



Advent

2023 FAMILY ADVENT GUIDE



Christmas at Taylors

Taylors Christmas Worship

What Child is This?

Join us for a moving experience of worship, featuring the Taylors Worship Choir and Orchestra, with the Blue Ridge High School Drumline, as we welcome the season of Christmas.

November 30 at 7:30 pm

Childcare available for children up to age 4.

December 3 at 10:00 am

Childcare available for children up to age 5.

Children's Musical

Miracle on Main Street

December 10 at 6:00 pm

Childcare available for children up to age 3.

Christmas Lessons & Carols

December 17 at 6:00 pm

Childcare available for children up to age 4.

Christmas Eve Worship

December 24 at 10:00 am and 3:00 pm

Childcare available for children up to age 5 at 10:00 am only.

“What Child Is This?” by William C. Dix

This song is one of the most beautiful beloved carols that Christians sing during the Christmas season! As few other carols do, these lyrics prompt us to contemplate the identity, the Person and work, of the Babe in the manger. In fact, the carol politely but persistently presses us to answer the question: Who really is this Child? Is this Child truly a holy infant or a mere holiday infant?

When we think about that question, most of our reflections focus on the birth announcements in the gospel of Matthew and the gospel of Luke. Those passages certainly have their place. For this Christmas season, however, consider Christmas according to the Apostle Paul, as he reflects on the wonders of the birth of Jesus. Check out Galatians 4:4-5... ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

The Apostle Paul tells us five extraordinary things about Jesus as answers to the question that the carol poses to us.

Jesus is the Almighty God, the Messiah for whom all of time had waited: “when the fullness of time had come.” Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would be the Almighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

Jesus is the Holy Child. He was born under the law, yet was without sin. Truly this Child was not merely a holiday infant: He was and remains the Eternal Son sent forth by His Father.

Jesus is the Perfect Savior. The Child was sent to redeem us. The holy infant would ultimately redeem us from our sins and make us heirs of God with Him.

Jesus is the Word made flesh. The Son of God was sent to be one with us in our humanity. Yet Jesus is a perfect representation of the Father. Jesus himself said, “If you have seen me, you’ve seen the Father.”

Jesus is the Triumphant King. In his resurrection, He triumphed over sin, death, and the grave. And when He comes again, He will come not in humility, but in power and majesty, as the Righteous Judge. As His Church, we wait expectantly for the time that He will take all of His adopted sons and daughters home to eternal joy and light!

What Child is this? He is the Child who is the Son sent forth by His Father, the Son who is now and will always be “God with us.” He is the Savior of the world.

This, this is Christ, the King, whom Shepherds guard, and angels sing.

Haste, haste to bring Him laud, the Babe, the Son of Mary.

Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, the cross He bore for me, for you.

Hail, hail the Word made flesh, the Baby, the Son of Mary.



Watch Chris Tomlin with All Sons and Daughters

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



Watch One Voice Children's Choir

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

Family Advent Guide

Merry Christmas Taylors First Baptist Church Family!!

I love this season of the year. A season that we celebrate the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ. A season that we get to eat of great food and treats. A season in which we have some of the most treasured and valuable time with our loved ones. It is for that reason that our staff at Taylors First Baptist has invested much time and effort in providing for you this devotional.

This devotional will go along with the Christmas sermon series here at Taylors First Baptist. Each week you will have the opportunity to spend time alone with the Lord and with your family, hearing from God's Word, praying together, and worshipping the one true King! Our hope is that this booklet would be a resource for you this year to draw you and your family closer to the Lord.

We have an incredible team here at Taylors FBC that loves each of you very much, and our prayer would be that this season would truly be one of thanksgiving and praise for you and your family.

Pastor Josh

Jesus Came to Reign Forever

Philippians 2:5-11

² Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

English Standard Version

Personal Devotional

When you think about a king, what sort of character traits come to mind? Chances are that humility isn't at the top of your list. One reason is because we so often don't see an abundance of humility in earthly rulers. Another reason is because, deep down, we might even think that we don't want leaders who are too humble. Too much humility might mean that he lacks conviction, or resilience, or a fighting spirit. If he is too humble, he might also be weak.

In Philippians 2:3-4, Paul reminds us about the importance of humility. He writes, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." The message is clear enough. Don't be too full of yourself. Honor those around you. Serve their needs. But it's what Paul writes next that ought to really make us stop and think. Because instead of giving us an example of a humble servant, he points to the example of the King of Kings—who was also a humble servant!

In Philippians 2:5-11, Paul writes some of the most familiar, yet astonishing words about Jesus in all the Bible. He is the example whom we should follow as we cultivate humility. In his incarnation, the eternal Son of God became a man. In doing so, he voluntarily set aside all the glory that was due to him as Creator and took upon himself instead the lowly state of a creature. The One who is worthy to be served by all instead humbly became a servant

to others. His humble service was evidenced in his obedience to his eternal Father and in his sacrifice on behalf of his fellow men.

But that is not the end of the story. The one who humbled himself has now been exalted. God raised Jesus from the dead, and now the Son is seated at the Father's right hand. God has bestowed upon Jesus the name that is above all names: the name of Yahweh, the Lord. And one day, everyone will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. Some will acknowledge him because he is their Lord. Others will acknowledge him as the Lord, because by then there will be no doubt, but it will be too late to bow the knee to Jesus by faith. In every case, God will be glorified because all people, everywhere, will proclaim Jesus as Lord, the Humble King, and the Savior of the world.

During this Advent season, we should remember the humility of King Jesus. God became man. The Lord of all creation was born in one of the lowliest corners of that creation. The God who knit Mary together in her mother's womb was, Himself, later conceived miraculously in Mary's virgin womb. The Great Craftsman who made all things by the power of his words was born to a simple craftsman who made things with the labor of his hands. The One for whom the Temple was built was born in a stable built for animals.

And why did Jesus humble himself in all these ways—and so many more? To serve us through his perfectly obedient life, sacrificial death, victorious resurrection, triumphant ascension, ongoing intercession, and imminent return. All praises to the Humble King.

Personal Time of Reflection

- Think about some of the other individuals who were in Bethlehem the night when Jesus was born: Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. What are some ways that they modeled humility? What can you learn from their examples?
- In addition to his death, what are some other ways that Jesus displayed humility during his earthly life? How often does your own attitude and actions reflect this sort of Christ-like humility?
- Paul ties Jesus' humility to Jesus' servanthood in Philippians 2:5–11. What are some ways during this Advent season that you can serve others in your family, in our church family, or in the community?
- What are some other ways that you can cultivate Christ-like humility during this advent season?

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

⁶ Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.

⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

New Living Translation

Family Devotional

Read Philippians 2:5-11 and Acts 16:6-34. I love reading about how the church at Philippi got started in Acts 16. Let's discuss and highlight three things from each passage. We will begin with the start of the church in Acts 16 and then talk about the letter to the church in Philippians.

First, in Acts 16 we see that Paul was directed by the Spirit in a vision to go to Macedonia which is where Philippi was located. This is a beautiful picture of God being All-Knowing and expressing His love for us. He had a plan and purpose for the people who lived in Philippi. He was sending Paul and his friends to start a church in that city. God desires for us to be in relationship with His Son Jesus.

Second, Paul went out to the place of prayer and found a few women gathered together. One of the women he encountered was named Lydia. She was from a place that is hard to say, Thyatira (Thigh-ah-tie-rah.) This shows us that God does not care if you are a man or a woman, God is looking for those who are faithful, obedient, and love Him. The Bible says, God opened up Lydia's heart to pay attention to what Paul was teaching and this is when she believed! Only God can save people, Paul was just being obedient to share the Good News like we should.

Third, Paul and Silas were in a tough situation in prison but they knew God could still use them to share the Good News. They prayed and worshipped God even in a very difficult time and place. God by a miracle, had them freed from prison but they did not run away because they wanted to share the Good News with the jailer who was in charge of keeping them in prison. This is another reminder that there is no one who God cannot save. I am thankful that God sent his Son Jesus to rescue us from our sins!

Now let's look at the passage in Philippians.

First, verse five shows us an important truth about the mind. We can only access this mind through a relationship with Jesus. You must believe in God's Son and repent of your sins to become a new creation. This is a good time to stop and give thanks to God for saving us when we did not deserve to be saved.

Second, let's talk about how powerful the mind that was created by God can be. What is the large fruit that is either an oval shape or circle shape and green on the outside? It is red on the inside and sometimes has black or white seeds. It is mostly eaten during the summer months. That's right, watermelon! Your mind can picture a watermelon even though you do not have one in front of you. God is Creator and this is just one example of how amazing our mind is. Think about some other ways your mind is amazing!

Third, Jesus humbled Himself to come to earth to make a way when there was no way out of our sin problem. We need to tell about why we celebrate Christmas. We want to share with our family members, our neighbors, our teammates, and our friends about the King that came to rescue us from our sins. Verse 11 says, every tongue will confess Jesus Christ is Lord and we want those people to have heard the Good News to have believed in Jesus!

Family Time of Reflection

- After reading Acts 16, how did the church start in Philippi?
- Who can rescue us from our sin problem?
- Romans 12 talks about our mind being transformed. What did we say is a good practice for our mind?
- As believers, we have the responsibility to share what with others?



**Watch and Sing
"Jesus Is"**

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

Family Activity

Mini Advent Wreaths

Our preschoolers love learning about Advent in the Sunshine Room on Sundays. We have our own Advent Wreath and we “light” the candles. It helps us learn why we anticipate Christ’s arrival! As we go through each week at Church, revisit your own Advent wreath and remember the reason for the season.

Materials

- Scissors
- 3 green pipe cleaners
- 2 purple pipe cleaners
- 1 pink pipe cleaner
- 4 yellow buttons

Steps

- 1 Connect (by twisting) three green pipe cleaners end to end to make one long stick.
- 2 Wrap the stick around a pencil or pen tightly and remove it gently. Bring the ends together to make a circle and twist closed.
- 3 To make the candles, cut the purple and pink pipe cleaners in half. Thread the button on. Holding the button at the center, fold the pipe cleaner in half, and twist it.
- 4 Connect the candles, by curling their bottoms around one of the coils in the wreath, and then twisting it around itself to hold it in place. Get it real snug so they don’t fall over.



Family Serve

Christmas Letters to Homebound

Taylor's First Baptist Church has over sixty members who are homebound and unable to attend our church services. Many are still very active members, praying for Taylor's First Baptist Church consistently, listening to and watching the services online, and continuing to read and study the Bible with their Life Group as the curriculum is brought to their home quarterly.

This Christmas, we would like to show them how much we love and appreciate them by sending them mail. Use the sample letter below and click on the QR code to download a coloring page. Please take a few minutes this week as a family to:

- Pray for our homebound
- Write a letter of encouragement
- Color a picture for them

This week as you attend our Christmas Worship event, "What Child is This?," please drop off your letters and coloring pages in the Welcome Center. They will be mailed the following week to ensure they are received before Christmas!



Coloring Page

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

Dear Friend

During this special time of the year as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, our family wanted to take this opportunity to let you know that you are in our family's hearts and prayers. Our prayer for you is that this will be a blessed Christmas for you and your family, and that you will feel the love of our church through this letter and the picture we have colored just for you.

Merry Christmas from the _____ family.

Jesus Came to Redeem His People

Galatians 4:4-5

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

English Standard Version

Personal Devotional

These verses remind us of the profound truth at the heart of the Christmas story: God's timing is perfect. In the busyness of the season, it's easy to focus on the materialistic aspects of Christmas. But, as believers, we must reflect on the significance of God's timing in sending His Son into the world. The gift of the Christ Child changed the world, bringing believers redemption from the penalty of sin and new life through salvation.

In these verses, Paul speaks to the Galatians, highlighting that God chose the specific timing for the arrival of the Savior. God's timing was not a random or arbitrary decision. It was a meticulously planned and flawlessly executed moment in history. Jesus's birth preceded centuries of anticipation, prophecies, and divine preparation. God intervened, sending His only Son into the world for the sake of humanity. God's timing is always perfect, even when we do not fully understand His purpose.

In the broader context of Galatians, Paul addresses the heart of the gospel message. He teaches the essential truth of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ rather than human works of obedience to the Mosaic law. This message is the basis for the gospel truth of justification by faith alone. Paul points out that Christ alone wholly followed the law without sin, and God's law demonstrates the fallen state of humanity. The world at the time Jesus was born was a place of political unrest, oppression, and moral decay. It might not have seemed the right time for the Messiah's birth, but God knew it was the perfect moment. He sent Jesus into the world to meet the greatest need of humanity. The birth of Jesus brought deliverance from the curse, the wrath of God, the penalty of sin paid by the death of Christ, and the hope of the resurrection that provides salvation.

Paul teaches in these verses that Jesus was "born of a woman," showing the full humanity of Christ. Jesus experienced the joys and sorrows, and the triumphs and trials of human existence. He understands our struggles and comes to be with us in our humanity.

He was also “born under the law,” fulfilling every requirement of the Old Testament law, thus making it possible for us to receive God’s grace. He was tested in every way that humanity was tempted to sin, but He was without sin. Jesus lived a sinless life, making Him the perfect, spotless sacrifice for our sins.

As we contemplate these verses and their message, we find reassurance and hope that we, too, can receive adoption into the family of God through Jesus Christ. God’s timing is perfect, not only in the grand narrative of the birth of Christ but also in our own lives. He knows when we need His guidance, comfort, and intervention. Just as He sent Jesus at the perfect time to bring salvation to the world, He will come to our aid and answer our prayers at the perfect time in our lives.

This Christmas, let us remember the miracle of God’s perfect timing and the profound love demonstrated through the birth of Jesus. As we exchange gifts and enjoy festive meals, may we also celebrate the greatest gift of all, the birth of our Savior, who came at the right moment to redeem us and offer us the hope of eternal life. In our moments of waiting, uncertainty, and challenges, may we trust the One who knows the perfect time for everything. May we find peace and joy in His presence this Christmas season.

Personal Time of Reflection

- Have you trusted Jesus Christ by faith alone, recognizing that your good works are not the means to salvation?
- What are specific examples of God’s perfect timing in your own life?
- Adoption as children of God is a special gift. How does this special status of a child of God impact your life as a follower of Christ?
- What specific ways do you and your family celebrate Christmas, emphasizing the blessed hope of salvation through Christ?

Galatians 4:4

⁴ But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law.

New Living Translation

Family Devotional

Start by reading Galatians 4:4.

Time.... are we there yet? what time are we eating dinner? how many more days until Christmas? The Bible is full of true stories about waiting. We also read all throughout the Bible about the many promises God has made. God has never broken a promise and He never will. We can trust if He made a promise, He will keep it.

It is hard for us to put ourselves into the place of God's people in the Old Testament. We have always had the true story about Christmas, but I am aware, it has not always been viewed as a picture of rescue to us.

Read Psalm 51. Within this passage we are told we were all born into sin but let's not start there. God is good and God is what is best. God has always been and has always existed. God did not need anything but out of His goodness He created everything. When God created Adam and Eve, their hearts were clear and clean. The Bible tells us that God is Holy. He is completely perfect and separate from sin.

Adam and Eve decided to rebel against God's good design. Through that disobedience, Adam and Eve became slaves to their sin. Everything changed and everything was broken. Remember we talked about how God is Holy and separate from sin? Because of their sin, Adam and Eve were separated from God. All people are guilty of sin and separated from God.

Now, read Galatians 4:4 again. At just the right time, God sent his Son Jesus. Jesus is completely God and completely human. He came to earth and lived a perfect life without sin. Jesus was not guilty of sin and did not deserve the punishment of sin. Jesus took our place on the cross and absorbed all of God's anger toward sin and sinners. Jesus defeated the power of sin by dying on the cross and defeated the power of death by raising from the dead three days later.

Those who believe in Jesus are forgiven of their sins and adopted as children into God's family. When we believe in Jesus, God gives us a new heart to love and trust Jesus. We are all

born outside of God's family but because Jesus died on the cross to make a way for sinners to be forgiven, it made a way for us to be adopted into His family. When God changes someone's heart and gives them a new one, it is a free gift from God.

Not too early and not too late. At just the right time, Jesus came to rescue us.

Family Time of Reflection

- What was a time you can remember when it was hard to wait for something?
- Did God create the world and us because He needed something?
- How did Adam and Eve rebel against God?
- Did Jesus come too early or too late when He came to Earth?



Watch and Sing "Jesus Is"

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

Family Activity

Decorated Gingerbread Cookies

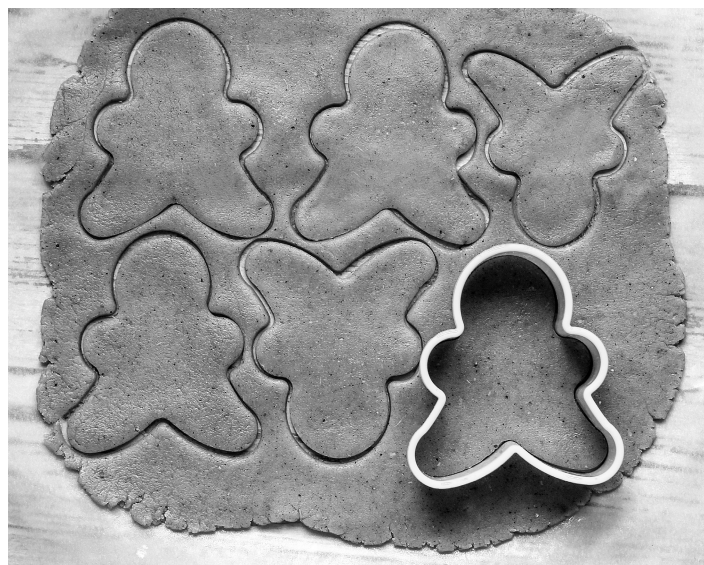
Bring the joy of Christ our Savior to others during this week. Make a plan as a family to create all kinds of decorated Gingerbread cookies. Take them to a loved one, neighbor, close friend, or someone you don't know well. Tell them about Christ our Savior and the good news of the Gospel.

Ingredients

- 2-1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup butter softened
- 1/2 cup molasses
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- 1/2 tsp ground cloves
- 1/2 tsp ground nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 egg

Directions

1. In a large bowl, with mixer at slow speed, beat flour, sugar, butter, molasses, egg, cinnamon, baking powder, ginger, cloves, nutmeg, baking soda, and salt until well mixed.
2. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour.
3. Preheat oven to 350°F.
4. On a lightly floured surface, working with half of the dough at a time, roll 1/8 inch thick. With floured cookie cutters, cut dough into shapes. Using a metal spatula or pancake turner, place cookies 1/2 inch apart on greased cookie sheets. Re-roll trimmings and continue to cut shapes.
5. Bake for 8 minutes, or until very lightly browned. Transfer cookies to racks to cool completely.



Family Serve

Invite a Neighbor

Christmas is a great time to share the joy of the Lord with others! This week we encourage you to invite others into your home and to our church!

First, who is someone who needs to know the Lord that you can invite into your home this week for dinner? We encourage you to open your home and share a meal with another family or an individual who needs to hear and experience the love of the Lord.

Second, who is someone who needs to know the Lord that you can invite to one of our Christmas services? We have invite cards available in the Welcome Center. We encourage you to pick up a card and invite a neighbor or friend to come to one of the Christmas worship services at our church! Spend time this week praying for your friend and/or neighbor.



Jesus Came to Receive Sinners

1 Timothy 1:12-17

¹² I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷ To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

English Standard Version

Personal Devotional

Have you ever heard someone give their personal testimony of their salvation experience? Every salvation story is powerful, but we tend to remember the ones that express the greatest life change—a person captured in sin who is finally transformed and now walking in truth and rightness. Salvation stories encourage and strengthen our faith. They authenticate the power of the gospel.

In this passage, Paul is sharing his salvation story with Timothy and the church in Ephesus to strengthen their faith in the gospel. They are facing opposition. There are men who are working against the gospel to turn the people back to the Law. Paul's defense for the gospel is his own testimony which points to Jesus, the One who came to save sinners!

Paul's testimony begins with who he was. He states, "I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent" (v.13.) He approved the execution of Stephen and was there, holding the cloaks of the men as they stoned him. In Acts 8, we are told that he was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, dragging off men and women and committing them to prison. Paul was an opponent of Jesus, and a persecutor of Christians. Even Paul admits and confesses that he was the foremost of sinners!

But, Paul's testimony continues. Something happened to radically change him. Paul says,

“I received mercy,” and “the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” In Acts 9 we are told that Paul, on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians, encountered Jesus and was radically saved. He was baptized. And, he began to proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God. Paul had been transformed from persecutor to proclaimer. Now, he declares to Timothy, “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” And almost, as if he cannot help it, he finishes his testimony in worship of the King of ages!

At Christmas we have the opportunity to remember and celebrate the coming of Christ Jesus! The Son of God—the eternal, immortal, invisible, who became temporal, mortal, and visible (v.17.) Christ Jesus took on flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14.)

We also have the opportunity to remember and rejoice that not only did Jesus come, He came to save sinners! He was crucified, He was buried, and He rose from the dead! In the gospel of Mark it states, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45.)

This Christmas, remember, rejoice, and celebrate Christ Jesus, who came into the world to save sinners, even sinners like us! We have a testimony to share, who will you share your testimony with this Christmas?

Personal Time of Reflection

- In verse 12, Paul calls his former self an “insolent opponent” of God. Think of your life before coming to know the Lord. In what ways were you in opposition to the Lord? How does this shape the way you see the unbelievers around you?
- Paul makes the radical statement throughout this passage that he “received mercy” from God through Jesus. Take a moment and thank the Lord for the mercy that you have received.
- Paul is clear in v.15 that “Christ came into the world to save sinners.” In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus commissions his disciples to then go out into the world to make disciples of all nations. How does Jesus’ coming into the world fuel our going out into all the world?

1 Timothy 1:12–17

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do his work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve him, ¹³ even though I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted his people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them all. ¹⁶ But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life. ¹⁷ All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God. Amen.

New Living Translation

Family Devotional

Have you ever been given a gift that blessed someone else? Take a minute and ask your parents how a gift they have received has been a blessing to you. A few years ago, my wife’s parents were given access to beach housing. This gift they received has been a blessing to my family and me as we have been able to get away and go to the beach a couple times for very little cost.

In 1 Timothy 1, Paul gives a brief personal testimony starting in verse 12. He talks about how he was against Jesus and even persecuted His followers. Even while he was doing this, Jesus showed him grace and called him to be His follower. Listen to what Paul says in verse 15, “This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’—and I am the worst of them all.” Paul knows that the whole reason Jesus came into the world was to save sinners just like him. Christmas is a celebration because the God of the universe entered our world as a human so that we could be saved.

Has Jesus saved you? Romans 10:9 says, “If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” This belief in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead is like saying that your life depends on that truth. Admit that you are a sinner, ask Jesus to forgive you and turn away from that sin, and trust Jesus with your life; this is what it means to be saved.

Paul keeps going and says something very interesting in verse 16, “But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst

sinner. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.”

Paul is saying here that God showed him mercy and saved him so that others would come to salvation as well. Through the gift of grace and mercy Paul receives from Jesus, others will also experience this gift from Jesus.

If you are a follower of Jesus and have received the gift of grace that saves us, do you realize that this gift is not for you to keep to yourself?

Just like how God showed Paul mercy to show His patience and to be a testimony for others, so God has saved you to show His grace to others through your testimony.

If my wife’s parents never would have told us about the gift they were given, we would have never had a chance to enjoy that gift and take part in it. In the same way, God saved us and made us his representatives, “So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, ‘Come back to God!’” 2 Corinthians 5:20.

Who do you need to share your gift of Jesus with this Christmas season? Who are you and your family praying for that might be close to you that needs to hear about Jesus from you?.

Family Time of Reflection

- Why did Jesus come into the world?
- What is part of God’s plan for saving you?
- Who are people in your life that you know need the message of Jesus?
Will you tell them?
- According to verse 17, who does Paul give all the credit for his salvation?
- How can your family grow in being the ambassadors for Jesus that God has saved you to be?



Watch and Sing “Jesus, Savior Of the World”

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

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, Ornament, 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.

“Spreading Joy Game!”

Materials

- Black permanent marker
- Red and Green Dot Stickers

Use a marker to write the word JOY on all the red and green dot stickers.

Pass out a sheet of stickers to each person in your family!

Explain that their mission is to spread as much joy to others by sticking their dot stickers on other family members.

Ready, set, GO spread JOY!

After you finished running around and putting stickers on each other, sit down and talk about what it felt like to spread joy. Pretty fun, right? When we have been filled with the joy of Christ it bubbles out and spills over to everyone that we come in contact with. What are some ways that we can spread JOY to others (the joy that only comes from Christ) in our everyday life just like we did in this game?



Family Share

Bake and Take

The Lord has given to us generously! He sent his very own Son, Jesus! This week, we have the opportunity to be generous to others in His name. We encourage you to bake some goodies and share them with a neighbor or friend who may be far from God, or just needs encouragement.

You may have your favorite Christmas goodie recipe, but if not, we have included a simple recipe, Preacher Cookies, below for you to try! Enjoy and share the joy of the Lord with others!

Ingredients

- 3 cups quick-cooking oats, uncooked
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup peanut butter
- 1 stick + 2 tablespoon unsalted butter, divided
- ½ cup milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- ½ cup chocolate chips



Directions

- Pour oats into a large bowl and set aside. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Note: A baking sheet isn't "required" - a flat surface, like a counter top, works.
- Melt 1 stick butter in a saucepan on medium-high heat, stirring frequently to melt butter. Bring to a boil for 1 minute, then remove from heat. Add peanut butter and vanilla extract and stir to combine.
- Pour peanut butter mixture over reserved oats. Add milk and sugar, and stir until fully incorporated.
- Scoop 1 tablespoon full of batter onto baking sheet, pressing down to flatten.
- Melt chocolate chips with 1 tablespoon unsalted butter in a microwave safe dish, 20 second intervals on medium heat, stirring after each interval, until chocolate is completely melted. You could also use a double-boiler.
- Use a spoon to drizzle chocolate over top of cookies. Cookies are ready to eat once chocolate has cooled and set. Or, chill in refrigerator for 1 hour. Transfer cookies to a serving platter, or store in an airtight container.

30 - 40 minutes to prepare 30 - 40 cookies

Jesus Came to Renew Lives

Titus 3:4-7

⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

English Standard Version

Personal Devotional

At Christmas, it is especially nice to receive gifts that are both needed and wanted. I remember this to be true for my brother and me as we expectantly unwrapped our presents under the tree. There would be those items that were a necessity for us as growing boys—the usual socks or pajamas, an outfit or a coat. However, it was also true that we would experience the excitement of finding gifts under the tree that were clearly things that we did not need but just really, really wanted! Over the years, there were bicycles and board games, Red Rider BB guns and remote-controlled cars — lots of “toys” that made our childhood filled with fun. Receiving both what we needed and wanted made Christmas a very special time for us as kids.

Essentials and wish-list-gifts under a tree are one thing, but the Gift that God has given is something so much more spectacular. We know that because of our sin there are serious consequences...the penalty of death and eternal separation from God. In Titus 3:3-7, Paul describes the goodness of God in giving to mankind the perfect Gift that meets the greatest need and want of us all.

“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Titus 3:3-7 (ESV)

Paul reminds us in this passage that there is absolutely nothing that made us worthy of this Gift. We are foolish, disobedient, led astray, and slave to various passions and pleasures. Days are filled with malice, envy, and hate. Our darkened hearts and rebellious lives should have positioned us to only receive wrath from a God who is holy and just. It wasn't our works that earned us this gift. Rather, Paul describes grace as the motivation for the good gift of salvation offered by the Lord. It is out of His goodness and His loving kindness that He provided exactly what we, as sinners, needed.

And though we may not recognize it, this gift of salvation is also what we really, really want. Because of the fall, fellowship between mankind and his Creator has been broken. As image-bearers of the One true God, it is only right that in our hearts there is a desire to dwell with Him in relationship. And God has made a way for that...by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. Immanuel, God with us, is now dwelling in our hearts because we have been justified by His grace, and we've become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Better than the finest wardrobe or the most desired toys, reconciliation with the Holy God provides exactly what we need and want. And just as those presents under the tree require one to open them up and receive them as theirs, so does this gift of grace. Receive God's great gift of salvation through Jesus and make this the best Christmas ever!

Personal Time of Reflection

- Many of our Christmas gifts either wear out, are passed along due to lack of use, or end up in the trash from overuse! Can you recall a gift you've received that was exactly what you had always wanted but has become like one of those mentioned above?
- Unlike the temporal, material "treasures" we unwrap at Christmas, Christ offers us the greatest Gift ever—our sin to be dealt with and God's wrath to be turned away from us... giving us a new birth, a living hope and an eternal inheritance (1 Peter 1:3-7.) Have you received this gift of grace in your life? How about those around you? Will you take every opportunity you can to share with them the gospel, so that they too, can receive the greatest Gift ever?
- Commercialism has overtaken us here in America as the focus of Christmas has shifted from the birth of our Savior to decorations, gifts, and festivities. May Hebrews 2:9 remind us of why we celebrate: "But we see Him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone." How can you tune your heart to make each day a day of worship, focused on the One who left glory to die on a cross that you might be saved? How can you guard your time, your energy, and your resources so that Christ and Christ alone receives the glory this Christmas season?

Titus 3:4-7

⁴ But— When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, ⁵ he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. ⁶ He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. ⁷ Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.

New Living Translation

Family Devotional

Have you taken a bath or shower today? Yesterday? Ew, seriously, has it been a week? I remember one time when I was nine years old my mom and dad wanted to teach me a lesson about what happens when you don't wash yourself regularly. They let me decide when it was time to take my next shower, and 13 days later I finally took that shower. (Did I say that it was in the middle of July?) You know what I learned? I learned that my parents were right, being clean is better than sitting in your filth. Filth can cause you to be sick and have rashes. I also learned that it really doesn't take very long to start smelling pretty bad! That lesson remains true today. I have to take a shower every day or I start to smell bad. Washing ourselves is a never-ending task that we will always need to do, so go get you some fun, good smelling stuff and get to scrubbing.

In Titus 3:4-7, Paul writes about another kind of washing that happens. Listen to this, “But— When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.”

These verses start with one of the most awesome words in the Bible, “but.” I know what you are thinking, “uh, are you sure you typed that right?” Yes, the word “but” is awesome because it is the transition used so often in the Bible to move us from something bad to something very good. It moves us from death to life, from darkness to light, from sin to righteousness, from hatred to love, from separated to brought near.

In verse 3 Paul writes about our reality before Jesus, “Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other.”

But... God did not leave us in our foolish darkness without hope, He sent His son Jesus, the Savior of the world because of His great love and kindness toward us. Verse five tells us that he saved us by the power of the Holy Spirit with His mercy, not because of anything we did. This

means that there is nothing we did or can do to earn God's love, grace, and mercy, He simply gives it to His children as a gift to receive.

The beautiful thing about this mercy that God gave us through Jesus is that it “washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life.” Unlike our physical bodies that need to be washed every day over and over again, our spiritual heart is washed once by the blood of Jesus which gives us new life. This means that when we confess Jesus as the one that died, rose again, and saved us from sin, and make him the one in control of our life, God gives us a brand-new spiritual heart (Ezekiel 36:25-27.) This new heart and new life God has called clean forever and nothing can change that. Because he declares you clean, verse seven says that we can have confidence that we will live forever with God.

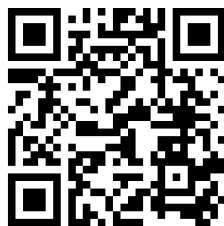
So, God has made me clean, given me new life, what do I do now? What do you think we should do now that we are clean? Look at verse eight, “This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to insist on these teachings so that all who trust in God will devote themselves to doing good. These teachings are good and beneficial for everyone.”

As a follower of Jesus, God has made you clean so that you will live to do good. This means living for what God wants from us each day. It means sometimes when we sin that we need to go and ask for forgiveness from God, not because we aren't already clean, but because God wants us to be reminded of Who cleaned us, Jesus.

Christmas is a time that we often think about gifts, but don't ever forget the greatest gift ever given, Jesus himself! Jesus came so that people might be able to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, Who washes us clean when we give our whole life to Jesus Christ.

Family Time of Reflection

- What is the difference between washing in the shower and the washing that Jesus does?
- When you think about being made clean by something someone else (Jesus) did, instead of what you do — what is your first thought?
- God declares us clean forever because of Jesus, so why do we need to confess and ask for forgiveness from God regularly?
- What are some of the good works that you can be doing every day now that you are clean in Jesus?



Watch and Sing "Jesus, Savior Of the World"

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

Family Activity

Hot Chocolate + Christmas Lights Family Night

Materials

- Hot chocolate
- Whipped Cream
- Sprinkles
- Portable Cups

Christmas lights and hot chocolate are the perfect pair to surprise your kids with during the advent season. The lights remind us that Jesus is the LIGHT in the darkness!

Directions

1. Make your favorite hot chocolate.
2. Add whipped cream and sprinkles on top!
3. Pour the hot chocolate into a portable cup that you can take in the car. Be sure there is a lid especially if you have littles!
4. After you put on your pajamas, get buckled up in the car and enjoy sipping hot chocolate as you drive around and look at Christmas lights.

While you are driving you can talk about how Christmas lights are a really neat visual reminder of God's hope during the advent season. Just like the twinkling lights brighten the night sky, Jesus brings LIGHT to the darkness. He is the Light of the World and brings hope and life to a dark world!



Family Share

Send Relief

There are many around the world who have not heard the good news of Jesus! We partner with Send Relief to not only meet physical needs, but to also share the gospel! This week, we would like to encourage you to click on the QR codes below.









First, learn more about Send Relief and how they seek to share the love and truth of Jesus with those in crisis and among the most vulnerable.



Second, open the Send Relief Catalog and choose a project your family would like to support and donate to.



Third, spend time this week praying for the person, family, or community who will receive your gift, pray that they will respond and accept the greatest gift of all, Jesus!

 <p>Fish</p> <p>STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES <i>International</i></p> <p>\$3</p>	 <p>Mosquito Net</p> <p>RESPOND TO CRISIS <i>International</i></p> <p>\$5</p>	 <p>School Supplies</p> <p>PROTECT CHILDREN & FAMILIES <i>Greatest Need</i></p> <p>\$10</p>	 <p>Seeds</p> <p>STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES <i>International</i></p> <p>\$10</p>
 <p>Blanket</p> <p>CARE FOR REFUGEES <i>International</i></p> <p>\$10</p>	 <p>Food for a Child</p> <p>GLOBAL HUNGER RELIEF <i>Greatest Need</i></p> <p>\$10</p>	 <p>Infant Formula</p> <p>GLOBAL HUNGER RELIEF <i>Greatest Need</i></p> <p>\$20</p>	 <p>School Uniform and Shoes</p> <p>STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES <i>International</i></p> <p>\$25</p>

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

Merry
Christmas!



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