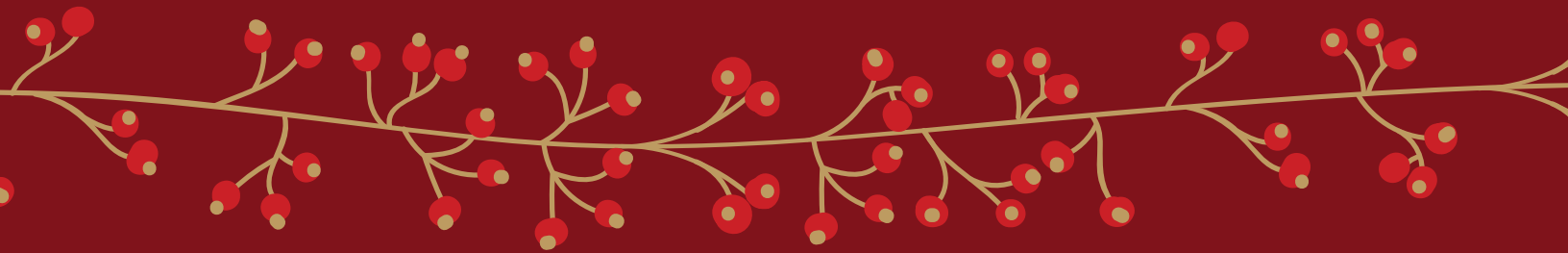




*Advent
Devotional
2021*



Dear Friends,

Advent is the time we spend to prepare for Jesus' birth. Jesus was born a very long time ago, but it is still fitting to get ready to celebrate his birth. Because without his birth, we would never have had his life to learn from, his death to save us and his resurrection to give us hope.

It is our hope that this devotional will draw you close to the Lord and help you ponder the miracles surrounding his birth. God did some amazing things and it is worth thinking on, preparing for and celebrating. How will this impact you so you can impact our world?

We hope you find this a tool to help you **PRAY** to God for wisdom, discernment, creativity, love and compassion as we strive to **BLESS** the world in many different ways, following **JESUS** with all our hearts.

Many thanks to our authors who did a fantastic job.

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Enjoy!

Kelly Laird
Director of Children's Ministry

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PRAY

BLESS

JESUS

Day 1

So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, you *are* cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

Genesis 3:14-15 NKJV

Believe

In order to fully understand and participate in the joy of this Advent season, it is important that we not forget the sorrow that precedes it. Adam and Eve were led by Satan in the form of a serpent to first doubt God's word, then to distort God's word, and finally to deny the goodness of God. We all must guard our own reactions to worldly challenges which tempt us to waiver in our faith. In God's judgment of the serpent, He then laid out the plan of redemption from the very beginning of man's disobedience. One day a descendant of Eve would crush the serpent! Praise be to the God who reigns supreme over His creation!

Today's Challenge: PRAY

Dear God and Father of Us All,

I marvel at your amazing grace. While I trust in the work of Christ my Savior who has bruised the head of Satan, I recognize that I question your goodness as I look around at a broken world. Help me to be a messenger of your grace and mercy to those around me as we wait for a new earth, to be filled with the knowledge of your glory as the waters cover the sea.

Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

- Jim Yoder



PRAY

Day 2

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.

2 Samuel 7:12-16 ESV

David's Son

David knows he has a great place to live. The God of Israel has nothing to compare it with. The ark, God's presence among his people, is kept in a tent. A temple worthy of the God of Israel would be a great legacy for David to leave. But before blueprints are drawn, God sends David this message through the prophet Nathan.

*"So who's asking for a house? And who do you think you are anyway, volunteering to build it? The tent's just fine for me. I'm turning the tables on you, David. You wanted to build me a house, a building of wood and stone. That won't ever happen. Instead, I'll build you a house--not a building, but a dynasty. I will establish the reign of your offspring. **He** will build a house for me, and his kingdom will prevail forever."*

This promise comes true, and in more than one way. David builds no house for the Lord; it is his son Solomon who constructs the temple. Descendants of David reign over Israel and Judah for centuries, but finally those kingdoms come to their end. The promise of an everlasting kingdom finds its fulfillment in a later descendant of David, namely Jesus, who through his cross, resurrection and ascension comes to reign over a kingdom that is eternal.

Today's Challenge: BLESS

If we pay careful attention to our lives, we may discover that what happened to David and his grand scheme happens to us. Our plans are not objectionable. Certainly, people can be blessed. But they can be motivated by a bit of human love mingled with portions of pride and short-sightedness. Before we BLESS, we need to listen, really listen, to the One whose plans and pure invincible love sent His son to us to establish His eternal kingdom.

Today, go find a task in the house that would bless someone if you did it. Don't tell that person you did it. What an even greater challenge? Do the same for a neighbor.

- Brian Altmeyer



BLESS

Day 3

For to us a child is born to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end, on the throne of the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 9:6-7 ESV

Peace

Today, keep peace in mind. Jesus comes to bring peace. He is called our Prince of Peace. Peace is an elusive thing nowadays. People want it and pretend to have it. On the outside, it looks like they've got it. They are calm, cool and collected. But inside they might be churning, burning and warring! God tells us in this Old Testament prophecy that Jesus will come to bring peace. Oh how I long for that day! No more fighting and bickering. No more disagreements. No more arguing over things that really have no eternal value.

Today, keep peace in mind. Be the bearer of peace. Greet those you see with a peaceful countenance. Be the peacemaker. When others around you don't have it, exude a peaceful outlook and attitude. When you go into that staff meeting, ask yourself first, "How can I bring peace to this meeting?" Keep that ever in mind. Kids, when you go to school, let gossip stop with you. Bringing peace can mean not passing along information about others. Today, try in every way, to bring peace.

Today's Challenge: JESUS

Dearest Lord Jesus,

Thank you for another day! Thank you for the opportunities to live and thrive in You! Help me today to keep peace in mind. Remind me when I start to feel anxious or worried that you are the Prince of Peace. You can calm my troubled mind and soul. Help me rely on You today to be the peaceful one, when others are not. Help me to speak words of peace wherever I go. Thanks Lord in advance of what You are going to do!

Follow Jesus today by being a peacemaker. Is there a relationship that, as far as it depends on you, you can work to mend? Is there someone to whom you owe an apology? Is there someone you can love better? Act on those promptings today.

In Jesus Name,
Amen.

- Kelly Laird



JESUS

Day 4

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.

In his teaching, the islands will put their hope.

Isaiah 42:1-4 NIV

Gentle Servant

Today, let us keep in mind serving with a gentle spirit. Our Lord Jesus, the king of the universe, came as a gentle servant who would not crush or further wound those who are hurting. He brought light and truth to those in the world that the Father brought to Him or sent Him to. We need to realize that people who are bruised or smoldering often lash out at others in anger or pain. Keep the Lord in mind and treat those that are hurting with love and compassion, not meanness or disdain. If Jesus has brought peace and love to your life, let that peace and love shine brightly in your life.

Today's Challenge: PRAY

Dear Lord Jesus,

Thank you for your love for a sinner like me. Thank you for your gentleness in loving me when I am not lovable. Help me to hear the words of your Holy Spirit as He guides and directs me to serve the people in my family, my neighborhood and my church and show love to them. Allow me to put aside my pride, my hurt and my self-righteousness to do what You show me to do for those around me. As You walked the earth, there was nothing too small or unpleasant for You to do. You answered the call when the Father gave You a job to do. Help me to humbly and willingly be able to say, "Here I am, send me," when He calls my name.

- Anonymous



PRAY

Day 5

Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:13-14, NIV

God With Us

Through the prophet Isaiah, God promised a unique sign. It was not a sign in the stars above. The sign was not a flashing LED sign announcing a new product to buy. The sign would be a person, a baby in fact. Like other babies, this baby would have a mother who would bear him. His name would be significant. He would bear the name "Immanuel" which means "God with us." In Isaiah's day where they faced enemies who wished to attack them, this was a comforting message. It still is a comforting message today that God is "with us." The Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 1:22-23) identifies Jesus as the one who is the ultimate fulfillment of this verse and Mary as the person God chose to bring this wonderful sign into the world. In the person of Jesus Christ, God has come to be with us, even when he was merely an infant. Whether we are lonely, tired, sad, angry, or anything else, we can know that God has come to be with us.

Today's Challenge: BLESS

Is there someone at school, in the neighborhood, or at work who needs to hear these encouraging words today that God is with us and he has shown his love by coming to us? Think of someone who might be sad, lonely, disappointed, or upset and could benefit from hearing these words today. If you don't feel ready to tell them these words, maybe just "be with" them as God has come to be "with us" and listen to them.

- Ben Burkholder

BLESS

Day 6

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

Isaiah 61:1-3 ESV

Jesus Messiah

This is the passage Jesus chose to read in the synagogue in Nazareth in the earliest days of his ministry (Luke 4). He clearly indicated that it was being fulfilled in Him. Jesus is the anointed one – which in Hebrew is *Mashiach* or *Messiah*. The Spirit falls on Him and empowers Him to both preach of the coming deliverance and then to make it a reality by His death and resurrection. Sinners are here called *the afflicted, the brokenhearted, captives and prisoners*. So, the Messiah has come to heal and liberate which work clearly leads to our joy and to our holiness as we get to be the *oaks of righteousness* that bring Him glory.

The message Jesus brings and sends us to declare is called *good news*. That is what we mean when we speak of the *gospel*. It is news that comes to hurting people and points them to the one who is their hope and deliverer. It is our privilege to bring the good news of Jesus.

Today's Challenge: JESUS

Father, we rejoice in our anointed King this day and commit ourselves to trusting Him, loving Him and declaring His joy to those around us. Give us insight as to how we can apply the good news to those who are in need of healing or deliverance. And anoint us to represent well our precious Savior, whose glory we long to see and in whose name we pray, Amen.

Reflection Question: How has Jesus bound up your broken heart or given you liberty or freedom? Thank Him today!

- Dan Hendley



JESUS

Day 7

*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear*
Isaiah 11:1-3 ESV

Resurrection Hope

“For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again” (Job 14:7) Christmas has the power to restore the hope that what has been cut down can sprout again. That is true for the stump that was the kingdom of Israel, and it is true for us cut-down stumps as well. This hope is founded on the power of God in the gift of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit, which rested on Jesus, gave Him wisdom and understanding. It gave Him counsel, might and knowledge. It delighted Him in the fear of the LORD. And it does the same for us! Because Jesus promised us that same Spirit. He said, “I will ask the Father and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth...He dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:17) And that Spirit, “who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies.” (Romans 8:11) The fact that Jesus was raised to life is a firm foundation of hope for those who trust in Him. When we feel the temptation to despair or fear the world around us, we should do as Paul instructed Timothy: “fan into flame the gift of God...for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Timothy 1:6-7). Let your delight be in the fear of the LORD and let that lead you to hope in the promise of new life.

Today's Challenge: PRAY

When you are tempted to fear or lose the hope of restoration, let the knowledge that the Spirit is with you drive you to pray. Through prayer, fan into flame the gift of God – faith in his resurrection power. Ask God to show you who needs to feel the hope that life can sprout again through Christ.

- Andy Stites

PRAY

Day 8

Marshal your troops now, city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod. "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be our peace...

Micah 5:1-5a NIV

Shepherd from Bethlehem

It is amazing to realize that prophets could tell what would happen in the future including where Jesus would be born. The prophet Micah predicted that the Northern Kingdom of Israel which included Jerusalem would be besieged by Assyria. It happened. The Kings and rulers were taken captive to Babylon. Then he predicted that out of the little town of Bethlehem one would come to rule over Israel. God's people would be abandoned until this child was born. It happened 700+ years later. That child (Jesus), would be a shepherd to his flock and his greatness would reach to the ends of the earth.

We can marvel in God's faithfulness and his plan to redeem the nation of Israel who had turned its back on God. Punishment and hard times may come, but God sent his son to be born in Bethlehem to shepherd his flock back to live securely.

Today's Challenge: BLESS

A simple way to bring joy to someone today would be to give them a candy cane. The excessive sugar might not be a blessing, but the spiritual message it conveys is sweet. Tell the recipient of your gift that the candy cane reminds you of a shepherd's crook and that if you turn it upside down it is a "J", the first letter in Jesus' name. Jesus was God's gift to us on Christmas. The red stripes remind you of the blood Jesus would shed for the forgiveness of our sins. The white stripes remind you that he was the only one "pure white" (without sin) who was worthy to pay the price for our sins.

As you share the candy cane with your friend, be thankful that God sent his son to shepherd us into His Kingdom.

- Jim Ludwig

BLESS

Day 9

This is the genealogy^(a) of Jesus the Messiah^(b) the son of David, the son of Abraham:

Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah, Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah^(c) and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Elihud, Elihud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

Matthew 1:1-17 NIV

What's In a Family Name?

Has anyone in your family traced your family history and identified the countries of origin? If so, what kind of significance does it have for you? Family histories can be fun. Sometimes there is a well-known historical figure in the family tree or the family crest is discovered. For my own family, we have discovered that the Burkholders came from the Swiss mountains. While no one is quite sure what "Burkholder" means, there are two primary possibilities. One is the holder of a fortress. The other is the holder or dweller of a hillside. Of course, I like the first one better.

We might find family histories amusing today and perhaps a matter of some significance, but it was more than that in Jesus' day. The family history mattered a great deal, especially if you descended from important people. Our passage today shows that Jesus' family has very important connections. It begins with Abraham, which would be true of other Jewish people in his day, but his ran through King David, which meant he would qualify to be the "Son of David" that God promised back in 2 Samuel 7. In fact, when Matthew starts off calling Jesus the "Messiah" or the "Christ," he is saying that Jesus is the rightful king who was to come from David's line. That is pretty important.

I'll make one other note here too. Matthew has broken Jesus' family history into three series of 14 generations. The first runs from Abraham to David. The second goes from David to Josiah and to what Matthew calls "the exile to Babylon." This was when God removed his people from the land because they disobeyed him. The final series of generations ends with Jesus and then Matthew summarizes his pattern: "Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah" (Matt. 1:17). For those waiting for God to restore his people from the conditions of exile, the coming of the Messiah was the moment for which they had been waiting. God was rescuing them from their exile through the promised son of David. Help had come. By the way, do you know what number you get if you turn the Hebrew letters of David into numbers and add them together?--14!

Today's Activity: JESUS

If you're doing this *as a family*, discuss with someone what you know about your family history. What does this mean for you? If you're doing it *by yourself*, ask a friend about his or her family history and the significance that has to his or her family. Then, ask what it would be like if you could trace the family history to an important king. Imagine what it would be like to grow up in Jesus' family when you knew you had connections to royalty.

- Ben Burkholder



JESUS

Day 10

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about; His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" -- which means, "God with us." When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25 NIV

Joseph and Mary Believe

Joseph was concerned about what other people would think of him and of Mary if they had a baby so early in their marriage. He was so afraid he considered walking away from Mary and from God's purpose for him - to be the father of Jesus! Sometimes fear can make us feel like running away from God and others. Have you ever been afraid of what people will think of you if you follow Jesus? You are not alone! Sometimes God asks us to do courageous things for his purposes. God encourages us to follow him and his purposes, even if we are afraid, through the Holy Spirit. Joseph and Mary believed that God called them to an important purpose - being the parents of Jesus! Even though this was an important purpose, they were still afraid. But in their fear, God encouraged them by his Holy Spirit and his word - Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promise to save his people from their sins. We can find courage to believe and trust God's promises and purposes in our lives just like Mary and Joseph did, because of Jesus and the Holy Spirit!

Today's Challenge: PRAY

Dear Lord Jesus,

Thank you for coming to earth as Immanuel, God with us! Thank you for giving Joseph and Mary courage to believe and follow your purpose for them even though they were afraid. Help us follow you even in the times when I am afraid. Thank you for saving us from our sins and by your Holy Spirit helping us to follow you and obey your word. In Jesus Name, Amen.

- Jen Burkholder

PRAY

Day 11

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her."

Luke 1:26-38 NIV

Do not fear

How do you react when you hear news about something that is completely out of your control?

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, even though she was greatly troubled, she didn't run away or ask him to leave her alone; instead, she listened and tried to understand the meaning of it all. She bowed in submission to God's call on her life. She was called, chosen, and consecrated ... therefore, she cooperated and let God use her as He so desired.

A faithful response to God looks to Him in trust even without answers to all our questions. Seldom can we say why things happen as they do. Often we don't have all the information we need. If we waited until all our questions were answered, we'd never do anything. So, we do not fear but bow in obedience.

Can you and I learn from Mary's example to trust God when we hear something that is going to rock our world? Can we pause and truly take to heart that God is in charge. Nothing happens, good or bad, outside of the providence of God's grace and love. We walk by faith and not by sight. Believing this, we're able to take the unexpected events of everyday life and see them not as impositions that get in the way or as obstacles to be overcome, but as opportunities that can lead us into a closer relationship with God and those around us. Then, can you and I find ways to take that trust and come along side another who is in a fearful situation?

Today's Challenge: BLESS

God, help us to bow in humble submission to You, trusting that You will enable us, whom you have chosen, called, and consecrated, to walk by faith for Your glory. Amen

Do you know someone who is about to or just had a baby? If so, write them a card today to let them know you are thinking about them.

- Jane Anzaldi

BLESS

Day 12

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

Luke 1:39-45 ESV

Blessed Are You

What joy and excitement Elizabeth has as she receives greetings from Mary. The presence of Jesus, even as an unborn child, along with the Holy Spirit bring joy and excitement. Elizabeth could not control what her own unborn child would do. We can conclude that her unborn child leapt for joy because of the presence of Jesus. How special to be filled with joy completely, from the inside out. Do you look for your blessings from the Lord? Blessings are there every single day. We need to recognize them and thank God for them. It brings us joy when we know how God is blessing us. Sometimes we can see our blessings right in front of us...clean running water, shelter, health, good food to eat, etc. Other times our blessings come through faith, hoping for the fulfillment of God's promises, as Mary did. Mary is blessed because she believed that what the Lord said to her would come to pass.

Today's Challenge: JESUS

How is the Lord blessing you? Do you experience joy and excitement from within, because of your blessings? Does it bring you joy to use what God has given you to bless others? What gifts and skills has he given to you? Do you enjoy making things? Do you like to write? Do you like to play an instrument or sing? Do you enjoy talking with people? Take time today to thank God for all the ways He is blessing you, including sending His Son. Then ask the Lord to show you ways to share these blessings to bless others, and perhaps in doing so, they will meet with His Son and share your joy.

- Laura Osmond



JESUS

Day 13

And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. "For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name. "And His mercy is upon generation after generation Toward those who fear Him. He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, And has exalted those who were humble. He has filled the hungry with good things; And sent away the rich empty-handed. He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy, As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever." And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her home.

Luke 1:46-56 NASB 1995

Mary's Song

When Mary visited Elizabeth, Elizabeth declared, "blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb." What follows is the Magnificat. I pondered. "What makes Mary so magnificent?" The scripture tells us. Although Mary will indeed be, "blessed throughout all generations," the Magnificat is not alone about Mary, but more about her declarations of the LORD. She sang of the Lord. Mary's soul exalted the Lord. She rejoiced in God. She proclaimed His mighty deeds. She was His bondservant. And then she served her cousin for three months. It's not about her. It's not about us. It's all about you, Lord.

Today's challenge: PRAY

Thank you Lord, that you gave us Jesus through Your servant Mary. Help me to see that as it's not about Mary, it's also not about **me**. Help me to take my eyes off myself and put them on You. To see others as you see them. To see myself as Your bondservant.

- Gloria Baldauff

PRAY

Day 14

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Luke 2:1-7 NIV

Heavenly Travel Agency

Isn't it *amazing* that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob used the Roman government to relocate Mary & Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem? I expect Caesar Augustus mostly had future tax revenues in mind when he declared the census; but God was busy keeping promises and fulfilling prophetic scripture. Caesar thought he was in charge, yet he had no idea that he was actually performing a job for the Heavenly Travel Agency. The timing of the mandatory trip was not convenient for Mary & Joseph. Traveling at the end of a pregnancy is never easy or comfortable. When news of the census decree was announced, I expect most of us would have responded with either, "Are you kidding me?!" or "Really?! Now?! Couldn't this have waited?!" Events may be unexpected to us—even governmental initiated ones—but they are not a surprise to God. He is the one who is truly in charge. Often we don't understand our circumstances, but God is with us (*Emmanuel*) and we can trust that His plan is the best plan.

As the master orchestrator, He is conducting the entire musical score. We often only hear our small part and don't understand the measures of silence, but God hears the whole symphony—and it's AWESOME!

Today's Challenge: BLESS

Are you grumbling and complaining about your current situation? Ask God to grant you contentment and heavenly insight into your difficult situation.

Is there someone you interact with frequently who is in a challenging circumstance? What practical thing can you do to demonstrate the love of Jesus to him/her? Did you not make the team, or get a part in the musical or get that promotion? Open your heart. Maybe the Heavenly Travel Agency is looking to redirect you. If you realize God is sending you, then when you arrive, not only will you be blessed, but you will be a blessing to others.

- Susan Burke



BLESS

Day 15

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Luke 2: 8-14 NIV

Shepherds and Angels

Shepherds were different. They spent most of their time working and living outdoors, rarely coming home. While at their job, they were surrounded by far more sheep than people, smelling a lot like the animals they were tending! Shepherds were rough and tough, able to protect their sheep from bears or thieves or whatever came at them. They were rarely seen in town, except to occasionally get supplies; and when they did, they weren't usually welcomed.

Angels are spectacular! They are radiant, seemingly quite large, and there are lots of them! They cause people to be in awe and fear. Today's verse even says that they terrified the shepherds. More than this, angels are residents of heaven and primarily serve as God's messengers to His people, saying important things to those who need to hear them.

In today's passage, we read about the angels appearing over Bethlehem to announce the birth of Jesus to the people, the Good News of the Savior's arrival to save man from sin. In this moment, God announces that His promise to His people has been kept: Immanuel; God is with us! Yet, who do the angels make this announcement to? The temple priests? The local government? Caesar? No. The angels first come to the shepherds. The rough, smelly, unwelcome shepherds. The announcement of the King's birth comes to the lowliest people! Why? Because God wanted to show us that He didn't send His son for the proud and self-important. Rather, He sent His son to everyone who is humble and believes that Jesus is God's promise and hope for salvation. Even for shepherds! ...and that's Good News worth announcing!

Today's Challenge: JESUS

Who are the "shepherds" in your life? Who do you know who needs to hear the Good News of Jesus? What stops you from announcing the Good News of Jesus to them? Identify one way you be an "angel" to them today and do it!

- Gary Laird



JESUS

Day 16

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 2:15-20 ESV

Glorifying & Praising God

Simple shepherds - smelling like sheep, most likely dirty, living like nomads in tents, "uneducated" according to the world's standards - these are the lowly people whom the angels visited! The Lord, through the angels, made this amazing announcement to these lowly, uneducated, simple shepherds and they believed Him! They went immediately to find the special place where the child lay. Angels (they saw), amazing announcements (they heard), awareness (they felt), to take action (they walked) because they had been told that something special had happened. Oh, that we too would believe and immediately act on what God shares with us! Where did I experience God today - at work, at school, at home, talking with my neighbors, playing with my friends, reading my Bible, praying, talking with my family? God is everywhere and always communicating. Am I listening? Help me Lord to hear Your voice and be obedient to what you say every day.

Today's Challenge: PRAY

Dear Lord Jesus, awaken our spirits, our minds, and all of our senses, to believe and act on what you show us this very day! You never cease to communicate with us. Help us to experience You in new ways this season of Advent so that we too can walk away glorifying and praising God for all we have heard and seen!

In Jesus Name, Amen.

- Pat Premick

PRAY

Day 17

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Luke 2:25-35 ESV

My Eyes Have Seen

El Roi, "the God who sees," is one of the names of God in the Bible. In Genesis 16:14-15, after an angel of the Lord cares for her in the desert, Hagar, Sarai's servant, addresses God as El Roi, "the God who sees me." Think about that for a moment. God sees you! What is the full implication of this promise? I don't think it means simply that God's eyes work, but rather that He truly knows us—every thought, every feeling, every shortcoming—He knows it all. Nothing escapes His attention and He still loves us, cares for us and wants what's best for us.

In our passage today, we read that God also allows us to see Him! When Simeon takes the child in his arms, he sees more than a baby. Simeon sees salvation and glory. He sees God in the flesh.

In Jesus, we can see and know God. When we read our Bibles and learn about what Jesus does and how Jesus loves and cares for those, whom no one else loves and cares for, we are seeing God. And not only do we get to see Him, He invites us to become like Him. Jesus is a light to reveal God to the nations and while He was here, ministering on earth, He said to His disciples, "You are the light of the world. ...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Today's Challenge: BLESS

Take the time to bless people by seeing them. As you go about your day, slow down, smile, say hello and "see" the people you live with, work with or go to school with. God could use you to be a light to reveal Himself to the nations.

- Amber Stites



BLESS

Day 18

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Luke 2:36-38 ESV

Anna

These three verses are the only ones in the entire Bible that talk about Anna, but we learn much about her in this short passage. She lost her husband at an early age and dedicated the rest of her life to worshiping God while even living on the temple grounds. Do you know what happens when you spend 60+ years dedicated to prayer and fasting? You get to know God really well! When Simeon announced that Jesus was God's salvation for both the Jews and the Gentiles, Anna came without hesitation to thank God. After a lifetime of prayerful expectation, she was able to recognize that Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promise. He had not performed any miracles or taught in the temple yet, but Anna immediately took to spreading the word about Jesus. And 2000 years later, he is still the same source of *our* salvation! Does that make you excited? Do you recognize what Jesus means to you the way Anna did? No matter your age, there is still time to get to know him better.

Today's Challenge: JESUS

Choose a way that you can get to know Jesus better today. Perhaps you could learn a new hymn about him and sing it to yourself each day or dedicate yourself to a regularly scheduled time of prayer. Maybe you could even choose some of the scriptures from this devotional and memorize them to remind you what Jesus means to this world. Then, as you think about him more, watch for places where the salvation that he brings can be an encouragement to the people around you, and share the hope that he gives you!

- Chad Morley



JESUS

Day 19

When Jesus' parents had fulfilled all the requirements of the law of the Lord, they returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. There the Child grew up healthy and strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on Him.

Luke 2:39-40 NLT

Strong and Wise

It is amazing to think that the Son of God not only came to earth but submitted Himself to being raised in an earthly home with earthly parents, Joseph and Mary. Even as a young child, Jesus grew strong and wise because God's favor was upon Him. When Jesus was left in the temple by His parents, He spent His time asking the temple leaders good questions and listening well to the teachers. Thank God that because of His grace, you can ask for and receive God's strength to consider others as better than yourself. You can seek His wisdom to ask good questions and be a good listener in all kinds of different situations. These are the best kinds of Christmas gifts that keep on giving each day.

Today's challenge: PRAY

Come to my heart, Lord Jesus. Please give me a song of joy to sing that would strengthen my heart and the hearts of those around me. I want to be wise like You and I want to spread the knowledge of You through words and actions that are filled with grace and truth. Thank You that You are the God of truth and grace and that You are the great joy-giver. I love You, Lord Jesus. Amen.

- *Beth Hendley*

PRAY

Day 20

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: " '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.' " Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Matthew 2:1-12 ESV

Gifts of the Magi

How did the Wise Men know to go to Jerusalem? There were Jews that settled in the East after the exile, having not returned to Israel. They shared their hope of their Messiah, their King of Kings, who would rule forever. Hearing of the promise of the Messiah, the Wise Men saw a star of stars and set off seeking the King of Kings. They arrive at the Jewish capital and meet King Herod (a king under Caesar). When asked about the King of Kings, Herod's wise men (scribes and chief priests) gave answers from scripture and sent them to Bethlehem. There the star rose and their eyes were opened to the house where the Messiah laid. They went in, seeing the child, they knew this King was greater than their kings, so they fell down, worshipped and freely gave gifts. The President of the United States does not fall down and worship a foreign head of state when they meet! No, the Wise Men had their eyes opened to the Messiah and they believed, fell and worshipped. Their belief is also demonstrated their belief in that they listened to a dream and not to Herod who asked them to return. King Herod could have them killed for not listening to him. The Wise Men 1) sought the Messiah the Jews believed in and spoke about, 2) listened to the scriptures that spoke of the King of Kings and 3) had their eyes to the life changing truth of Christ the Messiah.

Today's Challenge: BLESS

1. Invite someone to attend church to hear God's Word and the hope that is within you on Christmas Eve.
2. If you are under the age of 12, make or draw a star and then give it to someone you love. If you are older than that, is there a meaningful gift you could give to or make for a neighbor? Think on this and act today!

- John Holt

BLESS

Day 21

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet:

“Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Matthew 2:13-15 NIV

Into Egypt

When my Father was ten years old, his family had to leave their comfortable home and move to a new place several hours away. They had their car and the clothes on their back and not much else. That was scary and difficult—it was something he never forgot but didn't talk about very much.

Just after the Wise Men visited Jesus, the babe's father was warned in a dream that it was too dangerous to stay in Bethlehem. Jesus was still a little guy—likely between one and two years old—when his family left for the long walk to Egypt in the middle of the night. Can you imagine what that would be like?

They left because King Herod did not want another king in Israel and was trying to kill Jesus. Egypt had not always been a safe place for God's people, but it would be for the boy Jesus and his family, because God would go with them.

Today's Challenge: JESUS

It's hard to imagine the one who created the whole world being a small boy who had to run away with his parents so he could live. It was a narrow escape.

Sometimes we forget that Jesus is not only 100% God, but 100% human. He knows what it is like to lose everything and start over. That's why we can come to him with whatever is on our hearts. Take time today to tell Him of a challenge or difficulty you're feeling right now.

- Dan Dupee



JESUS

Day 22

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. 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 2:16-18 ESV

Suffering

One way we can know that the Bible is true is that it doesn't omit hard things or gloss over things that are difficult to understand. Today's scripture passage is a good reminder of that truth.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, just as the prophets and the angel Gabriel foretold. What great news! An angel, accompanied by a heavenly chorus of angels, shared the exciting news with a lowly group of shepherds that lying in a manger in Bethlehem was a baby who was the Savior.

Also great news!

But in the midst of these Christmas card worthy illustrations, we find a hard truth dropped into the mix. A paranoid, power hungry king named Herod felt threatened when some wise men stopped by his palace asking where to find, "the one born king of the Jews." The birth of Jesus that brought, "good news of great joy that would be for all people," (Luke 2:10b) also resulted in the slaughter of precious little boys in Bethlehem, aged two years old and younger, as Herod sought to eliminate the competition. What a reminder that sin and suffering don't take a break, even at Christmas.

BUT, there is a glorious truth worth remembering, not just at Christmas, but every day of the year. That baby born in Bethlehem is also called Immanuel, which means "God with us." One day, many years later when that baby was grown up, He would remind His friends "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Today's Challenge: **PRAY**

Lord, the Christmas season can bring suffering and sadness to the forefront in people's lives. Loss and loneliness seem to be magnified at this time of year. Show us someone today who needs the hopeful reminder that you are not a God who is far off, but one who is truly Immanuel, God with us.

- *Natalie Karr*



PRAY

Day 23

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 2:19-25 ESV

Refugees

A refugee is a person who has been forced to leave their home in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. Imagine having to leave your home and travel. But this journey isn't for a vacation or a fun road trip. It is so you are not killed. Jesus fled to Egypt to escape Herod, eventually being called back home. How amazing and comforting that this is part of God's plan for Jesus the Nazarene, who is the Once Refugee King.

Currently in 2021 there is an estimated 82.4 million refugees worldwide, forcibly removed from their homes. Can this possibly be part of God's plan? Why is He allowing so much pain and displacement? During this season you can raise awareness and pray for those who are displaced. In refugee camps all over the world men, women, and children are being exposed to the Gospel for the first time through mission endeavours. May they find their rest and hope in the Once Refugee King. You can reflect on how God sent his Son to us, as a refugee, displaced from his home in heaven to become our King of a new home that cannot be taken away. May we have eyes to see how God is using this world wide refugee crisis to call his children home.

Today's Challenge - BLESS

How might you be a blessing to someone today? Is there someone who is a missionary working with refugees that might be encouraged by a letter or email? Go ahead and write a note of encouragement. Then, give the note to the church and we will get the note to its intended receiver. Or, is there an organization doing work with refugees that might need items or funds? While there are many severe needs globally, maybe your "refugee" is someone much closer. We as humans are prone to wander far from the God we love. Maybe you could come alongside someone in a time of displacement.

- Grant McKinney

BLESS

Day 24

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:1-5 NIV

Jesus is the Word

What are words? Words are how we think, they are how we communicate with each other. DNA are words of information that are the foundation of all life. God spoke the universe into existence.

How is Jesus the Word?

1. He is the agent through which the universe was made.
2. The Bible is the story of God's redemptive plan that is fulfilled in Jesus. The Old Testament points forward towards the Messiah and the New Testament points back to what Jesus did to secure our salvation as the Messiah.
3. Jesus' words give us new life so that we can be born again and live in Him if we believe in Him.
4. Jesus will speak the most beautiful words we will ever hear when he tells us "Well done good and faithful servant".

Today's Challenge: JESUS

Today, go into a room, turn off the light and close the curtains. Then, light a candle. Does the darkness overcome it? Why not? How does Jesus shine through the darkness in our world? Thank Him for all of the ways He does and then try to emulate Him today!

- *Phil Van Sickle*



JESUS

Day 25

There it was—the true Light [the genuine, perfect, steadfast Light] which, coming into the world, enlightens everyone. He (Christ) was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own [that which belonged to Him—His world, His creation, His possession], and those who were His own [people—the Jewish nation] did not receive and welcome Him. But to as many as did receive and welcome Him, He gave the right [the authority, the privilege] to become children of God, that is, to those who believe in (adhere to, trust in, and rely on) His name— who were born, not of blood [natural conception], nor of the will of the flesh [physical impulse], nor of the will of man [that of a natural father], but of God [that is, a divine and supernatural birth—they are born of God—spiritually transformed, renewed, sanctified].

John 1:9-13 AMP

Belief

In John 1:12 we learn that God has given us the **right**, in the Greek, *exousia*, to become children of God. *Exousia* (G1849), from Strong's concordance, is power, physical or mental power, the power of authority and right of privilege. These reveal that at the moment we make Jesus our Lord, He gives us His delegated power, authority and divine influence.

Jesus is the light of the world and we are called His children, His ambassadors, His beloved, His chosen, His anointed, co-heirs with Him in the Kingdom of God. It is when we believe that Jesus has died for us and when we receive him and we become children of the Most High God.

We believe, from the Greek, *pisteuo* (G4100), which means to think to be true, to be persuaded of, to credit, place confidence in Him. In making Jesus our Lord, and becoming His children, and putting our firm confidence in Him we acknowledge the plan of God and become enlightened in Christ. He is the way, the truth, and the life. In Him we live and move and have our being.

Today's Challenge: PRAY

Father, we come to you with thanksgiving and praise for giving us Your Son Jesus. And Jesus, we thank You for Your sacrifice on the cross. Thank You for giving us Your Holy Spirit and never leaving nor forsaking us. We praise You and give you glory and pray that we are bold, powerful witnesses for you as we proclaim the Gospel. We ask that you make a quick work in the hearts of the lost, those chosen by You. We thank You that You do not want anyone to perish but that all should come to the saving knowledge of Jesus.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

- Diana Rush



PRAY

Day 26

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

John 1:14-18 ESV

Grace and Truth

Have you ever broken the law? While I find it easy to abide by most laws, I struggle to keep my speed in check and continually find myself breaking the speed limit. Have you ever broken God's law? I have, and despite all of my efforts, I continue to find places where I am not living up to the perfection that God demands. Unfortunately, the truth of the matter is that breaking God's law demands eternal punishment. Left to my own devices, I am destined for eternal punishment.

God saw the plight of man and sent His son as the manifestation of His grace by giving His life on the cross to pay for our sins. Those of us whom God has called are invited into this relationship, initiated by grace, to enjoy an eternity with God.

Jesus' ministry on earth applied grace to sinners and truth to those who thought they had no sin. This provides a template for how to demonstrate love to our neighbors. Some people are comfortable with their position, seeing no need for a Savior. Others perceive their failures and live tormented lives, absent of hope. This is where the good news of the grace of Jesus can be shared and celebrated.

Today's Challenge: BLESS

Do you know someone who has done something wrong and can't seem to give up their guilt? Find ways to share the grace Jesus has given to you with that person.

- Adam Bright



BLESS

Day 27

In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Galatians 4:3-5 ESV

Adoption

Have you ever waited for a baby to be born or adopted into your family? Was it in the fullness of time? I remember waiting for the day to meet my daughter Sarah. We had a photo of this beautiful Korean baby at our family Christmas table. The fullness of time was not Rachel's pregnancy, but a call from the adoption agency to get on an airplane. Yet our intent was the same as for our three-year-old son Adam: to unconditionally love this second child God had provided for us.

At Christmas, Jesus was born of God by Mary's pregnancy so that we might become children of God, receiving His unconditional love for us. When we place our faith in Jesus, we are adopted into God's family. This legal right leads to personal delight and love for others. Galatians 4:1-7 states what God did for us in Christ: redeemed us, adopted us, gave us the Holy Spirit, and made us heirs of His kingdom.

Today's Challenge: JESUS

Remember that you are a beloved child of God. Out of that love, share your Christmas joy with someone at your school, work, family, or neighborhood. Consider the price of your spiritual adoption, and invest in someone else to be adopted too.

As we approach Jesus' birthday tomorrow, remember that as an adopted child, you are privileged to:

- Approach the throne of grace with confidence [*Hebrews 4:16; 1 John 5:14*]
 - Enjoy the blessings of God's protection and care [*Matthew 6:25-34; 1 Peter 5:7*]
 - Undergo trials as Fatherly discipline rather than as punishment [*Hebrews 12:5-11*] and
 - Be sealed by the Holy Spirit and kept by the power of God [*Romans 8:31*].
- Mark Sharpnack



JESUS

Day 28

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

Philippians 2:5-11 ESV

Mind of Christ

As we close out this advent season let us cling to our hope revealed in our Christmas celebration. Jesus, the Christ, of royal birth by the Virgin Mary, grows up to live a sinlessly perfect, prophetic life and completes His priestly work on the cross, which we'll celebrate in just a few short weeks. God glorifies Himself and sets the example of how we, out of gratitude for what He's done, should glorify our Father.

Ephesians 2:1 tells us to be imitators of God, so let us, as the body of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, put God's glory on display by living out our servant responsibilities to both our fellow believers and to the lost around us. Let us dwell on the word of God, trust in the work of Christ & remember whose we are and where we are, for we are in Christ & He is in us! This is the gospel on full display, for God's holiness requires atonement for our sinfulness. To display His glory, and out of love for us, God became the God-man in the person of Jesus. He lived a perfect life for us and took on our sin in what is known as the double imputation. Not only did He give to us His righteousness and pay our penalty through His death, but now Jesus is with the living God, seated at His right hand in triumph over death and continually interceding for us to the Father. Halleluiah!

Today's challenge: PBJ

- **PRAY:** in thanksgiving for what God had ordained, the Son accomplished & the Holy Spirit applies to us shown in our belief – Father God, thank you for Your plans for me and how Jesus died on my behalf. I'm so grateful for all You teach me through Holy Spirit. Thank you for sending Jesus!
- **BLESS:** motivated by gratitude, do acts of service for believers & non-believers - Identify one person today you can "serve" by being like Jesus
- **JESUS:** imitate His example of being a servant to others - Do something kind for that person, serving them and blessing them with the message of Jesus at Christmas!

- Bryan Whittington

PRAY

BLESS

JESUS



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