



— An —
Advent Mosaic



PREPARING OUR HEARTS FOR
***Christmas through the
four Gospels***



Day
1

Jesus, son of David, son of Abraham

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 1:1 | Genesis 22:15-18 | 2 Samuel 7:12-17

FOR CENTURIES, THE NATION of Israel had been eagerly waiting for the Messiah that the prophets had promised them in the pages of the Old Testament. By the time Jesus was born, this anticipation had risen to a fever pitch. The Jews were looking for someone who would free them from oppression under the Roman Empire and restore their fortunes as the people of God.



The Gospel of Matthew was originally written with this Jewish audience in mind. Matthew wrote it to show them that Jesus was the fulfillment of all the messianic promises God had made in the Scriptures. This is the reason Matthew began his Gospel by describing Jesus as the son of David and the son of Abraham.

However, Jesus was to be a far different Messiah than what the Israelites expected. He wasn't born so that he could crush the Roman Empire and restore Israel's political power. According to the Scriptures, he was to be a king from the line of David, but his reign would be universal and everlasting. And because he was also the descendant of Abraham, all people and all nations of the world would be blessed through him.

Day
2

The women in Jesus' genealogy

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 1:2-17

WE MAY FIND IT STRANGE THAT Matthew began his account of Jesus' birth with a genealogy, filled with obscure names that are hard to pronounce, at least for us. But for Matthew's original Jewish readers, it reinforced his claim that Jesus was the promised Messiah, descended from David and Abraham.



What would've caught the eye of those first readers, however, was that Matthew included four women in the list, along with Mary: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba (the unnamed wife of Uriah). In a culture that traced lineage exclusively through men, these women would've stood out like beacons in a stream of male names – and they still do.

Three of these women, if not all four, were gentile outsiders in Israel. All of them had complex, difficult stories in one way or another. Nevertheless, Matthew included them in his list of the Lord's ancestors. Their presence is a reminder that Jesus came into the world to save all kinds of people – women and men, pagans and Jews, even those with the messiest of backgrounds. Jesus wasn't just the Messiah of Israel, but of the entire world.

Day
3

The birth and names of the Messiah

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 1:18-24 | Isaiah 7:14

MARY AND JOSEPH WERE a young Jewish couple, likely still in their teens and engaged to be married, when it was discovered that Mary was pregnant. Being pregnant before marriage would've caused a scandal that would've destroyed Mary's reputation and her prospects in life. Joseph, wanting to spare his fiancée this public disgrace, decided to end their engagement.

It's understandable that Joseph was confused about what was going on. Nothing like the Virgin Birth had ever happened before or would ever happen again. And so, God sent an angel to reassure Joseph that he should take Mary as his wife because the child in her womb was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

The angel also told Joseph to name the child Jesus, because he would save his people from their sins. The name *Jesus* is the Greek form of the Hebrew *Yeshua*, which means "the Lord saves." Matthew added that this was to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy about the Messiah, who would be born of a virgin and called Immanuel, which means "God with us." The names of Jesus show that he was more than the son of David and the son of Abraham – he was also the Son of God.



Day
4

The visit of the Magi, a light for the nations

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 2:1-12 | Isaiah 49:6 | Isaiah 60:3

IN THE ANCIENT WORLD, THE MAGI were a professional guild from Babylon and Persia who interpreted dreams, ancient texts and signs in the heavens. Such signs were associated with the rise of new rulers, and the Magi would visit the court of a new king as foreign dignitaries, to pay homage to the monarch and bring him royal presents.

The star this group of Magi saw may have been natural or supernatural, but either way, it was arranged by God. They saw it as a sign of the rise of the true king of Israel and followed it to Bethlehem, to the house where Joseph and Mary were staying with the child Jesus. Their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh were customary for a new monarch, and emphasized Matthew's point that Jesus was the promised royal figure from the line of David.

These visiting foreign Magi illustrate the universal scope of God's grace. Although limited in knowledge and relying on divination, they came to recognize and worship the true Messiah – and became the first gentiles to do so. Their presence marks the moment when the light and hope of the Gospel first began to dawn on the nations outside of Israel.



Day
5

Out of Egypt I called my Son

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 2:13-15 | Hosea 11:1

SEVERAL TIMES IN Matthew's Nativity account, God arranged events by sending an angel to speak to people in their dreams. First, he instructed Joseph to take Mary as his wife and name her child Jesus. Next, he warned the Magi not to return to Herod. Finally, the angel told Joseph to flee with his family to Egypt because Herod intended to kill Jesus.

This was a huge step of faith for a young couple with a small child and few resources. They were to leave their home and live in a foreign country for an unspecified time, until God told them to return. The royal gifts of the Magi would become providential means of support while they were away.

According to Matthew, this incident fulfilled the words of the prophet Hosea, about God bringing Israel out of Egypt during the Exodus. For Matthew's Jewish readers, this recalled the Old Testament portrait of Messiah representing Israel, the perfect Israelite who identifies with his people to deliver them. From that perspective, the Exodus is a picture of God calling and redeeming his people via his true Son, Jesus.



Day
6

Rachel weeping for her children

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 2:16-18 | Psalm 34:18 | 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

TO DEMONSTRATE THAT JESUS WAS the promised Messiah of the Jews, Matthew laced his account with Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by Jesus' birth. Not all prophecies are pleasant, however, not even all messianic prophecies. Herod, furious at being thwarted by the Magi and intent on destroying the newborn king, ordered the killing of every male child under the age of two in and around Bethlehem.

Unlike Jesus, the true king of Israel descended from David and Abraham, Herod was a puppet ruler installed by the Roman government and descended from the Edomites, Israel's ancient enemies. While Jesus came to give his life for his people to save them from their sins, Herod sought to maintain his power by any means he could.

In history, and in life, acts of evil and violence like this are impossible to understand. The prophecy of Jeremiah about Rachel weeping for her children not only highlights our grief and heartache in the face of tragedy, but it also illustrates the darkness present in the world, against which the light of the coming Saviour would shine that much brighter.



Day
7

He would be called a Nazarene

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 2:19-23 | Jeremiah 23:5 | Isaiah 53:3

GOD OFTEN CALLS US TO FOLLOW a path less direct than we expect. In Joseph's case, the angel appeared to him once more in a dream, telling him to bring his family back home because Herod had died. But upon learning that Herod's son Archelaus ruled in his place, Joseph became afraid. Rather than telling him to stay the course, the angel redirected him to settle in Galilee, in the town of Nazareth.

This was God's plan all along, so that Jesus would fulfill prophecy by being called a Nazarene. Although "Nazareth" and "Nazarene" don't appear in the Old Testament, the prophets spoke of the Messiah as a Branch, using a word, *netser*, which sounds like Nazarene in Hebrew. Moreover, people from Nazareth were held in low regard at the time of Jesus, and Isaiah wrote that the Christ would be despised and rejected.

While these allusions may seem vague to us, they would've been clear – and compelling – for Matthew's original Jewish readers. The weight of genealogical and prophetic evidence left no doubt. Jesus *was* the anticipated Messiah, the one in whom both Jews and gentiles would hope.





Jesus, dynamic and powerful Saviour

SCRIPTURE

Mark 1:1-8

UNLIKE MATTHEW AND LUKE, Mark didn't mention the Nativity but jumped right into the start of Jesus' public ministry as an adult. It's a literary technique known as *in medias res* (Latin for "in the midst of things") which omits any prologue or setup and begins in the middle of the action.



And Mark is the Gospel of action. Events race along at a brisk pace. The coming of John the Baptist, Jesus' baptism, his temptation, the call of his disciples, his preaching, healing and miracles, all tumble into each other with minimal description, driven along by the staccato repetition of "immediately."

This narrative style isn't a concession to modern limited attention spans. Although Mark skipped the Nativity, he labelled his work "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." As the apostle Peter's assistant, Mark wrote for a Roman audience that appreciated concise language and decisive action. Accordingly, he portrayed Jesus as a man of action as well as words, a dynamic and powerful Saviour who is ready and able to save.



Day
9

The dramatic entrance of the King

SCRIPTURE

Mark 1:9-15

LIKE THE OPENING MONTAGE IN an action movie, Mark portrayed the beginning of Jesus' public ministry through a series of rapid-fire vignettes. His writing style resembles what modern literary critics call lean, clean prose – dispensing with extra description and moving the plot forward.



After Jesus was baptized by John, he was immediately driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by Satan for 40 days. With these sparse words, Mark depicted Jesus as the well-pleasing Son of God and the powerful victor over Satan, surrounded by wild animals and served by angels.

Mark bookended this series of vignettes with Jesus' declaration that echoed Mark's opening verse: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel." The word "Gospel" is a translation of the Greek *euangelion*, meaning good news. In the ancient world, it was a message from a conquering king or emperor to his new subjects. Mark was serving notice to his Roman readers: a new King had arrived and was calling for allegiance to his new Kingdom.

Day
10

Authority over bodies and spirits

SCRIPTURE

Mark 1:21-34 | Psalm 103:20-22 | Psalm 147:3

MARK WASTED LITTLE TIME in starting to unfold the various spheres of Jesus' power and authority. After choosing his first disciples, Jesus headed to the town of Capernaum, went straight to the synagogue and began to teach. Those who heard him were amazed because in contrast to the Jewish leaders, Jesus taught them with authority.

While at the synagogue, Jesus was confronted by man with an unclean spirit. Unlike the people Jesus encountered, the unclean spirits were well aware of his identity – the Son of God who had complete authority over them. With a simple word, Jesus ordered this spirit to be quiet and come out of the man, which it did with shouts and convulsions.

Following this dramatic encounter, Jesus went to Peter's house and healed his mother-in-law of a fever. After sunset, the whole town came to Peter's door, bringing people suffering from various illnesses and demon possession. Jesus healed them all and forbade the demons from speaking because they knew who he was – the one with absolute authority over human bodies and spiritual beings.



Day
11

Authority to forgive sins

SCRIPTURE

Mark 2:1-12 | Psalm 86:5 | 1 John 1:9

AFTER VISITING THE SURROUNDING villages of Galilee, Jesus returned to his home base at Peter's house in Capernaum. This time, an even larger crowd than before came to be healed and to hear him teach. They thronged the doorway so that no one could get in, but an enterprising quartet lowered their paralytic friend through the roof on a mat to see Jesus.



Observing the faith of this group of friends, Jesus shocked everyone. Rather than healing the man, Jesus told him that his sins were forgiven. Immediately, the religious leaders in the room began to wrestle with the thought that Jesus was blaspheming because only God could forgive sins.

Jesus knew what they were thinking, and to prove he had authority to forgive sins he then told the paralytic man to get up, take his mat and go home – which he did, walking through the crowd and out the door. Through this dramatic miracle, Mark illustrated two more of Jesus' divine attributes – the power to pardon sin and the capacity to know a person's every thought.

Day
12

The physician of our souls

SCRIPTURE

Mark 2:13-17

FROM PETER'S HOUSE in Capernaum, Mark shifted his fast-moving focus to a tax office by the sea where Jesus called his next disciple: Levi the tax collector, also known as Matthew the Gospel writer. Levi responded by throwing a dinner party for Jesus and his disciples, along with many of Levi's fellow tax collectors and other "sinners," as Mark described them.



Tax collectors were considered the worst of society, traitors to the Jewish nation who sided with the Roman oppressors and collected taxes for them while skimming profits for themselves. Respectable Jews avoided them at all costs, but Jesus ate and drank with them and invited one of their number to join his intimate circle of disciples.

The religious leaders were scandalized and asked why Jesus would eat with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus told them it was the sick who needed a doctor, and these were the ones he came to call. Not only a healer of bodies, Jesus was also a physician of souls. The new King was a powerful worker of wonders as well as a kind and compassionate Saviour.

Day
13

The bridegroom of his people

SCRIPTURE

Mark 2:18-22 | Revelation 19:6-7

THIS SHORT DISCUSSION ABOUT fasting may seem strange to us, but Mark used it to draw his next quick sketch of Jesus as the bridegroom of his people. Fasting was a key element of Jewish piety, and people were wondering why Jesus' disciples didn't fast, while the disciples of John and the Pharisees did.



Jesus answered them with a series of cryptic metaphors. He described his time on earth as a wedding feast with himself as the groom and his disciples as wedding guests. While the groom is present, the guests cannot fast, but once he leaves, they will fast. This picture foreshadows an eternal truth: Jesus and his people, bride and groom, will be joined forever in perfect, loving union.

The metaphorical pictures of the garment, the patches, the wine and the wineskins are more challenging to interpret, but they illustrate a single principle. The arrival of Jesus and his Kingdom breaks the old traditional paradigms of faith and worship and recreates them in entirely new and unexpected ways. The Gospel changes everything about how we relate to God.

Day
14

Authority to define truth

SCRIPTURE

Mark 2:23-3:6

DISPENSING WITH A PROLOGUE, Mark began his Gospel narrative with a simple opening line: “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” He expanded this statement in the first two chapters with a series of vignettes focusing on Jesus’ early ministry to display various facets of his grace and power.

Then at the cusp of chapters two and three, Mark arranged these two episodes about Jesus and the Sabbath as a linked pair. In the first, Jesus defended his disciples picking grain, and in the second, he healed a man’s shrivelled hand – both on the Sabbath. As Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus had authority to define its purpose. His actions challenged the legalism of the religious leaders, and they were furious.

But these two vignettes are about more than the Sabbath. As the Son of God, Jesus has authority to declare what God’s Word does and does not mean. He has the right to define truth. Even without the Nativity, Mark portrayed Jesus as the King who has arrived and announced his reign. Powerful and kind, this dynamic Monarch calls everyone to repent and believe his *euangelion*, his Good News.



Day
15

Jesus, light of nations, outsiders and women

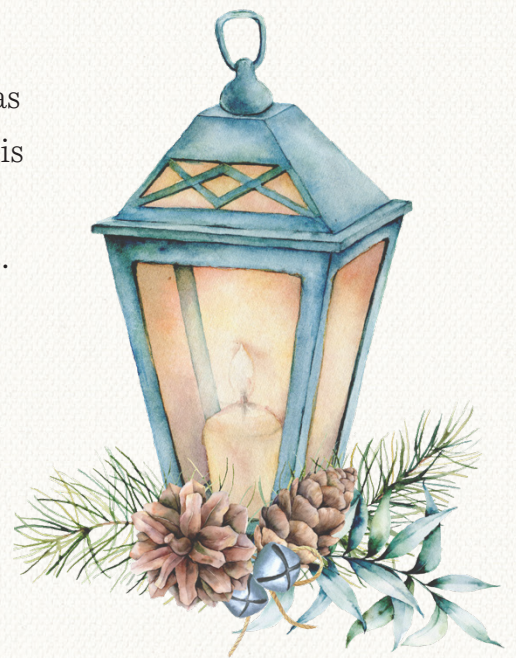
SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:1-4

FROM THE START, Luke's stated purpose for writing his Gospel was to compile a carefully researched history of the life of Jesus. But this was no dry catalogue of facts. Like all good history writing, Luke's Gospel is a narrative designed to inspire and persuade his readers.

Most of the iconic images we associate with the birth of Jesus come to us from Luke: the Roman census and journey to Bethlehem; the scene at the manger; the shepherds watching their flocks at night; the angel announcing the Saviour's birth; the heavenly chorus singing glory to God and peace on earth.

In contrast to Matthew, Luke wrote his Gospel (as well as his book of Acts) with a gentile audience in mind. He was the only non-Jewish author of Scripture, an educated Greek physician who wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else, including his friend and mentor, the apostle Paul. As a gentile, Luke had a special concern for foreigners, outsiders and women. In his Nativity account, he sought to impress on his original readers that Jesus was a Messiah for everyone – “a light for revelation to the Gentiles.”



Day
16

Ending four centuries of prophetic silence

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:5-25 | Malachi 3:1

BEING A THOROUGH HISTORIAN, Luke began his account before the birth of Jesus with the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner who would pave the way for the coming Messiah. The angel Gabriel first visited Zechariah the priest to inform him that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a son named John, despite their advanced age.

Luke then shifted his focus to Elizabeth, who unlike her husband greeted the coming birth of her son with unqualified faith and joy: “The Lord has done this for me. He has looked with favour in these days to take away my disgrace among the people.”

Rather than inserting prophetic quotes editorially, like Matthew, Luke allowed the prophecies to speak through the voices of the men, women and angels in his narrative. With the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist, Gabriel paraphrased the final words of the prophet Malachi – which were the final prophetic words in the Old Testament. In so doing, the angel bridged a 400-year gap in prophecy with an emphatic declaration: the messianic forerunner was about to arrive, and the Messiah wasn’t far behind.



Day
17

Through the eyes of two mothers

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:26-45

LUKE HAS BEEN CALLED the evangelist of women, with good reason. His lengthy account of the Nativity forms a lyrical prologue to his Gospel, rich in intimate details and told largely from the perspective of the two mothers, Elizabeth and Mary.



When Gabriel appeared to Mary and explained her role in the birth of God's Son, he alluded to several prophecies that would've been familiar to the young woman. Although she couldn't fully understand, she trusted the angel's message and rushed off to visit her pregnant relative. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, uttered the first recorded human pronouncement of the Messiah's arrival while he was still in the womb – with a strident shout, according to Luke.

It's not clear whether Mary visited Elizabeth out of sheer joy at what God was doing in each of their lives, or to seek comfort with an older woman who could relate to her condition. Likely it was both. In any event, the three-month visit between these two women, sharing their unique experience of a miraculous pregnancy, is one of the most sublime and grounded episodes in the Gospels – all the more for being written at a time when women's voices weren't especially valued in the wider culture.

Day
18

Mary's Magnificat and Hannah's prayer

SCRIPTURE

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

IN LUKE'S NATIVITY ACCOUNT, Mary was a young girl, likely in her mid-to-late teens. She was devout and humble but also bright and inquisitive, with an enthusiasm for whatever God had in store for her. In addition, she had a poetic streak to match her youthful sense of inquiry and wonder.



After Elizabeth's Spirit-filled outcry about the messianic baby in her womb, Mary responded with her exuberant *Magnificat*, brimming with allusions to Old Testament themes and modelled on the song of Hannah. Although Hannah lived more than a thousand years earlier, the spirit of her faith and art, expressed in her song of praise at the birth of her son Samuel, is echoed in Mary's *Magnificat*. Separated by a millennium, the two poems share a remarkable series of parallels in thought and word.

Mary ended her song by recalling God's promises to Abraham and his descendants throughout the book of Genesis. By connecting the birth of her child with the Abrahamic covenant, Mary became the first person in the New Testament to identify Abraham's offspring with the Messiah, the One to whom the promises were made and through whom the nations would be blessed.

Day
19

Good news and great joy for all people

SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:1-20

IN THE KIDS' HOLIDAY CLASSIC *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Charlie Brown is disillusioned with the superficial commercialism of the season and asks whether anyone can tell him what Christmas is about. His friend Linus recites Luke's account of Jesus' birth and adds, "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."



For many of us, the details of Luke's Christmas story are so familiar that we can miss the impact they would've had on his original readers. Luke grounded his narrative in then-familiar historical details about the Roman census that was the catalyst for Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem. The young couple had few resources and were forced to have their baby in a dirty feeding trough where the animals were kept.

Meanwhile, the shepherds would've been seen as filthy outsiders who lived on the fringes of society. They rarely came to town and were never welcome. Yet an angel came to tell them the good news of great joy for all people – even for them. God chose an obscure young couple, a band of social outcasts, and a backwoods corner of the Roman Empire to shine the first rays of his salvation into the world.

Day
20

Jesus at the temple with Simeon and Anna

SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:21-38 | Isaiah 42:6 | Isaiah 51:4

LUKE CONTINUED HIS THEME of messianic light via the words of Simeon, an old man who witnessed the presentation of Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem. Simeon recognized the child as the Messiah who would bring light and salvation to both Jews and gentiles, echoing several prophecies from Isaiah.



Moving on from Simeon, Luke shifted his focus to Anna, a prophetess from Asher, one of the smallest and remotest Jewish tribes. Located at the northwest limit of Israel's territory, Asher had deeper cultural ties with its gentile neighbours than it did with Jerusalem. Anna's presence at the temple and her prophetic office are reminders that the Gospel is for everyone – small and great, gentile and Jew, and those who don't fit neatly into any category.

Although Anna was a prophetess, Luke didn't record any of her words. He did, however, mention that after she'd seen Jesus presented at the temple, "she came up and began to thank God and to speak about him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem." In other words, Anna became the first evangelist recorded in the New Testament to publish the good news of salvation through Jesus.

Day
21

A snapshot from Jesus' boyhood

SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:39-52



THE SCRIPTURES ARE SILENT about the time between Jesus' birth and the beginning of his public ministry, except for this single boyhood incident recorded by Luke. When Jesus was 12, his parents took him to Jerusalem for the Passover, as they did every year. Heading back home, they couldn't find the boy and returned to the city, where they discovered him in the temple, talking with the religious teachers. When his mother asked why he'd done this, he replied that he needed to be in his Father's house.

This brief, cryptic and human glimpse into the early life of Jesus doesn't fit the way we often picture him during his formative years. There's a temptation to distort his deity into the image of an all-knowing divine child, fully formed before his time, in effect only pretending to be a finite human being.

Luke added this afterword to his Nativity account to reassure his readers that Jesus, the Son of God, lived a genuine human life in every sense. He was subject to his parents and grew up not only in physical stature, but also in wisdom and in favour with God and the people around him.

Day
22

Jesus, cosmic Creator and intimate friend

SCRIPTURE

John 1:1-18

JOHN IS THE ODD ONE OUT among the Gospel writers, following a different framework than the other three. His narrative begins long before the Nativity, before the creation of the cosmos. John identified Jesus as the Word who existed with God and as God from the beginning, the source of all light and life and the Creator of all things.



In place of a detailed account of Jesus' birth, John offered this summary: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." With these few brief strokes, John outlined the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation – mysteries none of us can fully grasp.

Together with the Nativity accounts in Matthew and Luke, John's simple description, "the Word became flesh," forms an astounding picture: The infinite, eternal Creator of all things stepped into his creation as a human baby born of a young virgin in Bethlehem. The rest of John's Gospel unfolds this balanced, incarnational portrait of Jesus as cosmically powerful Son of God and intimate human friend.

Day
23

The Word who reveals God

SCRIPTURE

John 1:14-28

JOHN BEGAN HIS GOSPEL BY introducing Jesus as the Word, translated from the Greek *logos*. In ancient Greek thought, *logos* meant word, speech or principle, the divine reason that shaped the cosmos. John applied this to Jesus as the one through whom God created everything and the one who has made God known to humanity.



“No one has ever seen God,” John wrote. “The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father’s side – he has revealed him.” This stupendous claim means two things. First, whenever people encountered God in the Bible, they were interacting with the Son representing the Father. Second, when we see Jesus in the Gospels, we’re seeing God, full of grace and truth. “The one who has seen me has seen the Father,” Jesus told his disciples.

As in Luke’s Nativity account, John drew attention to John the Baptist as the prophesied forerunner of the Messiah. John the Baptist testified that this coming Messiah would be far greater than himself because he existed before him. In human terms, Jesus was three months younger than John, but as God’s Son, he has existed forever, before time and creation.

Day
24

The Lamb sacrificed for our sin

SCRIPTURE

John 1:29-42 | Isaiah 53:6-7 | 1 Corinthians 5:7

WHILE PEOPLE WERE THRONGING to be baptized in the Jordan River, John the Baptist kept pointing them to Jesus as the coming Messiah. He drew attention to the public sign of the Holy Spirit, descending from heaven as a dove and alighting on Jesus, and to the Father's testimony that Jesus was the eternal Son of God in human form.



John the Baptist was the first to describe Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This was the purpose for which Jesus was born and for which he lived his whole life. God had sent him to be the ultimate Passover sacrifice, prefigured by all the sacrificial lambs offered through centuries of Israelite history. As the angel told Joseph in Matthew's Nativity account, Jesus was to save his people from their sins, which he did by dying for us on the cross.

No one paid much attention when John the Baptist first made this announcement. But the second time, two of John's disciples left him to follow Jesus instead. Jesus welcomed them as his own disciples, and they were soon convinced that he was the promised Messiah.

Day
25

Son of God and Son of Man

SCRIPTURE

John 1:43-51 | Deuteronomy 18:15 | Micah 5:2



AFTER WELCOMING ANDREW AND his brother Peter, Jesus called Philip, who was from their hometown of Bethsaida. Philip then told his friend Nathanael that they'd found the one Moses and the prophets had anticipated, Jesus of Nazareth.

Nathanael was less than impressed. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" he asked. His blunt comment reflected a prevalent attitude that Nazareth was the ultimate backwater town in Galilee. It echoed the prophecy cited by Matthew that Jesus would be called a Nazarene, underscoring the humble human origins of the Messiah.

Following a brief exchange, Nathanael realized Jesus was the Son of God, and Jesus promised he'd see heaven opened and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. This angelic imagery calls to mind the scene from Luke's Nativity of the heavenly chorus declaring glory to God and peace on earth. It's also the first time Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man, right after Nathanael called him the Son of God. The juxtaposition is no coincidence: Jesus is both human and divine, Son of God and Son of Man.

Day
26

A wedding and the first miracle

SCRIPTURE

John 2:1-12 | Psalm 104:14-15 | Isaiah 25:6

WHILE THE OTHER GOSPELS introduced the start of Jesus' ministry via his teaching and healing, John began with a wedding. Just like at a modern wedding, the wine running out would've been a social disaster. Prompted by his mother, Jesus ordered six massive stone jars, each holding about 100 litres, to be filled with water, which he turned into the finest wine anyone there had tasted.



According to John, this was the first miracle Jesus performed. He'd go on to heal the sick, cast out demons, control the weather and raise the dead. But by creating hundreds of litres of fine wine for a wedding, Jesus highlighted the truth of his Incarnation, his care for human cultural activity and for the physical world, and the legitimacy of enjoying good things to the glory of God.

This was how Jesus began to reveal his glory, and his disciples believed in him. Afterward he went to Capernaum with his mother, brothers and disciples to enjoy some personal time with them. Through this episode, John showed what he meant by “the Word made flesh” – the one who controlled nature while cultivating close relationships with the ones he loved.

Day
27

The true temple of God

SCRIPTURE

John 2:13-22



LUKE CAPPED HIS NATIVITY WITH a story about Jesus in the temple at age 12, talking with the religious teachers and claiming he needed to be in his Father’s house. In John’s narrative, Jesus was back at the temple as an adult, driving out the moneychangers and their animals, pouring out their coins, overturning their tables and telling them to stop turning his Father’s house into a marketplace. Jesus’ actions reminded his disciples of a messianic prophecy: “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

When the Jewish authorities asked Jesus for a sign to demonstrate his authority for doing these things, he answered, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days.” John noted that Jesus meant the temple of his body, which his disciples only understood after Jesus rose from the dead.

In ancient Israel, the temple was where God met with his people. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, he has become the temple for his people, both Jew and gentile. Those united with him by faith are also united with his Father. Jesus is thus our sacrifice, our high priest and our temple. He is our everything.

Day
28

Jesus knows everything about us

SCRIPTURE

John 2:23-25 | Psalm 139:1-16

JOHN BEGAN HIS GOSPEL NARRATIVE by going far back before the birth of Jesus, before the beginning of all things, to when the Word existed with God and as God. In time, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus, full of grace and truth.



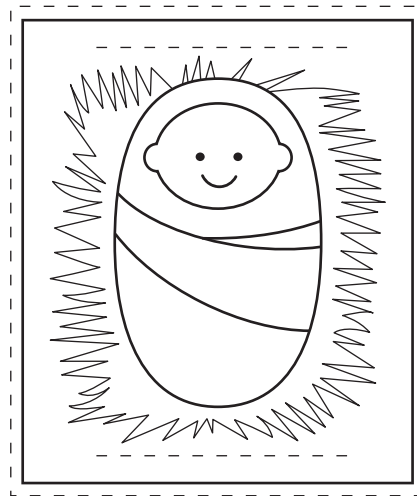
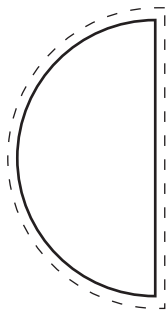
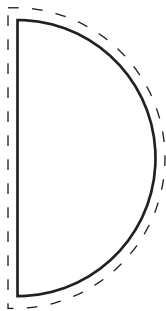
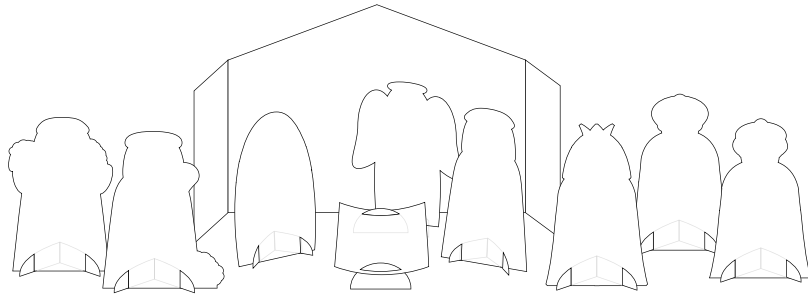
Across his first two chapters, John expanded on what it meant for Jesus to be both Son of God and Son of Man, culminating in his appearance at the Passover Festival in Jerusalem. This anticipated Jesus' death on the cross as the final Passover Lamb, sacrificed for the sins of the world.

To bookend his introduction of Jesus as the Word of God, John noted that Jesus didn't need anyone to testify about humanity because he knew the hearts and motives of every person. Along with his Father, Jesus knows everything about us, our every thought before we think it and our every moment before we live it. As King David observed, such wondrous knowledge is beyond us and we're unable to grasp it. Like John, we're left to marvel at Jesus, our cosmic Creator and intimate friend.

ACTIVITY

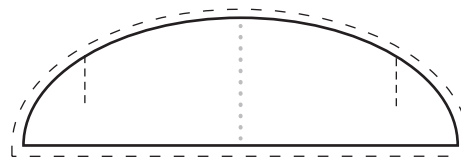
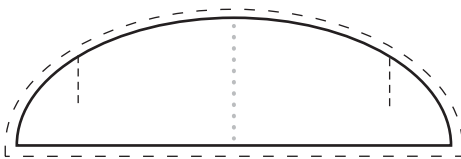
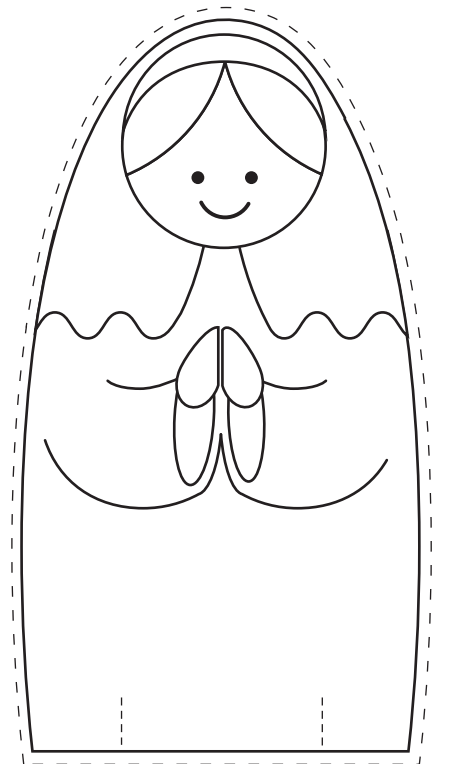
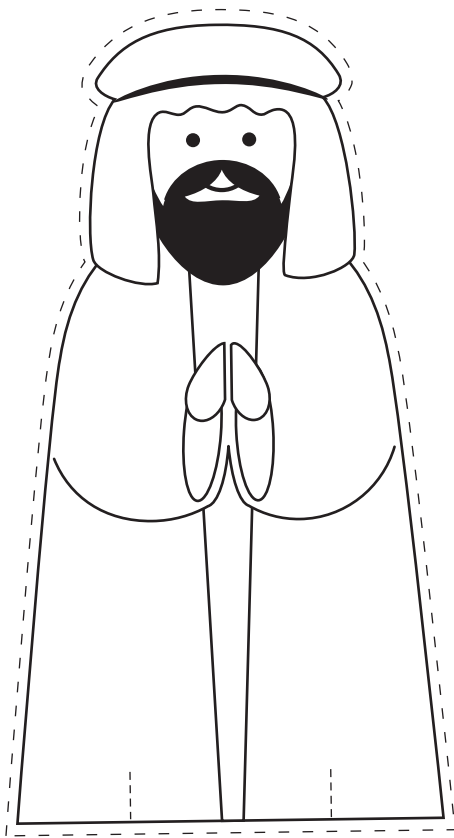
Create your own nativity scene

STEP 1 Print | **STEP 2** Colour | **STEP 3** Cut out | **STEP 4** Fold | **STEP 5** Assemble



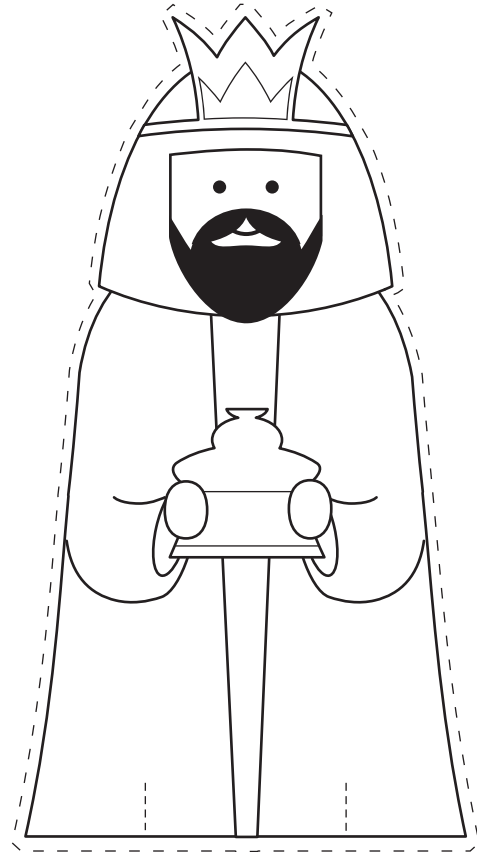
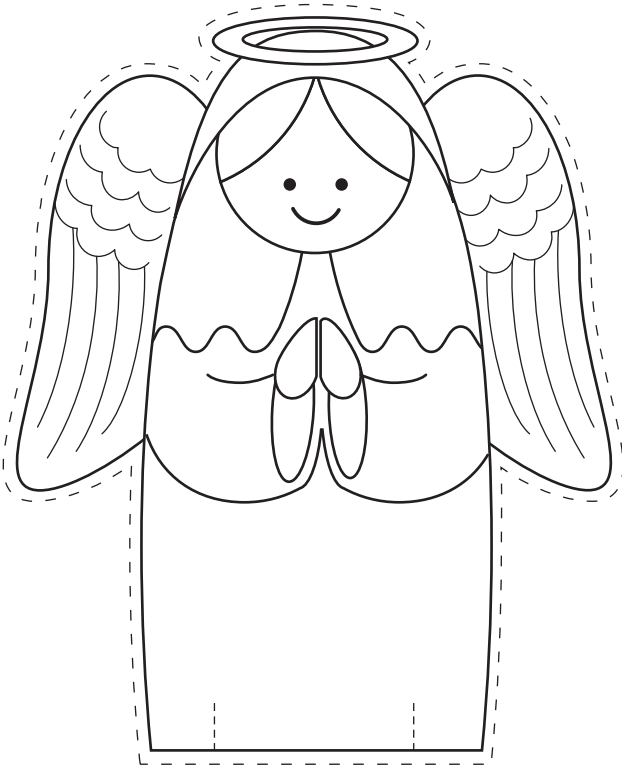
FOLD

CUT — — — —



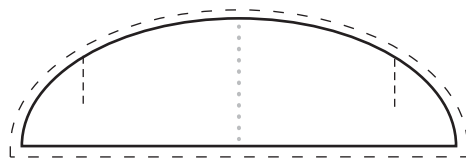
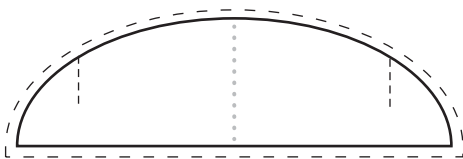
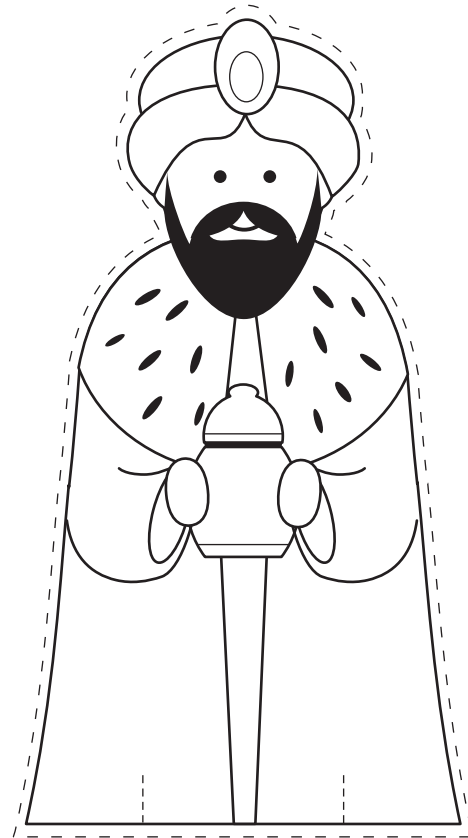
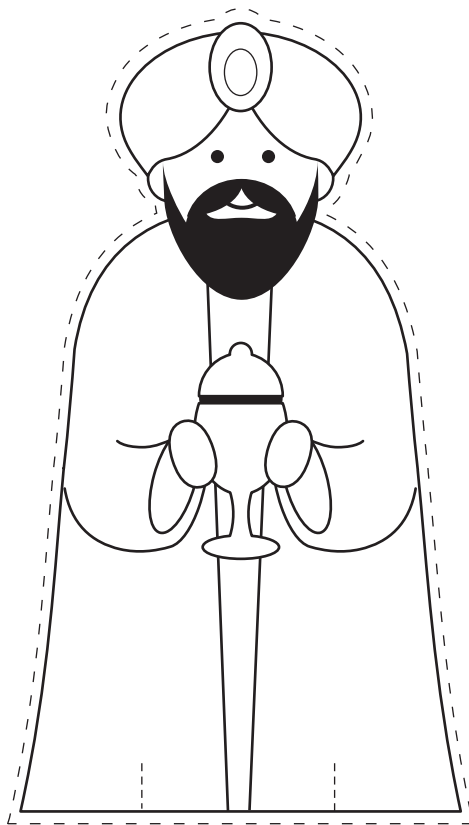
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CUT — — — —



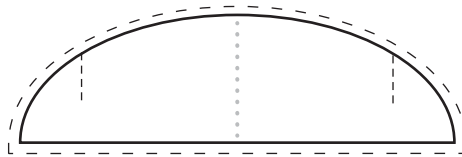
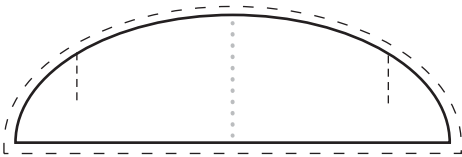
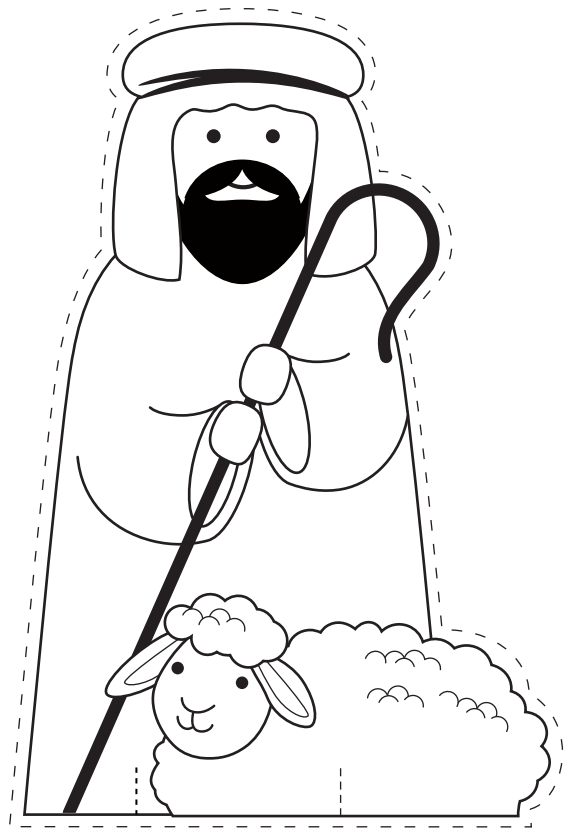
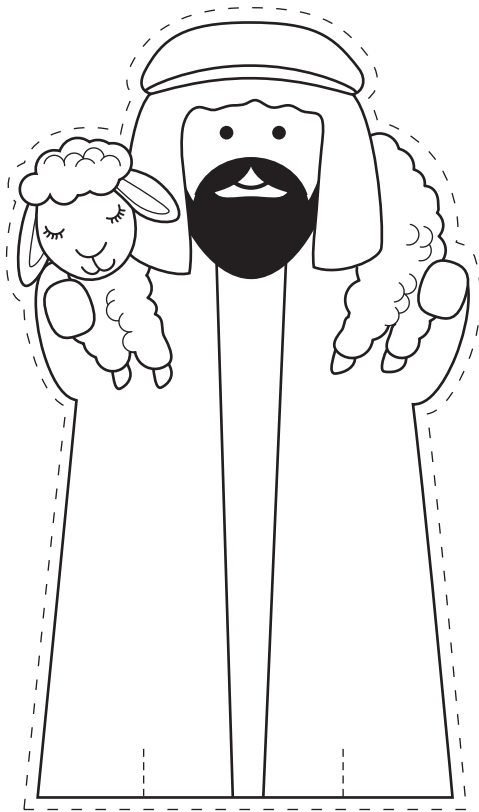
FOLD

CUT — — — —



FOLD

CUT — — — —



FOLD

CUT — — — —

