy is His name.

Oh, the freedom our Savior won; The yoke of sin has been broken.
Once a slave, now by grace no more condemnation.
Unto us a Son is given, unto us a Child is born.

He who is mighty has done a great thing;
Taken on flesh, conquered death's sting,
shattered the darkness and lifted our shame.
Holy is His name. Holy is His name.

Now my soul magnifies the Lord; I rejoice in the God who saves,
I will trust His unfailing love, I will sing His praises all my days.
My soul magnifies the Lord; I rejoice in the God who saves,
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Taken on flesh, conquered death's sting,
shattered the darkness and lifted our shame.
Holy is His name. Holy is His name.

JOY TO THE WORLD

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns;
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found,
far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of His righteousness,
and wonders of His love,
and wonders of His love,
and wonders, wonders of His love.

O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL (HIS NAME SHALL BE)

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant;
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!
Come and behold Him, born the King of angels!
O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation;
O sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God, all glory in the highest!
O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to Thee be all glory given;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!
O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord, the Lord!

His name shall be Wonderful Counselor.
His name shall be Everlasting Father.
His name shall be Prince of Peace, Mighty God.
His name shall be Emmanuel.

We'll praise Your name forever, we'll praise Your name forever,
we'll praise Your name forever, Christ the Lord!
We'll praise Your name forever, we'll praise Your name forever,
we'll praise Your name forever, Christ the Lord, the Lord!

His name shall be Wonderful Counselor.
His name shall be Everlasting Father.
His name shall be Prince of Peace, Mighty God.
His name shall be Emmanuel.

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SILENT NIGHT

Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin mother and Child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night, shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
heavenly hosts sing, "Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!"

Silent night, holy night, wondrous star, lend thy light;
With the angels let us sing,
"Alleluia!" to our King;
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night, Son of God, love's pure light;
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth. Jesus, Lord at Thy birth.
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth.

WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

What Child is this who, laid to rest
on Mary's lap is sleeping,
whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
while shepherds watch are keeping?

This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
the Babe, the Son of Mary.

Why lies He in such mean estate,
where ox and lamb are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here
the silent Word is pleading.

Nails, spear shall pierce Him through;
The cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
the Babe, the Son of Mary.

So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh,
come peasant, king to own Him;
The King of kings salvation brings,
let loving hearts enthrone Him.

Raise, raise a song on high,
the Virgin sings her lullaby.
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
the Babe, the Son of Mary.

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the Virgin sings her lullaby.
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
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"What Child is This?" is by William Chatterton Dix. This song and arrangement (based on the arrangement by Sovereign Grace Music) are Public Domain.

Good NEWS OF GREAT Joy

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL SURVEY

If you used this book in any way this Advent season, please take 3 minutes to let us know in this brief survey following the QR code below. Your responses will be very helpful to us in determining how to best serve our families during Advent in the future.



Christmas SCHEDULE

Join us this Advent as we celebrate
good news of great joy!

(All services are at 9:00am and 10:45am)

December 3RD

Sunday Morning Worship
with Handbell Choir & Communion

December 10TH

Sunday Morning Worship
with students from Youth Group

December 17TH

Sunday Morning Worship
with Children's Choirs

December 24TH

Christmas Eve Worship
with Adult Choir & Orchestra



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