

# Devotional Guide



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He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.  
And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father  
David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and  
of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Luke 1:32-33

Day 1:

Sunday  
December 5

Luke 1:26-27 (ESV)

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

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**Devotional:**

The text says that Gabriel was sent from God, stressing that the angel was a divine messenger. God sent him to Nazareth, a tiny village; one might even say it was insignificant. The village is not mentioned in the Old Testament and was off the beaten path and not close to major cities or trade routes. In this small village, we learn of Mary, a virgin who was betrothed to Joseph. It is noteworthy that Joseph was from the house of David; the house of David alerts readers that Joseph was from a royal line. Furthermore, it is the line promised to produce the Messiah (2 Sam. 7:12). Unlike the dream sequence that Joseph experienced, in this narrative, Gabriel appeared to Mary with a profound message.



**Reflection:**

1. God sent Gabriel to speak to Mary? How might we compare this narrative with Hebrews 1:1-2? How is God speaking to us? How can we make sure we are listening to God?
2. Nazareth was a small insignificant village, and yet God sent a message of hope. To some degree, we are also small and insignificant (1 Cor. 1:26-31), but God sent each of us a profound message through His Son. What is the message (John 3:16-18)?
3. Joseph and Mary would become ambassadors of God by becoming the parents of Jesus. They could have hidden or downplayed the events of the birth of our Savior, but they did not. If not careful, we can downplay the message entrusted to us, but we too have been consigned with a message of hope (2 Cor. 5:17-21). What does this look like in our lives?



Day 3:

Tuesday  
December 7

Luke 1:29-30 (ESV)

<sup>29</sup> But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

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**Devotional:**

The angel's greeting left Mary troubled because she was not entirely sure what the greeting meant. Interestingly, the angel's presence was already a profound thing, but the greeting itself causes her to be perplexed; the Greek language envisions being confused. Gabriel provides calming reassurance by affirming that Mary has found favor with God. It is in light of God's blessing that Mary is encouraged and told, "do not be afraid." Like other great biblical heroes of faith, Mary had found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Compare to 2 Chr. 16:9, "*For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.*" God divinely chose Mary for this blessing, and the situation reminds us of a profound truth. Many times, living out a great story of faith is NOT us believing in us; it's not a worldly idea of a "do more, try harder" attitude. Faith means believing in who God says we are and walking in the "God-fidence" of being chosen by the Lord for a specific part of HIS redemption story. We all have a role to play, and while it may trouble us, God says HIS children are blessed and live in a favor-based relationship!



**Reflection:**

1. Do you find yourself troubled by what God says about you? Read 2 Cor. 5:20- Do we honestly believe those words? If not, why? What can we do to receive the words of the Lord upon our lives and walk by faith? What concepts stick out in 2 Cor. 5:20? How can we understand God's favor upon our lives and truly live as the person God sees in us?
2. What is your role in God's redemption story? God sovereignly created us, gifted us, and called us to salvation. As children living in God's favor, how are we called to live? How can fear keep us from being committed Christians? What does God tell us about fear (2 Tim. 1:6-7)?

Day 4:

Wednesday  
December 8

Luke 1:31 (ESV) And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

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**Devotional:**

The angel moves from encouragement to exhortation. Mary is favored and blessed, and she has a massive calling in her life. “Behold” means to look or pay attention. Gabriel is about to share some fantastic news, and he wants Mary’s full attention. Gabriel’s words fulfill the Messianic prophecy. Mary is to bear a son, and this son is the Messiah. Isaiah writes, “*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel*” (Is. 7:14). The statement is profound; Mary has found favor. She will carry and conceive the Christ. Gabriel commands her to name the Messiah Jesus. Isaiah declares the virgin will conceive Immanuel, which means, “God with us.” Gabriel tells Mary, “*and you shall call his name Jesus,*” and Jesus means, “Yahweh saves.” The saving work of the Messiah is central to His ministry, the same Kingdom ethic that the Son of God upholds for the Heavenly Father. By Luke 2:21, readers learn of Mary and Joseph’s obedience, as they name the child Jesus.

We will find that God calls us to “give birth” to things to bring forth salvation in our own lives. As “born ones” (1 John 3:1), our calling is to receive and conceive the Kingdom of God. God called Mary to give literal birth to the Messiah. Similarly, God is calling us to deliver the power and presence of our Lord; our words and actions are incarnational. When we give birth to Christ in us, we truly live as Christians and allow the seed of God (1 Pet. 1:23) to manifest in this world (1 Peter 1:24-25). Giving birth to the Kingdom of God is no small calling, but it is essential to being disciples who make disciples (Matt. 28:19-20).



**Reflection:**

1. How did obedience to the calling of God radically change the rest of Mary’s life? In the same way, how is obedience to God meant to change our lives fundamentally? What does such change look like in our lives?
2. Mary gave birth to the Messiah, and His message changed the world. How can our words and actions as Christians give birth to the power and presence of the Messiah? How can our commitment to the gospel help produce life in others? How can this foster discipleship that continues the Great Commission?

Day 5:

Thursday  
December 9

Luke 1:32 (ESV)

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David...

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**Devotional:**

He, Jesus, will be great. This adjective means "large, surprising, big, or loud." Interestingly, Jesus' life and ministry can be defined as "large" in impact, "surprising" in the message, "big" as its ability to welcome the nations into God's family, and "loud" as it shook the universe. Remember, Mary, is to name the child Jesus, which means, "Yahweh saves." The text continues, the child will be called "*Son of the Most High*." Most High is from the Hebrew "El Elyon" (Gen. 14:18-20) and stresses that Yahweh is the Supreme Ruler of the universe. The Christ child is the Son of the Supreme Ruler of the universe. When reading the Bible, one learns that the Son of God is the equivalent of God the Son (John 10:22-42). The Christ is God in the flesh (Matt. 1:18-23; 1 John 1:1-18; Col. 1:15-20); this is all profound, truly hard to grasp if we are honest, but the statement continues and dives deeper into the mystery of God.

The Christ child is the Son of the Most High, the Lord God (who is the Father, the Most High). He, the Lord God, will give to Him (the Son, the Christ child) the throne of His father, David. Jesus is all God and all man (John 1:1-4; Romans 9:5), and this text balances the union of Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14; Matt. 1:23). Jesus receives the throne of his father, David. Jesus' earthly and legal father is Joseph, who is of the line of David (Luke 3:23-37). Therefore, Jesus is the rightful heir of David's throne (2 Sam. 7:12), the true King of Israel (Psalm 89:28-29), and as our narrative unfolds, we learn just that, that Jesus is King (Matt. 2:1-6).



**Reflection:**

1. Jesus is great! How have we revealed the greatness of Jesus in our own lives? How have we seen the world strive to reduce or entirely remove the preeminence of Jesus Christ? How might we have allowed the world's influence to impact our attitude towards the greatness of Christ and the Advent story?
2. Jesus is King. Have we allowed the Lord to be King over our lives? Does He rule and reign? He who is great was born to die and free us from death and damnation. How is the gospel revealed in our lives? How is it large? How is it surprising? How is it big? How is it loud?



Day 6:

Friday

December 10

Luke 1:33 (ESV)

and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

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**Devotional:**

Yesterday's devotion looked at the greatness of Jesus and Him being the One who sits on the throne of David. Today's text adds that Jesus will *"reign over the house of Jacob forever"* and *"of His Kingdom, there will be no end."* Both statements balance nations; God is Lord of all, and salvation is for both Jew and Gentile (Romans 2:6-11). When God appears to Moses, He says, *"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"* (Ex. 3:6). God (Jehovah) is the God of Abraham, with whom the people of God have a covenant. Isaac (the Son of Abraham, the child of covenant promise), with Rebekah, has Jacob. Jacob is the father of twelve sons (Gen. 35:22-25), and he, who God renames Israel, lays the groundwork for what become the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Most High, is the Messiah King who sits on David's throne; as King, He reigns over all of Israel. However, the Kingdom of God does not end with Israel. Jesus' Kingdom has no end. It seems fitting to understand this statement in two ways. First, Jesus' Kingdom has no end because it is eternal. As we learn in Revelation 11:15, *"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."* Jesus was not establishing an earthly or temporal Kingdom. His incarnation set into motion the fulfillment of God's promise in the garden; the Father was making right what man had made wrong. Second, Jesus' Kingdom has no end because it is not limited to Israel but will extend to every nation, tongue, and tribe! Daniel 7:14 states, *"And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."* The Messianic Kingdom is for all people, and prophecy affirms that the story did not begin in a manger and did not end at the cross. Jesus declared, *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also"* (John 14:1-3).



**Reflection:**

1. The response to the identity and message of Jesus determines one's eternal destiny. What is your response to Jesus' identity and message?
2. Acts 4:12. How are we to live out such a message? Who do you know that needs to hear the hope of the Advent message?

Day 7:

Saturday  
December 11

Luke 1:34-37 (ESV)

<sup>34</sup> And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

<sup>35</sup> And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

<sup>36</sup> And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God."

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### Devotional:

This text opens with Mary asking a very reasonable question; the news that she will carry the Christ child is supernatural, for she is a virgin. The virgin birth stands alone in the annals of time as the incarnation of God. The angel answers Mary and explains that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and the power of the Most High will overshadow her. Remember, the Most High is the father of the Christ child; Jehovah will accomplish this profound miracle, this supernatural event. Such a profound act can only mean one thing, the child is the "Son of God" and in this moment Mary hears the connection between Jesus and the Heavenly Father. Jesus is the Son of God, the Son of the Most High, the Christ, the One called "Yahweh saves," and the One who sits about the throne of David, ruling over the house of Jacob and His' Kingdom is eternal. Yep; that is all the information Mary is processing within the context of doing so as a virgin. Jesus is God in the flesh (John 1:14). He is the perfect Son of God, and Jesus knew it (Luke 10:22), satan knew it (Luke 4:3), the demons knew it (Luke 8:28), as did the Apostles (John 1:14; Acts 9:20).

We also read of Elizabeth, who is old in age and barren, but will also conceive a son, who is John the Baptist (Luke 1:57-66), the forerunner of the Christ. As Mary was processing the angel's message, she must have also celebrated the joy of knowing her relative was with child. This news also affirms that God, who was working in Mary, had already worked a miracle in Elizabeth six months prior. Overall, we learn that God is the God of the impossible; nothing is impossible for Him. In grace, the angel uses Elizabeth to comfort Mary. Even today, we find comfort in our own lives by resting in the power of providence of the God is does the impossible (Deut. 3:24). In other words, as we learn of who God is and what He has accomplished in the past, we find encouragement to know that He is the same God working His perfect will in our present and into our future.



### Reflection:

1. How might we put limits on God? Do we read such events and dismiss them by putting God in a box in our own lives? How can we live with the posture that God is the God of the impossible?
2. How can the continual message of God's supernatural movements provide comfort in our lives? In seasons that we might feel like Mary, do we know of an Elizabeth story God uses to bring us strength and confidence that He is working in our lives?



Day 8:

Sunday

December 12

Luke 1:38 (ESV)

And Mary said,  
"Behold, I am the  
servant of the Lord;  
let it be to me  
according to your  
word." And the angel  
departed from her.

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**Devotional:**

Take a minute or two and go back and read verses 26-37. Process all that has been said and revealed to Mary, and then process the implications of all that the angel has said. Now, let's process her response: "I am the servant of the Lord" and "let it be to me according to your word." We learn that Mary is clear about who she is and the calling upon her life in these two statements.

Mary is a servant of the Lord. Mary declares her status before God as a "*doule*," which means bondswoman; this is the female word of "*doulos*," which means slave. *Doulos* is the favored term by the Apostle Paul and probably best personifies that attitude that all Christians must embody (Phil 2:5-11) as they strive to live like Christ. Our identity can be rooted in a myriad of things. The world loves to provide plenty of things for us to define our identity. Examples are gender, sexuality, profession, education, race, wealth, and the list only continues. Ironically, we only see society adding more labels in a world that speaks of longing for unity. We can allow many things to define us, and while some may not seem bad, we must have the courage to examine how we allow ourselves or others to define us. A profound biblical model is to embrace humility before God and welcome the term "*doulos*." Mary was quick to refer to herself as God's slave; this was her identity. She had no problem making this immediate statement to Gabriel.

Mary declared, "*let it be to me according to your word*." Mary's obedience is impressive. She did not count the cost of God's plan; she chose obedience as a servant. An obedient servant does not question the directive of their master. Mary did not ponder the struggles of being pregnant, explaining things to Joseph, or dealing with the gossip and slander that was sure to follow. We must remember that God sent the angel; thus, as his messenger, he was sharing the word or command of God. Mary was not simply listening to an angel; she was receiving the word of the Lord as shared from a heavenly messenger. Therefore, Mary connected her status as a slave with her obedience to receive the message of God, for she is a servant of the Lord, Him who does the impossible.



**Reflection:**

1. Mary was quick to identify as the Lord's slave. Do we have the same commitment? When prompted, is our identity in our faith, and are we quick to call ourselves slaves of God (Rom. 6:15-23)?
2. Mary was also quick to manifest obedience. She allowed the word of God to have its way in her life; what a message for us! Think about the revelation of the New Testament. Are we continually reading the Scriptures, and when they speak God's will over our lives, are we quick to declare, "let it be to me according to your word?"

Day 9:

Monday  
December 13

Luke 2:1-3 (ESV)  
In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.  
<sup>2</sup> This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.  
<sup>3</sup> And all went to be registered, each to his own town.

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**Devotional:**

Scholars wrestle to understand the specific decree that Luke is referencing. Still, it appears to be an administrative directive and not a formal law. Taking a census was standard practice throughout Egypt and Syria, which would include Palestine. Second-century church father Clement of Alexandria affirmed the census and connected it to the birth of Christ. Luke was an excellent historian, and he is the only gospel writer to mention this census; it appears he intends to set the stage for how the directive affected Judea. Luke states that the registration took place with Quirinius, the governor of Syria; this also creates some historical challenges, but the Greek word for governor translates, “one with authority.” Historians also provide insight that it is likely best to read the Greek, stressing that the administrative registration was pre-Quirinius and was likely Herod pulling the strings behind the scenes. The type of census also lends credence to this position. As a Roman creed, a census law would have people stay home instead of returning to their family homes, as presented in Luke’s gospel. Such a census must have included a deadline to justify Joseph and Mary taking such a long journey in late winter as she was close to giving birth.

As we begin Luke 2, readers are left to assume that Joseph must have owned property around Bethlehem to have them travel from Nazareth. Such a practice was Roman per se but could have easily been an acquired practice from the Jews. Historically, we understand that the Romans were flexible regarding religious and public law and maintaining peace. We cannot miss one profound truth amidst all this: God is the Sovereign Lord of providence. The Lord orchestrated the administrative census that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. The Old Testament provides several examples of God directing the will of man to accomplish His divine purpose (Ezra 7:21-26; Isaiah 10:5-7; 45:1-4). In this case, God the Father arranged the events that had Jesus born in Bethlehem, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy.



**Reflection:**

1. Think about the lengths God went through to make sure His Son was born in Bethlehem. What does this teach us about God’s power over mankind? What does this teach us about God’s faithfulness to His promises? What does this teach us about His love for mankind?
2. Examine your own life. Can you think of unique or extraordinary circumstances that God did to make way for your salvation? What events or what people did God use to save you? Take time to praise God for His providence to produce saving faith in your life!

Day 10:

Tuesday

December 14

Luke 2:4-5 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judaea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup> to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

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**Devotional:**

Today’s text continues to unpack the story of Joseph making the trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Luke highlights a narrative that unfolds God’s prophecy. Micah 5:2 states, “*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*” Again, God divinely directed Joseph and Mary to be in the exact place needed to fulfill the Messianic prophecy.

The text itself also lends some fascinating insight into the character of Joseph. While we do not fully understand the administrative census, that said, Mary’s presence was likely not needed. However, Joseph chose not to leave his pregnant wife alone in Nazareth while he traveled to Bethlehem. To leave Mary alone would have her potentially giving birth without his presence and open the door for her to receive slander. Luke states that Joseph and Mary were betrothed to each other (Luke 2:26-27), and Matthew’s gospel implies that they were married (Matt. 1:18-21) but had not consummated their marriage (Matt. 1:24-25). Luke likely does not add the detail; thus, we can harmonize both gospels to understand the narrative entirely.

Furthermore, Jewish tradition would have viewed betrothal as a legally binding contract, meaning they were married. Thus, Joseph leaving Mary alone would leave her vulnerable, and that is not love. Finally, Joseph himself would not have wanted to miss the profound birth as heralded by God’s angelic messengers (Matt. 1:20-21). Overall, we can think through a decree of a census, the obedience of Joseph and Mary, and other circumstances that took place. Leon Morris writes, “God works through all kinds of people to affect His purposes.”



**Reflection:**

1. What lengths are we willing to go through to be obedient to God’s call upon our lives? Think about the call of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). As we learn of Joseph and Mary’s commitment to God’s call, how can we apply their example to our commitment to the call upon our lives?
2. Many scholars believe that Joseph and Mary were aware of Micah 5:1-2 and aligned the angelic message with biblical prophecy, and obediently walked out God’s plan. How can we apply this to our own lives? What has God spoken and provided in our own lives, and how are we walking out His plan?

Day 11:

Wednesday  
December 15

Luke 2:6-7 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.  
<sup>7</sup> And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

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**Devotional:**

While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, the time arrived for Mary to give birth. One must understand this moment as the manifestation of God’s perfect will and plan. As Paul writes, “*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law*” (Galatians 4:4). The time had come, to be exact, “the fullness of time.” The Greek word for fullness (*pleroma*) can mean complete, ripe, or full measure. The birth of Jesus Christ comes at the perfect or complete moment; time was at its full measure or ripeness, and the fruit of God’s promise was incarnate.

Mary gave birth to her “firstborn son.” First, notice that this amazing event is seemingly very uneventful. No appearance of heavenly hosts, no other people, just Joseph and Mary. A young couple, about seventy miles away from their home in Nazareth, walking out the promise of God. Think of all they have been told, and now they are experiencing it. Some of us might compare this moment through the lens of our young adult and young married phases. Second, Jesus is the firstborn (*prototokos*), carrying the idea of being born and stresses the first in time, rank, and authority. This child would be first in line for inheritance and so forth. Thus, it also carries a power or birthright concept that goes beyond birth order. One can think of the story of Jacob and Esau. Third, Jesus is the firstborn, which conveys that he was not Joseph and Mary’s only child, but the first of their children, which the Bible affirms (Luke 8:19).

Why was Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger? Because there was no place for them in the inn. A classic line in our Advent narrative! Jesus is kept warm with pieces of cloth and laid in a manger, which was simply a makeshift bed amidst some challenging circumstances. No space in the inn; there were no open guest rooms or areas because of the large crowds gathered for the census. The Messiah was born in a chilly, smelly, makeshift shelter likely surrounded by animals. The Son of Man, who came not to be served but to serve (Matt. 20:28), the One who humbled Himself to death for the Father’s glory (Phil. 2:5-11), incarnates in the lowliest of situations. From the onset, Jesus embodies humility and reminds each of us to live a life of humility and remember that this material world does not determine our Kingdom success.



**Reflection:**

1. What comes to mind when you think of God’s perfect timing? How might this help us understand that God is Sovereign? Have you ever experienced something that felt like God was in control and the timing was perfect? How did this encourage your faith and trust in God?
2. Jesus is firstborn. As Christians, we are children of God through adoption via salvation (Rom. 8:29-30)! According to Rom. 8:30, what promise does God the Father share with His children?

Day 12:

Thursday  
December 16

Luke 2:8-10 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.

<sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

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**Devotional:**

I cannot read these words without thinking of Charlie Brown Christmas and Linus sharing the text from the stage. Linus responds to Charlie's question, "Does anyone know what Christmas is all about?" Linus replies, "Sure," and proceeds to share the Advent narrative; this is not unpacking the text but does remind us of its importance. The Advent message is the hope for mankind. Amidst a landscape of materialism and man-centric joy, the Advent story grounds us in the love of God and the hope of the world. It reminds us that sharing this hope should be simplified to sharing the Scriptures. We can do a lot of good during the holiday season, but any good void of sharing the hope of Jesus Christ is missing the point.

The text tells us that the angel of the Lord appears to shepherds. Unlike the uneventful birth of Jesus, readers now learn of the glory of the Lord shining around shepherds, which produces great fear in them. The angel comforts the shepherds and declares, "Fear not." The statement follows this encouragement: "I bring you good news." This news is of great joy and for all the people. This good news was for "all people" and referred to Israel (Luke 1:16). It reminds us that God's salvation began with Israel (John 4:22) but would include the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6) because God loves the world (John 3:16-18). By God's grace, Jesus' incarnation is "good news."

Good news is not about judgment but grace and mercy. The Greek word for good news is one of Luke's preferred terms, and he saturates his gospel with it. This good news is the gospel; God incarnated (John 1:1-4) to save mankind (Eph 2:8-10) because Jesus was born to die (John 1:29). The good news produces joy because God's love enlightens those lost in the darkness of sin, and great joy is the only response to being a Christian. Peter writes, "<sup>8</sup> *Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, <sup>9</sup> obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls*" (1 Peter 1:8-9). This season is about joy, but one can only understand such joy in light of the good news of God. May the salvation of our souls undergird the joy we share. When we believe in HIM, we obtain (receive) salvation, which is good news worth rejoicing!



**Reflection:**

1. What is the good news? How are we to understand this news from the cradle to the cross? How can we explain the good news to others?
2. Why is God's good news filled with great joy? Why does Peter refer to such joy as inexpressible? What does it mean that godly joy is filled with glory? Godly joy is in salvation; what does it mean to obtain salvation? What does it mean to believe, and in whom are we to believe?



Day 13:

Friday  
December 17

Luke 2:11 (ESV)  
For unto you is born  
this day in the city of  
David a Savior, who  
is Christ the Lord.

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**Devotional:**

I love the phrase, "for unto you is born this day..." For unto you communicates a profound sense of grace. Before we get to the title Jesus, let's pause and think about the statement, "for unto you." Jesus was born, a gift of salvation for mankind; He was born amongst man, "pleased to dwell with man" as we love to sing. For unto you, in other words, Jesus was born for man, and we know He was born to die, thus born to save, and as we learned yesterday, that is good news!

I love the imagery of "unto you." Jesus incarnates; the Creator cloth Himself with His creation and lives among them and for them. Such a simple statement invokes such a profound view of God's grace and pursuing love. Jesus came for us; He came to die for us, He provided salvation for us, and one can even say, He continues to live "unto us" through His presence (Matt. 28:19-20). The birth of Jesus unto mankind is good news because of who He is. Jesus, the promised One, who was born in the city of David (Micah 5:2), is Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Jesus is the Savior; again, his name means, "Yahweh is salvation," and this is no random name but the fitting title of the Son of God. Jesus is Savior; He is the unmerited incarnate favor of God, delivering mankind from sin, death, and hell (Matt. 1:21). Furthermore, Jesus the Savior is Christ the Lord.

Christ is the Lord! First, Jesus is Christ, an amazing title for a baby born in such a lowly estate. Christ means "anointed one" and is the parallel of the Jewish term, "Messiah" (Dan. 9:25-26). Jesus is the Christ; He is the promised Messiah. While He is currently a baby, the firstborn will grow in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). One day, Jesus, the Son of Man who serves mankind (Matt. 20:28) by mediating the covenant of grace (1 Tim. 2:5), provides eternal life as God the Son (John 14:1-14). Second, Jesus Christ is Lord, born in a lowly estate, but a King and worthy of one's honor. Historically, we connect the terms Lord (*kurios*) and slave (*doulos*). A slave had a lord—such a paradox since Jesus is both Lord (Rev. 17:4) and slave (Phil. 2:5-11). We also must remember that Mary's response to God's message was to take the posture of a servant (*doule*). Being like Jesus is to be a servant. Being a servant is to call Jesus Lord/Master. Our Lord was born to die for us, and in our salvation that He secured, we are born again to live for His renown.

**Reflection:**



1. For unto you. How can we personalize the Advent message? Jesus was born for us. He came to this world to die for us; how does this help us understand the profundity of God's love?
2. Jesus is Messiah and Master and yet became a servant, and we are not above Him as our Master (Matt. 10:24). How can we acknowledge Jesus' role and example and live it out in our own lives through our worship and faith?

Day 14:

Saturday  
December 18

Luke 2:12 (ESV)

And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

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**Devotional:**

The angel finishes his divine message by providing the shepherds with a sign. When we think of signs, we tend to envision supernatural events. Jesus spoke of signs and stated that His death and resurrection was a sign that is likened to the story of Jonah (Matt. 12:39). That said, the sign spoken of by the angel is not sensational. Just as the birth of Jesus is low-key, the sign given is the same, though it would be unique. The baby wrapped in "swaddling cloths" would not be unique; this would have been standard practice for first-century Jewish mothers. However, a baby "lying in a manger" would have been extraordinary. The shepherds are told to find a baby lying in a manger, resting in a makeshift bed.

For the shepherds, the sign of Christmas was unique because it was simple and humble. How often do we celebrate Christmas with such enthusiasm? We spend more than we should, decorate lavishly, travel long distances, and prepare extravagant feasts. The sign for the shepherds was unique and straightforward. Through some personal inventory, maybe we let the symbol of our Christmas celebration be luxurious. I wonder if the best witness for the world, the most authentic sign of our discipleship, would be maintaining the uniqueness of simplicity. As I get older, I find I want to make much more of Jesus, and a straightforward way to accomplish this is not to blur the message of God. A simple message is unique, and it creates a clear sign to the world. The shepherds' indication was clear; they would be able to find the Christ child because He was uniquely in a manger. The message of Christ is unique and straightforward; the gospel is unique and straightforward. Bearing this in mind, my commitment to worship God and reflect the good news of the Advent should be simple (easy to understand) and unique (different than the normalcy of the world). Coming out of a season of such pain, division, and hardship, we have a tremendous opportunity to display the uniquely loving message of the gospel (good news) with clarity and simplicity.



**Reflection:**

1. It is a good thing to attain and maintain family traditions. That said, one must be careful not to let traditions become trappings that distract us and blur the Advent message. Do our lives currently have traditions that have become trappings and kept us from fully worshipping God during the Advent Season?
2. The shepherds' sign was unique and straightforward, but it led them to Jesus Christ, the Savior. In our own lives, how can we manifest a symbol of our devotion that is simple and unique and guides people to Jesus Christ the Savior?



Day 15:

Sunday  
December 19

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

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**Devotional:**

In contrast to the straightforward birth of Jesus Christ, the conclusion of the angelic message involves a *“multitude of the heavenly host praising God.”* The appearance of such a large gathering of angels is unique in the Scriptures. As we think of the uniqueness of simplicity, we now think of the essence of extravagant praise. One can avoid distorting the good news of the Advent message by tempering expressions of celebrating during the Advent Season, guarding us against distorting the good news of the Advent. That said, we can swing the figurative pendulum in the other direction and communicate the uniqueness of our praise towards God, which should be extravagant. In affirmation and celebration of the Advent message, a multitude of the heavenly host praise God. Let that sink it, the response to the Advent message praising God. Think back to Peter’s words that our salvation produces an *“inexpressible joy.”* Words and songs fall short of conveying the glory of God and the profundity of our redemption. That said, the most straightforward way to respond to the Advent message, the abundance of God’s grace, is to lavish praise upon God.

The praise of the heavenly host is *“glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased.”* First, the only chance at peace on earth is when we exalt God by declaring His glory. God created each of us to bring Him glory (Isaiah 43:7). Hearing and receiving the Advent message must produce praise in our lives that we direct to the only One worthy of our worship: Jehovah. Second, God provides peace on earth with whom He is pleased. A persnickety passage to unpack, and we might restate the phrase as God’s peace rests upon mankind, who is of His good pleasure. The idea is that God’s favor rests upon those whom He chooses to extend His peace. The message is that God is Sovereign, and He made the choice to provide peace between Himself and mankind (Hebrews 13:20). God provides salvation; we are the recipients. God receives the glory; we give the credit. Advent is the collision of God and man, and the product is a people of praise.



**Reflection:**

1. God created and called us to be a people of praise. What should this look like in our lives? How can we use the Advent message and season to bring glory to God through our praise?
2. God’s peace was and is pleased to dwell upon His people. Jesus provided peace on earth, which makes sense because He is the prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6). As Christians, we are peacemakers (Matt. 5:9). During this Advent season, how can we use our lives and resources to manifest the peace of God in a way that awakens the lost to salvation and brings God all the glory?

Day 16:

Monday

December 20

Luke 2:15-16 (ESV)

<sup>15</sup> 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."

<sup>16</sup> And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

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**Devotional:**

The angel of the Lord shared the message, the multitude gave glory to God, and then they returned to heaven. The response of the shepherds is fitting; they decided to go to Bethlehem. The shepherds had just seen something unique; one would rightly call it miraculous, and we can quickly determine that their response was logical. However, as we investigate the biblical history, we see examples of people who witnessed the miraculous and did not exhibit a godly response. Quickly we can think of the exchange between Moses and Pharaoh. The supernatural kept happening, yet Pharaoh's heart kept hardening. The shepherds' choice to go to Bethlehem is not merely a response to the supernatural. It reveals their desire to investigate what had taken place in Bethlehem because it was that "which the Lord has made known to us." It's the revelation of God's plan that motivates the shepherds to investigate. What a great message and example for us today.

It is noteworthy that the shepherds did not go to Bethlehem because of God's command but out of desire. The shepherds witnessed the supernatural and were told of a sign. Then again, people ignore signs all the time. The shepherds did not overlook the message or the presence of the angels. The shepherds provide an excellent model of salvation. First, God's good news is of the coming of the Son of God, the Savior, who is Jesus the Christ. The heralding of this message elicits a response: those who believe in the Messiah trust Him. The shepherds heard, accepted, and acted upon their beliefs. All Christians are those who have heard the gospel, believed in Christ for salvation, and acted upon their belief by living a life of faith to the glory of God. Second, the shepherds acted upon the good news, and they "*found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.*" Living out our faith is not a blind leap of hope and insecurity. Faith is the evidence or assurance of things unseen (Hebrews 11:1). Faith in Christ produces security because salvation is rooted in God's promise and such assurance provides confidence (1 John 5:13-15). The shepherds found precisely what the angel said because it was God's message, and he is trustworthy.



**Reflection:**

1. The shepherds' response to what the Lord has made known was to investigate and confirm. How can we understand what the Lord has made available to us (Hebrews 1:1-2)? How can we explore this to strengthen our faith (Acts 17:10-11)?
2. How does faith in God produce security in our lives? How can we understand this security as spiritual and natural provisions? How does God keep us secure spiritually (John 3:16)? How does God keep us secure while upon this earth (Matthew 28:19-20)?

Day 17:

Tuesday  
December 21

Luke 2:17-18 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

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**Devotional:**

I am very thankful that my testimony of salvation involves the Advent season. It seems small, but it feels like such a grace gift and fits well with how God has wired me. That said, I resonate with verse seventeen, and maybe you can as well. When the shepherds saw "it," that being Joseph and Mary and the Christ child, "they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child." As God called the shepherds into the Advent narrative, they were faithful to investigate and give glory to God. They praised God by sharing His revelation; this is important because their testimony reveals what the Lord spoke to them and the evidence that God's Word was true. A testimony can be a collision of what God said and the evidence of its fulfillment. Testimony is not simply a story but evidence that affirms something. In the case of the shepherds, they shared what the Lord spoke to them. Imagine Joseph and Mary hearing their words and combining them with their own experiences. God was lavishing them with His grace and proving affirmation that something profound was in the works through Jesus. This scene brings glory to God because it affirms that He is faithful; when God says He is doing something, He does it!

*"And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them."* The story of God produces awe, or at the very least, it should. What is our testimony (John 1:19-28)? John the Baptist's testimony was not about him but what the Lord was doing through him. Notice that John's gospel explains John the Baptist's testimony through his actions. His obedience to God was manifest in words and actions that produced the glory of God. The shepherd's testimony created "wonder," which stresses amazement. We have the honor of embodying the story of God. As we share and live out the words God has spoken to us (the gospel), our words and actions should make the power and presence of God palpable and produce wonder. This Advent season, don't downplay Christmas, don't let it become marginalized by the world, and don't miss the opportunity to share and create wonderment. The world should feel the good news (the gospel) in our words and our actions. All we do and say should be a testimony that points people to the wonderment of God's faithfulness. Christmas is a testimony, a declaration that God pursued mankind through the Christ child and secured salvation for those who would believe in His Son.



**Reflection:**

1. What promises has God made to us? How can we combine God's promise toward us (1 John 2:25) and our faith as Christians (James 2:17-18) to produce a testimony that gives God the glory (1 Peter 4:7-11)?
2. What is your testimony? How can you share your testimony through your words and actions? How can your testimony produce wonder in others and give glory to God?

Day 18:

Wednesday  
December 22

Luke 2:19 (ESV)

But Mary treasured  
up all these things,  
pondering them in  
her heart.

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**Devotional:**

Every time I hear the word treasure, I think of the movie *The Muppets Treasure Island*. Yep, my family likes the Muppets. Much of my affection was birthed in my childhood and watching *The Muppet Show*. The reason I share. Well, the word elicits a powerful memory, something that has meaning and value to me. It carries enough worth and meaning that Crystal and I made a point to share the experience with our children, and this includes *The Muppets Christmas Carol*. The childhood experience produced something valuable, and the treasure chest of such worth is one's heart. I love the imagery of the "treasure chest" because the chest houses the heart. The Greek language envisions the heart as the seat of one's emotions. I think of this imagery often. The heart represents my love, my stories, my memories, and even houses the Word of God (Psalm 119:11). All of it is buried deep in my chest. It's my vault, my place of memories and emotions, and I can ponder the mercies of God.

Mary treasured up all the shepherds' words. Their testimony was valuable, as their words provided another layer of evidence to the incarnation story. Mary's response was to treasure all that was taking place. She figuratively buried them deep into her chest, so she was able to ponder them in her heart. I can relate, and that is why I spoke of the Muppets. As I reflect upon God's grace and mercy during the Advent season, I think of my salvation, my wife, and my children. I ponder Christmas seasons, gifts, service opportunities, church events, food, and fellowship, and so much more. I consider this because I see each person and experience as God lavishing His grace upon me in such tangible ways. It's also essential to bury memories in my heart because this season reminds me that people I love are not on earth anymore, which produces some sadness. I miss them. It is in such times that I ponder the treasured memories within my heart. While I find joy and even laughter at times, the greatest treasure is knowing that I will see them again because God is faithful to uphold His promise of salvation. Take time this year to reflect, treasure up the grace of God, ponder them in your heart, and rest in the joy of God's power and presence.



**Reflection:**

- 1. What "treasures" has God given to you? How can you view your salvation, family, friends, church, etc., as God lavishly blessing you with His grace?
  
- 2. In God's economy, the highest worth is salvation. The highest joy we can experience finds God's redemption at the center. Take time to examine your life. Ponder the grace of God as a valued treasure. How can such an action foster an attitude of worship this Advent season?

Day 19:

Thursday  
December 23

Luke 2:20 (ESV)  
And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

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**Devotional:**

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Such a statement was not simply experienced but empirical evidence of God. All they had heard and seen was not subjective, not their interpretation, but is qualified by “*as it had been told them.*” God sent an angel who told them the profound news of the incarnation of God (Matt. 1:18), and the shepherds went and investigated. The message they were given was confirmed by finding Joseph, Mary, and the Christ child, and the baby was in the manger. The Bible does not give us the entire interaction. Still, I often believe that Joseph and Mary, amidst the pondering, must have shared what the Lord spoke to them to the shepherds. All of them must have been in total awe of what God was doing, and each layer only deepened and enriched the Advent story.

Such a seemingly simple verse reminds me of a few essential things. First, the story of God is not subjective truth but objective. The affirmation that God worked in the world is not in the testimony of one’s experience but testimony that affirms the words of God. The same is true today; our lives are not conveying subjective truth but the objective truth of God. Such truth declares the gospel via the incarnation of His Son. Christ secures the new covenant through His birth, life and ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. Second, when we see and hear what God has done, it must foster the glorification and praise of God. Worship is the only fitting response to God and how He sovereignly works out His will in His grace and mercy. Third, the shepherds returned. That may sound funny, but I think it is incredible. Their story is not one of the disciples dropping their nets, but of people returning to their land, families, and regular vocation, but they were never the same. They returned to normalcy but were not the same; their return was personified by glorifying and praising God. Therefore, they became witnesses of God. They were now salt and light; God had fulfilled His Messianic promise, and they were witnesses.



**Reflection:**

1. How can we understand the empirical evidence of God’s objective truth through Advent?
2. How are our lives glorifying and praising God for what He has done?
3. How are we taking what God has said and accomplished and living as witnesses?



Day 20:

Friday  
December 24

Luke 2:21 (ESV)  
And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

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**Devotional:**

Luke 2:21 may appear to be an odd verse within the Advent devotion, but it provides great details. Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day, done in harmony with Jewish law (Gen. 17:12). Remember that Jesus was born under the law (Gal. 4:4) to redeem those under the law. Jesus declared that He did not come to abolish the law but fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). Joseph and Mary lived in obedience to the law. Their obedience reveals God’s sovereignty in the fulfillment of His promise through the Messiah (Eph. 2:14-16). Jesus, who is our peace, upholds the salvation promise for the world (John 3:16-18), for the Jew and the Gentile (Rom. 1:16). Jesus was born under the law, fulfilled it, and redeemed all to Himself, creating one people that worship God. The Advent narrative has always been about peace, love, and unity.

Joseph and Mary named the Christ child Jesus. Their obedience continues. God gives us clear direction, but we like to add our opinion, our “personal touch,” if you will. They did not name him Joseph Jr., John, Frank, Bob, or a myriad of other names. Their experiences leading up to the birth of Christ continually supported their obedience to God, and the naming of the child is no different. He was named “Jesus.” Again, He is the Savior, and the name fits. Hence, before the birth of Christ, the angel provided the name God had ordained.

God has spoken clear things over mankind. He has given us a clear gospel directive and then outlines obedience through one’s faith and practice. Before salvation is conceived in the heart of man (Romans 10:9-13), the direction of God exists. Our faith (belief and works) comes through being awakened to salvation through the words of Christ (Romans 10:17). Once saved, our lives are not about adding or modifying the directives of God but living in obedience to His Word. Joseph and Mary did as God had told them, and we can learn from this. God has spoken over our lives, and the only fitting response is obedience. Today, many want to receive the aspects of God’s Word that they like but then modify other elements to fit their opinion, flawed worldview, or outright sin. However, our job is not changing the commands of God to be comfortable. Our job is to live out the commands of God, even at the expense of our comfort. The Advent narrative is about God becoming man to free man from sin, death, and hell (Romans 3:23; 6:23) and help Christians be conformed to the image of God’s Son (Romans 8:29). In salvation, God is changing us to be like Him (1 John 3:2), it is not us changing God to be like us; He commands, we obey!



**Reflection:**

1. What clear directives has the Lord given to each of us? How are we being obedient to His commands? How can we make sure we are not changing His plan for our preference, comfort, or sin but submitting to His plan?
2. How can we continue the Advent narrative by living out the gospel in obedience? As we celebrate the incarnation, how can we live incarnational lives?

Day 21:

Saturday  
December 25

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**Devotional:**

We are on the final day of our Advent devotional journey. It's also Christmas Day! Over the past twenty days, we have covered a lot of verses. That said, it seems appropriate to finish the journey by reading most of our text on the day we set aside to commemorate the incarnation of God. Whether you are alone or as a couple or family, take time to read through Luke 2:1-20 together. Let's all make sure we create time on Christmas Day to open the Scriptures. It is an excellent time to pause and remind ourselves of the *Advent of Something Amazing*.

**Luke 2:1-20 (ESV)** *In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup> This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup> And all went to be registered, each to his own town. <sup>4</sup> And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup> to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. <sup>6</sup> And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup> And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. <sup>8</sup> And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" <sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*



**Reflection:**

1. Finish by pinpointing one thing that brings praise and thankfulness to your life. If you are doing this as a couple, a family, or friends, take time to share your gratitude and close by glorifying God in prayer.
2. Advent means "arrival or start." Jesus' birth is the incarnation of God and starts the arrival of "God with us." As each of us reflects upon the Christmas season, what "new thing" can we start (considering the promise that God is with us through His Son Jesus Christ)? Reflect and, if comfortable, share it.