



Unto Us a King is Born

31 Devotions to Focus Families on Jesus and the Real Story of Christmas



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- December 30: The Boy from Nazareth**
Exodus 14:10-31; Matthew 2:19-23 & Luke 2:39-40, 4:29-30 † God provides a safe place for Jesus to grow up and prepare for His work.
- December 31: "I Must be About My Father's Business"**
Luke 2:41-52 † Time for service to God begins after our preparation.

Introduction

It's that time of year again when much of the world plunges headlong into a gift-buying frenzy that is wrapped in ribbon & tinsel, decorated with evergreen trees & winter themes, boxed with stories of Santa Claus and given with the words, "Merry Christmas." For Christians seeking to maintain some symbol of truth when using the word "Christ" it can be a very confusing time of the year. The confusion comes when we try to combine the world's Christmas themes with Biblical themes surrounding the birth of Christ. Even stories told about the birth of the baby of Bethlehem can miss the point if their focus is on a little baby. The birth of Christ isn't as much about a baby being born as it is about God coming to us in the form of human flesh. Yes, He was born as a baby but this baby grew to be a boy and then to become a man who suffered and died for our sins and was gloriously resurrected from the dead in a grand display of victory over death for all who believe in Him. Christmas is really about Immanuel, "God with us."

These Christmas devotionals are given to help us separate the true reason for Christmas from the world's reasons for Christmas. They were produced through the combined effort The Anchor Missionary Baptist Mission in Anchorage, Alaska and Harvest Missionary Baptist Church in Avon, Indiana. There is one devotional per day for the entire month of December that focuses our attention on Jesus Christ from eternity to the age of twelve when He said He must be about His Father's business. It is our desire and prayer that families or individuals will use them each day during December to be strengthened and encouraged by the true meaning of Christmas.

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The Anchor Missionary Baptist Mission – Elder James A. Keen, Pastor

- ✠ Chris & Aimee Demientieff
- ✠ Rob & Kristi Duckett
- ✠ Mary Keen
- ✠ Nathan & Jody Patterson
- ✠ Elder Charlie Pratt
- ✠ Dan & Sherry Wright

Harvest Missionary Baptist Church – Elder John A. Keen, Jr., Pastor

- ✠ Terry & Betty Adamson
- ✠ Elizabeth Fullen
- ✠ Bart Jones
- ✠ Brett & Leanne Jones
- ✠ Cathy Jones
- ✠ Elizabeth Jones
- ✠ Barbara Keen
- ✠ Joseph Keen



May God bless you as you meditate on Jesus Christ during this Christmas season!
Pastors,

James A. Keen & John A. Keen, Jr.

December 1

The Pre-Existent Christ

Reading:

Genesis 1:26, 27; John 1:1-5; John 1:14 & John 8:58

In this season of Christmas celebration we are reminded of our Savior's human birth. But, we don't always celebrate the Biblical truth that the Christ existed prior to His birth in the stable, even before the creation of mankind. The New Testament teaches us that He was born a man, lived, preached His gospel, preformed many miracles, lived according to the Scriptures, honored God the Father, then died and was resurrected, all for our (mankind's) benefit.

In Genesis 1: 26-27, after God (the Trinity) made the earth and all things therein, we note that God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." So God created man in His own image. In the image of God He created him. Male and female He created them. Couple this with our reading in John 1:1-5:

"In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by Him and without Him nothing was made that was made.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

John 1:14 states, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." And, in John 8:58 we read that Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

Jesus Christ is more than the baby born in Bethlehem who grew to become our Savior. He is the eternal God and our Creator. The Christ whose birth we celebrate at Christmas has always existed.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- ✠ Jesus is the reason we live each day and the reason we all have to celebrate His birth. The song, "Because He Lives", says, "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow." Our Scripture reading reminds us that this life we enjoy had its origin in Jesus Christ
- ✠ During this season of celebration especially, we should stop to consider our lives and our existence before an eternal God.
- ✠ The Christ was... before time began.

December 2

From the Beginning, God Promised a Savior

Reading:

Genesis 3:14-15; 2 Timothy 1:8-9 & Revelation 13:8

The birth of Jesus Christ was the culmination of plans that God had in place from the very beginning of time. In the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve transgressed God's only law, God prophetically declared that the seed of the woman would bruise the heel of the serpent. He could confidently predict that Jesus would be born of a virgin and defeat Satan because He not only planned for this to happen but He controlled all of the events to ensure that this prophecy was fulfilled.

Think for a moment about God's sovereign love for mankind. Because God is sovereign, He can control every event in history to make sure the baby Jesus was born in Bethlehem (and died in Jerusalem) right on schedule. God used His sovereign power to give His love to us through Jesus Christ. Because of this God could promise a Savior to our spiritual fore-fathers/mothers throughout Old Testament times. What hope that must have been for them!

Though the birth of Jesus Christ fulfilled many purposes of God, there is little doubt that the primary purpose of His birth was to provide a Savior to mankind. God purposed to have a people that would be His people so that He could be their God. After Adam sinned, the only way to accomplish this was through a Savior and only Jesus, who was God in the flesh, could be that Savior. The greatest story in the entire world is that God provided His own Lamb, Jesus Christ, to be our Savior by being the sacrifice for our sins. From the beginning, God was thinking of us and planning for our redemption.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- † How comforting is it to know that people have thought of you and included you in their plans? (Remembering birthdays, other special occasions or inviting you to events; etc.)
- † Isn't it even more special to you that they went to a lot of trouble and had been planning something special for you for a long time?
- † How much more gratitude should we have in our hearts in knowing God has done this for us and that He gave His own Son to suffer for us?
- † Thank God from the depth of your heart for thinking of us and giving us Jesus!

December 3

The Word Made Flesh

Reading:

John 1:14-18; Hebrews 2:16-17 & 10:8

What is the purpose of a veil? At Christmas, we often hear of Jesus being "veiled in flesh" when He came to Earth. Remember the verse from "Hark the Herald Angels Sing"? The word "veiled" means to be partly concealed or hidden. But what did Jesus have that needed to be partly concealed from man?

It all goes back to the Garden of Eden when Adam sinned. This is where we first see that a sacrifice is required to cover sins. The animal sacrifices that were offered in the Old Testament were intended to foreshadow the sacrifice that was to come. A sacrifice was needed that would be sufficient to cover the sins of all humanity. Not just any sacrifice would do. The sacrifice that would suffice needed to be perfect and undeserving of the death that sin brought upon every living creature. Only the Divine Savior Jesus Christ could be this sacrifice.

We read in John 1:18 that, "no man hath seen God at anytime." However, in order for Christ, who is God, to be able to fulfill his role as the Saviour, He needed to come to earth and be seen by men. Perhaps a better way to understand this verse is "no man has fully seen God at anytime." We know that Moses saw the hind parts of God on Mount Sinai, yet he did not fully see God. In Exodus 33:20, God tells us why we are unable to view Him in all of His glory on this side of eternity: we can't handle it!

Let's go back to the question we asked earlier. What is the purpose of a veil? The reason for Christ's veil of flesh was to partly conceal His glory, so He would be able to dwell among sinful men. Also, His flesh, combined with His sinless nature, became the perfect sacrifice that was needed and is sufficient for all. What better mediator could there be between God and man than one who is fully God and fully man?

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- † Most people can quote John 3:16. Have you ever really thought about how great a love God has for us, by being willing to come from heaven to earth in the form of a man to die for sinful men?



December 4

John: The Forerunner of Christ

Reading:

Luke 1:5-17

While serving in the temple, an angel appeared to Zacharias and told him that Elisabeth, his wife, would have a son. His name was to be “John”, and he would become great in the sight of the Lord. The angel went on to tell Zacharias that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit and used by God to turn hearts to Jesus. He was going to be a soul winner!

John was chosen by God to prepare the Israelites for the coming of the Lord. He was to be the last prophet of the Old Testament. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a defined life purpose like John? Wouldn't it be amazing to be chosen from among men to bear His message? Just like John was called to prepare the way for Christ, all who are saved are called to be a forerunner for Christ. A forerunner is an individual who goes or is sent in advance to announce the coming of someone or something that follows. When we share the gospel or our testimony, we are preparing the way for the Lord to come into that lost person's heart.

In Matthew 4:19 Jesus told His disciples, “... Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” This was an invitation to be taught how to share the good news with all men by the Master Himself. Jesus diligently trained the twelve apostles over his three year ministry. John began the work of preparing people for Jesus, but Jesus taught His apostles how this work was to be carried on throughout the world after He departed.

Of the many lessons the apostles learned, one of the most important was the necessity of sacrifice. To be a good witness, we must sacrifice our “rights and privileges” in order to let Jesus' name shine forth. In John 3:30, John the Baptist said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” John knew his place in the message of Christ. Despite John's success, Christ was the focus. John never took this glory for himself.

Sometimes our pride gets in the way when we witness to others. We can fall into the trap of talking too much about ourselves and not enough about Jesus Christ. He is after all the One who has the power to save, not us. Our pride can also get in the way by discouraging us from witnessing at all. We fool ourselves into believing there will be another opportunity or that witnessing isn't as important as what's going on at the moment. Let us be willing to stand up and live out the principle set forth by Christ and demonstrated by John: He must increase and we must decrease!

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- ✠ Have you turned down the invitation to be taught of the Lord how to witness to others?
- ✠ What can you do if your pride gets in the way while trying to witness?

December 5

Zacharias Doubts About the Birth of John

Reading:

Luke 1:18-25

Zacharias' encounter with the angel Gabriel must have been a miraculous thing to behold. The very angel, one “that stands in the presence of God,” meets Zacharias and tells him God has heard his prayer.

It's evident that Zacharias, when told he and Elisabeth would have a son, doubted the angel's word. His doubts were understandable – but with God all things are possible (Luke 1:37)! Like many of us today, Zacharias doubted God's ability to perform what He has promised. We put our trust in our own abilities, reasoning or experiences rather than God. We forget that His power is not limited or restricted by narrow perspective, nor bound by human limitations. Zacharias saw only the obstacle. He wanted a “sign.” Unbelief results in punishment and as a result, God prevented Zacharias from speaking until the promise became reality. Luke's account of Zacharias' news concludes with his return home and the record of Elisabeth's pregnancy. Without a doubt, Zacharias and Elisabeth would think this answer was one worth waiting for!



When Christ gives us His Word, He wants us to live in absolute expectation of it, trusting that whether it happens *sooner* or *later*, it will happen. You can have complete confidence that God keeps His promises! It may not be the next day, but it will be “in their season.” If you are waiting for God to answer some request or fill some need, remain patient. No matter how impossible God's promises may seem, what He has said in His Word will come true at the right time. Live your life by faith expecting Him to intercede.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- ✠ Have you almost given up on God answering an earnest, long-term prayer of your heart? Not growing weary in resisting the temptation to be faithless and hopeless over a repetitious request can be terribly challenging. Remember God's power is infinite.
- ✠ Are you guilty in asking God to produce a “sign” to validate your faith? God is faithful for that which he has promised.
- ✠ If you can recognize other works God is doing in your life it will prevent discouragement as you await your answer. Share with others how God has answered prayers for you.

December 6

In the Fullness of Time

Reading:

Ephesians 1:10; Galatians 4:4-5 & Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

On December 2nd, our devotional was about a promise God made to give us a Savior. The clock began ticking (events were set in motion) in the Garden of Eden when Adam sinned and all mankind needed a Redeemer (Genesis 3:15). Throughout the Old Testament days, there were men and women of faith. We read about Abraham and Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, David, the judges and the prophets. But there were dark times too. We often see God lamenting (Psalms 81:6-16) that His people would not “walk in My ways!” When God’s people quit listening, God quit speaking. It was prophesied in Amos 8:11-12 that God would cause a famine of hearing the Word of the Lord. This famine lasted four hundred years until the fullness of time had come.

Recall the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-17? The son was loved but he took his inheritance, left his home and wasted his possessions with prodigal living. He came to himself when he was in the fields with the swine, realizing his father’s servants were better off than himself. He returned and his father welcomed him with open arms as he confessed his sins. Sometimes we have to go without to appreciate what we had. Similarly, God used the four hundred year absence of His Word (spoken by the prophets) to make a people ready to welcome His Word (Jesus Christ). The time had come for the birth of Christ. As King Solomon said and you read in Ecclesiastes, there is a time for all things and the fullness of time had come in Bethlehem when our Savior was born. Four thousand years after God first promised man a Savior, God had everything in place to fulfill this promise. “In the fullness of time,” I like the sound of that! That phrase comforts me, reminding me that God is in control. He has not forgotten His promise nor has He forgotten us. When the fullness of time has come, everything will be okay.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- † Are you impatient? Do you sometimes pray and think God doesn’t hear or isn’t listening? Can you look back over your life and reflect when God has answered prayers – maybe not in the time or way you expected – but better?
- † Are you listening to God? Do you keep your heart open to His instructions from His Word (both written in Scripture and in the person of Jesus Christ)? Be comforted in knowing that God has a plan for you and in the “fullness of time” it will be revealed to you.

December 7

The Angel Gabriel Visits Mary

Reading:

Luke 1:28-38

Once again we find the angel Gabriel appearing with a message, this time “to a young virgin named Mary.” Imagine Mary’s surprise! This was an event, which she certainly wasn’t expecting. When Gabriel appeared to Mary, he called her a “favored woman” because she would be a special recipient of God’s grace. This heavenly messenger’s announcement promised Mary would conceive a son to be called Jesus, who was the “Son of the Highest.” God chose Mary, blessed her, and through her act of submission and obedience He made her mother to the Messiah, the long-awaited Savior.

Unlike, Zacharias who had desired a sign as proof of the angel’s words, Mary’s question of “how shall this be?” displayed her faith. She naturally wondered how this was going to occur. She was betrothed to Joseph and had faithfully remained a virgin.

Although Mary didn’t ask for a sign it seems like Gabriel offered her one by stating that her cousin, Elisabeth, had conceived a child in her old age as a result of God’s grace. He assured Mary “that with God nothing is impossible.” As Christians, what better comfort can we have than to be reminded, what God has promised He is able also to perform (Romans 4:21). We may feel that our limited abilities, experiences or education make us unworthy subjects for God’s service. *Don’t limit God’s choices.* He can use us if we trust Him.

A young unmarried girl who became pregnant risked disaster. She risked losing Joseph, her family, friends, reputation and even her very life (Deuteronomy 22:23-24)! Still Mary said, despite the risks, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.” She took the bold step of faith, knowing God was asking her to serve Him. She left the details with God and submitted entirely to His will. If we are willing to cast away all our fears, hindrances and unanswered questions and be submissive to His will, God will use us to His honor and glory.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- † What has God promised to his children who to try to live an obedient, submissive life?
- † Are you confident of God’s ability to use you as an instrument to carry out His will or do you offer up excuses why you cannot be used? How can we overcome our insecurities? Remember, God will equip us for every task.
- † God has given each believer a measure of faith with which to serve Him. If we consider ourselves worthless, we also withhold what God intended to deliver to others through us. A surrendered life will produce joy!

December 8

A Virgin is Chosen by God

Reading:

Luke 1:34-35 & Isaiah 7:14

After man's fall in the Garden of Eden, God cursed Adam and Eve for their rebellion and the serpent (Satan) for his deception of Eve. The curse upon Adam and Eve was great and every member of the human race has drunk from its bitter cup. However, the curse upon Satan was the deadliest of all. In Genesis 3:15, the Lord said, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Satan's deception of Eve sealed his fate as The Enemy of God and enmity (hatred) was placed between the seed of the woman and Satan. It was also foretold that Satan would bruise the heel of the seed of woman, but that the seed of woman would bruise the head of Satan. This was a blow that would lead to Satan's eventual downfall. This is a picture of the death and resurrection of the Son of God.

The necessity of Jesus being born of the seed of woman is a critical point in the doctrine of salvation. The sin and curse of Adam is passed from generation to generation through the seed of the man. Every man passes this curse on to his children. However, Luke 1:34-35 confirms Mary as never having known a man. She was a virgin until after the birth of Jesus. The manner of her conception is mysterious, but we are told that the Holy Spirit came upon her and the miraculous power of God enveloped her. The child in her womb was not of the seed of man, but the seed of woman. He was the Son of God.

As the seed of woman, Jesus was qualified to fulfill the prophecy, yet His work was not complete. He lived out the law of God perfectly during His life and was delivered into evil hands after His three year ministry. Satan was behind His betrayal and crucifixion, yet Satan did not escape the providential hand of God. The Bible tells us that Jesus gave His life; it was not taken from Him (John 10:18). At His death, Satan fulfilled the prophecy of bruising His heel. Yet, the prophecy was not complete!

Early on that Sunday morning, Jesus rose from the dead. This is an amazing and miraculous event of its own accord, but greater than the renewal of life was the deeper accomplishment. Jesus conquered death and sin and struck a fatal blow to Satan. Satan's judgment was meted out. The prophecy was fulfilled. The seed of woman, the One born of the virgin bruised the head of Satan.

Luke 1:28 describes the person that Mary was. The Lord was with her and she is called blessed among women. We can see from the testimony of her life that she was righteous. Her purity was necessary for her place in God's plan. However, her blessing was the place she held in the span of human history. She was the virgin who bore the seed that was enveloped by God to become the Son of Man that saved the world.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- ✠ Find some of the prophecies concerning Christ and see how they compare to the actual events.
- ✠ How important was Mary's life in her preparation for the task God had for her?
- ✠ Think of some other young people in the Bible with whom God chose to do great things.



December 9

Jesus... Lion of the Tribe of Judah

Reading:

Genesis 49:1-12 & Revelation 5:1-5

Proverbs 14:26 – “In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.”

Judah was the fourth son of Jacob and his first wife, Leah. As Jacob lay upon his death bed, he called each of his sons to him and pronounced blessing and prophecy upon their lives from the eldest to the youngest. However, Jacob’s oldest three sons: Reuben, Simeon, and Levi forfeited this blessing because of their sin. Judah was next in line. He had not lived a perfect life. However, there was a sincere humility and mark of character in him that was not found in his older brothers. While his brothers plotted to kill Joseph in his youth, Judah pleaded for his life and sought to sell him into captivity rather than harm him. Years later, Judah promised his father that he would be responsible for bringing his youngest brother, Benjamin back alive from a trip to Egypt and was willing to spend the rest of his life as a slave rather than see his father mourn over the loss of another son (Genesis 43-45).



Because of this character, Jacob pronounced the firstborn blessing upon the fourth: Judah. He was told that his brothers would praise him and that he would rule over his enemies. Jacob also called him a lion’s whelp (a young lion) that had gone up from his prey and was lying down asleep; who would dare wake him? Finally, Jacob said that the scepter (the sign of a king) would not depart from Judah’s descendants until Shiloh comes. Shiloh means “the one to whom it belongs”. Jacob was prophesying about One who would come from the descendants of Judah: a Lion, a King, that would rise up and reign over all people. A lion is a symbol of sovereignty, strength, and courage. Not only would Judah’s descendants be kings, but there was a sleeping lion among them.

The Lord made a promise to Abraham that through his seed, all the nations of the world would be blessed. This promise was passed on to Isaac, to Jacob, and now to Judah. Some might want to find fulfillment in King David and the line of earthly kings that descended from him. However, the last of the earthly kings of that lineage, Zedekiah, was told to “take off the crown” (Ezekiel 21:24-27) because dominion over Jerusalem would ultimately be given to the one “whose right it is” (Shiloh). Years later, in a stable, one was born of the tribe of Judah who bore the right to wear the crown.

The fifth chapter of Revelation transports us to heaven, where we witness a scene of historical significance for all mankind. There was a book with seven seals that had to be opened, yet there was no man found worthy to open the book. Heaven and earth held its breath. Finally, One stepped forward, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ. He alone was worthy to take and open the book. The Lion was awake. Judah’s blessing is fulfilled.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- † What inheritance will you leave for your children and your children’s children? Will you leave a legacy of righteousness and spiritual blessing?
- † How do we see the lion qualities of sovereignty, strength, and courage in Jesus Christ?

December 10

The Angel Visits Joseph

Reading:

Matthew 1:18-25

This passage tells us about the angel Gabriel’s visit to Joseph, the espoused husband of Mary, and his announcement of the birth of Jesus and the manner of His conception. His birth can be described as a miracle. The definition of a miracle is an “act that defies the laws of nature”. Throughout Jesus’ life, He performed numerous miracles. To name a few, He walked on water, fed masses with bread and fish, changed water to wine, cleansed lepers, raised the widow’s son, stilled the tempest, and gave sight to the blind.

Joseph was probably amazed and maybe even confused about why the Lord would do things this way. God does things we don’t always understand and we may never know why. But the key is to remember that God has a plan for each of us. We may not understand it, or know why things happen as they do. If we spend our time focusing on how we can serve God, rather than trying to figure out why the “sky is blue or the water is green”, we’ll be fulfilling His plan. Joseph embraced the message from Gabriel, trusted God, and acted in faith. Joseph was used by God.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- † Have you ever tried to figure God out?
- † What did you learn from this?
- † Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Meditate on this passage.

December 11

The Name of Jesus

Reading:

Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:21 & John 1:5, 14

Jesus, Jesus, oh what a beautiful name. That is the beginning verse of a song that expresses in a small way, the response of Christians to the name Jesus.

If we search out the Bible, to look at all the names that were given to Christ Jesus, it is a very eye opening experience. It helps us to realize more fully, all that He is or can be to us. We probably more often associate the name Jesus, with the babe that was born in Bethlehem, especially during the time of year that we celebrate His birth.

But even in the book of Isaiah, the prophet had many names that described the prophesied Christ. In Isaiah 9:6, we find, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Isn't it comforting that this prophet of the Old Testament not only saw Jesus Christ as the babe to be born, but also as the one that was present at the beginning of creation. If we look in John 8:58 we find the following verse, “Jesus said to them most assuredly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” This identification (“I am”) He gave Himself while on earth was one that was used in the Old Testament as a name for God.

So, the name **Jesus**, as we can see from the above Scriptures, should take on a much more joyous meaning, especially for those who know Him. One of the most precious names that we can use is **Savior**.

Points of Reflection:

- † Have you ever gone to the Topical Index in your Bible and looked at the subject of Christ? (A good recommendation to all who read His Word.) It provides an overwhelming realization of just who Christ Jesus is to mankind.
- † Do you know Him, this Christ Jesus that we celebrate? Does the name Jesus translate to Savior for you? (John 1:12-13, John 10:9, I Timothy 4:10, Titus 1:1-3)

December 12

Jesus... Son of David

Reading:

2 Samuel 7:1-29 & Matthew 1:1-17

The story of David is remarkable in its illustration of God's grace to the lowly. As a young shepherd boy from Bethlehem, he was anointed to be the next king of Israel. The Lord guided his steps through perilous dangers and great tests of faith and exalted him to the throne of Israel. However, more than the thrill of victory and the praise of men, David delighted in the Lord. In fact, God calls him a man after his own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). As David successfully reigned over Israel, his heart again turned to the Lord and the tabernacle at which the Israelites worshipped. He desired to build a grand temple that would provide a physical reminder of the greatness of his God.

The Lord came to Nathan the prophet and told David that the temple would not be his to build, but that God would raise his descendant, Solomon, to complete this work. David's desire to honor God, however, was not discarded. The Lord rejoiced over David's love and promised to establish his throne through his descendants forever. At this revelation, David humbles himself before God and utters, “who am I... that You have brought me this far?” (2 Samuel 7:18)

The significance of God's promise to David is often overlooked because of our cultural differences. We live in a republic and have only a vague concept of a being under a monarchy. The Lord promised David an eternal dynasty, a succession of rulers belonging to the same family spanning generations. As one surveys the great dynasties of ancient history, only one reigns to this day. The English throne lost its true power to Parliament and the ancient dynasties of China and Russia were replaced by communist regimes. Yet, the throne of David is still inhabited.

Fourteen generations after David, his dynasty appeared to be extinguished by the Babylonian captivity. Another thirteen generations passed and the heir of David was a simple carpenter by the name of Joseph. However, Joseph's wife Mary carried in her womb the Son of God who would become by birth the heir of David's throne. Awestruck shepherds from Bethlehem attended the child's birth, a reminder of David's lowly beginnings. Like David, Father God carried Jesus through many difficulties and trials, even to the death of the cross. Like David, He raised Him up, placing Him on the throne of David where He reigns until His enemies shall be made His footstool. God kept His promise to David and eternally established his throne. God has amazing grace for the lowly. 1 Peter 5:6 reminds us, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- † Do you believe that the Lord has the same love for you that He had for David? Have you experienced Him exalting you from humility?
- † Psalms 37:4 teaches us that if we delight ourselves in the Lord, He will give us the desires of our heart. Do you delight in the Lord? Is He your greatest joy or have you traded a relationship with the Creator for a piece of His creation?

December 13

Mary Visits Elizabeth

Reading:

Luke 1:5-7 & Luke 1:36-45

If you read the verses recorded in Luke 1:5-7, you learn something about Zacharias, a priest, and his wife Elizabeth, who was of the daughters of Aaron. They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly. However, Elizabeth was barren and well advanced in years.

The angel revealed to Zacharias that Elizabeth would bear a son and his name would be called John. Due to his unbelief he was struck dumb and was not able to speak until John was born. In contrast, Luke 1:25 records that Elizabeth's reaction was one of faith, "Thus the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among men."

Mary, her cousin, who was pregnant with the Christ, visited Elizabeth when Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the babe (John) leaped in her womb and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth recognized the unborn Christ and expressed joy that Mary had honored her with her visit. The Holy Spirit, working through her faith, also helped her to reassure Mary. She told Mary that she was blessed through her belief and that the prophecy concerning Christ would be fulfilled.

In John 20:29 states, "Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

In faith Elizabeth believed through the work of the Holy Spirit. She was blessed and filled with joy. Through faith, she was also a blessing to Mary and a blessing to us because this event was recorded for our learning.

Points of Reflection

- ✦ Do you believe the Holy Spirit dwells in us today, revealing God's will for our lives as it did in Elizabeth's day? (Read 1 Corinthians 2:11-13)
- ✦ Those who believe in Christ Jesus and have faith in His Word, through the work of the Holy Spirit, can experience the same joy that filled Elizabeth. (Read 1 Peter 1:5-9)



December 14

Mary's Magnificat

Reading:

Luke 1:46-56 & 1 Samuel 2:1-10

Magnificat is the Latin word meaning "to magnify". This passage got its name from the Latin translation of Mary's first few words, "My soul doth *magnify* the Lord."

Have you ever wondered why – of anyone He could have chosen to fulfill His plan – God chose Mary to be the mother of our Savior? The Magnificat is Mary's song of praise to God. This particular passage gives us a great vision of Mary's character. It reveals many qualities and attitudes she possessed, which put her in a favored position in which God chose to bless her with this honor:

She was excited! This reflects her genuine willingness and acceptance of her part in God's will and His plan for the world. If anyone could have felt intimidated about the task that God set before her, it was Mary! Instead, she felt joy that her gifts could be used by God to accomplish His will.

She made an effort to study God's word. She examined it, and kept it close to her heart. Her song reflects *multiple* Old Testament passages! One example is where Hannah, mother of Samuel, also sings a song to glorify God. Mary's song is modeled in the same manner. She spoke about all of the things the Lord has already done for His people.

She possessed humility. She recognized her "low estate," and rejoiced in the fact that God is merciful toward those that fear him. When Mary said, "from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed," it was a realization, not a declaration. She was not making a prideful statement, or demanding admiration. Instead, she was astonished and humbled. This was her "wow!" moment – the realization that God's promise was soon to be fulfilled.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- ✦ Are you genuinely excited when God shows you His will and the part He wants you to play in it?
- ✦ Do you make a point to study God's word and see how it can apply to your life? Would you be able to think of multiple Scriptures to draw inspiration from or help you with a problem?
- ✦ Are you amazed at the blessings that God has given to you? Do you give God the credit He deserves?

December 15

His Name is John

Reading:

Luke 1:57-66

Luke 1:63 reads, "Zechariah asked for a writing tablet, then he wrote, 'his name is John.'" After writing these words, Zechariah's tongue was loosed; he could speak and he began praising the Lord for sending a Savior for his people, just like the holy prophets foretold. Zechariah continued with a prophecy of his son and the Savior he would serve. In Luke 1:76-77, Zechariah said, "You my son, will be called a prophet of God in heaven above. You will go ahead of the Lord to get everything ready for Him. You will tell His people that they can be saved when their sins are forgiven."

Zechariah knew his son would have a special purpose in life: to be used by God to prepare His people for the coming of Christ. What a blessing to have such vision! Our children have a special purpose too. Just like the Lord wanted to use John, He wants to use our kids. Even though an angel probably did not visit you to provide special revelation about their name and purpose, we do have the Word of God. Proverbs 22:6 tells us to, "train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." It is our responsibility to raise our children in the ways of the Lord. We have just as much of a mandate from God to prepare them for their purpose as Zacharias did for John.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1 the Apostle Paul says, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ". He was a spiritual father to many of the early churches and like a good father, he set out an example for them to follow. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 says "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up". We are instructed to set a godly example for our children and consistently teach them God's ways. Just like John prepared the way for Christ, we too are looking forward to Christ's coming. Regardless of whether He returns during our lifetime, we have a work of preparation to do. Along with witnessing to others we must prepare our children and even our children's children for His return. Don't waste the opportunity!

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- ✠ Can you remember a family member or friend who shared something special with you about their life? Do you do the same with your children? Share your testimony with your kids.
- ✠ Encourage your children by telling them how special they are (pointing out particular talents they have) and reminding them that God has made them for a special purpose.
- ✠ Tell your children how God has used you to touch someone's life (it could be anything from spreading the gospel, bringing someone to church or something you have done for others).
- ✠ Pray with your children and thank the Lord for blessing you with awesome kids.

December 16

The Prophecy of Zacharias

Reading:

Luke 1:67-80

It had been at least nine months since Zacharias had spoken because he did not believe what the Angel Gabriel had told him about the birth of his son John. No doubt he pondered the angel's words in his heart during this time and studied Old Testament Scripture to learn as much as he could about the events that were now beginning to unfold surrounding the birth of his son and of the Messiah he would herald. On the day of John's circumcision, Zacharias' tongue was loosed so he could speak again and the Holy Spirit filled his heart. So, guided by the Holy Spirit, the first words he spoke were filled with prophetic glory to God and the culmination of nine months of study of God's Word.

The first part of this prophecy (verses 68-75) is the conclusion that God has now fulfilled the promise that He would provide us a Savior to save us from our sins, a promise He made before the world began. Of course this was a direct reference to the birth of Jesus Christ. The second part of this prophecy (verses 76-79) is the announcement that Zacharias' son, (John the Baptist), would be a prophet of this Christ to go before Him and prepare the way for His ministry and message. This would involve giving the people knowledge of salvation by the remission of their sins, giving light to those who are in darkness under the threat of death and guiding the feet of people into the way of peace. Notice that as he spoke of his son John, Zacharias still maintained the focus on Christ. John, himself, would later say of Jesus, "He must increase and I must decrease."

It is interesting to note that Zacharias and his son John both exhibited this attitude of humility and maintained their focus on Christ. It's not a coincidence because they both were filled with the Holy Spirit. When God's Spirit fills our heart, our attitude will also reflect humility. When God's Spirit guides our speech we will not speak of ourselves to promote ourselves in any way. Instead the true reflection of Jesus Christ that is in our heart will come pouring forth from our lips. Even the Holy Spirit will not testify of Himself but will glorify Jesus Christ (John 16:13-14).

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- ✠ Have there been times in your life when you believe God surrounded you with His presence and filled you with His Spirit? Think about those times and what they had in common. Isn't a common thread the focus you had on Jesus and His Words?
- ✠ Scripture teaches us that the evidence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Look again at this prophecy of Zacharias and identify as many of these Spiritual fruits as you can.

December 17

Bethlehem: City of David

Reading:

Luke 2:1-5; Micah 5:2; Exodus 3:4-12 & 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

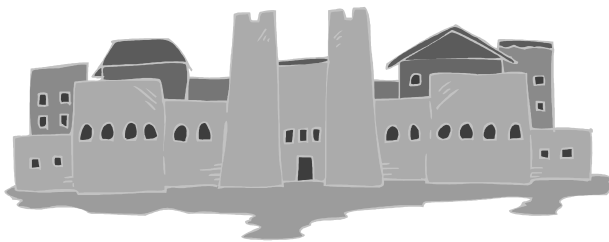
During the time of the Roman Empire, the emperors believed they were divinely placed into their ruling position. This was how Caesar Augustus felt as the first true emperor of Rome. The time of his reign was labeled the “Golden Age” of the Roman Empire and the “Pax Romana” which means Peace in Rome. Augustus Caesar is often viewed as Rome’s best emperor, however, when Caesar ordered the census to take place he had no idea he was merely a puppet in God’s hand. God controls everything. If we believe the Bible when it says that the heavens are the work of God’s fingers (Psalm 8:3) and that He has ordained the moon and the stars, it should not be difficult to believe that God can control the actions of the emperor of Rome. This is exactly what our Lord did. Just as He hardened Pharaoh’s heart in Exodus 11:10, the Lord controlled the actions of Caesar Augustus to call a census throughout the entire Roman Empire making Joseph and Mary return to Bethlehem for the birth of our Savior.

When the Lord calls us into His service don’t we often feel small and unable to perform what He would have us do? That was exactly how Moses felt when the Lord spoke to Him from the burning bush. Moses proclaimed, “Who am I?” The question we need to ask ourselves is why we immediately have this reaction to God’s calling. Some may argue that it is because we are feeling very humble and realize we can do nothing. Upon closer examination though, we see that when we say, “Who am I,” we are really thinking of our capabilities rather than what God can accomplish through us. When we have a big view of God, we realize that He can use us, as unworthy and unable as we truly are. If the Lord can use a king who does not acknowledge Him, how much more could He use us if we would submit our lives to Him!

Though Bethlehem was “little among the thousands of Judah,” as part of God’s plan it was greatly used and its name has been immortalized.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- † Are there instances in our life when God calls us to action but we answer Him with excuses?
- † What keeps us from fully relying on God for everything He asks us to do?
- † Take a moment and meditate on the greatness of our God who can create everything we see with His fingers, control the actions of Caesars, and come into our lives to commune with us individually!



December 18

No Room at the Inn

Reading:

Luke 2:6-7



No vacancy for the Lord?

Joseph and Mary were young first time parents traveling alone to fulfill their responsibility of taking part in the census. There were NO rooms available in the City of Bethlehem. This was not a typical vacation destination where they would have other hotels from which to choose. Mary was pregnant with delivery imminent and had NO place to give birth. The innkeeper directed them to the stable, which was probably a cave where the animals were kept. There Mary gave birth (no pain meds mind you) with the help of her husband Joseph. There was no professional hospital staff and the stable definitely would not pass OSHA standards, yet God’s provision was perfect to accomplish His will.

Isaiah 55:9 says, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” I am sure if we were planning where Jesus was going to be born we would ensure all the latest medical equipment and skilled personnel were available. We would provide a clean environment and do all that we could to make Mary comfortable during the delivery. However, as usual, God’s plan is always better and many times much different than ours. Christ had humble beginnings and continued in this manner throughout His life, even unto the torture of the cross. God provided just what He needed and by doing this God also provided what every soul of man, woman, and child needs, a Saviour!

Mary and Joseph were ready to receive their son Jesus in these humiliating circumstances trusting that God knew best. It is difficult for us to imagine why the innkeepers and towns people had their “no vacancy” signs up. We might think, “How could they not open their hearts and feel for this young couple away from their home and family and about to give birth?” Yet, today some hang “no vacancy” signs on their hearts, unwilling to budge for various reasons. Lost and saved alike refuse to give Christ free reign in their hearts. Jesus draws men unto repentance, yet many still reject Jesus like the innkeeper did on that night in Bethlehem.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- † When was the last time you hung a “no vacancy” sign on an area of your life that you didn’t want Jesus to live and take part?
- † Please pray and ask God to forgive you for this and to help you have a “vacancy” sign for only Jesus in all areas of your life.

Born in a Manger

Reading:

Luke 2:6-7

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.” – Luke 2:7

Bethlehem, the City of David, was unusually full of activity due to the census ordered by Caesar Augustus. It would seem to be a fitting place for the birth of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Yet most were unaware that the Christ child, Jesus, was brought forth on that night to carry the sins of the world. Humbly, He was born as Jesus Christ, Savior of the world. Most men gave Him no esteem. No trumpets were sounded and no soldiers paraded throughout the kingdom heralding the good news. No purple linens or kingly attire were given to Him... just swaddling clothes. No royal palace housed Him... nor was even a room at the inn given to his family, but a stable where the animals remain. His bed was not a crib but a manger where the animals would come to feed. Just a quiet and humble setting with simple surroundings.



Becoming a man should be humbling enough, yet our Lord humbled Himself even further by the type of man He became: a poor carpenter’s son. Throughout His life, He humbled Himself by serving all. His final act of humility was the cross, where He hung as a servant, dying for the sin of every man. In Matthew 20:28, Jesus said, “even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”. The Lord still comes today in a humble manner to all who would seek Him.

Jesus’ manger, the feeding trough of the animals, was symbolic of His glorious offer to man. Through His death, Jesus became that spiritual food that will sustain eternal life. In John 6:35, Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. Heed the advice of Psalm 34:7, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good”.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

✠ Are you hungry? Do you thirst? Do you believe? There was no room for Jesus in the inn but is there room for Him in your heart? An inn is a place that welcomes all sorts of travelers. So does Jesus. But, unlike the inn, there is always room in Jesus for you.

Shepherds are the First to Hear the News

Reading:

Luke 2:8-14 & 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Imagine your thoughts and feelings if you were one of these shepherds that night when Jesus was born. All of a sudden, in the midst of the darkness of night, your tranquil setting was transformed into majesty of light all around you and an unmistakable presence of an angel appearing to speak to you in the midst of this glorious light of God. Perhaps it would have taken more than an angel to say, “don’t be afraid,” to stop the shaking. And then after the angel had spoken, just as suddenly there was a host of angels that showed up to praise God with a Heavenly *Amen*.

At first it might seem the message of the angel might have been lost in the presentation. Sometimes we see this illustrated on TV in commercials. There is a particularly impressive commercial, maybe a funny one, and the only thing we remember is the presentation. We can’t remember the product that was advertised. This was not the case in the countryside around Bethlehem on the night Jesus was born. The message of the angels was not lost in the glory of God. Instead the glory of God highlighted the message. This was God the Father announcing the birth of His Son. The presentation was appropriate.

What also was appropriate was that this announcement of “good tidings of great joy, which will be to all people” was first made to shepherds. Of all the professions at that time, shepherding was probably regarded as the lowest. It didn’t take any particular skills and most certainly was not very well paid. Even a child could perform this job, of which King David testified. We have a confirmation in the shepherds that God uses the lowliest to perform the greatest works. Recall that Jesus stated that He didn’t come to save the righteous but to save sinners (Matthew 9:13). Similarly He tells His shepherds today (those who will lead His people) that if they truly desire greatness, they will become servants of all (Luke 22:24-27 & John 13:1-17). Maybe it is appropriate that God gave the greatest news to shepherds and put it in their hearts to tell others. If God’s shepherds today will truly see themselves as God’s servants, this announcement on Christmas night will be repeated every day.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

✠ In Romans 12:3 we’re told to not think too highly of ourselves. This is a big problem with all people and the world encourages this wrong view. How are you doing at staying grounded in your attitude about yourself? Realize from today’s devotional that God can’t use us when we are lifted up in pride. His only recourse when His people lack humility is to bring them back down.

✠ Romans 12:16 tells us to not think we are too good for anyone but instead to associate with the humble. It also says to not be wise in our own opinion. Are you tempted to think you know more than others on a particular subject? Do you open up your heart to consider the opinion of others? Closed mindedness is much more likely to shut out the truth than it is to protect it.

December 21

Shepherds Herald the News Abroad

Reading:

Luke 2:15-20; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Luke 17:11-19 & Revelation 4:11

Were all profoundly affected by events. Think of the last vacation you enjoyed and the pictures you probably took. Do you remember coming home with excitement and telling your family and friends about your experiences? Did you show them the pictures and fill them in on all the details of your trip? I imagine our excitement over a vacation pales in comparison to the excitement the shepherds had over the appearance of the angels heralding the birth of Jesus. The Scripture says they immediately made haste to the city of Bethlehem to see this Child. Afterwards they were even more excited and made widely known all that had happened. After your last vacation were you so excited that you told strangers about your trip? These shepherds told strangers what about the glorious events that occurred in Bethlehem. How excited would you have to be to tell complete strangers about the birth of a baby? This is the extent of excitement the shepherds were filled with over the birth of Jesus. What a zeal and passion they had for playing a role in the greatest birth in all of human history.

There are many instances in the Bible where people were touched by Christ and could not be kept silent for the joy that filled their hearts. We read in Matthew 28:1-8 about how the two Mary's ran to tell the disciples Jesus had risen and was no longer in the tomb. The fourth chapter of John describes the urgency with which the Samaritan woman left her water pots to tell those in the village about the amazing Man who told her everything she had ever done. God wants us to be excited about Him and about everything He is doing in this world and in our life. He wants us to remember Him in all of our ways and to continually praise Him for all He has done for us. Luke 17 tells of ten lepers that Christ healed. Only one came back to give Him thanks and praise. Jesus questioned why the other nine didn't return to offer Him praise. He asks the same question of us today if we do not praise His name. Hasn't he touched all of our lives and blessed us in many unimaginable ways? The answer is a resounding YES and He expects us to be excited about His work. He wants it to be the highlight of our life and for us to be aware of every aspect of His care. This should fill us with such zeal about God that we want to run and tell strangers about Him!

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- † What are some things that God has done in your life that are truly miraculous and made you want to tell others?
- † Do you exhibit this same excitement for God that the shepherds exhibited? What needs to change in our lives for this excitement to be displayed?

December 22

Baby Jesus at the Temple

Reading:

Ezra 3:10-13 & Luke 2:21-24

Have you heard the phrase, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder"? When the Israelites rebuilt the temple after returning from captivity, Ezra records that many of the older Jews wept at the completion of the foundation because the new temple would not compare to the physical glory of the Solomon's temple. They desired a magnificent building for their Holy God. Yet, we read in Haggai 2:9, "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts."

How could this be so when the new foundation couldn't even compare to the foundation of Solomon's temple? When Solomon dedicated the original temple to the Lord, a cloud filled the holy of holies and the priest could not even stand to minister because the presence of the Lord was so strong. What could be greater than this? How could the new temple surpass the old?

We find the fulfillment of this prophecy beginning in Luke 2:21-24, as baby Jesus is brought to the temple. This simple child, born to poor parents, was the greatest glory this temple had yet seen. While the physical glory of the new temple didn't compare with the old, the true glory of the new far exceeded the old. Remember, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. In the eyes of God and those who love Him, the beauty of Jesus Christ, the union of God and man is unsurpassed. What greater glory could there be than the fact that God humbled Himself to take on human form, even the form of an infant, because of His love for man? What greater glory than the realization that God had embarked upon the journey to settle the debt for sin once and for all?

Most who were present at the temple that day missed the grand significance of this event. Most were unstimulated and continued on with their business. Yet, those whose vision surpassed the veil of this world rejoiced with a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- † What are some events in your life that may have gone unnoticed physically, but had great spiritual significance?
- † What does this teach us about the value of the spiritual verses the value of the physical? (1 Samuel 16:7, Proverbs 11:22)



December 23

The Joy of Simeon

Reading:

Luke 2:25-35

And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ."

– Luke 2:25-26

Simeon was the first to proclaim that Christ had come in the temple at Jerusalem. He was a very old man. He waited to see the Messiah for many years, holding onto a promise made by God that he would not die until he saw the Messiah in the flesh. Simeon is nowhere else mentioned in Scripture. We know he was a righteous man, approved by God, and of good reputation. He patiently awaited this moment since the Lord made the promise.

Psalm 62:5 says, "My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him". (NASB)

Have you ever waited a long time for something or someone? Did you feel like giving up hope? God does not work on our timeline, but on His. He doesn't seek to frustrate us, but to teach us patience and faith in Him. Isaiah 40:31 tells us, "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Not only will the Lord fulfill His promise, but He will give us the grace to wait until the time of the fulfillment.

Not only was Simeon allowed to see the child Jesus, but he was able to hold Him and touch Him. He took the Lord into his arms! God rewards those who are patient and wait upon Him. There are many prophecies throughout the Bible that are already fulfilled. Yet, we are still waiting on the fulfillment of others. Many of us have prayer requests that we've taken to the Lord for years and still have not seen them answered. Just remember the reward of patience and keep the faith. God always keeps His promises and He is good to those who wait upon Him.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- ✠ Can you think of a time that you were patient and God blessed you?
- ✠ What would it mean if God didn't keep His promises? What would that tell us about His character? Do you think God would ruin His good name and righteousness by defaulting on a promise to you?

December 24

The Joy of Anna

Reading:

Luke 2:36-38

Little is known of the prophetess Anna spoken of in the New Testament though her life speaks volumes of her character and service to God. What we do know is very important when considering her purpose in God's plan.

Her name means "grace". She was of the tribe of Asher, which was known for its women of royalty and beauty. She had only been married seven years before she was widowed. After the death of her husband, she worked diligently for God for the rest of her life. At the time of Christ's birth, she was about 84 years old. Her life was longer than those of the time for a purpose. Without concern for herself she worked daily in the Temple, fasting and praying and bearing witness to the messages of Simeon. She brings to mind a female New Testament version of Daniel.

She is an important instrument in the birth of Christ. She was a bridge from the days of law to the days of grace. Her extended life span allowed her to spread the message of the Messiah for many years and to see the prophecies fulfilled. By her faithfulness and perseverance to the end, she was allowed by God to see that fulfillment

of Scripture and to bask in the joys of that occasion. Two thousand years later, Anna's life still speaks to us as a witness to living a faithful and patient life for God.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- ✠ What does she teach us about faith?
- ✠ What fruits of the Spirit do we see in her?
- ✠ How does "prophetess" of the Old and New Testaments apply to the 21st century Christian woman?



December 25

The Magi from the East Following a Star

Reading:

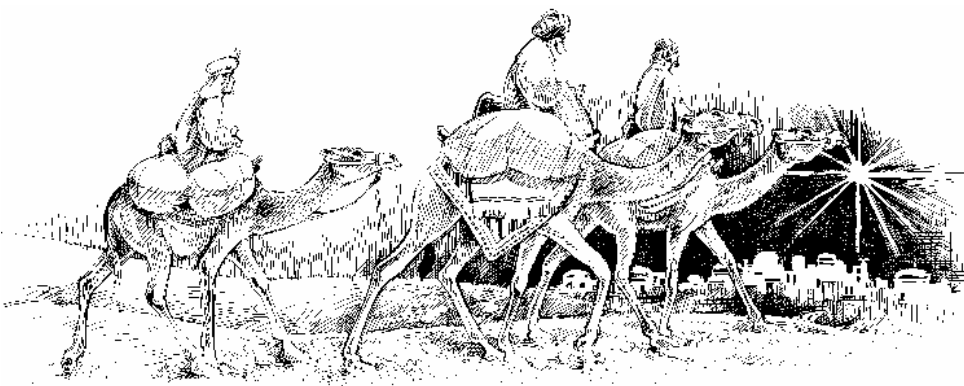
Matthew 2:1-10

Have you ever thought about what a Magi is? A Magi is an astrologer (see Daniel 5:15). Daniel 5:11 says that Daniel was made “chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers” (rab-mag – chief of the Magi). The Magi that went to see Jesus were likely followers of Daniel. As Magi, they readily watched the stars for signs and through Daniel’s influence looked for the Star that would come out of Jacob (Numbers 24:17), Jesus Christ.

Why did the Gentiles follow a star and the Jewish shepherds see an angel? It very well could have been because the Gentiles studied the stars but the Jews would relate to an angel. The Gentile wise men saw the star in the East and went to Jerusalem to find Jesus. How would they be able to find him? They went to King Herod who gathered all the priests and scribes to find out where the Christ was to be born. After King Herod’s secret inquiry of his wise men, he sent them to Bethlehem to find Christ. As the wise men resumed their search for the Christ Child, the star went before them and stood over where Jesus was. How often does God direct us and want us to rely on faith for him to guide us?

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- † How often does God direct us and want us to rely on faith for Him to guide us?
- † Are we willing to follow God’s direction as the wise men did?



December 26

The Gifts of the Magi - Gold

Reading:

Matthew 2:11-12; Psalms 72:10-11 & 15; Isaiah 60:6 & Revelation 19:16

The giving and receiving of gifts in Eastern cultures has in all ages been a more frequent, more formal and more significant event than it has in the West. The Hebrew language in the Old Testament has fifteen different words or phrases used to express the concept of gift giving. The different expressions reflect the relationship of the giver to the recipient as well as the motive and the occasion of the exchange. There is little doubt that the gifts the wise men brought to the baby Jesus reflected their relation to Him, their motive and the significance of this birth.

Throughout the Old Testament, gold has represented something of significant value. No metal is mentioned more frequently nor revered more highly than gold. From the golden calf the rebellious children of Israel constructed to worship at the foot of Mt Sinai to the magnificence of Solomon’s Temple with its gold construction and gold instruments, gold represents the wealth of the earth. It is the emblem of purity (Job 23:10), nobility (Lamentations 4:1-2) and is the gift of kings (Ecclesiastes 2:8).

Ancient commentators believed the wise men’s gift of gold to the baby Jesus symbolized His Kingship. Everything points to this being true. As today’s Scripture reading suggests, kings would fall down before the King of kings to give Him gold, the wealth of the Gentiles. As customary as it was for people to bring gifts to dignitaries, it is clear these wise men only had one King on their mind. There is no record they gave King Herod any gold. They bypassed him in his royal robes, sitting on his throne in his royal palace to pay homage to a baby with no royal adornments. And when they saw Him they fell down to worship Him and gave Him gifts.

Also, there is no record the wise men knew that God would send Joseph, Mary and Jesus into Egypt to escape the sword of Herod. But, they didn’t have to know in order for God to use their gift in an unexpected way. It is commonly believed this gold provided for the welfare of this poor family in Egypt until the danger from King Herod had passed.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- † The giving of the gift of gold by the wise men to Jesus reminds us of our need to give our best to Jesus. Jesus is our King and worthy of our best gifts. If we are sincere in the surrender of ourselves to Him, we shall not be unwilling to part with what is dearest to us and most valuable to Him and for Him.
- † For our gifts to be accepted, we must first present ourselves as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-2). Recall that God had respect to Abel and then to his offering (Genesis 4:4). Above gold, God desires obedience from His children.



December 27

The Gifts of the Magi - Frankincense

Reading:

Matthew 2:11-12; Exodus 30:34-38; Psalms 141:2 & Revelation 5:8, 8:3

Frankincense (often mentioned only as incense in Scripture) is an odorous resin that grows in Palestine and was imported from Arabia (Song of Solomon 4:14 & Jeremiah 6:20). As discussed in the reading above, it was used to make a perfume that was put before the testimony in the Tabernacle of the Congregation where God would meet with His people. Frankincense became associated with God meeting with His people. When burned, frankincense emitted a fragrant odor and became a symbol of the Divine Name (Malachi 1:11). Also, our reading noted that frankincense was an emblem of prayer. What an appropriate gift that to the baby Jesus! God had indeed come down to meet with His people through the virgin birth and frankincense marked the occasion.

Is there ever a closer presence of God with us as there is when we are truly praying to Him? The act of calling upon His Name and confessing our sins to our Heavenly Father should be a time when He meets with us. These prayers of God's people are a sweet smelling fragrance to God, as is shown in our reading from Revelation. It is wonderful to read this account in Revelation and know that God has our prayers stored in bowls to magnify His presence. I hope we think as highly of our prayer time as God does!

Ancient commentators believed the wise men's gift of frankincense to the baby Jesus symbolized His divinity as the Son of God. Certainly this is Scriptural and would be appropriate for that purpose. Perhaps we could add just one more thought to their opinion. In addition to it representing His divinity, it also represents God with us. For surely when Jesus came down from Heaven to become a man in the form of the baby Jesus, God was with us.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- ✠ How is your prayer life? Does it rise toward Heaven to God as a beautiful fragrance that is pleasing to Him? If not, how could you improve your prayer life to achieve this goal? Focus on praying to Him for His glory and to conform to His will.
- ✠ Do you imagine God coming down from Heaven to be with you as you pray? Perhaps you see yourself rising up to Heaven in your prayers to sit at God's feet. Either way, prayer can be a time when you meet with God. Dedicate your heart to prayer so that God will hear.

December 28

The Gifts of the Magi - Myrrh

Reading:

Matthew 2:11-12; Exodus 20:23-24 & John 19:39

As I searched through the Scriptures to see what it had to say in reference to myrrh, I discovered some interesting facts. Myrrh was one of the ingredients in the holy anointing oil which God appointed, the like to which was not to be made up for any common use (Exodus 30:23-24). The Messiah was known as the Anointed One.

Also, the company that purchased Joseph from his brothers carried spicery, balm and myrrh (Gen 37:25-27). Years later, Jacob sent spices and myrrh to Egypt to make up for the money returned with the corn Joseph's brothers brought up from Egypt (Genesis 43:11).

The most frequent reference to myrrh is found in the first five chapters of the Song of Solomon. This attests to the richness and intimacy of our relationship with our beloved Christ. As a young woman preparing for marriage and dreaming of her beloved, I think Mary would have known these verses well. And I expect she pondered these things in her heart, as she often did. It is good for us to dwell on the Word of God and reverence the Holy Anointed One: Jesus Christ.

"Who is this that comes out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense..." (Song of Solomon 3:6). Did they not ask of Him - can any good thing come out of Nazareth? "I will go up to the mountain of myrrh" (Song of Solomon 4:6). Christ's love was such that He was willing to go to Mount Calvary for His beloved. A soul redeemed is filled with a fountain of gardens and a well of living water (Song of Sol 4:13-15 and John 4:14). We anxiously await the times of communion with our Lord. "He is altogether lovely, my beloved, my friend" (Song of Solomon 5:16).

The final reference to myrrh is found in John 19:39, when Nicodemus came to the tomb with a mixture of myrrh and aloes to prepare Jesus body for burial in the sepulcher, as was the custom. It was for this purpose that Jesus came into the world. He finished His course well and PRAISE GOD that final anointing by Nicodemus was not the end. He arose and death has lost its sting!

I once purchased some myrrh, because of its reference in Scripture. It is still very expensive. It is likely that Joseph and Mary were able to sell those gifts to help sustain their time in Egypt. It is fitting for us to continually bring our gifts to the King of Kings.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- ✠ Do you meditate upon the Word of God frequently?
- ✠ Do you see the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as a collection of facts or do you see the spiritual beauty of these accomplishments? As you meditate upon them, do they make your heart rejoice?

December 29

Out of Egypt

Reading:

Matthew 2:13-15; Acts 7:9-36; Exodus 4:22-23 & Hosea 11:1

One of the central turning points of the Old Testament was the deliverance of the nation of Israel out of Egypt. As you read, they were brought down to Egypt by the providential hand of God after the sons of Jacob (Israel) sold their brother, Joseph into slavery. The Lord's purpose in bringing the Israelites down to Egypt was to preserve them through a great famine. As Joseph himself said in Genesis 50:20, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive".

After Joseph's death, another king arose in Egypt that did not know him and made the Israelites slaves. Isn't it ironic that Joseph was sold into slavery and that destiny eventually befell all the sons of Israel? The Israelites endured many hardships during those years, culminating in Pharaoh's order for all the males born to the Israelites to be killed. Yet, the Lord spared baby Moses from this death and raised him in the house of Pharaoh. After 400 years of slavery, the Lord delivered Israel out of Egypt by the hand of Moses. He then baptized the Israelites unto Moses as they crossed through the Red Sea and led them into the wilderness where they wandered for 40 years before being led into the Promised Land.



As we study the Old Testament narrative, we get a glimpse of God's purposes as He led the Israelites through many difficulties. Yet, from a bird's eye view, we get a prophetic glimpse, a shadow if you will, of greater things to come (Colossians 2:17). The prophet Hosea referred to Israel as God's son when he spoke of their deliverance from Egypt. The gospel writer Matthew recognized this as a prophecy of Jesus Christ. King Herod was jealous and angered by the birth of Jesus and like the Pharaoh of Egypt, ordered that all Jewish male children two years of age and under be killed, hoping that he would eliminate the Jesus in the process. Yet, the Lord spared Jesus from this death by delivering Him and His parents into Egypt. Just like God's delivered His son, Israel, the Lord delivered His only begotten Son. When the time was right, the Lord called His Son, Jesus, out of Egypt.

The similarities do not stop there. Years later, upon Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, He was led into the wilderness for a time of testing, which lasted 40 days and 40 nights (Matthew 4:2). These events remind us of Israel's baptism in the Red Sea and their subsequent 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. We gain so much from the Old Testament stories. They provide us illustrations of faith and warn us of the dangers of disobedience. Yet they are just a shadow in comparison to the One who was to come: Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is an inspiration; but Jesus is our salvation.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- ✦ Look at some other similarities between Jesus and Israel: compare Isaiah 41:8 (KJV) and Galatians 3:16 (the seed of Abraham), compare Exodus 4:22 and Colossians 1:15 (the first born), compare Psalm 80:8 and John 15:1 (the vine)
- ✦ If the Lord would orchestrate all of these events to point to Christ, what does that tell you about how important and necessary Christ is in our lives?

December 30

The Boy from Nazareth

Reading:

Exodus 14:10-31, Matthew 2:19-23, Luke 2:39-40, 4:29-30

Jesus became a Nazarene by Divine guidance. He was allowed a place of safety in which to grow in wisdom and become strong in spirit. God brought Him to Nazareth to protect Him, just as He guided the children of Israel out of Egypt and closed the Red Sea around Pharaoh and his army. The Lord, because of His great love and mercy, grants us that same protection.

We can see that God protected Jesus and allowed Him time to grow. After He had grown and began His ministry, Jesus came back to Nazareth and being prepared and willing, He did His Father's will, even when His own people rejected Him.

The same can be said for followers of Christ today. After salvation, God allows us time to grow and become strong in the faith and in His Word. This is so we can be prepared and able to look to Him when we attempt to accomplish His will in our lives as He sends us out.

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

- ✦ What do you think Jesus learned through His time in Nazareth (speculation)?
- ✦ What are some examples of ways God grants us protection? Why do you think that God allows us this blessed protection? How can we make use of His protection?
- ✦ Do you think God still allows us to go through trials during this time?

"I Must be About My Father's Business"

Reading:

Luke 2:41-52

Have you ever thought about what your purpose in life is? It's a question we should all ask of ourselves. Jesus knew His purpose from the start. In accomplishing His purpose, He lived the only truly godly life the earth has ever seen and His life, as recorded in God's Word, should serve as the pattern for our lives. When the Son of God came into the world he declared, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God" (Hebrews 10:9). Throughout His life He never deviated from His purpose.

Luke 2:49 records a question the youthful Jesus asked of Mary and Joseph, "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" Like Jesus, all saved people have a Father in Heaven who desires that His children be about His business. Ephesians 2:10 states, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." You can see that God has a purpose for every saved person. He has prepared the way in advance and He will equip you for your life's purpose just as He prepared Jesus for His. Luke 2:52 lists the ways in which Jesus matured unto His purpose. Jesus increased in wisdom and stature. This wisdom was God's wisdom, not man's wisdom.



For our lives, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). Ideally, our wisdom should increase with our stature (physical maturity). Proverbs 22:6 declares, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Spiritual growth and subsequent favor with God cannot begin until a person is "born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). And being a child of God, it is important that we maintain a spiritual focus in our lives and not a worldly focus. Though Jesus gained respect socially (favor with man), He was not a friend of the world. There is a difference between showing yourself friendly (Proverbs 18:24) or loving your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31), and being a friend of the world (James 4:4).

Discussion Starters/Points of Reflection:

✠ Have you decided it's time to be about your Father's business? Do you seek out God's purposes and will for your life? Evaluate your growth and maturity using Jesus' as your example.

Untitled Poem

by Aimee Demientieff
September 23, 2004

Matthew 18:12-14

"How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." (KJV)

Once I was lost, living in sin
Dwelling in darkness, dieing within.
Sorrow and pain, brought by an evil friend
Hoping and praying for a means to an end.
I was so lost, unable to find the way.
Clouds in my head had led me astray.

But then one day, broken and crying
Falling down on my knees
I begged O Lord please.
Forgive me of my sins, transgressions, and devious ways
For all have fallen short of the glory of God.

By repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ
I knew that I couldn't but I knew that He could
Save my soul
And I knew He would.

Thank you O Lord,
By your grace and mercy my soul has been saved.