



THE FAMILY ADVENT-URE

CELEBRATING THE WONDERS OF HIS LOVE



A NEW DAY

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15TH

Read As a Family – Genesis 3:8-19

“And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, ‘For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.’ And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the Lord.” – Genesis 4:25,26

It never ceases to amaze me how quickly and utterly we can destroy that which took great time and care to make beautiful and glorious. My poor wife learned this lesson over the course of just a few Christmas holidays. She had spent most of her childhood, teen years, and young adult life acquiring and collecting some of the most stunning Christmas ornaments one has ever seen. They were delicate, finely crafted, colorful, and exquisite works of human artistry and creativity. However, they never stood a chance against the clumsy and sometimes destructive tendencies of four toddler children. My wife’s collection went from museum-quality displays to fragmented, glued-together monstrosities; at least those that weren’t sent to the trash heap.

Though we may treat our material possessions better as we age, the truth is, the same propensity to destroy the sacred remains in us. No picture of destruction is made any more graphic and clearer than that of the first family to befall planet earth. Adam & Eve were given beauty and perfection on a scale that none of us could ever fathom. All of creation existed in goodness and holiness, without the effects of sin we see today. There was no death, no sorrow, no division, and no pain.

Unfortunately, this perfection would not last. When Adam and Eve opened the door to disobedience, in walked death and destruction, not only for creation but for their family as well. They immediately began to operate in selfishness and self-preservation toward one another. Pain would now be factored into the equation of creating a family. Their desire to have supremacy and favor would be passed on to their kids and manifest itself in one of the darkest days in humanity, when Cain killed his brother Abel. Mankind’s first murder was between two brothers!

Incredibly, they didn't throw in the towel, despite this family being a train wreck. They persisted in the promise that a Son & Seed would come who would set matters straight. They held onto hope that one day, the Anointed Man would come and crush the head of the Serpent and snuff out sin itself. This is evidenced by the very verses we just read. You see the name Seth translates to anointed, and the name Enosh to man.

I believe that the first family, and some of their immediate descendants, called on the name of the Lord in hope, and with the expectation that only the Anointed One could help mend their broken family. Church family, it's to the same Anointed One that we look to and call upon now to restore that which is broken in our families as well! Though my wife doesn't have the same ornaments she once had, she has a collection of new ones, hand-selected and hand-crafted by the family she has been blessed with today. Each one has attached to it memory and meaning. Let the Lord bring restoration and hope where there was once disaster.

1. What area of your family do you want to see God do something new in?
2. What has God called you to do to bring life and light into your home?
3. Do you need a fresh start in your life? It could be at home or in another part of life. How will you do that?

Family Adventure Challenge – Get that tree up if you haven't already, and go pick up a family ornament that holds meaning and significance to this year and your family! You can also make one if you are super creative, but just make it personal to you and your crew!





DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16TH

Read As a Family - Genesis 11:31-12:3

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” – Hebrews 11:8-10

The holidays are full of tradition! One of my favorites was getting my grandmother's homemade chocolates, which she would hand-make every Christmas. Families with traditions share common bonds for gathering and celebrating. They can pass down lessons and memories through these meaningful customs. However, families that don't create new and godly traditions can get lost in routine and become spiritually stagnant. Some traditions we have practiced for so long, and for so many generations, that their meaning and value have been lost.

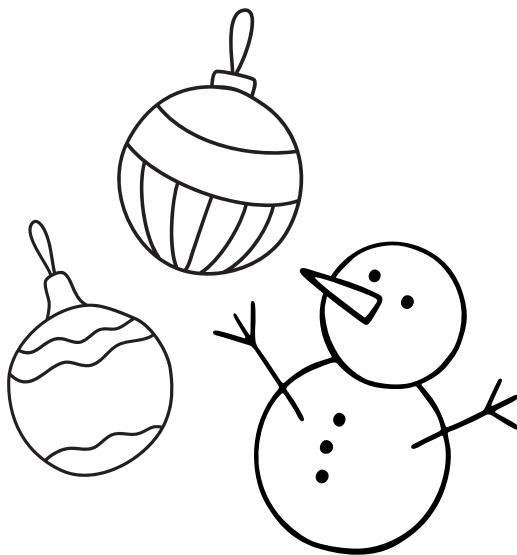
Terah, Abraham's father, started something new for him and his family. He left the world he knew in pursuit of something better. Abraham would do the same and go even further in obedience to God's direction. Preserving ideas and traditions rooted in truth and godliness is great, but being a family willing to follow God at the cost of their own comfort is a great adventure. There is no family that knew this better than the family of our Savior. Mary and Joseph would be called into uncomfortable situations, like trying to explain to family and friends that Mary's pregnancy was one of virgin origin. God led Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, Egypt, and eventually Nazareth, often without the comfort of family and friends for support. In fact, one might go so far as to say that the reason Christ came into the world is to do something new entirely!

That's what the prophet Isaiah said about 700 years prior to Christ's birth: “Behold, I will do a new thing. Mankind had become accustomed

to sin and death. There was no glad tidings to bring ourselves, no holiday hope or Christmas cheer, so God decided to do something different. Like Abraham's family, and all who belong to the family of God, God wants to do something new in your family! He wants to create new traditions of triumph, take you on joy-filled journeys, and He calls us all to follow Him on adventures of obedience!

1. What holiday family traditions have become stagnant, or whose meanings have been forgotten? Shed some light on them, Mom and Dad!
2. What adventure do you sense God wants to bring your family on in this upcoming year?
3. Go around and have each person share an area of life that they have become too comfortable in. How do you think God wants to shake that up?

Family Adventure Challenge – Start a new holiday tradition. Have everyone write down an idea(s) and pull one out of a hat. It could be a Christmas scavenger hunt, a holiday relay race, or even a special Christmas outreach you and your family plan. If you feel adventurous, try two, and let the adventure begin!





UNEXPECTED JOY

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17TH

Read As a Family - Exodus 1:15-2:10

"Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you." – John 16:22

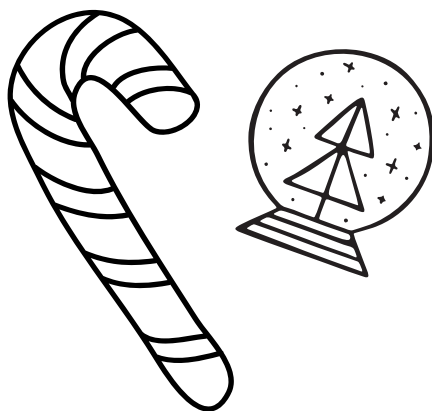
About four years ago, my family and I received word that my father-in-law was very sick. He had a rapidly developing lung condition that would put him in hospice before the end of December and take him home to be with the Lord by the end of January. He was a father, a grandfather, a patriarch, and pastor to many in the family. This was not the news any of us wanted to receive during the holidays. About a week before Christmas, with his condition worsening daily, the family made the decision to celebrate Christmas early, fearing he wouldn't make it to the actual day. It was my job to decorate the house and get it ready for a party that no one was planning or ready to have. I went all-out with the party décor I picked up. I looked for the gaudiest and most ridiculous things I could find. There were holiday cactuses and white unicorn Christmas trees, but the crown jewel was a four-foot-tall plastic Santa we named Wrigley Bigsby (after a pack of gum and a football player I had heard about earlier). We gave him a backstory that made him a traveling pajama salesman and made sure he photo-bombed every family picture possible, even when it started to frustrate some. The best part was that it brought my father-in-law some unexpected joy for his last Christmas here on earth.

The Bible is replete with stories of great tragedy that are sprinkled with incredible moments of unexpected joy and triumph. While the story of Moses we just read has elements of tragedy and trial, it also records some real irony and joy. No one at that time saw having a child as a tremendous joy. There was a very real threat of death at worst, and bondage at best. Yet, Moses' mom did not see tragedy but rather something special and beautiful in her son's birth. No one had any clue that this wasn't just a Hebrew child marked for death, but the one God would use to deliver all the children of Israel. Like Moses, the birth of Christ our Savior came during a time of great darkness, and brought the

desperate wrath of a wicked king down upon the innocent children of the region He was born in. Yet, in the midst of this tragedy, there wasn't just hope, but joy, for a new day and morning was beginning to dawn. The Child we celebrate in this season would leave His wooden manger, grow into a Man, and climb upon a wooden cross. He would do this, not for just the deliverance of the children of Israel, but so that all might become the children of God!

1. Share a time in your life that was or looked dark, but had a moment of light and joy burst in. How did that change your ability to navigate during that hard time?
2. What do Moses' and Christ's birth stories teach us about hope and joy?
3. How do you handle hard times and hopelessness? Where and in what can you find joy in the midst of heavy times?

Family Adventure Challenge – Find some funny Christmas décor! Christmas is definitely a time of serious and solemn reflection on Christ's coming into the world, but it is also a time to rejoice and celebrate. Whether it's a hilarious lawn inflatable, a funny themed tree, some goofy Christmas décor, or a ridiculous holiday outfit, bring some silliness to this special time of year. Plan, pick up, and take pictures with something that is seasonally silly. Post and share with us, and let's all enjoy, for there is much for us to be joyful over!





THE PRINCE'S PEDIGREE

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18TH

Read As a Family – Matthew 1:1-16

"Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding. So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests." – Matthew 22:9,10

I know that wasn't the most exciting read for a Christmas devotion, but if you are going to celebrate the birth of our King, you should know where He came from! When most of us read through passages like this, our tendency is to blow through them. However, that would be a mistake. Within these passages is a rich truth that no one should ever forget: Jesus' family is far from perfect or glamorous. However, just like His family today, this family line is forever redeemed and remembered because of what He came and did 2,000 years ago. It doesn't matter if you've lied like Abraham and Sarah, gotten what you wanted through trickery like Jacob and Tamar, come from the wrong kind of people like Ruth, or pursued poor choices and professions like Rahab and David. The good news is God has a place for you in His family!

One of the most impactful moments of my life was the day I was invited over for a holiday meal with my wife's family. We had only been dating for a short time, and to say I was nervous would be an understatement. I was a young, immature kid who had an answer for everyone and often not enough respect for anyone. I came from a broken home, with very few material possessions, but a whole lot of personal baggage. The home I showed up to was pristine; the décor was perfectly ordered and on display, and the food smelled and tasted unlike any meal I had ever had before. Yet, you would be wrong to imagine anything more than just a normal family holiday dinner. This was how little I knew about typical holiday customs. That evening, there was one tradition, though, that stood out to me above all others. There were tiny, little name plates at each setting, and for the first time ever, I had a seat at the table, not just a place to sit. I was thought of. I was prepared for. I was chosen for that place!

God has been including the most unlikely of people into His family since the beginning of time, and He continued this tradition even at His birth. The very first guests brought to Christ on the night He was born were dirty, smelly, and disdained shepherds! These were some of the lowest members of society, but on this night, they would be remembered as honored and cherished guests. He called them personally to come, see, and enjoy the One who would bring the Good News that all were welcome to be a part of God's family! Like those of Jesus' family line, and the shepherds heralded to Christ's advent, we too were invited to be a part of something we did not deserve. Our station wasn't just lowly. According to Scripture, we were enemies of God, but Christ's coming, crucifixion, and conquest over death made a way for us to be included in the family of God and eternity in heaven. That is a truth worth sharing and bringing others in on!

1. What is something about your family that you think is unique, maybe even a little crazy?
2. How do you think someone becomes a part of the family of God? What are some benefits of being a part of God's Family?
3. How does being included feel? How does being excluded feel? Who's one person that you think can benefit from joining the family of God?

Family Adventure Challenge – Come up with one person or family that you and your family can encourage this season. Write them a Christmas card, have them over for a meal, get them a gift, but most importantly let them know where your hope and joy come from!





THE GIFT

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19TH

Read As a Family – 1 Samuel 1:1-18

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” – James 1:17

I know, and every polite person would agree, that Christmas is not about the gifts, but it is a big part! Some love getting gifts, and I'm not going to make you feel bad about that. Some love to give, which, for these kinds of people, is a gift in itself. One of my favorite Christmas traditions is taking my kids out to buy gifts for their siblings and mother. I'm one of those crazy people who love getting gifts for others. There is a special kind of joy I get in blessing others through giving. One of the most effective ways I learned to do this was by listening. You see, if we listen closely, we will learn pretty quickly what those around us desire. However, it wasn't always like this. One Christmas, I was shopping for my very pregnant wife, and came across what I thought was the most incredible perfume I've ever smelled. It checked all the boxes for me. It was a well-known name brand, one of the newest scents on the market. It came in a fancy bottle, smelled amazing, and, most importantly, was on sale! Yet, to my dismay, my wife was less than thrilled upon unwrapping this treasure on Christmas Day. For her, it checked all the wrong boxes. Due to her pregnancy, aromas of all kinds had become nauseating. She could barely cook, couldn't stand walking through stores filled with artificial aromas, and she may have explicitly told me not to buy her perfume that year. No amount of explanation or justification could fix my failure. I had to own it, and went shopping that week for something she actually wanted.

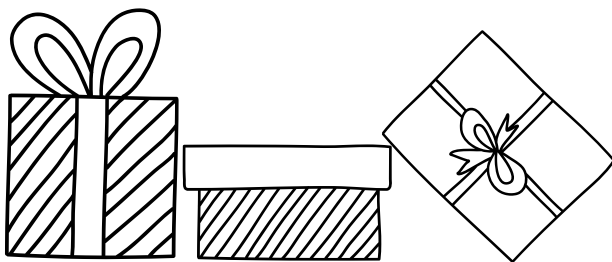
Though Elkanah, Hannah's husband, attempted to provide her with alternatives to her desire, Hannah's longing for family remained strong. She anguished over what she lacked, and she longed for the God of Israel to provide, as He often did for His people. After all, Jehovah

Jireh means “God my Provider”, and provide He does! Yet, not as many would expect. The son Hannah would receive would have to be given back for service to the Lord, not for growing up under Hannah’s care or in her home. Likewise, in Luke 2, we are introduced to a man by the name of Simeon who “waited for the Consolation of Israel”. At the time of Christ’s birth, the nation of Israel was under the rule of the Roman Empire. The people longed for a Messiah who would set them free. Jehovah Jireh heard these prayers, and as Simeon prophesied, would answer in an unexpected and altogether better way.

Like Hannah and Simeon, do you long and wait for God to answer your prayer? Young ones, are you hoping this Christmas you will unwrap the one gift you desired most of all? Let me let you in on a secret! God is still providing today. The gift of salvation, freedom, and hope remains available for all who would ask. He is not giving us something that we did not need or ask for (like I did with my wife). Christ has provided us with gifts even greater than we could ever ask, think, or imagine!

1. Apart from salvation, what is the best gift you ever received? Why was it so incredible?
2. What’s something that you have gotten unexpectedly that turned out to be better than you thought?
3. What is something you are praying and hoping for from the Lord? What should we do when it seems like our prayers aren’t being answered the way we want?

Family Adventure Challenge – Go gift shopping or make a gift for your family. You can do each member individually, or you can pull names like you would for a Secret Santa gift exchange. Set a limit that works for your family. It’s fun to take everyone to the store and split them up with Mom and Dad so the other person won’t know. If you want to make things really crazy, set a time limit and watch everyone scramble. Remember, think of the person(s) you’re getting or making the gift for!





THE CHRISTMAS PREQUEL

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20TH

Read As a Family – Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38

“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! for His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy,” – Psalm 107:1,2

Mom and Dad, today your story matters more than any of mine. Share a Christmas devotion with your family and connect a personal story!

1. What from today's devotion stood out to you?
2. Did you learn anything about each other from what was shared today or has been shared throughout the week? Why did that stick out to you?
3. What is something about each of your family members that you love the most? What is something you can do to better encourage your family in their walk with God?

Family Adventure Challenge – The greatest story ever told was written and recorded for us by the Holy Spirit, and we call it the Bible! Stories matter. They are a great way to share truth, history, and convey godly morals. They can be even more exciting when they are made into a movie, drama, or book. You pick, make a home Christmas movie, drama, or book (short one with pictures for your own sanity and time's sake). Have fun and make sure to include everyone. It can be a fictional or true story. Then cap the evening with a Christmas movie!



REST & REFLECT

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21ST

Read As a Family – Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” – Matthew 11:28

Even though God was physically with them, Mary & Joseph still needed a rest, and you do as well. The weekend’s devotionals and challenges are meant to be simple and easy in order to bring some much-needed rest during a season that tends to be stressful. Go to church, eat a meal with the whole family, relax, and rest in the Lord. The reason He came to begin with was to bring us true rest.

Family Adventure Challenge – Sometimes the greatest challenge we face is to do nothing. Go to church and then do something as a family that refreshes everyone. Take a break from the hustle and bustle and come together as a family. Don’t make plans with anyone else but your family and God. Enjoy His rest!



THE KIDS TABLE

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22ND

Read As a Family – 1 Samuel 16:1-13

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many [l]noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are” – 1 Corinthians 1:26-28

Every family holiday gathering I have ever been part of seems to share one dreaded detail. They all have a Kid's Table, and no one wants to sit at it. It seems like at the earliest stages of life, we figure out pretty quickly that the good conversations, the coolest members of our family, and sometimes even the better food reside at the adult table. In many households, the Kids' Table has become a place of banishment for the less mature and favorable. It's like the leper colonies of biblical days! Often this table sits at the end of the “main table”, marked clearly by a change of elevation, quality of seating, and sometimes even décor and tablecloth. In other households, this table stands alone and apart from the rest of those gathering. What every soul at the Kids' Table desires is to simply be included.v

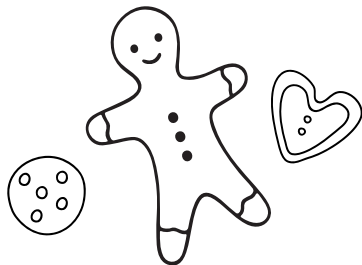
The young David knew this feeling well. For whatever reason, David was not the favorite or favored son of Jesse, nor well-liked by his brothers. This was made clear when Jesse picked through every other son but David, who he seemed to forget existed. Other parts of 1 Samuel highlight for us the tension that existed between David and his brothers. No one seemed to think much of David, let alone think that he would one day rule Israel and that his descendants would bring the long-awaited Messiah.

The people who are overlooked, unwanted, and purposely ignored seem

to be the very ones God utilizes when designing grand plans. This was also true of our Messiah as depicted by the very places He would be born and live. In Micah 5:2, it says of Bethlehem, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” When one of Jesus’ own disciples first heard that the Messiah came from the region of Nazareth, he responded, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” However, this principle doesn’t just apply to the places where Christ resided, but also the people He resides within. Regardless of how you feel about yourself or how anyone else feels about you, God said, you are a “royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people.” To put it another way, no one sits at the Kid Table when it comes to feasting with the Father. Christ’s lowly entrance into humanity gives all humanity assurance that no person’s station is too lowly to disqualify them from a seat at His Table. The only thing that could have robbed David of the place and position God had for him would have been to refuse the invitation. Hear God’s invitation, and know that like David, and the tiny town of Bethlehem, you are chosen by the King of all Kings!

1. Do you ever think of yourself as little, unwanted, or ignored? What does God think about you? Let others share what they think about you, too!
2. What does it mean to be chosen? How does God choosing us to be a part of His family reflect how he feels about us?
3. What things cause us to forget the truth of how God thinks of us?

Family Adventure Challenge – It isn’t the holidays if we aren’t doing something with food, so let’s have a food challenge! You can do a gingerbread house decorating contest with the whole family, or you can do a special dessert-making contest with the kids where mom and dad serve as judges. My family and I like to do a rice treat contest and let the kids pick their own cereals, ingredients, and decorations. Pick a food challenge that works for you and your crew, and make sure there is some sort of prize!





PUTTING UP THE LIGHTS

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23RD

Read As a Family – Daniel 1:1-21

“There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.”
– Revelation 22:5

There has been a bit of a battle waged in my house every holiday season. It isn't for the last turkey leg, or whose family we will visit with, or even who will get to open their presents first. The battle fought has been for the putting out of the Christmas lights and decorations. In my opinion, the perfect day for this endeavor is clearly November 1st, the day after Halloween. I think Thanksgiving is made even better and more joyful by the presence of Christmas lights. My wife, on the other hand, sees our Christmas lights as an infringement upon her favorite holiday, Thanksgiving. Ba-Humbug! Whenever you decide, one thing is certain: Christmas lights send a message. They usher in a time of celebration and joy. They send the clearest of messages that the people who live in these homes are ready for a celebration. These homes draw the observer toward joy and wonder, and do so especially well in the presence of darkness.

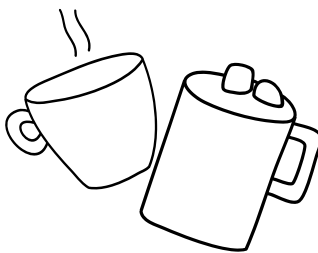
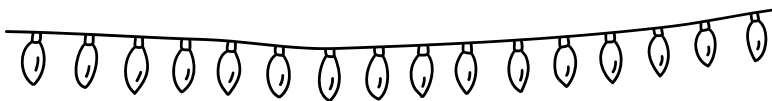
Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were four friends brought into a dark kingdom during a dark time for them and their people. They were captives and strangers in the land of Babylon, but this did not dissuade them from shining bright. They didn't do this with strands of electrical magic or with lanterns and candles. They did this by living differently from everyone else around them. The Spirit-led actions of these men were lights and ornaments that shone brightly for generations to come. Yet, these lights were not led by the will of men, but were the result of following the Greater Light. These men shone in this dark kingdom because they followed God.

We see a similar story unfold shortly after the birth of Jesus. Along with

the shepherds, God also brought wisemen who followed a great light in the sky, which brought them to a young Jesus in Bethlehem. These men traveled a great distance to behold the Light of the World, who would bring light to all men. Their journey was at times perilous, difficult, and met with opposition, but they persisted. Their persistence was not a product of their own creation, but was led and guided by the Lord of Light. Some scholars also believe that the origin of these mysterious magi traces all the way back to ancient Babylon and to the teachings of a Hebrew slave by the name of Daniel! No matter their origin, these men, like the Hebrew slaves we just read about in Babylon, did not follow God to gain glory for themselves, or so that they might shine among men. Rather, they walked in light to give glory to their God who brings light to all who reside in darkness.

1. Where has God called you to bring light? How does one walk in the light?
2. Is following the Lord always easy? How can we continue following God even when it is difficult to do so?
3. What is one area of your life that God wants to shine brighter in?
What makes it difficult for you to follow The Light and to be a light to those in darkness?

Family Adventure Challenge – Take a Christmas Car ride with your family! Make some cocoa, or another warm drink you and your family prefer, and go on a Christmas light cruise. Play some Christmas music in the car, enjoy the lights, and if you're like me, and everything needs to be a competition, pick your favorite house. You can even drop off a prize at the front door of the winner! Make it an annual contest in your neighborhood!





TIS THE SEASON

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24TH
ESTHER & MORDECAI

Read As a Family – Esther 4:1-17

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” – 1 Peter 3:15

My family and I used to be live tree people. There is something incredibly wonderful and nostalgic about a live tree. There is just one major problem for me and my youngest son. Christmas trees are out to kill us! Each year, with the welcoming of a new live tree, my son and I would begin to break out in hives, have streams of snot and sneezing consistently produced from our nasal cavity, and within a week, have red watery eyes along with restricted breathing. We were a mess, but we wouldn't give up our trees and opt for the plastic option. We suffered in silence, and so did those around us. Finally, my brave wife did what no one would do or admit needed to be done. She chucked the live tree and picked up a plastic pine for us to open our presents under. At first, we lamented, but that didn't last long when we could once again see and enjoy the beauty of what stood before us. The new tree was a literal breath of fresh air, and all because my wonderful wife responded rightly to our need!

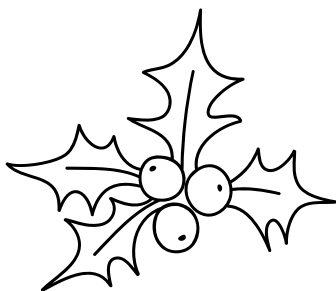
I know we are all excited for tomorrow, but first, let's step back 2,500 years to the time of Jewish captivity under the Persian Empire. There, we are introduced to Esther and her uncle Mordecai, who were prominent members of the King's administration. Esther was the new queen, and Mordecai, a palace gatekeeper. However, they were not like many of the others in the administration or the kingdom; they were Jews. They were a conquered people brought into the administration by the King of all kings' authority. They could have easily ridden the high of their past placement or looked ahead to the security and comfort this new position brought them, even as others around them suffered, but they did not. As Mordecai pointed out to Esther, their position and season carried with it a responsibility. Esther and Mordecai had to help

those around them. They could not stay hidden or quiet while others potentially perished or suffered. They could not remain silent in the face of evil.

Before Christ's arrival on the scene, many prophets spoke out against evil and the imminent coming of the Messiah. The very last forerunner happened to be Jesus' older cousin John. He fearlessly confronted the evil of the day, while at the same time bringing hope to those who waited for salvation and deliverance. Christmas Eve is not the day before Christmas; it is a day that the Lord has made for us, like all the others, to herald the previous coming of our King and His future return. This season is to celebrate the confrontation and victory Christ had over all sin and darkness. The good news is not that a baby was born, but that this little King would conquer what no king could before. Death is defeated, and evil is on its heels. Let's not shrink back, but with heaven and nature let us sing of the joy that this world now has!

1. What is something God has been burdening your heart to do? It could be a sin to overcome, a person to speak the truth to, or a stance to take at your school or work. Share and talk through a strategy for getting it done.
2. Esther, Mordecai, John, & the other prophets all seemed to have great boldness in the moments they lived. Where do you think that came from? What did boldness look like for them? What does it look like for you?
3. What is hindering you from being bold today? How does Christ's victory in the past provide us with boldness today?

Family Adventure Challenge – Come and worship with us! If you are feeling especially bold, do some caroling in your neighborhood and invite some others to join you at church for Christmas!





HOLIDAY PLANS

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25TH

Read As a Family – Luke 2:1-20

“They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them.” – Jeremiah 32:38, 39

The miraculous events we just read were not intended for greeting cards, the hanging of holiday lights, the giving of gifts, the singing of yearly anthems, or the donning of ugly Christmas sweaters. No, this day was designed for the redemption of mankind and the salvation of the sinner’s soul. All that we have read in previous devotions, and just read, has been for the purpose of bringing us to this place. The family that was broken apart in the garden is now made whole at the hill of Calvary. Not just that particular family, or our individual family, but the family of God. It is the grandest of all Christmas miracles. Every detail of the nativity story makes clear that what took place was not the working of men, but a work for men.

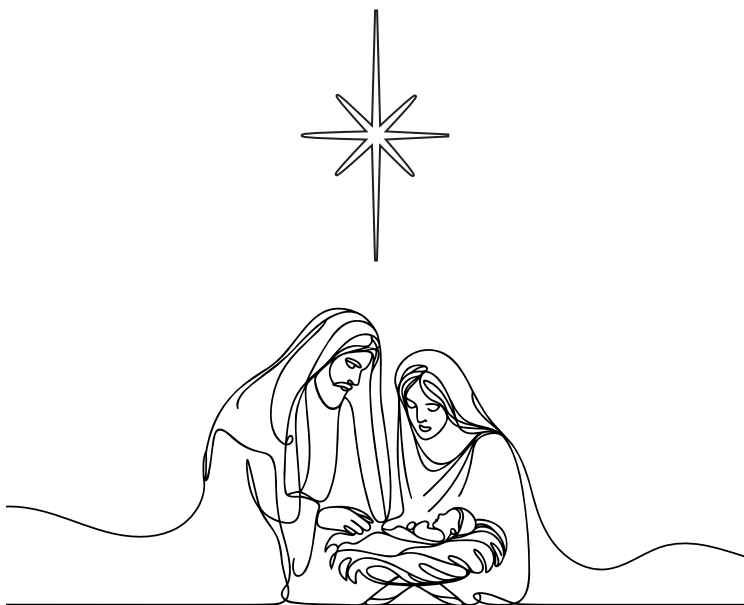
One of the best Christmases I ever had didn’t start that way. In fact, many of my childhood Christmases were not filled with the happiest of holiday memories. In my senior year of high school, I was kicked out of my home on Christmas Day. My home growing up was quite volatile and unhealthy, making that day’s event not particularly surprising. What was surprising was the kindness of a nearby neighbor named Jorge. Jorge and his family happened to hear the ruckus going on from my family’s apartment and found me outside crying over that morning’s event. Jorge brought me inside, included me in his family’s holiday feast, and let me enjoy some holiday Christmas programming with everyone on Telemundo. However, the most impactful moment came when Jorge handed me a present. Jorge didn’t know at the time, but our family spat started when I was intentionally left out of the family gift exchange. What I didn’t know was that while I was eating and enjoying my Christmas programs, he had snuck out to 7-Eleven on Christmas Day to buy me a shirt. While at one home no intentional provision was made

for me, at Jorge's house, I was intentionally thought of and cared for.

The formation and keeping of a family requires intentionality and diligence. It may have begun when two became one, but that bond requires another force entirely to keep it together. There can be no healthy or life-giving family until we are individually brought to life and into the family of God. That miracle requires much more than the acknowledgement of Christ's birth. According to Romans 10:9, it is our confession and belief in His Lordship, His death, and His resurrection that guarantee the removal of our sins and the salvation of our souls! Christmas is merry indeed, because the King has come and succeeded in restoring all who would believe back into His family!

1. Have you become a member of the family of God? If not would you like to join? What does one have to do to become a member of God's family?
2. How does being a part of God's family affect how we function with our family here?
3. What about God's gift of salvation makes you merry?

Family Adventure Challenge – It's Christmas Day, you know what to do!





NO REFUNDS OR EXCHANGES

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 26TH

Read As a Family – Acts 16:25-34

“Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” – Isaiah 43:18,19

I imagine that some of you reading and hearing this have now had the chance to open some gifts that you have been waiting on for quite a while. Great! Now let's pack them up and get them returned for something else you'd like far less. Wouldn't that be ridiculous? When it comes to the gift of salvation and the truth of God's Word, we mustn't forget how precious and invaluable a gift they are. Let's not forget the work that God has done throughout our lives, or in our families. Let us not so quickly disregard the many blessings God has brought us over the last 12 days of this devotional. These things are precious treasures and ornaments that we should not exchange for any earthly treasure or convenience. These blessings are not to be enjoyed just for the holiday season, ready to be packed up and forgotten until next year. They are to be accumulated and celebrated all year long.

For many years, I was a chronic exchanger after the holiday, even when my family got me exactly what I asked for. I was dissatisfied and convinced that perhaps I could find something better. Often these exchanges would leave me with no gift in return, not because of unsatisfactory options, but due to a dissatisfied heart. Despite how tempting old ways and old habits may appear, especially when rewrapped for new seasons and circumstances, the fact remains that they are still old ways. They have no part in the new life God wishes us to walk in.

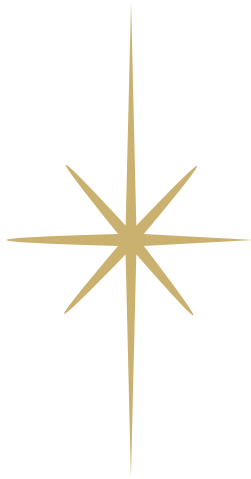
The jailer who was rescued from death didn't go back as the same old dad and husband as before. He walked and celebrated in his new life with his new brothers in Christ, and this led to his family being made

new as well. Brothers and sisters, we have been given spouses, children, blessings beyond our wildest dreams, and an eternal inheritance to which nothing else can ever compare. Let nothing in this world, nor in the kingdom of darkness, steal from us that which God has handed to us. Treasure it. Keep it. Fight for it. Celebrate it. Merry Christmas and have a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led new life!

1. Why do we go back to ideas and practices that are not beneficial for us?
2. How do we avoid becoming dissatisfied with God's blessings, or exchanging the good things He has given us for lesser things?
3. What does walking in new life mean to you? What does it look like? What impact does it have on those around us?

Family Adventure Challenge – Talk through and decide on one thing in this next year that you and your family will make your mission. It could be a ministry or outreach you will all be involved in. It could be a meal you come together for weekly. Whatever you and your family decide, it should be an activity that you will all commit to for the year. Make it something meaningful, and make sure your family knows there is no one else you'd rather do this with!





CELEBRATING THE WONDERS OF HIS LOVE