



Advent

2022 FAMILY ADVENT GUIDE

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Advent Daily Reading Guide

A daily reading for each day of Advent. This guide was originally published in “The First Days of Jesus” by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Alexander Stewart.

December 1	Luke 1:1-4
December 2	Genesis 49:8-12
December 3	Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-5
December 4	Micah 5:2-4
December 5	Matthew 1:1-17
December 6	Matthew 1:18-25
December 7	Matthew 2:1-12
December 8	Matthew 2:13-15
December 9	Matthew 2:16-18
December 10	Matthew 2:19-23
December 11	Luke 1:5-25
December 12	Luke 1:26-38
December 13	Luke 1:39-45
December 14	Luke 1:46-56
December 15	Luke 1:57-65
December 16	Luke 1:67-80
December 17	Luke 2:1-7
December 18	Luke 2:8-21
December 19	Luke 2:22-40
December 20	John 1:1-5, 18
December 21	John 1:6-8, 15
December 22	John 1:9-14
December 23	John 1:16-17
December 24	Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12
December 25	Revelation 21:1-8

Introduction

“She will bear a son, and you will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” These were the words that the angel spoke to Joseph when he told him that his fiancé was, “with child from the Holy Spirit.” Joseph did as the angel said and named the child Jesus, and God has done what He has promised and brought salvation from sin to all who believe in Him; His people.

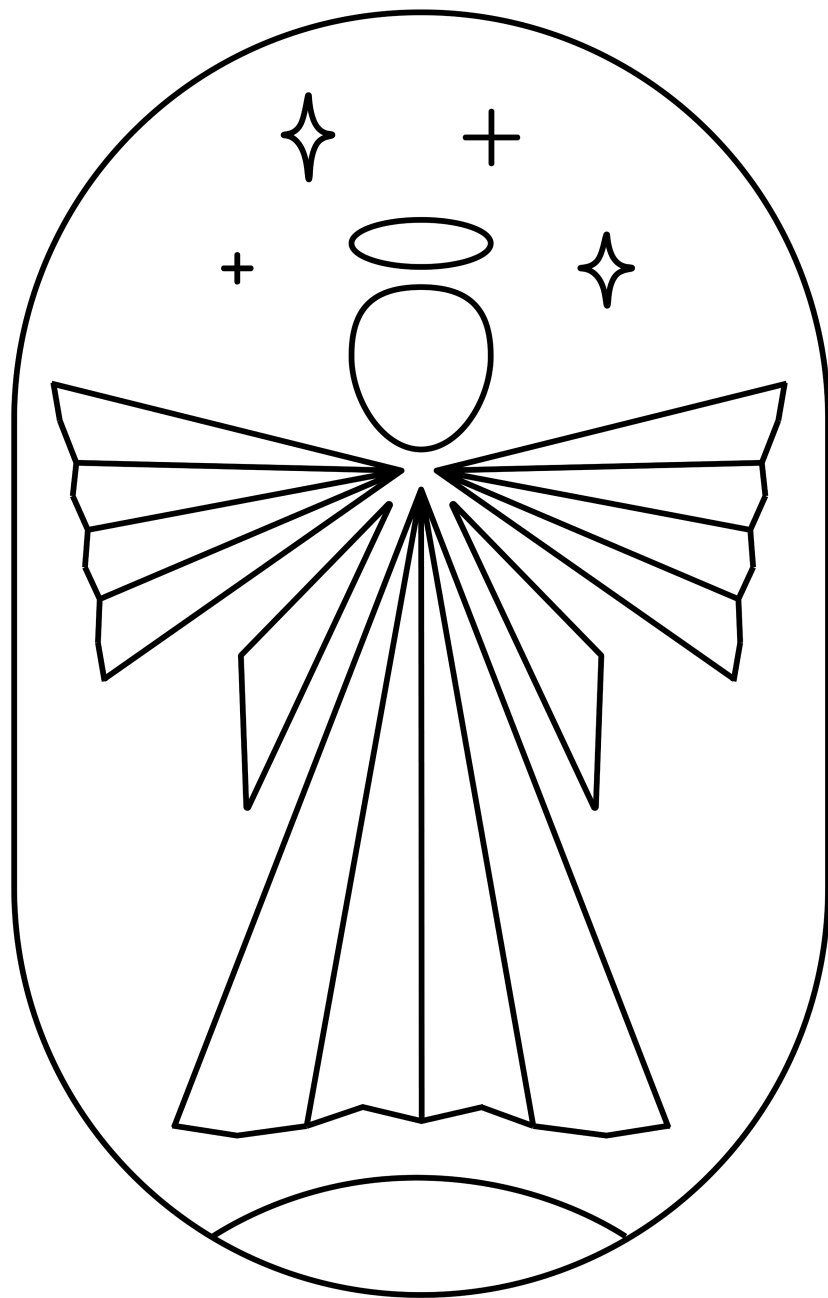
This Advent Guide is for His people. As we come to the end of the year and celebrate this Christmas season it is right that we take some time during a very busy season to reflect upon the good promises of God. The story of the birth of Jesus is found, particularly, in both Matthew’s gospel and Luke’s gospel. Last year we considered the story found in Luke’s gospel and how Luke told the story in four songs. This year we will consider how Matthew told the story of Jesus. Instead of using songs like Luke, Matthew used five quotations from the Old Testament to frame his story of the coming king. Each devotional in this book will center on one of those five passages.

In the following pages you will find five devotionals. Each devotional will give you the opportunity to read, meditate, and reflect upon a passage from the gospel of Matthew. Each devotional will have a personal devotional, which is appropriate for older students and adults, and questions for reflection. There is also a family devotional in each one as well. This is to encourage you as a family to sit down with the Christmas story and read, pray, and sing together. A fun activity is also included. Also, each week includes a Christmas carol devotional. This will give you a familiar song to sing and also the story behind the song.

Finally, this entire Advent Guide has been written by our team here at Taylors. Each person on our ministerial team played a part. I am so thankful for them and the faithful service they continue to invest into our church. I know you will be blessed just as I have been blessed by their contributions to this guide.

May God bless each of you and your families this Christmas season. I hope this Advent Guide helps you to spend time together reflecting on the goodness of our Savior.

Pastor Josh



November 27 - December 3

Such a Strange Way to Save the World

Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Isaiah 7:14

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

English Standard Version

Personal Devotional

If I put my trust in God, will He save me? Whether one asks this question regarding salvation from sin or of some other situation in life, no question we face in life, when truthfully answered yes, better defines and explains the essence of true faith.

One of the people in scripture who faced this important life question was King Ahaz. He was a wicked king of Judah around 735 BC and a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah. When faced with

that important question, he whiffed. Ironically, his lack of faith in God's deliverance enabled God to speak through Isaiah one of the most well-known of all Messianic prophecies, Isaiah 7:14.

When Ahaz was king, the twelve tribes of Israel were split into two nations – two tribes in the south known as Judah, and ten tribes in the north who kept the name Israel. As Isaiah 7 opens, Ahaz had not agreed for Judah to join a three-nation alliance with Israel and Syria to try to stand against the rise of Assyria as a world power. Ahaz's refusal angered the kings of Israel and Syria, so they decided to invade Judah and put a puppet king in Ahaz's place. In response to the news of a pending invasion "the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind." (vs. 2)

Seeing the depth of their fear, God sent Isaiah to give Ahaz this message of hope, "Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your hearts be faint because of these two smoldering stumps." (vs. 4) The reason? Their assault would not stand because both nations would become inconsequential over the next years. To further encourage Ahaz to believe His words and not fear, God spoke this key life truth to him, "If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all." (vs. 9) God wanted Ahaz to realize that trust in His ability to save is the cornerstone for standing firm in any circumstance of life.

Then God offered Ahaz the deal of a lifetime. God said, "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." What an opportunity God was giving Ahaz to become certain that Israel and Syria would not succeed. Sadly, his answer reflects false piety at its finest (vs 12), "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." God chided Ahaz, but surprisingly told Ahaz that He was going to give Ahaz a sign anyway. Isaiah 7:14 describes the sign, "Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call His name Immanuel." As if that was not enough assurance, further assurance would come from the fact that before the boy knew how to choose good from evil, the land of the kings of Syria and Israel would be deserted.

When Isaiah spoke God's promise to Ahaz and the people of Judah recorded in Isaiah 7:14, none of them would have thought that it had any meaning beyond their lives right then and there. They had no way of knowing that they had just heard a magnificent messianic prophecy that one day centuries later would be a sign to all that the Messiah had been born.

Let's fast forward seven centuries to the part of the Christmas narrative recorded in Matthew 1:18-25. Here the gospel writer Matthew, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, makes the connection between Isaiah 7:14 and what happened in the little town of Nazareth when Jesus was conceived. Connecting Isaiah 7:14 to the one who was conceived in Mary's virgin womb was essential to any claim that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. Based on Isaiah 7:14, Jesus had to be born of a virgin or He couldn't be the Messiah. Matthew attests to the fact that He was.

Matthew's account of the conception of Jesus was written from Matthew's perspective, Luke's from Mary's. When combined, they tell the wonderful story of the miraculous conception of Jesus so necessary to help prove He was the Messiah. They give a powerful description of how God above us, became God with us, Immanuel. That is something worthy of us celebrating at Christmas. But let's not overlook the fact that Matthew and Luke also tell an inspiring story of two Jewish young people, who, while simply living their lives in anticipation of marriage, family, worship, and survival had their lives turned upside down by an angel's declaration that God had chosen them to be the earthly father

and mother of the Savior of the world. No others who've ever lived have had their faith tested more than they have. Both came face to face with the same big question Ahaz faced that day 700+ years earlier, "If I put my trust in God, will He save me?" Whereas Ahaz said no, Mary and Joseph, by both words and actions, said a resounding yes. We would do well to do the same.

Personal Time of Reflection

The way God chose to save the world through baby Jesus, to quote the lyrics of a well-known Christmas song, seems like "such a strange way to save the world." If you were the one deciding how to accomplish salvation, how would you have accomplished it? Why did God have to do it the way He did?

Just as Mary, Joseph, and Ahaz had to answer life's big question, "If I put my trust in God, will He save me?", so do we. Think of a time in your life when that question confronted you. How did you respond? How can Mary's and Joseph's faith and obedience inspire us?

We need to remember that Mary and Joseph were flesh and blood with feelings, desires, and fears. Take a moment to mentally walk in their shoes. Imagine what it was like for them, not only to be invited by God through the Angel Gabriel to participate in this part of the Salvation narrative, but to actually carry out their roles. For example, imagine the conversation between them when she told him she was pregnant.

Has your heart ever "shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind?" How did your response affirm as true what God said to Ahaz - "If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all?"

Reflect on this: When Jesus was born, the greatest miracle was not that He was conceived in a virgin's womb, as miraculous as that was, but that it was God Himself in that womb.

Family Devotional

Matthew 1:22-23

²² All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

²³ "Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,
which means 'God is with us.'"

Isaiah 7:14

¹⁴ All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us').

New Living Translation

One of my favorite people in the world to be with is my brother. Whenever I am able to get to spend time with him we have fun, laugh, watch interesting stuff together and talk about real life. I think I enjoy being with him so much because he knows me better than most people in the world, we just have a special connection. Who is your favorite person or people to be with? What makes them your favorite?

There is always something special about getting to be with the people that we love most in our life. We grow to love those people and our time with them because of the memories we have made with them. The time we have spent together gives us a desire to spend more time with them.

Hundreds of years before Jesus was born the prophet Isaiah wrote these words, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). When Isaiah wrote these words God's people were in great threat from the enemy. It seemed as though God had left them alone but Isaiah's words here are a promise from God that He hadn't left them and that He would send a sign of hope for His people.

Then, in the gospel of Matthew, after Mary is found to be pregnant, her husband Joseph was upset and an angel appeared to him and told him to not be afraid to get married to Mary, she is having a baby that is from God, name him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:18-21). Immediately after this, Matthew 1:22-23 says, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel' (which means, God with us). What God had promised hundreds of years earlier was happening now.

Now, if you are anything like me, you might be thinking, wait, is it Jesus or is it Immanuel? The angel

told Joseph to name the baby Jesus, but the prophet Isaiah, that Matthew quotes, says to call him Immanuel. Throughout the Bible, names carried great meaning and weight. Whatever your name actually meant was often a direct connection to a person's identity. The name Jesus, which is the name He was called, means God is salvation. Jesus' name was to point to the fact that He is our Savior.

Jesus was and is our salvation and more. He wasn't a Savior who was far away; He was a king who left His throne in heaven to become a baby and be with us. "Immanuel" means God with us. Isaiah says to call him Immanuel, not to actually refer to him that way, but because that is what He was, God with us. Even greater still is that God is still with us in the form of the Holy Spirit. The God who created you loves you so deeply that He came to be "with you" so that you can be saved from your sin. This is the best news in the world!

Family Time of Reflection

God has shown us that He wants to be with us. Do you want to be with Him?

How do you show him that you want to be with him?

What are some things that we spend a lot of time doing that are not as meaningful and important as spending time with Jesus?

Do you think that the more time you spend with God, the more time you will want to spend with Him; just like your favorite people to be with?

What is one way you can be with Jesus more this week?

Family Activity

Anticipating Christ's Arrival | Manger Ornament Craft

Let's anticipate Christ's arrival with creating a meaningful ornament. Let's create a Jesus in the Manger Salt Dough ornament!

Materials needed:

- 1 cup salt
- 4 cups all purpose flour
- 1.5 cups warm water
- Acrylic paint to paint once dry. Yellow and brown for manger.
- Ribbon

Instructions:

- Preheat oven to 250 degrees
- Knead dough for 5 minutes. Add more water if the dough is too dry.
- Roll out the dough flat and then have your child push their hand into the dough.
- Cut a circle around your hand print using a plastic knife. Poke a hole at the top for the string.
- Bake for 1-2 hours.
- Let air dry for a few hours, paint your Jesus in the Manger, add a string, and then hang it on your Christmas tree.



Christmas Carol: "God With Us"

Verse 1

Oh, You've come to bring peace
To be Love, to be nearer to us
Oh, You've come to bring life
To be Light, to shine brighter in us
Oh Emmanuel, God with us

Chorus

Our Deliverer, You are Savior
In Your presence, we find our strength
Over everything, our Redemption
God with us. You are God with us

Verse 2

Oh, You've come to be hope
To this world, for Your honor and name
And You've come to take sin
To bear shame, and to conquer the grave
Oh Emmanuel, God with us

Chorus

Our Deliverer, You are Savior
In Your presence, we find our strength
Over everything, our Redemption
God with us. You are God with us

Bridge

You are here
You are holy
We are standing
In Your glory

Chorus

Our Deliverer, You are Savior
In Your presence, we find our strength
Over everything, our Redemption
God with us. You are God with us

Prophecy: Micah 7:14

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Prophecy Fulfilled: Matthew 1:22-23

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel."

What does the name Emmanuel mean? You've heard the name before, especially around Christmas time, but do you know the significance and meaning of Emmanuel? The word Emmanuel is a Hebrew name which means, "God with us." Sometimes you will also see it translated to Immanuel. Both are the same word, just different ways of spelling.

Genesis 1 tells us that in the beginning, God created everything, walked in the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, whom He created, and everything was in perfect harmony. Adam and Eve experienced "God with us" in the garden. However, sin entered the world in that same garden through Adam and Eve's disobedience and fellowship with God was broken.

What now? In the midst of their disobedience and sin, God had a plan for redemption. God made a promise that one day He would send the Messiah, the one who would take away their sins and bring them back into relationship with Him. Jesus, God's own son, would come to earth, born of the virgin Mary, to dwell among His people once again.

John 1:14 says it this way: The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Modern Hymn, “God With Us” was written by Leslie Ann Jordan and David Alan Leonard, an American Christian worship music duo called *All Sons & Daughters* that formed in 2009. They wrote and performed in the styles of acoustic and folk music, originating from Franklin, Tennessee. This song reminds us of what the coming of Christ means for us. God has brought our redemption, in Jesus Christ, by His life, death, and resurrection from the dead.

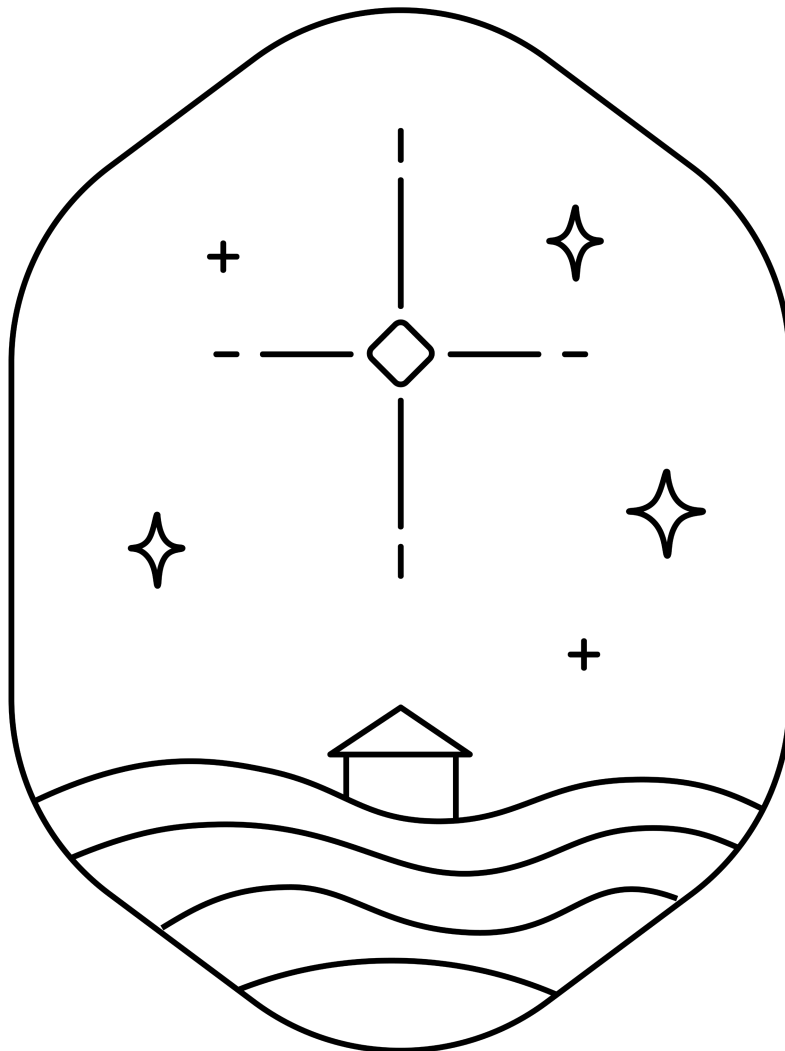
Sing along with this powerful song of Emmanuel, “God With Us”



LISTEN

Hold your phone camera up to this QR code. Click the link that pops up on your screen.





December 4 - 10

O Little Town

Matthew 2:5-6

⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

⁶ ““And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.””

Micah 5:2

² But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

English Standard Version

Personal Devotional

At first glance, many of the prophets in the Bible appear to have a continual message of doom and gloom, and the prophet, Micah, is no exception. Micah enters the picture 700 years before the birth of Christ during a period of great turbulence in Israel. He brings a message of judgment as God's people repeatedly sin against Him by committing idolatry, oppressing the poor, greedily grasping for more, and violating all of His laws. As a result of their sin, both the northern and southern kingdoms find themselves in a place of judgment that leads them into captivity by their enemies.

The first three chapters of Micah paint a picture that seems hopeless, ending with the declaration that “Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.” But in chapter four, the message shifts to “the last days,” and the picture changes dramatically to one of hope.

Micah describes a time of peace and prosperity saying, “We will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.”

As Micah delivers this message of hope for the future, he refers to the little town of Bethlehem that we still sing about today, a town that was “too little to be among the clans of Judah.” He prophesies of a ruler “whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.” How desperately God’s children must have needed hope, hope for the immediate future, to be rescued from their enemies, to be whole and prosperous once again. But their ultimate hope was not just around the corner, their ultimate hope would be a very long time in coming.

Seven centuries later, the gospel of Matthew records the birth of Jesus in the town of Bethlehem, a town that was small and obscure in Jesus day but that was rich with the history of God’s chosen people. Bethlehem was also the birthplace of King David, the home of Naomi, the place where Ruth and Boaz were married, and the place where Caleb’s family settled. Matthew 2 tells us of wise men from the east following a star as they search for the king of the Jews in order to worship Him. How did the wise men know to look in Bethlehem for the king? They knew because God had revealed the birth place of the king seven centuries earlier. God was continuing to weave His story while using people and places that were small and insignificant in the eyes of the world but central to the glorious plan He was unfolding.

There is nothing the creator of the universe has forgotten to account for – “he has planned, so shall it be, he has purposed, so shall it stand!” (Isaiah 14:24) Even the smallest details concerning the birth of Jesus were planned by God from the beginning of time. He made sure His people knew a Savior was coming to rescue them, and he made sure they knew where to find Him.

Micah had prophesied that a ruler of Israel “is coming forth from of old, from ancient of days,” also translated as “from eternity.” This ruler is Jesus, the lamb slain from the “foundation of the world,” the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Yet true to the word He gave to the prophet, Micah, God chose to have this “king of the Jews,” the Savior of the world, born in the little town of Bethlehem in a lowly manger. Yes, this was such a strange way to save the world.

Personal Time of Reflection

Why do you think God chose so many obscure people and places to play significant roles in His story?

Why, when God had told the people through the prophets what to expect, did so many not recognize Jesus for who He was?

How can we be sure we don’t make the same mistake so many of the Jews made in Jesus day as we wait for Him to come again?

The Jews waited 700 years for the promised Messiah to come. Almost 2000 years has now passed since the death and resurrection of Jesus, and yet we still wait for Him to come again. What does God desire for us to do as we wait?

Family Devotional

Matthew 2:5-6

⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶ ‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
are not least among the ruling cities of Judah,
for a ruler will come from you
who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’”

Micah 5:2

² But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
are only a small village among all the people of Judah.
Yet a ruler of Israel,
whose origins are in the distant past,
will come from you on my behalf.

New Living Translation

Have you ever been to a really small town or have a family member that lives in a place that seems really tiny? I grew up in a big city and never lived in a small town until I was married. After I got married, I moved to a small town called Hazel Green. I mean this place was so small it didn't even have a Walmart.

That is how I think about Bethlehem. In Micah 5:2, Bethlehem is talked about as “too little to be among the clans of Judah.” Bethlehem was small, it was seemingly insignificant as Micah writes. However, Micah continues, “from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.” So, what Micah is saying is that from a seemingly insignificant place is coming one who will be the ruler over Israel.

Now read Matthew 2:5-6. Matthew takes what Micah wrote and expounds on it so that we know that Bethlehem is not to be seen as insignificant at all, because not only is a ruler coming but He will also be a shepherd for the people. This is Jesus. The Savior of the world, ruler of all things forever, comes from a small place called Bethlehem.

In Hebrew the word Bethlehem means “house of bread.” In John 6:35, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” I find it beautiful that the bread of life was born in a place known as the house of bread.

This makes me think about what really matters. Does it matter the place you came from, the town

you grew up in, the popularity among peers, or the money you were born to? The simple answer is no. What matters is not where you came from but who you know. God loves to take the seemingly insignificant, most humble of things, and by His power use it for mighty works to advance His kingdom for His glory!

Family Time of Reflection

If what matters most is who we know, do you know and have a relationship with the bread of life, Jesus?

How does it feel to know that the God who created everything wants to know you personally?

Have you ever thought that you were too little or not smart enough for God to use you?

Where has God put you in your life right now that He can use you?

Family Activity

Sharing Your Joy with Others | Reindeer Hot Cocoa Treat

How can you bring the joy of Advent to others this week? Make a plan as a family to send your Christmas cards, make a phone call to a loved one, hang up Christmas lights together, or take a delicious treat to nearby neighbors. Here is a Reindeer Hot Cocoa Activity to make together as a family. Hand them out to friends and neighbors and tell them about the Joy of Advent!

Materials needed per cocoa treat:

- 2 piping bags
- 2 tbsp mini chocolate chips
- ½ cup mini marshmallows
- 1 red pom pom ball
- 2 wiggle eyes
- Tan or brown pipe cleaner
- Ribbon
- Glue
- Stapler

Instructions

1. Pour hot cocoa mix into the piping bag, pushing it all the way to the tip.
2. Cut off the top of the piping bag at ~2 inches above the top of the hot cocoa. Fold the excess two inches of the piping bag in an down. Staple to close.
3. Put the bag of hot cocoa into another piping bag and flatten.
4. Layer in mini chocolate chips.
5. Add a layer of marshmallows.
6. Cinch the top of the bag and tie on a ribbon.
7. Cut out a gift tag and punch a hole in the top. Weave the ribbon through the hole and knot it to hold the gift tag in place.
8. Wrap a pipe cleaner around the bag – just above the ribbon. Shape into antlers.
9. Place wiggle eyes near the top of the hot cocoa mix and glue in place.
10. Glue a pom pom near the tip of the bag for the reindeer noses.
11. Trim off excess piping bag above antlers.



Christmas Carol: "How Far is it to Bethlehem"

Text by Frances Chesterton (1869-1938)

*How far is it to Bethlehem? Not very far.
Shall we find the stable room lit by a star?*

*Can we see the little Child - is He within?
If we lift the wooden latch, may we go in?*

G.K. Chesterton was a well-known English writer, a Christian apologist, and penned more than eighty books and hundreds of poems. My favorite of his was the book *Orthodoxy*, a classic defense of the Christian faith.

This poem was written by his wife, Frances. She actually wrote it as the text for her Christmas cards in 1917. The poem has been set to music, most famously the English tune, 'Stowey', a traditional English melody.

The song asks the question, "how far is it to Bethlehem?" But the writer wasn't talking about GPS coordinates and Google maps.

We often hold back in our desire for Jesus. Am I worthy to come before Him? We want to see Him, and experience Him in our daily lives, but are we willing to open the door to Him? Or will we stand in the shadows with the animals?

*May we stroke the creatures there, ox, ass, or sheep?
May we peep like them and see Jesus asleep?*

*If we touch His tiny hand will he awake?
Will He know we've come so far just for His sake?*

We gather enough courage to approach the manger and see the baby. God come down to earth. The Son of heaven has become the Son of Man.

*Great kings have precious gifts, and we have naught
Little smiles and little tears are all we have brought.*

Our “little smiles and little tears,” our joys and our sorrows, these are the only gifts we have to bring — ourselves, the good and the bad, surrendered to Jesus. And that’s what Jesus asks for. When He called His first disciples, He looked for simple, common men and women who would follow Him.

*For all weary children Mary must weep
Here, on His bed of straw, sleep, children, sleep.*

*God in His mother’s arms, babes in the byre
Sleep, as they sleep who find their heart’s desire.*

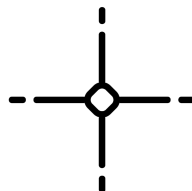
What is your heart’s desire? What are you restless for? Is it possible that what you seek can be found in the Savior, nestled in a cradle made of wood and straw? How far is your heart from Bethlehem?

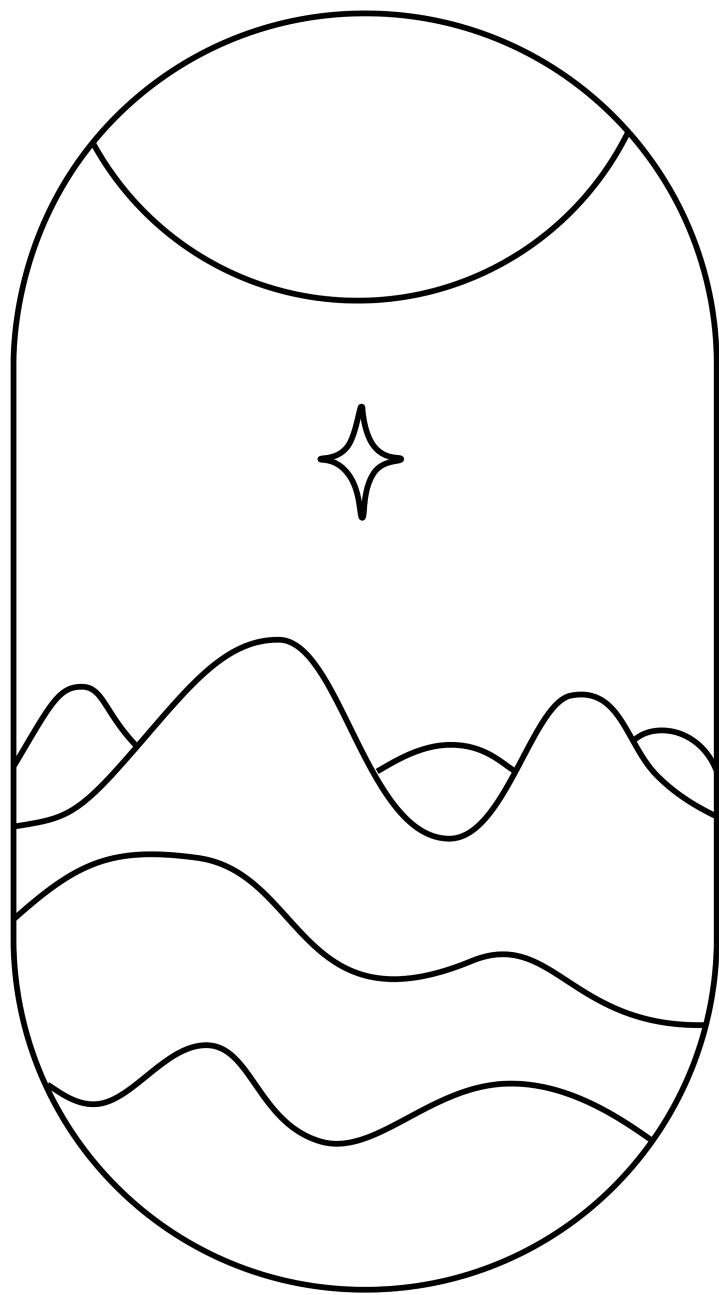
Listen to this beautiful Christmas carol...



LISTEN

Hold your phone camera up to this QR code. Click the link that pops up on your screen.





December 11 - 17

Tragedy, Protection, and Salvation

Matthew 2:15

¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Hosea 11:1

¹ When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

English Standard Version

Personal Devotional

The eighth-century B.C. prophet Hosea is writing during the tumultuous days of the final years of the northern kingdom of Israel. The nation rebelled against God by worshiping the gods of the Canaanites. Hosea describes the nation’s rebellion as spiritual adultery and calls the people to return to the one true living God. Hosea reminded them of the love and faithfulness that the God of the patriarchs demonstrated through centuries of provision and protection. The book foretells the destruction of the nation of Israel due to the unfaithfulness of her people. Hosea calls the people to repentance by declaring the destruction that will come due to their unfaithfulness, but the people do not heed his warning. Chapter 11 follows specific prophecies of the nation’s destruction with a reminder of God’s love for the children of Israel. Hosea expresses the love of God for the people by reminding them of how God loved, provided, and cared for them and the grace God has faithfully shown to those that follow Him.

In this context, Matthew draws on these verses and directly connects them to the birth narrative of Jesus, the Messiah. Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience that clearly understands the history and work of God through the ages. Matthew transitions from the wise men searching and worshipping to tears, tragedy, and a glimpse of the hope of salvation through Jesus Christ. We see the rebellion of the egomaniac Herod seeking to destroy anything or anyone that could seize his power. His plot to kill the children in Bethlehem is known as the Massacre of the Innocents. The exact number of deaths is unknown, but scholars estimate that it is possible that due to the size of the village

of Bethlehem at the time of the decree, around 20 to 30 children lost their lives. This tragedy demonstrates that the sin-cursed world needs the redemption that Jesus came to provide. Even in His birth, Christ was rejected, and God miraculously spared His life so that He could freely lay down His life as an atoning sacrifice for sin.

Matthew demonstrates God's miraculous work in providing and protecting the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Joseph receives a special message in a dream of urgency to flee to save his child. Egypt is a place of protection and provision from God for the baby and his family. In the first century, there was a sizeable Jewish community in Egypt that would have offered refuge from the decree of Herod. Little is known about the time the family spent in Egypt, but at the death of Herod, the family returns. In this context, Matthew connects the return of Christ from Egypt to the verses in the book of Hosea. God called His son out of Egypt. These words in Hosea reference the historical act of God's salvation of His people from enslavement by the Egyptians. The exodus was the path of salvation for the people of God. Matthew parallels Jesus, the Messiah, as the faithful son providing the way to salvation for the people of God. Jesus is Emmanuel, the son of God with us, who has come to save the people from their sins. The redemption of Jesus and His family points to Jesus as the hope for Israel and the world through His new covenant of Salvation. This Christmas, we celebrate God's sovereignty, power, faithfulness, and grace to bring salvation to the world.

Personal Time of Reflection

Like the people that Hosea gave his prophecies, are there areas of your life where you are in rebellion against God?

What are some specific ways that you have seen God provide protection and demonstrate His provision for your family over the past year?

What has God specifically called you to do to demonstrate your faithfulness to Him?

How do you and your family celebrate the faithfulness of God's faithfulness, grace and salvation this Christmas season?

Family Devotional

Matthew 2:15

¹⁵ and they stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt."

Hosea 11:1

¹ "When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and I called my son out of Egypt.

New Living Translation

As we begin, let's start with two important truths from the Bible. First, we worship a God that is knowable and second, God desires to make himself known. Those truths help us understand we can have right understanding of who God is and what God has done.

Next, let's talk about one word. What does the word promise mean? The word promise means a declaration or assurance that one will do this thing or that this thing will happen. What is a promise that you have made before?

Now that we discussed what the word promise means, let's look at a promise made in the Old Testament book of Hosea. Read Hosea 11:1. What does the word "son" mean in this passage? That is right, it is referring to the nation of Israel. This verse is talking about when God delivered His people out of slavery in Egypt. Do you remember what God used to deliver the people of Israel out of Egypt? That is right, God used 10 plagues to deliver the people out of slavery. After the people left Egypt, what was another way God delivered the people from Pharaoh and His army? Very good, God parted the Red Sea for the people.

Read Matthew 2:14-15. These verses are the fulfillment of the promise that was made in Hosea 11:1. In the Old Testament book of Exodus, that is where we read about when God delivered His people from slavery in Egypt. In the New Testament book of Matthew, we are reading about Jesus leaving Egypt to eventually deliver people from sin. So, what is Matthew wanting to tell us by using that reference in Hosea? Matthew is wanting to show us that Jesus is the new Israel.

Let's go back to what we talked about at the beginning. The Bible helps us understand who God is and what God has done. Our God is faithful. God does what He says He will do, always. God is not able to break His promises. Only God is fully faithful. God knows that His children have a tendency to forget His faithfulness. The promises in the Bible are reminders of God's faithfulness. One of my favorite things about being outside in creation is watching the sunrise in the morning and watching the sunset in the evening. It has happened since God placed the sun in the sky and is a reminder

to me of God's faithfulness. Just like I know the sun will rise tomorrow morning, I know from the Word of God, God is always faithful.

Family Time of Reflection

Has God ever broken a promise?

Can you think of another promise that God made in the Old Testament that came true?

Knowing that God has never broken a promise, should lead us to say God is _____.

Have you ever broken a promise?

How can we reflect God's character of faithfulness this week?

Family Activity

Spending Time with Those You Love | Christmas Light Scavenger Hunt

At the end of your Advent time together, take a moment to get out of your home and go on a Christmas Light scavenger hunt! Use the page below as a guide.

CHRISTMAS LIGHT SCAVENGER HUNT

Quick like frosty — get your jammies and slippers on, grab your favorite stuffed animal, a cuddly blanket, hot cocoa, cookies or snacks and find the following:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Snowflake | <input type="checkbox"/> Colored Lights on a Tree | <input type="checkbox"/> Santa |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mickey Mouse | <input type="checkbox"/> Nativity Scene | <input type="checkbox"/> Bell |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Penguin | <input type="checkbox"/> Wreath | <input type="checkbox"/> Snow Globe |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Train | <input type="checkbox"/> Nutcracker | <input type="checkbox"/> Cross |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Christmas Tree | <input type="checkbox"/> Snowman | <input type="checkbox"/> Star |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Candy Cane | <input type="checkbox"/> The Grinch | <input type="checkbox"/> Gifts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Winnie the Pooh | <input type="checkbox"/> Red-Nosed Reindeer | <input type="checkbox"/> Snoopy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Lights | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Deer Together | <input type="checkbox"/> Horse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Green Lights | <input type="checkbox"/> Elf | <input type="checkbox"/> Angel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Red Lights | <input type="checkbox"/> Icicles | <input type="checkbox"/> Dancing Lights |

Christmas Carol: "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear"

Text by Edmund H. Sears (1810-1876)

*It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old
From angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold
"Peace on the earth, good will toward men from heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing.*

The message of peace to the world that was shared by the heavenly host of angels is one of God's greatest gifts to mankind.

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. — 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 ESV

The reconciliation God provided in Jesus brought us peace with God, peace with each other, and peace within our own hearts.

The second verse encourages the listener to find peace and rest from the labor and troubles of life:

*And ye, beneath life's crushing load, whose forms are bending low
Who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow
Look now, for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing
O rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing*

The carol was written in 1849, pre-Civil war. The United States was divided over the issue of slavery. Rapid automation of the Industrial Age was changing the economy, and the gold rush was bringing a sense of frenzy to California. Into this time of upheaval and strife, the words bring comfort and calm.

*For lo, the days are hastening on, by prophet bards foretold
When with the ever-circling years comes 'round the age of gold
When peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling
And the whole world give back the song which now the angels sing.*

Edmund Sears, a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, spent his life pastoring small churches in the northeast. One of the first and best carols written by an American, his text is timeless. In the current world of chaos, wars, and division, the words call us again to seek the peace of Christ, the peace that passes all understanding.

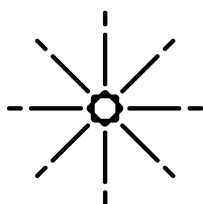
¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”— Luke 2:13-14

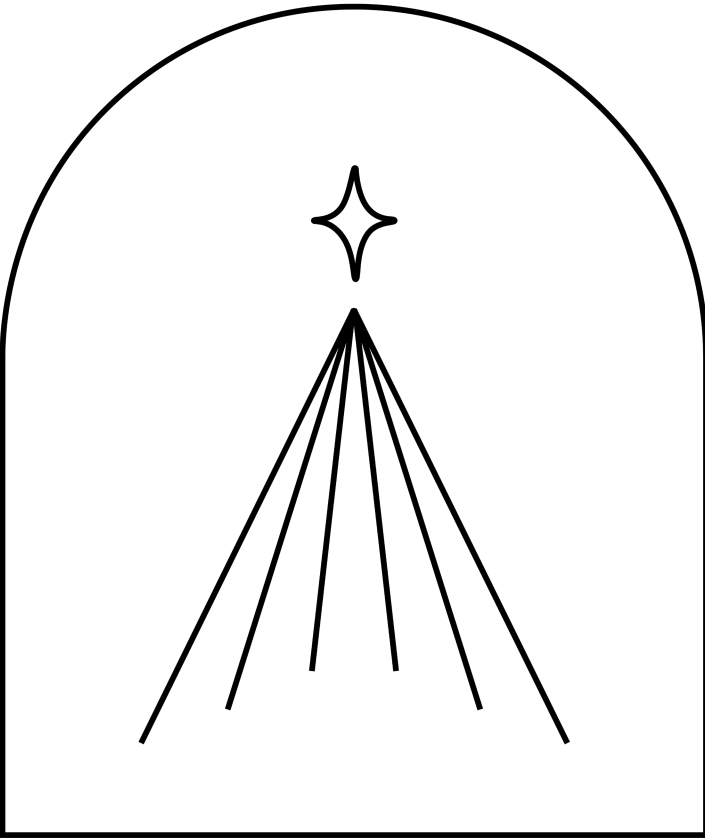
Sing along with “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear.”



LISTEN

Hold your phone camera up to this QR code. Click the link that pops up on your screen.





December 18 - 17

Mourning into Joy

Matthew 2:17-18

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

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

Jeremiah 31:15

¹⁵ Thus says the Lord:
“A voice is heard in Ramah,
lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
she refuses to be comforted for her children,
because they are no more.”

English Standard Version

Personal Devotional

Living in a fallen world, sorrow is all around us. Someone loses their job. Another receives an unexpected diagnosis. A family member or friend dies. A child goes astray. In some way or another, grief touches us all.

It was a time of great mourning in Israel's history when the Lord spoke through Jeremiah, “A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.” (Jeremiah 31:15) Why this lamentation and weeping?

It had been nearly 900 years since God established the Mosaic covenant with His people at Sinai. It didn't take long for Israel to dishonor God and begin what would become a repeated cycle of rebellion, rebuke, repentance, and restoration. They consistently failed in their struggle to honor God

by keeping the covenant. God was persistent and incredibly patient, sending prophets to call His people back to Himself. For nearly forty years, Jeremiah had been one of those voices, warning the people of the judgment to come because of their sin and rebellion.

Around 586 B.C., these prophecies would be fulfilled when Babylon would conquer Judah. Prior to this, many of the “sons of Israel” had been carried away into exile. You can imagine the bitter weeping of a mother as she watches this atrocity—here represented by Rachel, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin.

The words of Jeremiah and the emotion they bring come into the picture again after the birth of Jesus. Wise men had made their way to Jerusalem in search of the One who was born “king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). King Herod learned of this and fearing the loss of his kingdom, ordered the murder of all the male boys around Bethlehem who were two years old or younger. After this horrible act, Matthew bears witness, “Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.’” (Matthew 2:17-18) The heartache of these mothers for their children would seem inconsolable. And yet, considering what had been promised when Jeremiah first spoke these prophetic words, there is clearly a reason for hope!

In its original context, this prophecy of “weeping” would be followed by the promise of Israel’s future deliverance and the institution of a new covenant. Jeremiah writes, “I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them and give them gladness for sorrow. I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness,” declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 31:13-14).

It would be the baby Jesus who would make possible the fulfillment of this prophecy. Divinely protected from Herod that day, Jesus would go on to live a life that put the glory of God on full display. At the appointed time, He would be crucified as our substitute and raised to life again as our Savior and Lord. By His blood He would institute a new and better covenant.

Yes, we do live in a fallen world. And yes, we will all experience mourning and sorrow. However, as we celebrate Christmas this season, let’s be reminded of the faithfulness of God in sending the One who will ultimately turn all our “mourning to joy” and “satisfy us with His goodness”. Our Savior has come! Praise the Lord!

Personal Time of Reflection

What things have you experienced in life that have caused “mourning”? What has been your typical response to suffering?

1 Peter 1:3-7 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” What things do you see in this passage that you can rejoice in, despite your circumstances?

As we face the trials of today, we can look with confidence to what God has promised to come for those who are in Christ Jesus. “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’” (Revelation 21:3-4) How does this promise of God give you hope when you feel overwhelmed with the sorrows of today?

Family Devotional

Matthew 2:17

¹⁷ Herod's brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 31:15

¹⁵ This is what the Lord says:

“A cry is heard in Ramah—
deep anguish and bitter weeping.
Rachel weeps for her children,
refusing to be comforted—
for her children are gone.”

New Living Translation

In the beginning of Matthew chapter 2, wise men came from the east looking for the king of the Jews. Who were these wise men? It does not mean really smart men; it means astrologers, which basically means they study the stars. Those wise men came to King Herod looking for the one who would be born king of the Jews. King Herod was not happy with this news and was going to secretly try to kill Jesus. The wise men find Jesus and do not send word to King Herod like he asked them to do.

Two things before we read our passage today. First, isn't it interesting that it is pagans/unbelievers who worship the sun, moon, and stars that end up bowing down to worship Jesus, the creator of the sun, moon, and stars. Second, of all the kings that should have acknowledged the king of the Jews, it should have been the current king of the Jews.

Read Matthew 2:16-18. We do not know how much time has passed but we assume based on what Herod ordered, it was less than two years after first meeting up with King Herod. The question for us today, why is Matthew using the reference from Jeremiah 31:15? Let's first read that as well. Read Jeremiah 31:15.

This is speaking about the Babylonian captivity that happened for the people of Israel. Matthew is wanting to remind us that this is a similar type of grief and sadness. This was a terrible thing that had happened. Where else in the Bible do you remember someone in control killing male children? That is right. In Exodus and that is why Moses is put in a basket and floated down river to be found by Pharaoh's daughter.

So, what is the takeaway from this passage? What is Matthew wanting the audience to see and know?

We know that Abraham went down to Egypt out of weakness and eventually came back to the promised land. Joseph is in Egypt when his family comes down to survive the famine in the land. Those people are eventually freed from Egypt and taken back to the promised land by Moses. We have also seen Jesus coming out of Egypt and back into the promised land. Matthew wants us to see that Jesus, the new Israel, is going to be fully faithful and obedient. Although a lot of death happened because of evil leaders like Pharaoh and Herod, Jesus had come to die and would be raised to life rescuing all who believe and repent of their sins.

Family Time of Reflection

Do you ever spend any time looking at the stars at night?

Why did King Herod want the wise men to tell him when they found Jesus?

What is so special about people who worship the sun, moon, and stars bowing down to worship Jesus?

From talking about this Bible Lesson, how would you fill in this blank: God is _____ .

What makes Jesus better than Abraham, the People of Israel and Moses?

Family Activity

Christmas Charades

At the end of your Advent time, play a game of Christmas Charades as a family! Give everyone several pieces of paper. Let them write down something that goes along with Christmas to act out without words. Here are some ideas: Shepherd, Gift, Angel, Manger, Baby Jesus, Camel, Ornaments, Christmas Tree, Wise man, Stocking, etc.!

Fold up everyone's paper and put them in the same bowl. Take turns picking out a piece of folded up paper and act it out for your family.



Christmas Carol: "Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus"

Verse 1

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.

Chorus

Come Thou long-expected Jesus
Come Thou long-expected King

Verse 2

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.

Chorus

Come Thou long-expected Jesus
Come Thou long-expected King

Prophecy: Jeremiah 31:15

¹⁵ Thus says the Lord:

"A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping.

Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more."

Prophecy Fulfilled: Matthew 2:17-18

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

¹⁸ "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation,

Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

Advent is a season of longing, looking, watching, waiting, for God to break through the darkness once again. Each year we remember when Christ first arrived over two thousand years ago in Bethlehem, a lowly child placed in a manger for a crib.

Israel experienced a season of darkness soon after Christ was born as Herod sought to kill the Christ child. King Herod sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts from two years old and younger. He sought and failed to thwart God's redemptive plan through His son, Jesus Christ. Israel was waiting for the promised King who would deliver them from Roman oppression.

"Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus," was written by the prolific eighteenth-century hymn writer, Charles Wesley. Brother of John Wesley, the cofounder of Methodism, Charles wrote over 6,000 hymns, many of which we sing today (including "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today," "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing").

"Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus" wonderfully epitomizes the season of Advent. In this hymn, we put ourselves back into the place of the Israelites, hoping for God to send a king who would bring freedom,

strength, and consolation. Yet, we also sing this song as people who know that Jesus was the promised Messiah, that He came to set us free from our sins, that He is the Desire of every nation, not just the Jewish people. Because we understand that His work on earth is not finished, we ask Jesus, “Now thy gracious kingdom bring.”

In Advent, we hope and long for the second coming of Christ, establishing fully and finally the kingdom of God. Yet, in our yearning we also open our hearts to Him, inviting Him to fill us and use us through the power of His Spirit. Thus, as we pray, “Come, Thou long expected Jesus,” we are asking Him to come into our hearts afresh, to rule over us today so that we might serve Him in everything we do.

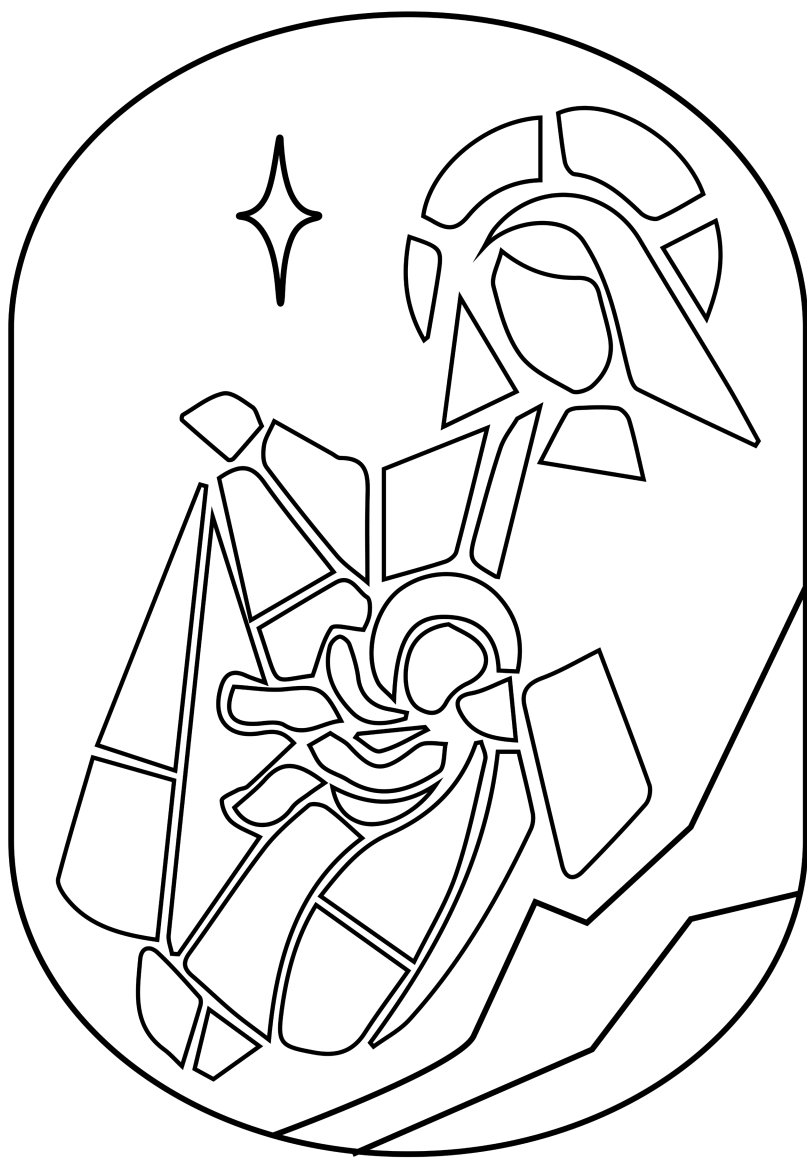
Sing along with this Advent hymn, “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus”



LISTEN

Hold your phone camera up to this QR code. Click the link that pops up on your screen.





December 25

Christmas Day

Matthew 2:23

²³ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

English Standard Version

Personal Devotional

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” And he rose and took the child and His mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene. (Matthew 2:19-23)

When Philip found Nathanael, he said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:45-46)

Nazareth was a small town about 70 miles North of Jerusalem. It was a place of lowly reputation and despised by all. When the Christians in Acts 24:5 are referred to as a Nazarene sect, it is a derogatory term meant to do harm, not bring honor. The scribes did not even believe prophets could come from Nazareth. It was a lowly and despised town, and those who came from it, were seen in the same light.

Jesus was a Nazarene. Though born in the town of Bethlehem He was referred to as Jesus of Nazareth. After returning from Egypt, the angel of the Lord led Joseph, Jesus and Mary to settle in Mary’s hometown of Nazareth, and it seems they stayed there as Jesus grew. In Luke 2 we read that after having visited the temple, “they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom.”

The prophets spoke, saying Jesus would be called a Nazarene. The prophecy does not have a direct text in the Old Testament to refer to like the previous prophecies in Matthew, but many prophets prophesied that the King and Messiah would come from a lowly background, and be despised and

rejected by men.

In the book of Isaiah, Isaiah prophesied, “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” Matthew wanted to remind his readers, the Messiah would not come in honor, but be despised by men. He would come not as a king, but as a servant. He would come not to reign, but to suffer and die. Jesus’ humble origin as a Nazarene actually testified that He was the eternal King who would sit on the throne of David forever!

Nathanael heard that Jesus was a Nazarene and wondered what good could come from such an obscure, poor, and despised place. Philip invited Nathanael to come and see for himself, and when Nathanael met Jesus, his eyes were opened and he declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

Jesus the Nazarene, was the Son of God who had finally come to establish His Kingdom!

Personal Time of Reflection

Many were looking for the Messiah. Many believed that God would fulfill His promise and send a King who would sit on the throne of David forever. But, they did not expect God to send His Son as a servant who would be despised by men, and finally crucified on a Roman cross. How have you seen God work in ways that you were not expecting?

Many have wrestled with the true identity of Jesus, or what to do with this Jesus. Those who should have been the first to recognize him as the Messiah, the scribes and pharisees, missed it completely. Herod, believed the prophecies of a king who would come and establish His kingdom, but he chose to try and destroy him. Who do you say this Jesus is?

If Jesus truly is the Son of God, King of all Kings, then how should you respond? Has He revealed to you something specific? What is your next step?

Dig Deeper – Read Isaiah 11:1-2 and listen to Pastor Josh’s message from this passage:



LISTEN

Hold your phone camera up to this QR code. Click the link that pops up on your screen.

Family Devotional

Matthew 2:19-23

¹⁹ When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt.

²⁰ “Get up!” the angel said. “Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead.”

²¹ So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother.

²² But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod’s son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. ²³ So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

New Living Translation

Have you ever had to move somewhere new? In this passage of Matthew we read that Joseph relocated his family to a small town, Nazareth. Jesus’ earthly father, Joseph, had an angel appear to him in a dream. This angel gave clear direction for Joseph and Joseph obeyed. Nazareth was about a weeks journey north of where they were currently living. As a family, they obeyed and traveled to Nazareth.

If someone were to ask you where you are from, what would you tell them? We typically associate our childhood location in response with that question. Some might be from Greenville, more specifically Greer, Taylors, or Tigerville. Nazareth was a small place and was his mother Mary’s hometown. This new home would be where people would refer Jesus as from: Acts 22:8, “And I answered, ‘Who are you Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth...’”

When people would hear Jesus was from Nazareth, they would often discredit His hometown. Nazareth was a very small town occupied with people who did not live in luxury. These people were likely farmers, shepherds, and laborers. When some heard Jesus was from Nazareth they were surprised; John 1:46 “Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

How have you seen God be faithful in your family’s life? The meaning of Nazareth can be associated with the Hebrew word Branch. Sometimes when a tree or shrub is cut down, a new branch can appear from the stump. The prophets wrote about the destruction and the rebuilding of Israel as a tree cut down only to sprout up once again. This “Branch” symbolizes hope! Isaiah 11:1 “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”

God always has a plan that is faithful and purposeful. Jesus’ hometown was not by chance. It was on purpose. “Jesus from Nazareth, King of the Jews” was placed by Pilate above Jesus as He hung on the cross. A lowly hometown with a king not just from Nazareth, but of the universe.

Isn't it cool how Christ is woven throughout scripture? Discuss as a family the following questions about this passage.

Family Time of Reflection

Where are you from? What about your parents?

How was Joseph obedient to God in this passage?

Why is it important to obey God?

In your life, how has God used something that seemed not great (Nazareth), to bring glory to His name?

Family Activity

Christmas Nativity Treasure Hunt

This is a great game to play in the morning! Cut out the cards below and put them in their locations before beginning with your family.

“To tell the Christmas story that is true, we’ll play a game with lots of clues.

First, find an animal that looks like a horse. It’s next to your morning’s first food course!”



Read Luke 2:1-3

The donkey carried a couple around,
So they could be counted in their hometown.
Who was the man who made this trip?
You’ll find him where the faucet drips.



Read Luke 2:4

Joseph’s family was from Bethlehem.
He took his wife on the journey with him.
She was chosen by God for a special plan.
Search for her where we keep pots and pans.



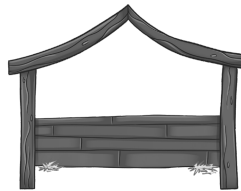
Read Luke 2:8-10

Jesus is the name of the baby boy.
The Lamb of God brings all people joy.
And suddenly there was a heavenly host.
Search for one where we sit down the most.



Read Luke 2:5-6

Joseph’s wife, Mary, was expecting a babe,
The Son of God, who would come to save.
Where did Joseph and Mary stay that night?
Look in the place that makes dirty things white.



Read Luke 2:7

There was no room for them in the inn.
So they stayed where the animals had been.
The baby was born amongst the creatures.
Find this animal where movies are featured.



Read Luke 2:15-16

The shepherds heard what the angels conveyed.
They came to see Joseph, Mary, and the babe.
And other visitors came from afar.
Go and search for one of these men in a car.



Read Matthew 2:4-7

In Bethlehem they searched for the child.
Though Jesus appeared lowly and mild,
A Ruler and a Savior He is sure to be.
Next to a cross, find wise man number three.



Read Matthew 2:8-9

All of the wise men who came from afar,
On camels they rode and followed a star.
The Morning Star shines, He is so bright.
Look for a star where there is light.



Read Luke 2:11-14

The angels sang of the child’s birth.
He is Christ the Lord. He brings peace on earth.
And who was there tending the sheep?
You’ll find him where we lie down to sleep.



Read Matthew 2:10-12

The gifts were given to the King.
And with the angels, we can now sing:
“Glory to God.” The greatest gift, you see,
You’ll find Him underneath the tree.



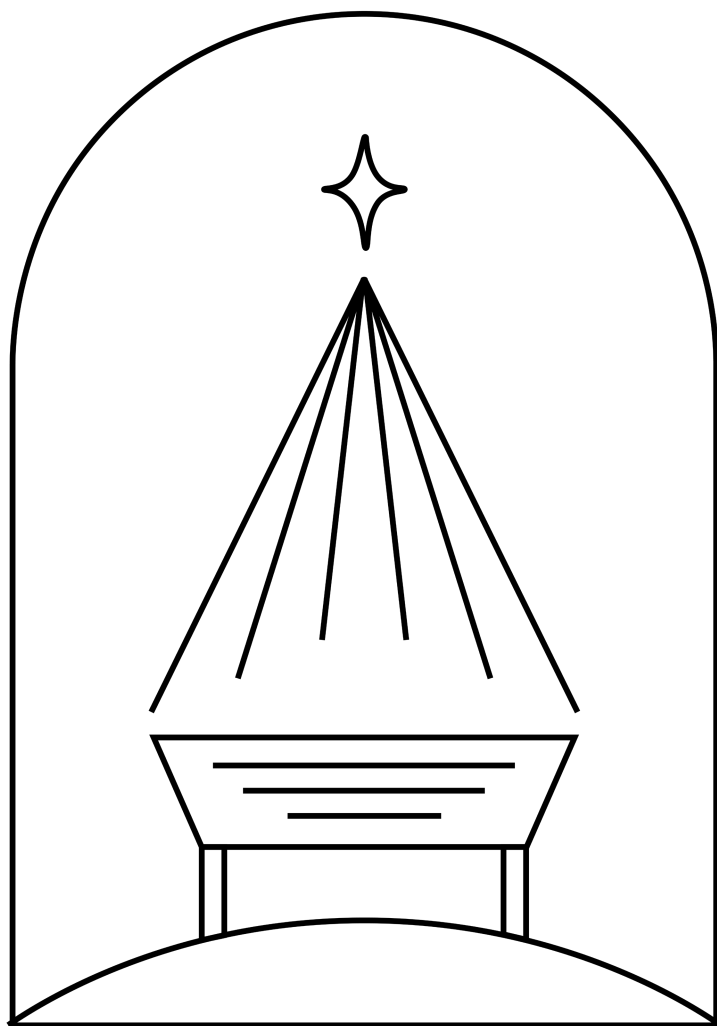
Read Isaiah 9:6

Jesus is the best gift we receive.
He’s our King, our Savior, our joy, our peace.
And now you know the Christmas story that’s true.
This special gift of Jesus is given to you.



Read Matthew 2:1-3

The wise men knew there would be a King.
They wanted to worship and had gifts to bring.
You’ll find another man if you look
By words of wisdom, it’s there by a book.



Christmas Carol: "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day"

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

It's sometimes hard for us to even imagine what it was like to live during the American Civil War. As an interesting aside, Taylors First Baptist Church began one year prior to the end of the Civil War, so those early brothers and sisters were establishing a church here in the Taylors community in the middle of an ongoing war. In fact the year of 1864, when Taylors FBC began, was the same year that saw Sherman burn Atlanta and begin his march to the sea. Over 620,000 men, about 2% of the US population, lost their lives in the war.

It was in this time of misery and loss that Longfellow wrote his poem of hope and peace. He had been greatly distressed by all that was happening. The most influential poet of his day, Longfellow gave courage and renewed faith to all who read his words. Although he was a Unitarian, he had a strong belief in God's goodness and His loving concern for people.

The poem was written in 1864 for the Sunday School of the Unitarian Church of the Disciples, in Boston. Originally it had seven stanzas and was titled, "Christmas Bells". The verses we generally omit had strong references to the Civil War. The message of the remaining stanzas that we sing today tell a clear and compelling narrative:

- God is in control.
- In His time, right will triumph over wrong.
- God will restore peace.

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day, their old familiar carols play
And wild and sweet, the words repeat of "Peace on earth, good will to men."*

*And thought how, as the day had come, the belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song of "Peace on earth, good will to men."*

*And in despair, I bowed my head: "There is no peace on earth", I said,
For hate is strong, and mocks the song of "Peace on earth, good will to men."*

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: "God is not dead, nor doth He
sleep!"
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with "Peace on earth, good will to men."*

*Then ringing, singing on its way, the world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime of "Peace on earth, good will to men."*

Longfellow experienced another tragedy some 18 years after he wrote the poem. His beloved wife was burned to death in a fire. While her death was devastating to him, some of his greatest works were written out of the pain he experienced. After his death, his bust was placed in the famed "Poet's

Corner” of Westminster Abbey in London, as one of the greatest of all American writers. In his later years, in another Christmas poem, Longfellow penned these words: “Though in a manger Thou draw breath, Thou art greater than life and death.”

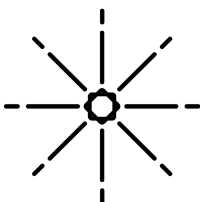
²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. – Jesus, recorded in John 14:27

Sing along with “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.”



LISTEN

Hold your phone camera up to this QR code. Click the link that pops up on your screen.





Christmas

AT TAYLORS

**JOIN US THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON AT TAYLORS FIRST BAPTIST
FOR ALL OF THESE EXCITING EVENTS.**

**TAYLORS CHRISTMAS WORSHIP
"THERE IS ANOTHER KING"**

December 1 7:30 pm* & December 4 10:00 am**

**CHILDREN'S MUSICAL
"A CHRISTMAS YARN"**

December 11 6:00 pm*

CHRISTMAS LESSONS AND CAROLS

December 18 6:00 pm*

CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP

3:00 and 5:00 pm*

CHRISTMAS DAY WORSHIP

11:00 am



200 West Main Street
Taylors, SC 29651