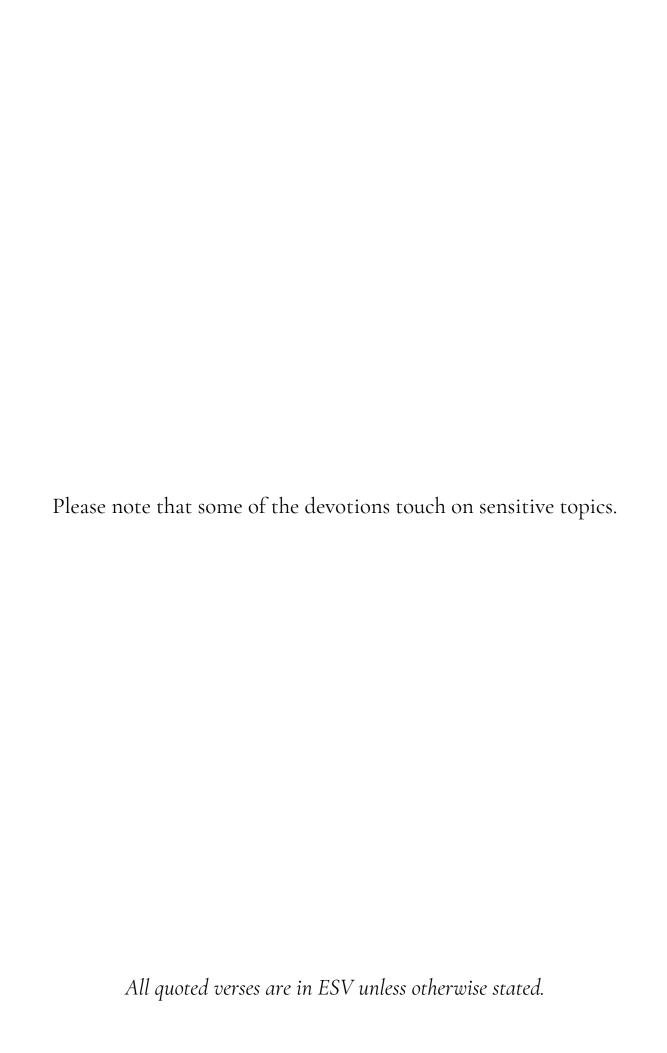
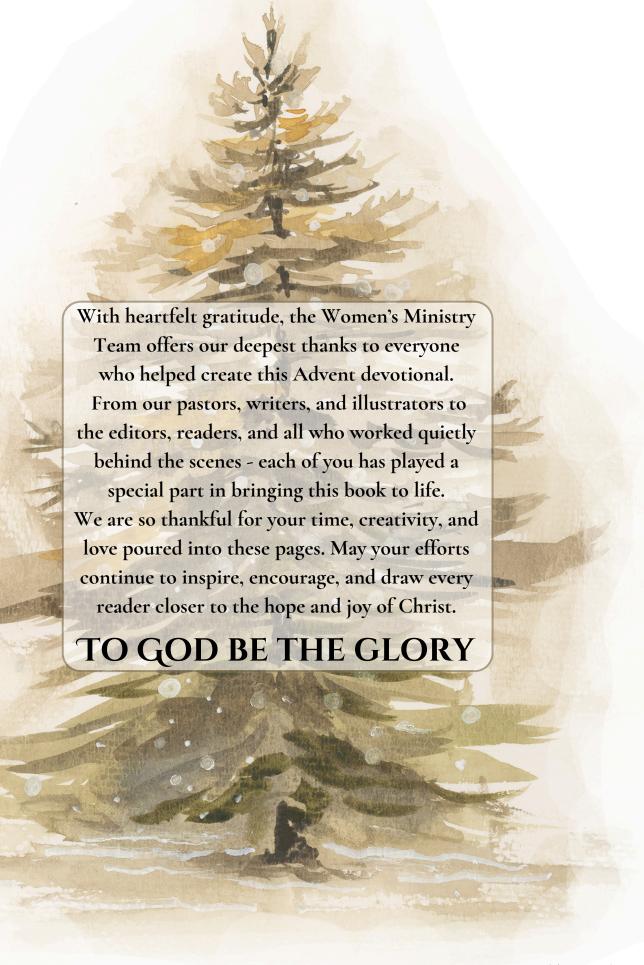


ABIDE IN THE COMING KING

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL
-2025-







Read John 11:1-16

Waiting. Waiting can be so hard and is often filled with exhausting emotions. From fear and loneliness, to anxiousness and anticipation, the feelings can overwhelm us. They can even undermine our trust in the promises and truth of God if we turn our gaze from Him. The promises that He will never leave us nor forsake us. The truth that His love for us is greater than all of our fears and that He is working even in the silence of the waiting.

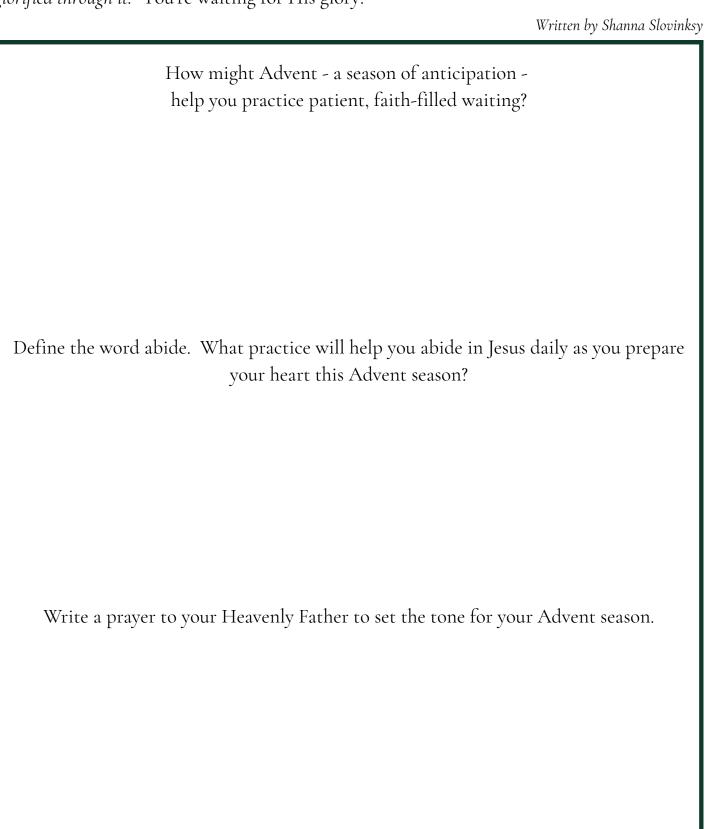
So many of us are waiting. Waiting for God to speak to us, to give us the response we desire Him to. Waiting for God to speak to a loved one, to soften their heart or to draw them close. Waiting for a friend, for healing, for a small encouragement that reminds us that God is still with us in the silence of the valley we may be walking through.

Mary and Martha were waiting. These faithful sisters were waiting for Jesus to come and heal their brother Lazarus. They fully believed that Jesus would heal him. After all, Jesus loved Lazarus, He loved Mary and Martha, He was their friend. Why wouldn't He answer their plea and heal their brother? But Jesus had a different plan and He waited. Lazarus died. The sisters then waited for Jesus again in their shared grief over the loss of their brother. Lazarus waited in silence in a tomb.

Just as the disciples did not understand why Jesus declared in verse 7, "Let us go to Judea again," we often don't understand why we have to wait. But Jesus was working in the silence and grief that Mary and Martha were walking through, just as He continues to be at work in our waiting today. We simply may not realize it or see it just yet. The disciples also did not understand what Jesus meant when he declared He was going to "wake Lazarus up" in verse 11. But they responded in faith, they trusted in Jesus and followed Him. They walked with Him, physically to Judea, and in faith, even with the possibility of death. Jesus was working to grow their belief and reveal His glory even though He did not reveal His plan. Similarly, by faith we can know that He continues to work to grow our belief through circumstances we may not fully comprehend. We just need to remember to continue to walk in faith as we wait, even when we, like the disciples, Mary, and Martha, simply do not understand.

Advent reminds us of another Mary who was waiting. She was waiting under tremendously difficult circumstances for her baby boy to be born. The world was waiting for a Savior to arrive and bring us back to our Father. This Advent perhaps the Lord is asking you to reflect on what you are waiting for. Do you feel your pleas return unheard, like Mary's and

Martha's were? Your wait may be a short one, as theirs was, or it may be longer. Remember that you are not alone in your waiting! Your Savior is at work and His promises never fail. As you wait, continue to seek and respond to the Lord as Mary and Martha did and cling to the promise of Jesus from verse 4, "It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." You're waiting for His glory!



25 ACTS OF

CHRISTMAS KINDNESS

| 1 Make Christmas cookies for someone | 2 Pick Up Litter | 3 PRAY FOR A MISSIONARY | 4 Memorize Isaiah 9:6 and share it | 5 Help a friend |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| 6 Give someone a compliment | 7 _{READ A} BOOK TO A SIBLING | 8 Do Yard Work for a neighbor | 9 TAKE HOT CHOCOLATE TO SOMEONE | 10 Candy Cane bomb a parking lot |
| 11 Christmas Caroling | 12 Make a gift for a friend | 13 Ponate your spare change to a charity. | 14 Donate old toys | 15 SOMEONE AHEAD OF YOU IN LINE |
| 16 give bottled water to those in need | 17 DONATE SUPPLIES TO AN ANIMAL SHELTER | 18 Hold the door open for a stranger. | 19 THANK SOMEONE | 20 Invite someone to Christmas Eve service |
| 21 Write a thank you note to a teacher | 22 SMILE at everyone you see today | 23 Call a Relative | 24 GIVE A CARD TO A NEIGHBOR | 25 feed the Birds |

Read John 11:17-37

The hardest shopping trip I've ever taken was picking out a casket for my dad after his sudden death. In a heartbeat, life changes forever. Survivors are left to go through the funeral arrangements in a daze. You shop in the funeral home's "casket room," you cry yourself dry, you wonder "what if. . .", and you replay memories. Mary and Martha were stumbling in that daze when their brother died.

Where was Jesus? Didn't Jesus come for moments like this? Where was He when Lazarus died? Death was never the Father's plan for mankind. But, the wages of sin had unleashed the death we each deserve.

Mary and Martha had four days of weeping and heartache. "If only" Jesus had come BEFORE Lazarus died is the thought that kept churning in their minds. But, Jesus didn't come in time. Lazarus died.

When Jesus arrived, He came alongside each sister in a different way. To one, He spoke with religious intellect and to the other with deep emotion. Still, His words hardly touched their grief. But, then, JESUS WEPT. He truly understood. He wept with them. Fully God and fully man—Jesus would change death's fatal trajectory.

What is more amazing about this story? Was it Jesus calling Lazarus from the dead, OR was it Jesus weeping with Mary and Martha in their grief? Both humble me because NOTHING compares to OUR GOD.

One of the names for Jesus is "Emmanuel" which means "GOD WITH US." This Christmas, remember that Jesus walks with us in our daze, cries with us in our grief, and conquers sin and death for us. There are no "casket rooms" in heaven.

Written by Patty Clark

HEAVENIY FATHER.

Thank You for being Emmanuel - God with us. In our moments of sorrow, when our hearts ache and our tears fall, You are near. You do not stand far off or hurry us through our pain. You come beside us, You weep with us, and You remind us that death does not have the final word. Thank You for the promise that because You live, we also will live. Help us, in this Christmas season, to see beyond the darkness of grief to the light of Your presence. Give comfort to those who mourn, peace to those who question, and hope to those who wait for healing. We praise You, Jesus, for conquering sin and death and for preparing a place where sorrow will be no more. Until that day, keep our eyes fixed on You - our Comforter, our Redeemer, and our forever Emmanuel.

AMEN

Read John 11:1-57

I was in middle school when my snarky crush divined to me, "You know what the shortest verse in the Bible is? John 11:35 . . . Jesus wept." I was besotted by his Bible literacy, of course. It would be many years before the significance of Jesus' words would resurface in my life.

The story of Lazarus' death and resurrection is arguably the zenith of Jesus' miracles. When reading this incredible story of God's glorious power over death that also foreshadows Jesus' own triumphant exclamation mark on the gospel story, why be distracted by this sidenote? But when I read through and meditated on this story recently, God kept bringing me back to those two words: *Jesus wept*.

Jesus' tears fascinate me because He already knew the end of this story! Why did He weep when He knew He was about to mend the whole situation? What was there to weep about?

Well, Mary and Martha felt there was plenty to weep about. They experienced deep feelings of pain and despair at the loss of their brother, and Mary was not ashamed to express to Jesus she wished He had done a little more to have prevented it: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Mary and Martha were deeply in the throes of grief and their responses were appropriately visceral and human.

Jesus' response teaches us what deep compassion can look like. Jesus responded to Mary and the rest of the grieving crowd with tears: "He was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled." Given his foreknowledge of the situation, we might expect Jesus to have said something like, "Cry no more! I've got this," or "Dry your tears – soon you will understand you have no reason to mourn." But Jesus responded by allowing the very human experience of sadness to manifest itself. He suspended judgment. He suspended correction. He suspended a declaration of the solution. He suspended the rights to His own feelings to join the very real hurt and pain of others.

Jesus' choice to join in their grief did not negate the glory of God's power over death. His tears did not cancel the power of the cross. But his tears did create more space and time for others to catch up to their need for His sacrifice and love. I'm so humbled by Jesus' example. I am quick to reject sensations of pain and loss, even more so if it isn't my own pain and loss. My soul can barely handle my own disappointments! But when Jesus weeps, He shows us another facet of self-sacrifice. Sometimes loving people means not rushing to the resolution, and sometimes demonstrating compassion means voluntarily entering

another's pain. And, like Jesus, we know that this patient pause is not the end of the story.

It doesn't feel like a very holiday-like suggestion. Certainly we would all rather have our gaze focused on holiday songs, twinkle lights, gifts, and pine-scented candles. But the reality of a broken world makes it likely that there is someone in your life who needs you to sit with them in their disappointment, pain, or sadness. Are there people in your life God is calling you to weep with?

Jesus wept – and sometimes, we should too.

Written by Becca Shaw

| WHO | SHOULE |) WF | WEEP | WITH? |
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| Use the space below to write the names of the | se or | your heart this Advent season. Lift each one gful way you can show them Christ's love. |
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HOLDING ON TO FAITH THIS HOLIDAY

Read John 11:38-44

The holidays aren't always full of happiness with beautiful decorations, thoughtful gifts, tempting smells from the kitchen and our favorite Christmas songs playing in the background. The holidays can be challenging for many people for different reasons, including those who are suffering with a chronic illness every day; unfortunately the illness doesn't stop for a holiday. If you have experienced a chronic illness, stood beside another suffering with a chronic illness, or lost a loved one to disease, it can feel at times as if God has forgotten them.

As we take a deeper look into John chapter 11, there are several themes around the death of Lazarus. In John 11:5, we are reminded that Jesus did not come quickly to Lazarus as he was sick, suffering and close to death. He waited two days to return to Martha and Mary, Lazarus' sisters, whom He loved. This must have been difficult for Martha and Mary; they trusted Jesus and believed that Jesus would not allow Lazarus to die. They understood his power and ability to save Lazarus.

When Jesus finally arrived in Bethany, Martha went to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house (John II:20). Was Mary upset with Jesus? Was she doubting that he would ever come or help? Lazarus had already died; it was too late. Was Mary angry, distressed, disappointed? Could this be why she stayed at the house and did not see Jesus? We don't know exactly how Mary was feeling at that moment, but we can imagine how it would feel to be in her situation. Certainly, we have all wondered if God was with us in our times of suffering. How could he allow this kind of suffering? Where is he when I need him the most?

Thankfully, God provides his Word where we are able to find comfort and understanding. God knows about our pain and suffering as we see in John II:I-6. The chapter begins with Jesus learning about Lazarus who is sick through Mary and Martha sending word of his illness, hoping that Jesus will come and heal him. However, Jesus doesn't respond and go quickly, but instead says that the sickness will not end in death but will serve to glorify God (John II:4). This delay is so hard to understand, but I believe it highlights that sometimes God allows situations to unfold in a way that seems delayed or unexpected to us. Chronic illness or disease is characterized as a prolonged struggle that doesn't seem to end, but we must continue to remind ourselves that God knows, and deeply cares for us.

We are reminded of these truths in other areas of the Bible:

"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." Psalm 34:18 (NIV)

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)

Oh, how comforting these verses are that help us to understand how God is with us in our suffering.

Suffering also has a purpose. This was difficult for me to grasp while I was sick many years ago with autoimmune issues. Though it's hard to understand why chronic illness occurs, the Bible suggests that suffering can have a redemptive or transformative purpose. This challenged me as I couldn't personally connect a purpose for many years; thankfully I do now. Some favorite verses that I reread often include Romans 5:3-4 (NIV): "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character and character, hope." James reminds us to consider it pure joy when we face trials in James 1:2-4. This teaches us that suffering can have a higher, divine purpose. Even in the darkest times, God may be preparing to reveal His glory or to grow our faith in ways that we cannot imagine in the midst of pain. Jesus is not distant or uncaring when we suffer. He weeps with us in our pain, showing that God is deeply empathetic to our suffering. We are definitely not alone.

In John 11:25-26 (NIV), "Jesus said to her [Martha], 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" What a profound moment shared with us! Jesus is not just talking about physical resurrection but also spiritual life. If you are facing chronic illness or long-term suffering, this statement invites us to place our hope not in temporary healing or relief but in the eternal life that Jesus offers. Our ultimate hope is not in our circumstances, but in the promise of eternal life in Christ! Hallelujah! Let's celebrate this reminder this advent season.

Written by Nicole Carroll

RESPOND IN PRAYER

As you reflect on this devotion, take a moment to talk honestly with Jesus about where you are hurting or waiting. Thank Him for the times He has been near in your suffering, and ask Him to strengthen your faith when His timing feels slow or unclear. Lift up anyone you know who is walking through illness or grief, and pray that Jesus, our Emmanuel, would bring comfort, peace, and hope to their hearts this Advent season. Ask Him to fill you with His strength and boldness so you can reflect His love to others even in hard seasons.



Six days before the Passover, Jésus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me." When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

John 12:1-11 (ESV)

THE SWEET SMELL OF CHRISTMAS

Read John 12:1-11

Christmas has a very special smell to most of us. This is because scent can trigger our brains to think back on specific memories. Bring to mind your own favorite scents. What memories come back as you remember the smell of sugar cookies or peppermint or pine trees?

Maybe it brought back joyful family memories or hilarious memories of cooking with friends. Often, people associate these smells with the emotions of the memories. It's why candles, essential oils, and lotions are such big sellers these days. The scent of a sugar cookie candle can make a room feel joy-filled or the scent of a lavender lotion can bring about a feeling of calm.

Today, we read about Mary pouring out expensive aromatic oil on Jesus' feet. This oil would have had an extraordinary smell. The perfume Mary used is said to be "pure nard." To our best knowledge, it came from Nardostachys, which is a genus of flowering plant in the honeysuckle family. If you've ever walked by a honeysuckle plant in full bloom, I'm betting you remember it now! These plants have a musky floral scent unlike any other.

In Jesus' time, this perfume was used for many things (perfume, anointing the dead, and healing), but the smell was one of its most useful characteristics. Remember, they didn't have running water or sewage systems! As Mary poured out this perfume, which normally would have been used sparingly, "the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume" (v.3). Her act of worship came alongside a smell that filled the space.

Mary's worship was individual and yet affected the whole room. As she anointed Jesus' feet, the disciples smelled her act of worship. Her worship lingered in the room through the smell that permeated the air.

All the disciples would have smelled it, but Judas was especially offended by her act of worship because he worshiped the money in his charge. He was appalled that the perfume wasn't sold. Every breath he took was a reminder of the money that wouldn't enter his purse. It was a constant reminder of what he lost.

But Jesus. Jesus accepts Mary's act of worship and acknowledges that she has done a beautiful thing. He recognizes the sacrifice she is making of this expensive perfume as a way to show her love for him. With every breath he took, he was reminded of her love and

appreciation for who he was. Jesus was just a week away from his crucifixion and this anointing was a preparation for that. While Mary's worship was an act of love, the anointing would be remembered throughout the coming week as they watched Jesus die and buried his body. The smell of nard would bring back memories of death and the life of Christ, the loss of loved ones, and the joy of being with Jesus. When he rose again, the smell brought on a new emotion. One of hope.

Mary's act of worship was not just a memory for her. The disciples and all those in the room with her would remember and worship Jesus whenever they smelled nard. How sweet is the smell that brings about hope.

How can you worship Jesus today and incite worship in the future? Will you bake sweet cookies with your family and friends while reading the Christmas story? For me, candy canes and the sticky sweet smell of peppermint always remind me of Christmas Eve and worshipping with my family. My mom would give us candy canes during the Christmas Eve service homily, and now I do the same for my kids.

How can you help yourself to remember and worship the King of Kings who has come, lived, died, and rose again?

Written by Becki Peek

Think about the scents, songs, or traditions that help you remember Jesus. In the space below, write down one scent, one tradition, and one habit that you can use this season to draw your heart into worship.

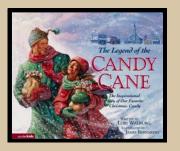
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KIDS CORNER

Read *The Legend of the Candy Cane* together and reflect on the meaning behind this Christmas symbol. Then, use the candy cane printables on the next page to bless those who might need to hear about Jesus for the first time ,or simply need a gentle reminder of His love. Buy a pack of full-sized candy canes, cut out the tags, put a slit at the top and the bottom and attach a candy cane before handing them out!



The Legend of the Candy Cane

Look at the candy cane . What do you see?

Stripes that are red like the blood shed for me .

White for my savior who is sinless and pure .

The "J" is for Jesus the Lord of all !

Turn it around and a staff you will see .

Jesus , my shepherd was born for me!



The Legend of the Candy Cane

Look at the candy cane . What do you see?

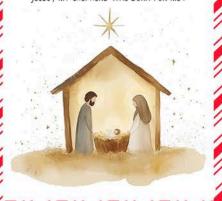
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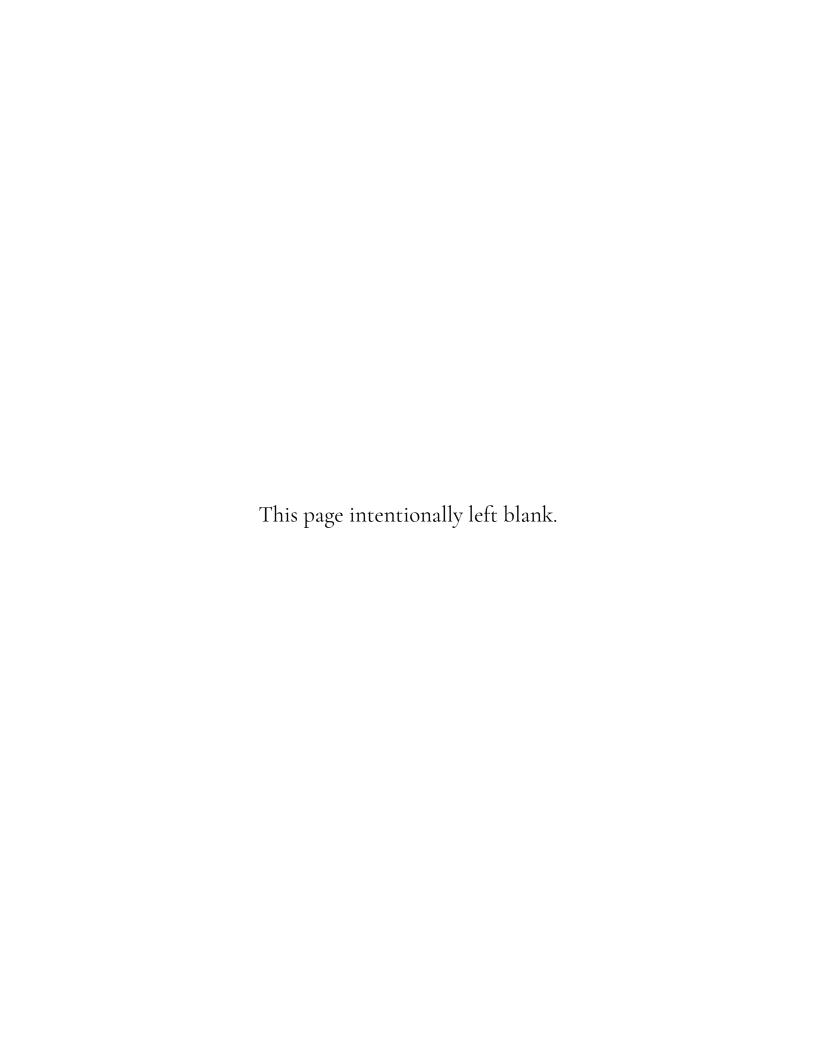
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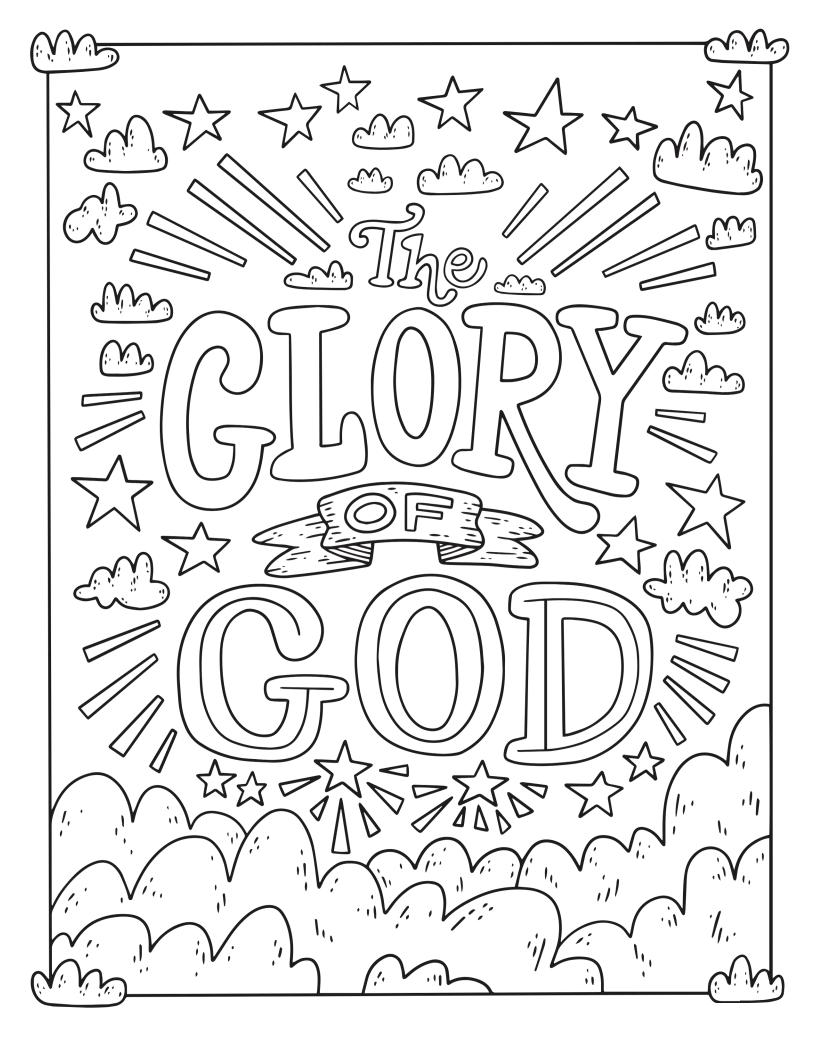
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Turn it around and a staff you will see.

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A DIFFERENT KIND OF KING

Read John 12:12-19

Every year, my family and I go through the same song and dance over the Christmas dinner menu. I don't know why I dig in my heels about it so much, but I do. I have very specific expectations for what gets served and how it's served, and I will fight (lovingly) to make sure everyone else complies. Heaven help the person who dares put marshmallows in the sweet potato casserole (yes, I realize I just lost some of you with that one).

One year, my mother-in-law suggested we do fondue for Christmas dinner, and I about lost my mind. Fondue?! On Christmas?! I only get this traditional meal twice a year - Thanksgiving and Christmas - and you think I'm going to give it up for cubes of bread on sticks? Not happening. My expectations are set.

And honestly, that's not all that different from the crowd who gathered when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. They had expectations too—big ones. They shouted "Hosanna!" which literally means "save us!" and laid palm branches down like a royal welcome mat. This was Passover, the city was buzzing, and word had spread about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. The people were ready for a king who would overthrow Rome and restore Israel's glory days.

But then Jesus shows up, not on a war horse, but on a young donkey. This was no accident. It was a fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, which says:

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

This made it crystal clear: He was the King, yes, but a very different kind of King. Not a military hero, but the King of peace, righteousness, and salvation. They were shouting "save us!" and Jesus was about to do just that - just not in the way they expected.

And here's the thing: Jesus offers that same gift of salvation to us today. This season is our chance to respond, to prepare our hearts and spread the good news. Even the Pharisees had to admit that Jesus was drawing the whole world to Himself. The people who saw Lazarus

raised from the dead couldn't keep quiet! They told everyone that would listen!

Jesus promises victory for us! He was a true king then, humble and riding a young donkey, he is the true king now, and he will be a true king one day, victorious and riding a white horse. He will restore us as his holy nation, chosen and loved.

Which makes me think - if I can be this passionate about keeping marshmallows out of my sweet potato casserole, maybe I should be just as vocal about the King who saves. The world needs to hear that there is a Savior - and we get to be the ones who tell them.

Written by Dani White

CRUNCHY TOP SWEET POTATO SOUFFLE



- 3 cups sweet potatoes, mashed (canned is fine)
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- ½ cup of milk

INGREDIENTS

- 11 teaspoons vanilla
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1/3 stick of butter, melted

TOPPING:

- 1/3 stick of butter
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1/3 cup flour
- 1 cup nuts (crushed pecans preferred)

DIRECTIONS

- 1. Mix together all of the ingredients except the topping.
- 2. Beat until fluffy and all potato strings are removed.
- 3. Pour into a greased baking dish.
- 4. Bake at 350 degrees for 25 minutes.
- 5. While baking, make the topping. Melt the butter and add brown sugar, flour and pecans.
- 6. Take casserole out of the oven and pour topping mixture over the sweet potatoes.
- 7. Bake for another 10 minutes.



From the Kitchen of Dani White

A CHRISTMAS DINNER GRACE

The Christmas tree, Lord is groaning beneath gift-wrapped anticipation; the table before us resplendent with shared food prepared by loving hands for which we give thanks. And now, as this waiting season ticks to a bell-ringing, midnight-marvelous close, we gathered around this table are scooting over to make room for the anticipated Guest.

Come join us, blessing us with the gift of your presence as we say,

**WEICOME.

Margaret Anne Huffman

THE GREATEST GIFT EVER GIVEN

Read John 12:20-36

One of the funniest gifts I've ever received came when I was a teenager. Every year my aunt sent Christmas packages to my siblings and me, and opening them was one of the highlights of the season. We'd shake the boxes, guess what was in them and just maybe, make a small tear in the wrapping paper to see what we could see!

But that particular year, on Christmas morning, I tore open the wrapping paper and was met with the blinding glare of a shiny, multi-colored Christmas light-bulb necklace. Hanging at the center of it was a Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer charm with a bright, glowing nose. I was fifteen. Truly, everything I had ever dreamed of.

Do you ever feel the pressure of trying to find the perfect gift, predicting what someone would love, hoping and praying that your gift makes their eyes light up? Some people have a talent for gift-giving, and others. . . well, we just smile and say thank you.

But have you ever sat still long enough to think about the greatest gift ever given?

In John 12:20–36, Jesus speaks about His coming death. In verse 24, He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." In this passage, Jesus is describing Himself - the One who would die so that we might live. His sacrifice was intentional, purposeful, and deeply personal. He wasn't simply predicting His death, He was revealing the gift He came to give: eternal life for all who believe.

Nothing could top that gift. Nothing can top that gift. Nothing will ever top that gift.

And when we receive an amazing gift, there's often a part of us that wants to repay the giver. But most of the time, the giver isn't looking for a return gift. Their joy is in seeing someone delight in what they've given.

Have you ever wondered if Jesus felt the same?

As He looked toward the cross, He wasn't motivated by duty or obligation. In John 12:32 Jesus says, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He endured

suffering because of His love for us; because the joy set before Him was you and me receiving the salvation He came to provide.

He didn't want repayment. He wanted a relationship. His gift was not a transaction but an invitation to know Him, follow Him, and walk in His light.

So as you think about gifts this Christmas – funny ones, thoughtful ones, surprising ones – pause and remember the gift Jesus gave. A gift that cost Him everything and yet is offered to us freely. And consider this, the delight you feel when someone enjoys your gift is only a tiny reflection of the joy He feels when we receive His.

Written by Megen McMichael

James 1:17 tells us, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

Take a moment to reflect on the good and perfect gifts God has given you this year. Below, write a prayer of thanksgiving, listing the blessings He has placed in your life. And as you pray, remember to thank Him for the greatest gift of all - our Savior, Jesus Christ.



THE UGHT WE CAN'T IGNORE

Read John 12:37-50

In 2010 I had a mountaintop experience with the Lord. It was the most challenging year of my life thus far, as our family dealt with deep health and relational issues. The Lord walked every step with me, providing in big and small ways. His light was my light in the darkness in so many tangible ways that year. I came out of that season seeing restoration of every sort happen only because of walking in His ways and trusting Him with the outcome. I felt as if my faith glowed bright within me as Moses' face had shone after spending time with God face to face.

The next summer I was sitting at my dining table reading my Bible and the Truth of God's sovereign choice – that God must give the gift of faith because no one would choose Him on their own (Romans 8:29-30, John 6:44, Ephesians 2:8-9) – hit me in a new way. In that, moment it felt like my rock-solid foundation was shaking. If He alone gives the gift of faith, how can He hold man accountable? Why doesn't he "choose" more people to save? Or at least most of mankind? What about the Truth of man's responsibility for his sin (Romans 6:23)? Weren't we the ones doing the believing in John 3:16? I was angry at God and struggled hard against these Truths I couldn't comprehend.

In retrospect, I see His goodness in strengthening my relationship with him before bringing me to this "crisis of faith." I sought Him in the Word and in trusted Christian resources for several years, seeking to reconcile His Word with my understanding. My closeness to Him helped me come boldly to the throne with my questions. Slowly but surely, He broadened my view of the matter with additional Truths He was calling me to trust deeply: I should expect His ways to operate outside of my understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6), His ways are higher than my ways (Isaiah 55:8-9, Romans 11:34-35), man is responsible, and God is sovereign (Philippians 2:12-13), His love and care for his creation are absolutely undeniable (the whole Bible...and my whole life). I had a choice to make – much like the Jews of Jesus' day. Our passage says that:

"Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God."

John 12:42-43

I believed, but I had to choose – would I "confess" it? Would I build my life on it? Would I make choices in my daily life based on it? The authorities wouldn't confess because "they

loved the glory of man more than the glory that comes from God." I struggled because I loved my own understanding more than the Truth of God's Word. I couldn't break free from the idea that if I couldn't make sense of God's ways, they couldn't be good.

And yet, I saw His light in the darkness all around me. The effect of His light is undeniable in the lives and communities of His people – love, humility, forgiveness, restoration, peace, abiding joy. We share our testimonies with each other because when we hear how He works in our lives – the "signs" He does before us today – our faith wells up inside us for His glory and our good. As the old Sunday school adage goes, do I really want a God that I can fit into the "box" of my finite human mind? No. I want a God that loves so deeply that he sent His Son as a tiny baby to live a perfect life and die the sinner's death that I deserve, all so He and I can walk side by side for eternity. I pray that at Christmas and every day we will live our lives by the Light we can't ignore, seeking the One who is the author and perfector of our faith.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways! Romans 11:33

Written by Tammy Castillo

B WAYS TO RESPOND IN PRAYER

| C |
|--|
| Dark Seasons |
| Jesus, thank You for stepping into my darkness just as |
| You stepped into the world on that first Christmas |
| night. Thank You for bringing light to |
| 2. Praise God for His Perfect Timing |
| Father, at Christmas I'm reminded that You sent Your |
| Son in the fullness of time. Help me trust Your timing |
| in |
| 3. Reflect on Jesus as the Greatest Gift |

1. Thank God for the Light of Christ in

4. Surrender the Parts You Don't UnderstandGod, the mystery of the Incarnation reminds me that Your ways are higher than mine. Help me trust You even when I don't understand _____.

Lord, thank You for the good gifts You've given me this year, especially the gift of Jesus. Today I'm grateful for

_____ and how it shows Your care.

| 5. Confess Where You've Loved Your Own |
|--|
| Understanding More Than God's Word |

Father, forgive me for relying on my own understanding, especially in _____. Teach me to rest in the truth that You are good and sovereign.

6. Ask for a Heart That Loves God's Glory More Than Man's Approval

Lord, just as the shepherds couldn't keep silent about Jesus, give me the strength to honor Your glory above the opinions of others, especially when _____.

- 7. Pray for Faith to Obey Like Mary and Joseph Jesus, give me the faith of Mary and Joseph willing to obey even without knowing the whole story. Help me walk in obedience in ______.
- **8.** Invite God to Restore What's Broken Lord, Christmas is the story of You coming to redeem and restore. Please bring restoration in _____.

GLOBAL PARTNERS



GANTUMUR AND DELGERTSETSEG

Gantumur and Delgerstsetseg serve as a couple on staff with Cru Military Global with the mission to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the military community of the World. Their ministry has a two-fold emphasis:

The first is to develop ministry within the USA by supporting and reaching out to the international military community represented within the USA.

The second emphasis is to support existing ministries to the military community and start developing new ministries within Greater Asia. They provide regional leadership to expand the Gospel of Christ to the military community in Asia and beyond.

WRITE 5 WAYS YOU CAN PRAY

1
2
3
4
5

LOVE CAME DOWN

Read John 13

"I celebrate the day
That You were born to die
So I could one day
Pray for You to save my life."
-Relient K

Sometimes it's hard to think about Jesus being born so that He could die. John 13:1-17 is a good reminder of that as Jesus is having his last meal with his disciples. They are sitting down to supper and Judas is already planning to betray Jesus at this point. In this passage, Jesus humbles Himself like a servant and washes the dusty and dirty feet of His disciples. When He gets to Peter, Peter is appalled and insists that Jesus will not wash his feet. But Jesus responds by saying that unless He washes Peter's feet, he will have no part with Jesus. So Peter enthusiastically requests that Jesus washes his head and hands as well. Jesus answers by saying that one who has bathed only needs to wash his feet.

It's almost as if Jesus is reassuring Peter of his salvation. We need to be washed in His perfect blood one time to be saved; we don't need to be washed over and over again for our salvation. Yet we still sin, and Jesus washing His disciples' feet is a picture of forgiveness and cleansing that we need on a daily basis for our sanctification.

Furthermore, Jesus desires his disciples to emulate Him in loving and serving others. This holy and perfect King came down and humbled Himself by serving others. How much more should we, who are not worthy, be willing to humble ourselves and follow Jesus' example by lovingly serving others? Verse 17 says, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

This Christmas season, let's reflect on the fact that Jesus came down to live a perfect life and die in our place so that we can be washed clean in His righteous blood. And in the joy of our salvation, let us go and humbly serve others, following Jesus' example in John 13.

Written by Suzy Epperley

KIDS CORNER

Give your child a washable marker. Ask them to quietly write a few "heart sins" on their hand - things like impatience or unkindness. Then bring out warm water, soap, and a cloth. As they wash the words away, explain that this simple act shows what Jesus does for us - He cleans our hearts completely, just as He lovingly washed His disciples' feet. Invite them to take a moment afterward to thank Jesus for His forgiveness.

TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY

Read John 14:1-14

This passage reveals Jesus' last conversation with the twelve disciples that took place after the Last Supper. Jesus has just told them that He wouldn't be with them much longer, some would soon deny knowing Him, and that one of the twelve would betray Him. This was certainly troubling news for the disciples! Despite facing great suffering and betrayal himself, Jesus' focus at this moment was on calming His disciples' troubled hearts. He didn't do this by promising they would have trouble-free lives. Instead, He gave the disciples hope so they could have untroubled hearts.

The remedy for a troubled heart is to believe and trust in Jesus. In verse 1, Jesus urges His disciples to believe in Him as they have believed in God. Jesus is the mediator between us and His Father. A strong faith and relationship with Jesus bring comfort and peace to a troubled heart.

Jesus goes on in verses 2-4 to reassure his disciples, explaining that He goes to prepare a place for them and will return to take them with Him. These verses demonstrate Jesus' immense love for us. The word "go" shows Jesus' choice to sacrifice His life for us. He wasn't taken to the cross, He went willingly and according to plan. Jesus did this so that we could have a place with Him in Eternity, a place that He has lovingly prepared for us.

In verses 4-6, Jesus tells His disciples that they know the way to where He is going. Thomas responds expressing his confusion of how that can be when the disciples don't even know where Jesus is going. Jesus explains that He is the way, the truth, and the life; the only way to a relationship with God is through Him. Following Jesus is the way to Godly wisdom and understanding and ultimately eternal life in the presence of our Heavenly Father. This is the hope we have in Jesus that can calm our troubled hearts.

Jesus continues in verses 7-11 to reveal His unique unity and oneness with God. Truly knowing Jesus is knowing His Father; all who have seen Jesus have seen the Father. I am sure this was a difficult concept for the disciples to grasp! Jesus explains that the words He speaks and the works He performs all come from the authority of God living in Him. The disciples had witnessed the many miracles Jesus had performed and had heard Him speak with great wisdom and authority. Jesus offers this as evidence to the disciples of His true identity.

In verses 12-14, Jesus tells his disciples that His work will continue after He leaves by those

who believe in Him. Not only will it continue, but even greater things will be done in Jesus's name to glorify God. When Jesus told the disciples He was leaving, they may have thought it was all over for them, and everything was coming to an end. Instead, this was only the beginning! His disciples would go on to preach and perform great miracles in Jesus' name. This must have been a significant encouragement to the disciples and is to us as well. His work continues through us.

This passage in which Jesus comforts his disciples reminds me of a favorite Christmas carol, "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen." The carol dates to the 15th century, though the first written version didn't appear until the late 1700s. According to the original written version, the title and corresponding verses should have a comma: "God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen." "Rest" in this context meant "to keep or continue in." The word "Merry" has an Anglo-Saxon origin and meant "valiant, mighty, or strong." Essentially, God keep you strong, gentlemen. The first verse and refrain read:

God rest you merry, gentlemen,
let nothing you dismay,
remember Christ our Savior
was born on Christmas Day
to save us all from Satan's pow'r
when we were gone astray.
O tidings of comfort and joy,
comfort and joy;
O tidings of comfort and joy.

This carol is a hopeful encouragement to stay strong despite our earthly troubles. This time of year can be especially difficult for many of us who may be experiencing suffering, sickness, or loss of a loved one or relationship. We may be feeling overwhelmed by the darkness and evil we see in our broken world. Yet we can take comfort in knowing Jesus has overcome death and rejoice that he has given us the gift of eternal life. We will live forever in the place Jesus has prepared for us in the presence of Him and our Heavenly Father. A place where there will be no more suffering, sorrow, or tears and the brokenness of this world will be long forgotten.

Written by Melissa Clymer

RESPOND IN PRAYER

Take a moment to think about what is troubling your heart today. What worries, fears, or burdens feel heavy? Talk to Jesus about them. Remember what He promises in this passage - He is the way, the truth, and the life, and that He is preparing a place for you. Ask Him to comfort your heart, give you His peace and bring joy.

GOD REST YE MERRY GENTLEMAN



Christmas Crossword Puzzle Can you figure out all the clues related to the story of the birth of Jesus? DOWN 1. Perfume-like gift from the Magi to baby Jesus **ACROSS** 2. They brought gifts to Jesus 4. Scene depicting Jesus' birth 3. Structure in which Jesus was born 6. The mother of Jesus 5. Where baby Jesus was laid after birth 7. There was no room here for Mary and Joseph 9. What the wise men followed to meet baby Jesus 8. Reason Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem 10. Another word for Christmas 11. What the shepherds did after visiting Jesus 12. Isaiah 7:14 is one 13. Messenger from God 12. What the angels declared on Earth 14. The earthly father of Jesus 14. The promised Savior 15. Type of cloth Jesus was wrapped in 17. The town where Jesus was born 16. The angels sang "___ to God in the highest" 19. They came from the fields to see the newborn King 18.A bitter perfume gifted to Jesus

20. A precious metal given to Jesus

21. Name that means "God with us"

HIS LASTING GIFT

Read John 14:15-31

By now, most of us are already deep in the rhythm of the Christmas season. Between daily responsibilities and holiday preparations, it's easy to feel pulled in a hundred directions. We try to slow down and be present with family and friends, but the busyness often takes over.

In the middle of it all, I often find myself longing for something deeper — something that can't be bought or made. Most mornings during this season, I try to pause and remember the true meaning.

It's in these moments of longing that the promise of the Spirit speaks most clearly to me. At Christmas, we rejoice not only in the baby in the manger, but in the Spirit He promised to give so we would never be alone. Jesus said in John 14:18, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

A few verses earlier, He refers to the Spirit he promised as a Helper. He says, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever" (John 14:16). The word "Helper" can also be translated as Advocate or Counselor—all names for the Holy Spirit.

PRESENCE

This promise is a last gift of God's own presence with us in every circumstance and season. Jesus knew that He would soon return to the Father, but His presence would remain through the Spirit.

PEACE

Later, Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (John 14:27). His peace is more than just the absence of conflict—it is wholeness, security, and the assurance that He has overcome the world. As John 16:33 reminds us, even when we face troubles, we can put our hope in Him.

POWER

Jesus also said, ". . . the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me" (John 14:30). The "ruler of this world" refers to Satan, who actively works to distract us from the work of the cross. Yet because of Christ's victory, Satan has no claim on those who belong to him. We have the power to resist his temptation and live in freedom, anchored in the Father's love.

Jesus was born not only to be with us, but to remain in us. As we celebrate Emmanuel—God with us—we also celebrate the Holy Spirit, His lasting gift. He didn't leave heaven just to walk among us for a short time; He came to bring His presence, His peace, and His power into our hearts forever.

Today, as you go about your day, let the Spirit remind you of His gifts: His **presence** in every moment, especially when you feel alone or are missing someone you love; His **peace** that steadies your heart and brings wholeness amid the pressures of the season; and His **power** to help you overcome fear, temptation, or dark thoughts. Take a deep breath. Notice the joy He's placed in your life. Let these lasting gifts fill you with hope, awe, and gratitude as you celebrate Emmanuel—God with us.

Written by Anonymous

"It is quite right that you should feel that 'something terrific' has happened to you (it has) and be 'all glowy.' Accept these sensations with thankfulness as birthday cards from God, but remember that they are only greetings, not the real gift. I mean, it is not the sensations that are the real thing. The real thing is the gift of the Holy Spirit which can't usually be—perhaps not ever—experienced as a sensation or emotion. The sensations are merely the response of your nervous system. Don't depend on them. Otherwise when they go and you are once more emotionally flat (as you certainly will be quite soon), you might think that the real thing had gone too. But it won't. It will be there when you can't feel it. May even be most operative when you can feel it least."

C.S. LEWIS ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

From The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis, Volume III

KIDS CORNER

Play a game called "Helper Hunt." Before the activity, cut out several small paper hearts. On each heart, write one gift or work of the Holy Spirit - ideas include Comfort, Peace, Help, Courage, Wisdom, Joy, and Presence. Hide these hearts around the room or house.

Invite the children to go on a hunt to discover the hearts. Once all the hearts are found, gather together and look at each one. Take time to talk about what the word means and how the Holy Spirit gives that gift to us. For example, "How does the Holy Spirit give us courage?" or "When have you felt the Spirit's peace?"

This activity helps children understand that even though we cannot see the Holy Spirit with our eyes, He is always at work, guiding us, comforting us, and helping us just as Jesus promised. And just as the children looked to find the hidden hearts, we also learn to look for signs of the Spirit's presence in our everyday lives.

ONCE DEPENDENT, ALWAYS DEPENDENT

Read John 14 & 15

Jesus' entrance into this world was dependent on the Father through a virgin.

His ministry on this earth was *dependent* on the Father's timing.

Jesus' death and resurrection was dependent on His obedience to the Father.

Jesus calls us into this beautiful *dependence*. The world wants to tell us that INDEPENDENCE is the way. But Jesus tells us I am the way. **Depend** on me.

In John 14:6, Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

In Matthew 11:28-30,

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

In John 15:9, "As the Father loved me, I also have loved you: abide in my love."

This Christmas may you *depend* on the one who is worthy, may you delve into the riches of His word, and may your spirit rejoice as in Mary's song of praise found in Luke 1:45-55:

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."

Written by Jessica Ashmore

I'm to Draw
Be m
Be
sweet April

State of the Draw
When I
I de
You't
You

For the sun to rise for my sleep at night I depend on You, I depend on You You're the way the truth and the life You're the well that never runs dry I'm the branch and You are the vine Draw me close and teach me to abide Where the Spirit leads as I'm following I depend on You, I depend on You For the victories still in front of me I depend on You, I depend on You You're the way the truth and the life You're the well that never runs dry I'm the branch and You are the vine Draw me close and teach me to abide Be my strength my song in the night Be my all my treasure my prize I am Yours forever Your mine Draw me close and teach me to abide When I pass through death as I enter rest I depend on You, I depend on You For eternal life to be raised with Christ I depend on You, I depend on You You're the way the truth and the life You're the well that never runs dry I'm the branch and You are the vine Draw me close and teach me to abide Be my strength my song in the night Be my all my treasure my prize I am Yours forever Your mine Draw me close and teach me to abide Here I am Lord Would you teach me to abide Teach me Would you teach me I depend on You, I depend on You Yes, I depend on You, I depend on You Oh, oh I depend on You, Yes, I depend on You

I depend on You, I depend on You

For my waking breath for my daily bread I depend on You, I depend on You

to listen to the song on Spotify



Jesus was born so we could remain connected to Him – the true source of life and love. Just as branches draw life from the vine, we draw our life from Christ. His birth in Bethlehem was the beginning of God drawing near so that we could abide in Him and bear lasting fruit. We've heard this passage over the past year, but let's not rush past when Jesus said this.

This passage is part of Jesus' last words to his disciples before he is arrested and crucified.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. . ." John 15:5

My grandmother said this passage was one of her favorites in a devotional she wrote for my first college mission trip. It was one of twelve devotionals she'd given me; she had copies that she'd open at the same time of day that I did. She died that summer, and I STILL got to hear her voice and her love in the devotions yet to be read. It's funny how someone's last words carry more weight in our minds. And today we STILL get to hear Jesus' voice and his love for us as we read these words in John.

Abiding in Him and He in me. "Abide" in Greek means to live or dwell, to follow, keep to, hold to. Doing this brings glory to the Father and produces more fruit. The idea of Jesus' life and nourishment flowing in and through me producing fruit were beautiful words to my young adult self who often tried to accomplish things through her own efforts looking for approval.

To abide was a new way of doing things for me. It wasn't gearing up to go full throttle independently, but humbly letting go, walking with God and watching Him show up. In many situations, I still find myself inadequate and "cracked," but am learning to trust Him to shine through those cracks to make something beautiful. Is this what it was like for Mary? Learning to abide in Him as the mother of her LORD? Is this what it was like for Joseph as he learned to father the Messiah? The beauty of it all is that He's the focus and gets the glory – not us.

To abide in Him brings about an intimacy in my relationship with Jesus. He knows me and I know Him. He loves me with abandon and gave up his life so that I can love Him with a fully surrendered heart. Nothing is more beautiful. Nothing can bring greater joy.

He gives me opportunities to freely offer to others the life and love I receive from Him. Fruit grows. As I know He listens and hears me. He delights in the time I spend with Him. This intimacy with Him helps me through many storms. Especially the ones that swirl around me – I can cling to Him.

One of these storms, my husband, Tim, and I have been weathering for several years. Heaviness and darkness have been thick in our home. One of the biggest factors was finding that one of our adult children was sexually violated. She's changed from a happy and vivacious daughter to an isolated and accusatory stranger. Over two and a half years she had lived with us, but avoided us at all costs. She continues to refuse any psychological help and spins lies out of our expressions of love. At times she's been homeless. And to add to this, we found that Tim has prostate cancer. If that wasn't enough, due to all the stress,

he had a heart attack this last summer.

During this time I found myself pulling back to give my brain a chance to digest everything. I often find solace in creating with my hands and was drawn to designing and sewing a quilt I named, "Abiding." The vibrant colors cheered me up and the vine that connects them all seemed to minister to my weary spirit...giving me hope that He would create beauty and life out of our dark circumstances. Hour after hour as I worked on it, I meditated on abiding in Him and letting Him be my lifeline. He led me to confess my anger at the situations, at others, and at



The Abide Quilt

Him. There's a little fruit. And this freed me up to love my daughter regardless of how she treated us. A little more fruit. I trusted that He WILL bring good out of all this. I let His love into the pain, the tears and the grieving...letting Him live each moment through me...moving me forward. Over and over, He helped me let go of my own timelines to embrace His Timeline and all its unknowns. Even more fruit. He continues to encourage us through the network of believers in the church body. He prunes us to make us more fruitful. And that hurts! I have to trust Him with this. The fruit in my daughter's life seems far off, impossible really.

BUT... last Spring Tim and I were travelling when God spoke to us through a stranger. He said, "I'm supposed to tell you that there's a child whom you're concerned about - I don't know if it's your child or someone else's - but God is keeping them safe. They'll be OK. He says He's sorry it's taken so long, but there were some blockages that delayed things. He

wants you to know that He doesn't want you to worry. He says, "Don't worry, but WAIT AND SEE WHAT I WILL DO." The gentleman said this last sentence three times.

Even though things are not resolved yet and we have a very long way to go on all fronts, I know His Promises are true. And I know His Loving Presence is real. He wants to do something impossible that will bring Him glory and produce fruit. I will continue to choose each day to wait for and to trust Him. I'll abide and hold on for I can't wait to see what HE WILL DO!

Written by Kathy Holcomb

Write The Word Reflect on the below Scripture and copy it in a way that is meaningful to you. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:4-6

ABIDE INE,

and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

JOHN 15:4

The image of the vine appears again and again throughout the Old Testament. Take a moment to explore these passages to further your understanding.

Psalm 80:8-19 Isaiah 5:1-7 Jeremiah 2:21 Jeremiah 6:8-9 Ezekiel 15 Ezekiel 17:4-8 Ezekiel 19:10-14 Hosea 10:1-2

THE COST OF CHRISTMAS

Read John 15:18-16:4

Diagramming sentences was one of my favorite parts of seventh-grade English. Maybe that explains why I also loved conjugating verbs through my language courses in high school and college. So, when I was reading (and re-reading and re-re-reading) this passage for this devotional, that's where my mind went (along with all the diagramming). These verses are a sentence-diagramming-and-verb-tense nerd's dream! There's simple present, present perfect, some conditionals, etc. This is a bit intense for someone who isn't an expert author. But, the complexity in all these tenses is exactly what makes this passage so encouraging – it holds the past, present, and future all in one place.

PAST:

- Jesus chose us out of the world.
- The world hated Jesus before it hated His chosen people.
- Because he came into the world, there is no excuse for people's sin.

PRESENT:

- We are not of this world.
- He is with us (and has been since the beginning).
- The words in this passage were once spoken to real people in a real moment. And they're still true today.

FUTTURE:

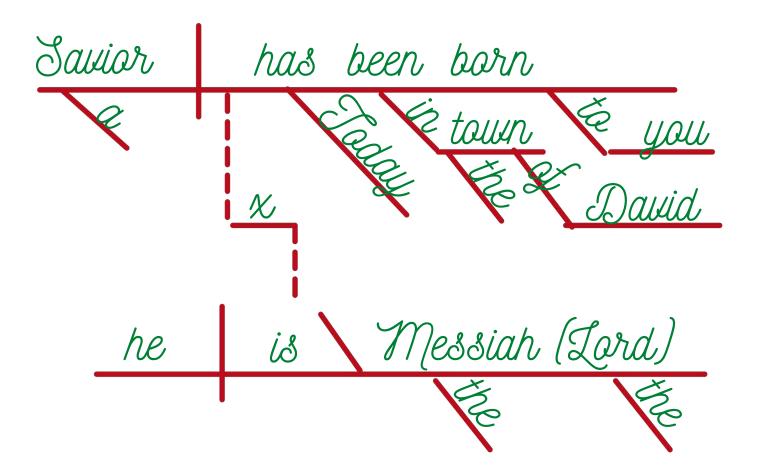
- Christians will be persecuted.
- Christians will bear witness about Jesus.
- Christians will be outcasts.
- Some Christians, including those who were the first to hear these words, will be killed for their faith.
- The Helper (the Holy Spirit) will give us the power to bear witness.

While it can be easy to feel overwhelmed by the disdain our friends, colleagues, or the world may show us during this Advent season simply because we hold fast to the true meaning of Christmas, I pray this passage encourages us. None of this surprises Jesus and so none of it should surprise us. He knew, knows, and already-knows! And He has given us the greatest gift: Himself.

Written by Lacey Grey Hunter

SENTENCE DIAGRAMMING

Can you un-diagram this sentence?





OUR ANCHOR CHAIN

Read John 16:5-16

When darkness veils his lovely face,
I rest on his unchanging grace;
in every high and stormy gale,
my anchor holds within the veil.
-Edward Mote, "On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand"

Some of my favorite memories from time spent deployed on an aircraft carrier were worship services in the fo'c'sle. This is a large interior space at the bow, or front, of the ship that contains the anchor handling equipment and a large, horseshoe-shaped section of anchor chain. The anchor itself is suspended just outside the hull of the ship—nearby, but out of sight. The chaplain and his team set up folding chairs inside the "U" each week, so congregants are surrounded on three sides by the anchor chain. Worshiping the Lord in this space was a profound experience. Sometimes services were punctuated by the roar of jet engines, dragging of tie-down chains, the slamming of a steam catapult following a launch, or the controlled crash of a recovery. These interruptions served as fitting reminders that we are at war in a broken world, even as we peer through the veil for a glimpse of a perfected one.

As we prepare to celebrate Jesus's embodied arrival into the world at Bethlehem, we do so knowing that Jesus's life on earth will be relatively brief. John quotes Jesus preparing his disciples for his departure:

"But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?" But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:5-7).

We have all endured enough separations in our lives to understand the disciples' sadness and confusion. From deaths of loved ones to long distance moves to work-related travel, even watching children leave home, be it to kindergarten or college. . . how can it be better to be apart? Despite the disciples' objections, Jesus assures them, and us, that it is. He has not left us alone, as much as we might be tempted to believe that He has.

During a season in which we celebrate the birth of Jesus with the giving and receiving of gifts, it is worthwhile to consider the present Jesus promises his disciples: the Holy Spirit.

Jesus tells them,

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:13-14).

Paul Miller said, "Spiritual wisdom is a personal gift from the Holy Spirit himself, customized for us to nourish our souls, encourage our spirits and help us endure." What an incredible gift from a loving savior. Not only was He preparing to pay the penalty for our sins thereby securing eternal life for us with Him, but He was planning to send his Spirit to us. This person tells us the truth and explains to us what Jesus says, all the while glorifying Him. If Christ is our anchor, the Holy Spirit is our anchor chain. He is strong enough to connect us to our savior no matter the height of the waves or the speed of the wind. May we rest in His unchanging grace this Advent season.

Written by Kelley Dausman

Write The Word

Reflect on the below Scripture and copy it in a way that is meaningful to you. Include some of the anchoring truths of Christ.

"We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf..." Hebrews 6:19-20 JOHN 16:20

EVERLASTING JOY

Read John 16:17-33

The end of a year brings great joy as we acknowledge our Savior who was born into this world to bring restoration and lasting peace. However, as a new year approaches, we can't help but reflect on the one soon to pass. It is easier for our minds to linger on the hardships from this last year rather than count our blessings. It grieves me to recall the times when I doubted God's goodness in my life, or shook my fists, questioning: Why this? Why me? When the burdens of this world feel so heavy and we are preparing for the unknown of the new year, how can we delight in the joy of Jesus' birth?

Christ's birth wasn't just the coming of our Heavenly King; it was the arrival of the Perfect Son who would conquer death, take on our sorrow, and fill us with joy. In John 16:20, Jesus says to his disciples, "you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy." Here, Jesus is foretelling the heartache that will come because of his death, and also the profound joy that comes with his resurrection.

I have had to remind myself many times this year, and maybe you also need the reminder, that joy can be found in our mourning. How did you experience grief this year? Were you waiting longingly for an answer to prayers? Or lamenting the loss of someone you love or something you value? Whatever it is, I pray that you would feel His peaceful presence and cling to a community that will both lift up and encourage you. In John 16:33, Jesus says, "in the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." Despite the inevitability of trials, we follow a God who understands our struggles and has conquered them all. So in this season of reflection, we can have hope.

The joy of this Advent season is not just about Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection. It is also about the glory that is yet to come when we meet him face to face. There may be pain, sorrow, and hurt in our lives on Earth. However, a glorious and unending joy will only come from holding fast to Jesus and having hope for our eternal life with him. As sisters in Christ, let us help one another hold fast to Jesus.

Written by Kait Urch

LORD.

We know that you are the steadfast joy and loving kindness that we need in times of trial. We thank you for the last year of life that you have blessed us with. We pray knowing that these hard things will produce fruit in due course because we trust in you. Help us, Lord, to cling tightly to you when the brokenness of this world is too much to bear. Would we continue to rest in the deep, unshakable joy you provide in this next year. We love you.

AMEN



Thank You for sending Jesus, who made Your heart known to us.

As He prayed for His disciples, He also prayed for me - that I would be kept in Your name, guarded by Your truth,

and wrapped in the unity You share with the Son.

Lord Jesus, make me one with You.

Sanctify me by Your Word.

Help me live in the world without becoming shaped by it.

Fill me with the joy You prayed I would have, and let Your love the same love the Father has for You -

ne love the Father has for You

take root in me.

Holy Spirit, keep me close, that I may know You, follow You, and reflect Your glory in all I do.

AMEN.

And this is eternal life

Read John 17

Before the beginning
was with-ness tangible, before anything touchable
was made.
Before he laid foundations,
listed generations,
or loosed his Spirit upon the nations,
He dwelled in love.
Out of this density of glory
this constancy of unity
this sanctified safety
came One
who, as the Word, created
and, with a word, comforted.

I, who seek my little joys
through study and singing and service
often look upon his manger and his cross
forgetting that he prayed for me
to see and feel
in cosmic proportions.
Out of his magnitude he manifested
the invisible;
guarded, kept, and gave gifts
only discernable
to His own.

In smallness, in stillness, he could kneel down low enough to the earth that was his footstool and bury the seed of his life.
But just before this new beginning was with-ness -

lifting up beautiful eyes to a good Father declaring his deepest desire is for us to know and be known.

A poem by Beth Gambardella based on Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17; other references include Genesis 1:1, John 1:1 & 12:24, Isaiah 50:4 & 66:1.

POETRY

Spend some time reflecting on John 17. Then, using your own creativity, write a poem that captures the heart of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer.

FULLY PREPARED

Read John 18:1-14

Jesus, after praying to the Father to prepare Himself for the mission He was sent for, goes boldly to the garden to be betrayed by his friend Judas. He goes fully prepared to fulfill the mission that He was sent for, with no hesitation. The pain of betrayal did not deter Him; He boldly declares "I am he" when the soldiers, priests and Pharisees come to arrest Him. He was born for this moment, to come as fully man, fully God, to rescue His creation. He is calm, confident, and ready. But then comes Simon Peter, who is slightly less prepared.

Now, if we are honest, Peter's reaction seems pretty extreme – slicing off ears sounds aggressive for someone who has been sitting under the teaching of Jesus the past three years, learning about turning the other cheek. But his reaction also feels relatable. Judas was part of his group, a friend, someone he trusted. Betrayal hurts, and lashing out in anger almost seems reasonable. Even though Jesus has been telling the disciples over and over again that He would have to suffer and die to save them, Peter was not prepared when Jesus's time came.

The Christmas season comes every year and yet, it can be hard to feel fully prepared for it. The distractions of activities, parties, gifts, family, obligations, cards, charities, decorations - all pulling attention away from the true purpose of our celebration of Christ's birth. Instead of filling our hearts and minds with the beauty of God's word, we start filling our time with the busyness of the season. We can be like Peter, not prepared, angry and frustrated when things seem to go wrong.

But what if this year looked different? Less busy? What if we said no, or not now, to some things so we have time to sit in God's word? To remember and rest in His promises? To thank Him for His provision of salvation that he was fully prepared to provide? To stand in awe of God's plan and purpose for each one of us, even when we are not fully prepared? Jesus didn't leave Peter in his anger and doubt, He corrects him and loves him through his faults and failures. We can receive that grace too.

So let's choose to prepare our hearts to receive the promised child, the God who chose us. The One who created the universe, who came to earth as a baby, knowing the cost - who came fully prepared to die and defeat death for you. He came fully ready and able to make everything wrong right again. Let's rest in the fullness of God this season.

Written by Heather Bamford

Phillips B O UTTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM



PEACE IN THE MIDST OF QUESTIONS

Read John 18:15-27

The reality of the human plight is that everything is uncertain. Things that once felt secure can shift, leaving us with insecurity and doubts. I thought this was the right choice. This used to make me feel so loved. I thought God was leading me on this clear path. I thought I belonged here. Then circumstances change, and questions take the place of confidence.

This passage is filled with questioning. Everyone is either asking or being asked something. Spend some time noting:

- Who is being questioned and why?
- What emotions rise up in Peter and in the high priest?
- How do those emotions shape their outward responses?

Both Peter and the high priest reveal the reality of fear in the face of change. Jesus' ministry threatened the high priest's power, influence, and wealth. Fear of being exposed, fear of losing status, and fear of having the system overturned led him to resist the truth standing before him. He valued the temporary good he could see and rejected the eternal good that was present.

- Where are you tempted to cling to something you believe will bring happiness instead of fully trusting that God is your portion and your good?
- What sin or comfort do you hold onto because it feels safer than trusting the betterness of Jesus?

Peter also faced the weight of change. Jesus' arrest meant life would never be the same. From the perspective of history, we know God's plan was moving forward exactly as intended and resurrection was coming. But Peter, in that moment, was walking in the presence and very real effects of evil and death. His instinct was to grasp for control, to fight, and to deny.

- When what you hoped for does not play out, or when something you love comes to an end, how do you respond?
- Where are you tempted to take control rather than trust God?
- In those moments, what ideal or desire looms larger than God?

Now consider Jesus' response in this same passage. Knowing He was both fully God and

fully man, He centered himself on truth and trusted His Father completely. "Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?" (John 18:11 CSB). Because of this trust, His words and demeanor reflected peace instead of fear.

- How does Jesus model peace in the face of questioning?
- What did Jesus understand that Peter and the high priest did not?
- What does this contrast reveal about fear and peace in your own life?

Read Ephesians 1:17–19. Advent reminds us that we live in the tension of the now and the not yet. The Savior has come, yet we still wait for the fullness of redemption. In the midst of uncertainty, fear, and change, pray for the spiritual insight and peace that Christ reflected in this passage. Because you are in Christ, this insight and peace can be fully yours here on earth and will be forever yours in eternity.

Written by MaryBeth Antcliff



I DO NOT CEASE TO GIVE THANKS FOR YOU, REMEMBERING YOU IN MY PRAYERS, THAT THE GOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE FATHER OF GLORY, MAY GIVE YOU THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND OF REVELATION IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM, HAVING THE EYES OF YOUR HEARTS ENLIGHTENED, THAT YOU MAY KNOW WHAT IS THE HOPE TO WHICH HE HAS CALLED YOU, WHAT ARE THE RICHES OF HIS GLORIOUS INHERITANCE IN THE SAINTS, AND WHAT IS THE IMMEASURABLE GREATNESS OF HIS POWER TOWARD US WHO BELIEVE, ACCORDING TO THE WORKING OF HIS GREAT MIGHT THAT HE WORKED IN CHRIST WHEN HE RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD AND SEATED HIM AT HIS RIGHT HAND IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES, FAR ABOVE ALL RULE AND AUTHORITY AND POWER AND DOMINION, AND ABOVE EVERY NAME THAT IS NAMED, NOT ONLY IN THIS AGE BUT ALSO IN THE ONE TO COME.

BORN FOR THIS

Read John 18:28-40

Have you ever thought about Jesus' life? It begins with the reference to a Roman ruler, Caesar Augustus and his life ends with another Roman leader, Pontius Pilate.

When I was a child, I remember hearing about Pilate in this scripture and feeling bad for him. Pilate was a military man and knew how to interrogate a criminal. He had taken time to question Jesus and had found him innocent of any wrong doing. He spoke the truth to the people when he declared in John 18:38 (NKJV), "I find no fault in Him (Jesus)." So why is this infamous name included in the Apostles Creed, "Jesus suffered under Pilate?"

According to R.C. Sproul, the early church found it important to reference Pilate because he was a historical figure used by God to bring about the death of Christ and ultimately our redemption.

Jesus was brought before Pilate because it was unlawful for the Jews to put any man to death and they wanted Jesus crucified. Pilate stated, "I find no fault in this man." (John 18:38 NKJV) Why did he make this statement? To make it clear that there was no fault in Jesus!

Jesus' life, death and resurrection would provide our rescue and reconciliation. Jesus freed us from the penalty of sin and brought about restoration with God for those who believe.

Now that I'm an adult, I feel like Pilate missed it. Pilate knew the truth, but his personal ambition and desire to advance his political career caused him to give into the pressure of popular opinion. He had the evidence, washed his hands of the responsibility of Jesus' death symbolically, but ultimately Pilate sentenced Jesus to death.

Even today, the truth and evidence of Jesus causes division and anger in political leaders and in the common man.

What will you do with the truth that Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords?

Written by Marnie Cooper

| What actions can you take to honor and submit more fully to Jesus, your King? | | | |
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APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

ALL ABOUT PERSPECTIVE

Read John 19:1-27

The baby born in Bethlehem didn't stay in the cradle. He was born to be our Savior, and this passage reveals the depth of His love. The swaddling cloths foreshadow the burial cloth. The wooden manger points to the wooden cross. Christmas is beautiful because of what it led to: Jesus taking our place so we could be brought into God's family.

When I was a child, I remember insisting that Christmas was more important than Easter because if Jesus had not been born, we wouldn't be "celebrating" His death and resurrection on Easter. I fought that position as a child because I couldn't understand the significance of Jesus' decision to choose death – a gruesome, painful and humiliating death on a criminal's cross. He had to be born first to do great things and die on the cross for our sins, right?

While we have no control of when or to whom we are born, our Savior chose to leave His place beside the Father in Heaven to be born into a dark, sinful world to parents who were not born into wealth, but of humble means – a King born to a couple of His poorer subjects.

Jesus chose to live a human life with us and His birth is a reflection of His death.

Born in a stable and laid in a wooden box, He died in the open, outside on a wooden cross. Wrapped in swaddling cloth at birth, He was buried in clean linen when placed in His tomb. When Jesus was born, He became a son cared for and loved by Mary; when He died, He cared for and loved His mother by asking a dear friend to become her appointed son to care for her in His absence.

Christmas and Easter, while they reflect each other in many ways, are both cause for celebration: both represent new life, a new start and a choice.

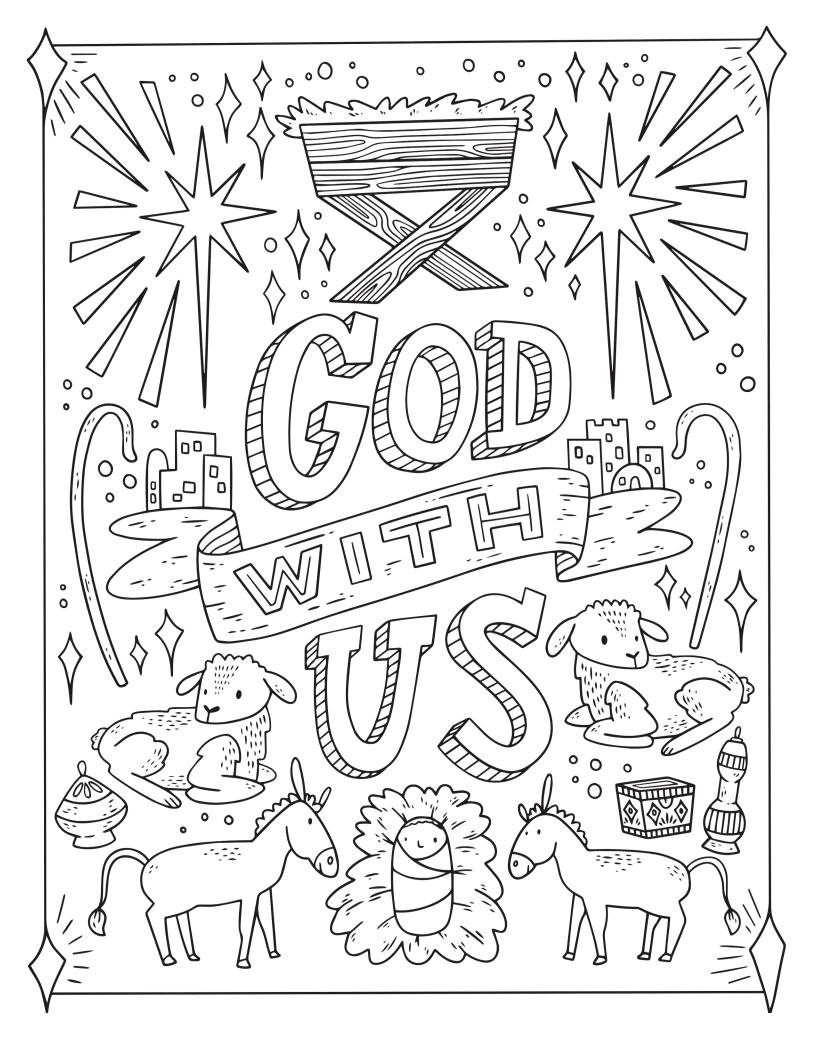
Like Jesus, we can choose. We can choose to accept Him as the perfect Christmas gift that He is. He is the Gift of Eternal Life, of Light and Love. Through the death of Jesus, we are given the greatest Christmas Gift of all: salvation.

"When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said, to his mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her in his own home." John 19:26-27

Written by DeeAnn Slover

AWAY IN A MANGER





FROM ADVENT TO AMEN

Read John 19:28-20:9 -

I don't know about you, but I love to read. I love all genres but am particularly drawn to stories based on true events. Historical fiction, autobiographies, and biographies are some of my favorites. This summer I read a series of historical fiction books set during World War II. Last year I read the autobiography of a woman who survived a plane crash by falling over 10,000 feet strapped in her seat into the Amazon jungle and then spent 11 days fighting her way out of the jungle. It was an interesting autobiography – written by the person who lived the story. But last year, I read several biographies – the story of someone's life written by another person. For example, I've fought my way through Bonhoeffer, starting, putting it away, coming back, putting it away again.

Pastor and writer Warren Wiersbe made an interesting and instructive point about the Gospel of John, which for all intents and purposes could be considered the biography of Jesus written by John. He writes, "If the Gospel of John were an ordinary biography, there would be no Chapter 20. I am an incurable reader of biographies, and I notice that almost all of them conclude with the death and burial of the subject. I have yet to read one that describes the subject's resurrection from the dead. The fact that John continued his account and shared the excitement of the Resurrection miracle is proof that Jesus Christ is not like any other man. He is, indeed, the Son of God."

So, as we come to the most crucial section of John's gospel, of the whole gospel, the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we see what sets our faith apart - the hope found in the Resurrection.

But before we jump ahead to the resurrection, it's important to take time to sit and meditate on the death of Jesus on that cross. I don't know about you, but anything that involves the intense suffering of Jesus Christ on my behalf is hard to swallow. It's easy to skip over the death - the suffering, the separation, the despair, the helplessness - and move straight on to the resurrection. But without spending time in the death, in the unpleasantness of the immense suffering Jesus endured because of our sin, we miss the enormity of his sacrifice - the cost of His sacrifice and the profound love that was displayed in it. But it also cheapens the hope that we find in the resurrection. Cheap hope is selling a version of hope that hasn't fully entered into the weight of death.

We must sit and reflect in the weight of His death to truly grasp the enormity of His sacrifice. We miss the true weight of our sin and what it cost Jesus if we don't take the time

to contemplate, study, and meditate on His death first. Jesus took on the full magnitude of death for us. He didn't just erase our sin. He became our sin. The sinless son of God took sin's curse for us on a cruel cross, out of His great love for humanity.

Contemplating the magnitude of His sacrifice - the suffering, separation, despair and helplessness that he endured on our behalf allows us to fully rejoice in the conclusion that death is not the end of the story. The details of Jesus's actual death also present corroborating evidence that validates the resurrection. We live in a post-resurrection world. Praise God.

Jesus' victory over death and the empty tomb is the completion of the Christmas promise: God with us, not only in birth, but in triumph. Advent isn't just about waiting for a babyit's about receiving the Savior who conquers sin and death. The truth of the resurrection is that it's not just about going to heaven when we die. It transforms our life and our death. Resurrection changes everything! It's the most important event in human history. Jesus was victorious over Satan, sin and death. His resurrection was the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. It was also confirmation of everything Jesus said and did in His ministry. His death paid our penalty and grants us eternal life. If there is no resurrection, our faith is in vain.

But, the tomb was empty! The empty tomb is a resounding living hope, a deep hope that changes our center and makes eternal life a reality not just in the future when we die, but now! We can live our lives with a living hope as we experience Jesus's resurrected life today and anticipate His glorious presence for all eternity. As we encounter the resurrected Christ, His presence empowers us to overcome our grief, fears, questions and doubts.

Recently I overheard a wonderful teacher in a classroom of 4-year-olds. She was describing Jesus praying before He began the journey to the cross. She said, "Jesus went to the garden to pray with His disciples. He was preparing for His coming death on the cross." Before she could even start her next sentence, a little boy jumped up and said enthusiastically, "It's not the end!! He comes back!"

Praise God that Jesus' biography didn't end with his death. There's more to the story! Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:3-17 (CSB),

"..that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. . . And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins."

That's how radical the resurrection is. If it didn't happen, we would still be in sin, and everything we believe about God, Jesus, and salvation would be empty and meaningless. The resurrection brought profound changes in our faith, purpose, and standing before God.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe with our hearts that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved!" (Romans 10:9 CSB).

Without the resurrection there is no gospel. The gospel is the good news and the best part of the good news is that Jesus won. Death was defeated and a living hope of eternal life is ours through him! Your life can change right now with the resurrection power Jesus offers! Jesus rose so that our dead hearts could come alive in Him. The risen Jesus calls you by name. He calls you to trust Him for eternal salvation and through life's challenges. He will steady your doubts and fortify your faith.

We, too, are promised resurrection with Jesus! The empty tomb is a resounding living hope! We can live our lives with the living hope of Jesus Christ, our Savior is alive today!

Written by Haley Campbell

WRITE THE WORD

Reflect on the below Scripture and copy it in a way that is meaningful to you.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,..." 1 Peter 1:3

"God is in the manger, wealth in poverty, light in darkness, succor in abandonment. No evil can befall us; whatever men may do to us, they cannot but serve the God who is secretly revealed as love and rules the world and our lives." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, God is in the Manger

When I read the Bible, I often forget that—Jesus being the divine exception—these were real people. They lived ordinary lives, felt deep grief, and, through beautiful providence, came to know the Lord. These giants of the faith didn't come from the womb quoting Deuteronomy; they navigated the mundane, practicing faith day by day, just as we do.

In John 20:10–31, I'm reminded of this almost immediately. We're given a glimpse into how Mary Magdalene, the disciples, and Thomas each wrestled with grief, fear, and doubt in different ways.

What strikes me first is the significance of Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene. To us, reading on this side of the Bible, her devotion is unquestioned. But in her time, she was a woman with a questionable past—in a culture that considered women second-class citizens. And yet, Jesus chose her as His first human witness of the resurrection. How amazing is that? The very first to proclaim, "Jesus has risen!" was a woman whose voice society would have dismissed. But Jesus entrusted her with the news anyway. He sent her to deliver it to the male disciples, and they believed her. In the eyes of the Lord, women are not second-class. They are image-bearers of God – valued, vital, and integral to the church.

When Mary first encountered the risen Jesus, she was so weighed down by grief that she didn't recognize Him. He asked, "Who are you seeking?" to gently pierce through her sorrow. It wasn't until He spoke her name that she truly saw Him. With a single word, Jesus lifted the heavy burden from her heart. Charles Spurgeon captured this beautifully:

"In the garden of Eden, immediately after the Fall, the sentence of sorrow, and of sorrow multiplied, fell upon the woman. In the garden where Christ had been buried, after His resurrection, the news of comfort—comfort rich and divine—came to a woman through the woman's promised Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ. If the sentence must fall heavily upon the woman, so must the comfort come most sweetly to her."

The good news of the resurrection was delivered with the most thoughtful, intentional care.

Later, Jesus appears to His disciples. He meets them exactly where they are – behind locked doors, filled with fear. He greets them with peace and breathes the Holy Spirit into

them. Into their fear, He speaks peace. Into their despair, He brings joy.

Then there's Thomas. Honest, doubting Thomas, whose doubts I can recognize in myself. He needs to see and touch in order to believe. And again, Jesus meets him right there, providing the tangible proof he longs for.

Over and over, Jesus shows us that He is not afraid of our fear, grief, or doubt. Instead, He steps into it. He meets us where we are, bringing peace that surpasses understanding, joy that sustains, and love that calls us by name.

Through these post-resurrection encounters, we're reminded that the child born in Bethlehem is now the risen King – the One who still speaks peace, breathes life, and calls us by name.

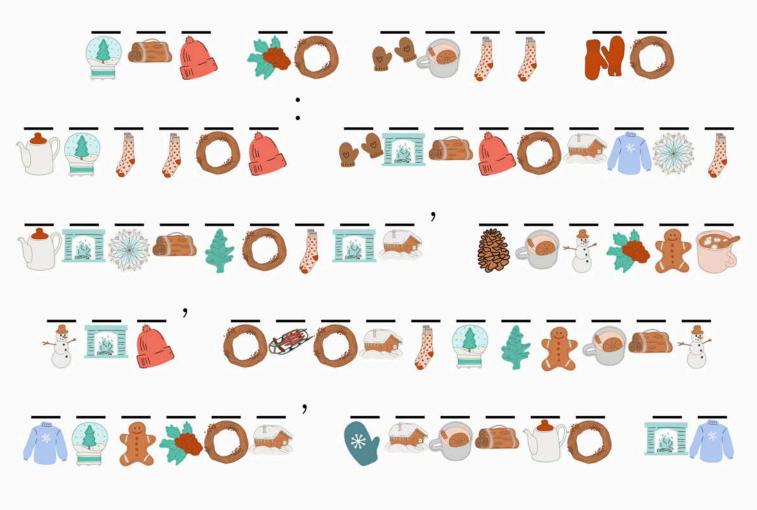
Written by Katharine Daigle

HOW MANY NAMES DO YOU KNOW?

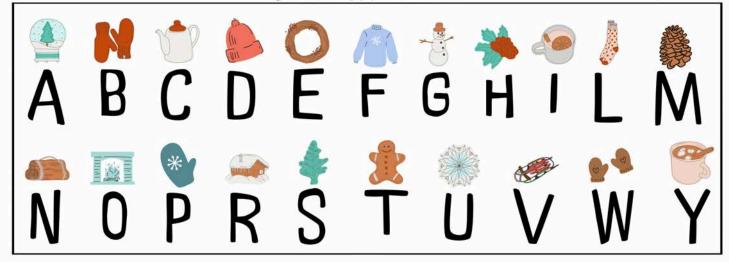
YESHUA Good Shepherd Prince of Peace THE WAY ALPHA AND OMEGA Christ LORD OF LORDS I AM MESSIAH King of kings Lamb of God Light of the World Master Rock REDEEMER Son of God Wonderful Lord Logos The Word The Door Chosen One Son of David BREAD OF LIFE Truth Almighty One Deliverer GREAT HIGH PRIEST OUR HOPE ADVOCATE 7 BELOVED SON OF GOD U THE WAY THE TRUTH & LIFE Author and Perfecter of our Faith LORD OF ALL RISEN LORD SON OF THE MOST HIGH RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE Yeshua THE WAY Strong Tower Savior Good Shepherd PRINCE OF PEACE Alpha and Omega STRONG TOWER Christ Lord of Lords | Am SAVIOR (Miller)

A Child Is Born - Isaiah 9:6

Match the picture to the letter to decode the message!









Dear Jesus,

Merry Christmas! I'm so thankful we get to celebrate Your birthday! Thank You for coming to earth to show us Your love and to save us.

This Christmas, I want to tell You

One thing I'm really thankful for this year is

I'm happy we get to celebrate because

Please help me share Your love with others by

The best gift You gave me is

I'm praying for

I love You, Jesus, and I'm so glad You're with me every day.

2025 DAILYBREADOFLIFE

COME AND HAVE BREAKFAST

Read John 21:1-14

There is something so profound about God embodied in flesh, both before and after he conquers death. Of all the miracles that John said would fill so many books the world couldn't contain them (John 21:25), he chooses to include this one. Why? What does it say about the character of Jesus? One observation is that he feeds his disciples after a night of fruitless fishing. He meets their physical needs before addressing their deepest spiritual questions. And he doesn't just feed them, he meets their need abundantly!

Perhaps Peter and the disciples going fishing that night is actually an attempt to grasp for control and take financial matters into his own hands now that their rabbi is gone. Maybe he is anxious for something to do and fishing feels familiar and safe. Maybe he just wants to hang with the guys. We don't know. In fact, Jesus doesn't even address why they went fishing in the first place. But we do know that in typical fisherman fashion, their catch is well documented - 153 large fish (way more than they need for breakfast)!

Another observation is that Jesus is addressing Peter's emotional needs. We've seen Peter leaving a boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee before (Matthew 14:22-23). We've seen him racing to Jesus before (John 20:4). John won that footrace, but Peter is not going to be outrun this time. He rushes to the shore. After Jesus tells him to bring some of the fish that he just caught, he seems to singlehandedly go back and haul the net to shore (keep in mind this is a net so full of fish, seven other disciples can't lift it into the boat). I wonder what is running through his mind? I imagine (based on what is coming) that Peter is just itching for a chance to be one on one with Jesus, to prove that he is still worthy of being a disciple.

And how does Jesus meet them? With miraculous provision. With food. With an offer of breakfast. With a charcoal fire. We've seen that charcoal fire before too at Peter's denial (John 18:18). Jesus is setting the scene for Peter's restoration that addresses his whole personhood - his physical and emotional needs, and in a moment his spiritual ones as well.

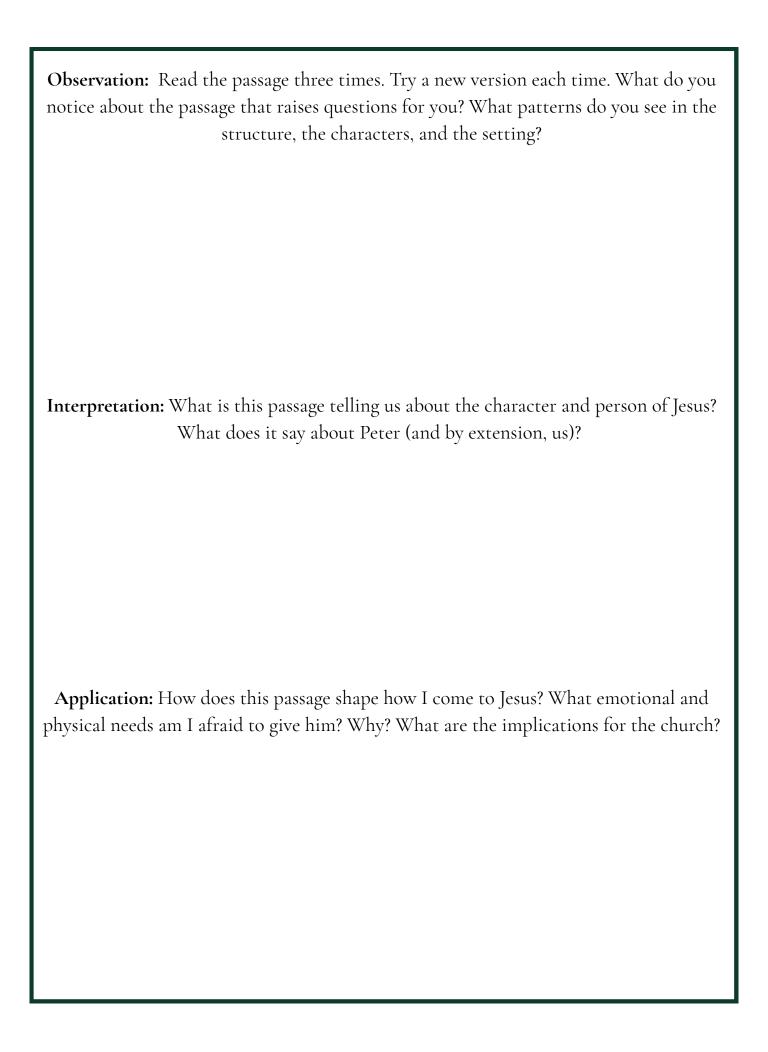
Use the next page to dive deeper into this passage.

Written by Abby Grimes

A FUN WAY TO START THE YEAR

During the month of January, grab some friends (old & new) and journey through this book. *Bible & Breakfast* by Asherita Ciuciu





OUR FAILURES AREN'T FINAL

Read John 21:15-25

I wonder what Peter was thinking about when he saw Jesus on the beach after the resurrection? I can't help but think that his denials of Jesus were first and foremost in his mind. Maybe he was wondering what Jesus would say to him. Maybe he was wondering what his future would look like as a disciple.

After Jesus and the disciples finished breakfast on the beach, he turned to Peter and asked him three times if he loved him. These questions correspond to the three denials outlined in John 18. As Peter tells Jesus he loves him three times, Jesus responds with "feed my lambs," "tend my sheep," and "feed my sheep." Jesus gently and lovingly restores Peter through this exchange. He then gives Peter a glimpse into his future. Peter would go on to advance the gospel as the "rock" (hence his name) that the church would be built upon. He would go on to die for it in the same way Jesus did.

Advent reminds us that we need restoration just like Peter. We needed Jesus to come down to earth and identify with our humanness and take our sin upon himself so that we could be saved from an eternity without him. Just like Peter, Jesus must deal with our past in order to give us a future that glorifies him.

Written by Sydney DeProfio

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER

Take a moment - on your own or with your family or friends - to write a simple Christmas Day prayer to close out the Advent season. You might each write a few sentences of gratitude, a truth about Jesus that comforts you, and a hope you're carrying into the new year. If you're gathered with others, share your prayers aloud. If you're by yourself, read your prayer slowly before the Lord and let it become a quiet, personal offering of worship.



"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." Matthew 7:7-8

THE CHRISTMAS STORY

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 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, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 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.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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. 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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

"GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE AMONG THOSE WITH WHOM HE IS PLEASED!"

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

I AM STATEMENTS

I am THE BREAD OF LIFE.

John 6:35

I am THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

John 8:12

I am THE DOOR.

John 10:9

I am THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

John 10:11

I am THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

John 11:25

I am THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE.

John 11:35

I am THE VINE.
John 15:1



Christmas Eve Services

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24 2PM & 4PM

Family Friendly Candlelight Singing & Refreshments

