

**JOY TO THE WORLD**  
An Advent Companion



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David W. Hegg





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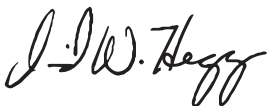


## Introduction

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! This is truly a season of celebration and joy as we remember the gift of our Savior. To help you find the joy of Jesus in the midst of the frenzy that accompanies the holidays, we offer this Advent Companion — an excuse to stop, sit quietly, read God’s word, reflect on his faithfulness and wondrous love, and respond in joyous prayer to him for his unspeakable gift of the Savior.

“Advent” is a Latin word meaning “the coming.” During the season of Advent, Christians across the world prepare for the celebration of the coming of the Lord into the world through the birth of his Son Jesus Christ. We celebrate his light in the midst of our darkness, as is often symbolized by the Advent wreath. The weeks of Advent remind us to set aside some of the hectic busyness of the holiday season and to quietly reflect both on the baby born in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago and his promise to come again. The two cannot be separated. Advent not only points backward to the first coming, but also forward to the second.

May your Advent season be joyous and may your adoration of our Lord Jesus Christ make you a fountain of his love, through his grace and for his glory!



David W. Hegg  
Senior Pastor

# CHRIST IS BORN

## A 4th Century Christmas Homily

Christ is born, glorify ye him. Christ from Heaven, go ye out to meet him. Christ on Earth; be ye exalted. Christ in the flesh, rejoice with trembling and with joy; with trembling because of your sins, with joy because of your hope. Christ of a Virgin, without Mother, becomes without Father (without mother of his former state, with father of his second). He who is not carnal is incarnate; the Son of God becomes the Son of Man.

The Festival of the Theophany or birthday, for it is called both, two titles being given to the one thing. For God was manifested to many by birth. On the one hand being, and eternally being, of the Eternal being, above cause and word, for there was no word before The Word; and on the other hand for our sakes also becoming, that He who gives us our being might also give us our well-being, or rather might restore us by his incarnation, when we had by wickedness fallen from well-being. The name theophany is given to it in reference to the manifestation, and that of birthday in respect of his birth.

Therefore, let us keep the feast, not after the manner of a heathen festival, but after a godly sort; not after the way of the world, but in a fashion above the world; not as our own, but as belonging to him who is ours, or rather as our master's; not as of weakness, but as of healing; not as of creation, but of re-creation.

Now then I pray you accept his conception, and leap before him; if not like John from the womb, yet like David, because of the resting of the ark. Revere the enrollment on account of which thou was written in heaven, and adore the birth by which thou was loosed from the chains of thy birth, and honor little Bethlehem, which hath led thee back to Paradise; and (render thanksgiving for) the manger through which thou, being without sense, wast fed by the word. Know as Isaiah bids thee, thine owner, like the ox, and like the ass thy master's crib; if thou be one of those who are pure and lawful food, and who chew the cud of the word and are fit for sacrifice. Or, if thou art one of those who are as yet unclean and inedible and unfit for sacrifice, and of the Gentile portion, run with the star, and bear thy gifts with the Magi, gold and frankincense and myrrh, as to a king, and to God, and to one who is dead for thee. As shepherds glorify him; as angels join in chorus; as archangels sing hymns — let this festival



## CHRIST IS BORN

be common to the powers in Heaven and to the powers upon Earth. For I am persuaded that the Heavenly hosts join in our exultation and keep high festival with us today...because they love men and they love God ...

Look at and be looked at by the great God — who in Trinity is worshiped and glorified, and whom we declare to be now set forth as clearly before you as the chains of our flesh will allow, in Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be the glory forever. Amen.

### **Gregory of Nazianzus (399–389 AD)**

Preached on December 25, 380 AD, in the Church of the Resurrection in Constantinople

Therefore, let us keep the feast, not after the manner of a heathen festival, but after a godly sort; not after the way of the world, but in a fashion above the world; not as our own, but as belonging to Him who is ours not as of creation, but of re-creation.

## DID YOU KNOW?

### Some Facts About Various Christmas Traditions

#### **The Christmas Tree**

Historically, the practice of decorating a tree during the celebration of Christ's birth dates back to 15th century Germany. Our custom today appears to be the combination of two different Christian symbols. The first was the "Paradise Tree." Believers chose a tree near their home to decorate with apples, symbolizing the tree of life in the garden of Eden. Over time, the decoration came to include other food items for the birds during the winter season, and eventually, brightly colored decorations associated with the Christmas celebration. Tradition has it that, during a particularly cold winter, Martin Luther brought a freshly cut evergreen inside his home so that his children could enjoy the Paradise Tree by the warmth of the hearth.

The second was a triangular shelf that contained Christmas figurines – perhaps an early Christmas creche — with a star representing the one the Magi followed perched on top. By the 16th century, these two Christmas traditions had merged into what we now call the Christmas Tree.

#### **Santa Claus**

It is not commonly understood that Santa Claus is of Christian rather than pagan origin. The name — Santa Claus — is actually an Anglicized form of the Dutch name Sinter Klaas. Sinter Klaas, or Saint Nicolas, was a 4th century bishop who was known for his kindness and generosity to children. Tradition also has it that he was appointed to attend the first ecumenical council at Nicea in 325 AD, where he stood in support of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, and the full deity of Jesus Christ. Certainly, stories about him living at the North Pole, running a toy factory, and "knowing if you've been good or bad" are purely mythological, and may actually encroach on the place only God has in our lives. And yet, while Santa is not essential to Christmas, he does represent a good way to redirect our celebration back to the reason behind all true generosity – the love of God extended to us in the gift of Jesus Christ. And, the historic Santa Claus stands as one who knew and lived out that important truth.

## **December 25**

Much has been written about the date we celebrate Christmas. Some insist that our celebration stems from pagan roots, arguing that December 25 was the date of a pagan festival commemorating the birth of a false deity. But, even if this is true, it does not of itself make our celebration of pagan origin.

In fact, the early church chose this date precisely because it was a pagan holiday. They chose this date to celebrate the birth of Jesus to point the triumph Christ's birth represented over the pagan traditions of the Roman empire. In choosing December 25 the church was not endorsing a pagan tradition but establishing a rival one — dedicated to the birth of the only Son of God. Today, barely anyone remembers the pagan gods of Rome, yet, around the world at least a billion people celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

Today more than ever, believers need to stand up for Christmas. While our society has tried to take it, and reshape it into a celebration of myth and materialism, we can reform Christmas according to the word, through the way we celebrate it in December and live out its meaning throughout the year.

# MAKE IT MEANINGFUL

## Finding Christ in Your Holiday Routines

### Thoughts for Families

The celebration of Christmas in our world has become increasingly more challenging for believing families. The joy and delight that should center around the birth of the Savior has instead become attached to gift getting, holiday foods, joyous music, and spending time with friends and family. These things — all wonderful expressions of the Christmas celebration — are certainly not wrong! Yet, how often these special joys of the season take on lives of their own, and if we are not careful, they can drain us of our energy and enthusiasm and overshadow the Birth that must always occupy the center of our celebration. So, the following thoughts are provided so that you might use the traditions and excitements of the season as pointers back to Jesus.

### Decorating Your Home

Most families take joy in “dressing” the house for Christmas, as it used to be called. This year, as you take down the boxes that have stored your Christmas treasures since last year, why not make it your aim to remember Jesus.

As you string the lights along the roof line, and wind them around the trees and bushes of your yard, use them to remind your children that Jesus came as the Light of the World. When you gather your family out front, for the initial turning on of the lights, the joy you feel, and the excitement you will see in your children’s eyes can be a vivid reminder that the Savior came into our dark world to bring a joy that is never extinguished. Take the time to gather your family and offer a prayer of thanksgiving to our Heavenly Father for his wonderful gift!

As you carefully unpack those special decorations and place them around your home, and on your tree, consider how each one reminds you of the love and grace of God, who sent his most precious Son to decorate our lives with his love. Perhaps some of your treasures were given to you by your parents or other friends. Take time to tell their “story” to your children. Christmas certainly is a time to remember the generations who have come before us, especially if the faithfulness of God can be seen in their lives.

## **The Christmas Tree**

Whether you trek to the forest to cut down your own tree or you go to the local store and purchase one, why not make getting your Christmas tree a spiritual adventure for your children this year? As you go about selecting and buying the tree, remind them of the Tree of Life in the garden of Eden. Remind them that Adam and Eve disobeyed God and that the effects of their sin have fallen upon us all. Also tell your children that God's remedy for sin also included a wooden tree, though it was called a Cross. And as a result of Jesus' death on that Tree, we enjoy the promise of eternal life. It is as though we have been given the fruit of the Tree of Life. Certainly, this is cause of great celebration! And, as you string the lights and place the ornaments on your Christmas Tree, think of how God's love has adorned our lives and given us the opportunity to shine his light, and display his glory to those in need of his forgiveness and the life he offers.

## **Christmas Treats**

Certainly, one of the best joys of the Christmas season are all of the goodies! This year, as you and your children make cookies, drink spiced cider and egg nog, and enjoy handfuls of nuts and candy, take time to make some spiritual connections. Many times the Bible likens the joys of food to the joys of loving God.

O taste and see that the Lord is good. (Psalm 34:8)

How sweet are your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth. (Psalm 119:103)

And we must always remind ourselves that, however wonderful food may be, our true lives are nourished, not by bread, but by the word of God.

But he answered and said, "It is written, man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

(Matthew 4:4)

## **Christmas Music**

Perhaps the most enduring Christmas tradition is music. Each year we sing songs that are hundreds of years old, yet they have endured throughout the years because of the message they bring and the joy they instill. Sadly, many of our children don't know these great Christmas carols. Why not make it a point to sing a Christmas carol as a family each evening? You might even take time to research the history of the carols and share those stories with your kids as you sing them. And be sure to come to our church's Christmas concert and Christmas Eve service ready to sing and celebrate the birth of the Savior.

## On Redeeming Christmas

I met a small boy whose eyes were filled  
with the glow of the season's lights.  
His running and jumping were strangely stilled  
by the many traditions designed to build  
in him an awe of this holiest of nights.

And I said in my heart, "This is good."  
For are not the lights a reminder O Lord  
of the One True Light, the Son so adored  
Who, coming to Earth, salvation to bring  
has filled our lives with every good thing?

I met a small girl whose lips with joy  
sang out sweetly the season's songs.  
And more than any food or toy  
She brought back the memories I so enjoy  
of the babe to whom my love belongs.

And I said in my heart, "This is good."  
For are not the songs we sing today  
but an echo of the grand angelic way  
that the heavenly choir announced the birth  
of the mighty Lord of Heaven and Earth?

I met a young man and in his hands  
he carried a freshly taken tree.  
With joy he told me of his plans  
to cover it with lights and strands  
of every hue for all to see.

And I said in my heart, "This is good."  
For was not Eden's tree of life  
a reminder that, 'midst sin and strife  
all creation points to the one  
who brings true life, Mary's son?

I met a young woman whose house was dressed  
with the finery of the season.

MAKE IT MEANINGFUL

Throughout her home she used her best  
to proclaim the Lord her heart confessed  
to be of her joy the sweetest reason.

And I said in my heart, "This is good."  
For is it not the Christ born this day  
who has taken our ordinariness away  
and replaced it with his own holy dress  
that blood-bought robe of righteousness?

I met another man who said: "You are wrong  
to celebrate pagan days and tradition,  
to use their symbols, sing their song  
to foolishly join the compromised throng  
who celebrates Christ mass by their own admission!"

And I said in my heart: "How very unknowing  
to glibly dismiss the grace that God brings;  
for all of mankind, and all of his things  
were once cups filled with destruction  
in need of God's grace, his act of redemption."

"Of course there were pagans who lived their days  
worshipping gods of their own creation.  
Yet God in Messiah has reformed their ways  
making a mocker into one who prays  
to the one who delights in reformation."

"So, since God has reclaimed and reformed me  
and poured his meaning into my song,  
why is it by you thought a great wrong  
if I should consider that he's done the same  
with the Christmas symbols used in his name?"

So come one, come all and celebrate Christmas!  
Let not the critics your gaiter curtail.  
For as Christ first redeems, then fills with new meaning  
So also his truth is in Christmas lore beaming  
That we might see, midst the darkness, his truth does prevail.





# THE PROMISE OF GOD

## Week 1 | Day 1 | Genesis 2 and 3

These verses describe God's work of creation. Too often, in our search for answers about the origin of our universe we miss what God wants us to understand in these chapters. First, we must see that Earth is dependent upon Heaven. All creation has come from God and is dependent upon God to give everything necessary for its existence and continuance. Second, we must see God's great love for his world. He made it to perfection and put everything in it that we needed. But he went further! He also made his world beautiful and filled it with all of the sounds, and colors, and tastes, and smells that make our world so rich. But, thirdly, God's beautiful creation was plunged into chaos; its beauty was marred, and its harmony broken — all because of sin. What would God do? Would he lash out in anger and destroy? Or, would he move in love and redeem? In Genesis 3:15, he shows his love as he promises that he would not allow sin to forever ruin his creation and the lives of man and woman. Rather, he would solve the sin problem and heal the rift between God and man by sending a "he" of the seed of the woman. Here is the first glimpse we have of God's great promise of salvation. Here is our first glimpse of the Savior — our Lord Jesus Christ.

### Prayer

*Almighty God, creator of all things — you have made me, and you have everything I need. And now Lord, as I look forward to Christmas, fill my heart with thanksgiving for all that you are, and all that you have given me so that I may not forget, in this season of getting and giving, that all I really need is you. Thank you for my life with all of its joys and sorrows. And thank you for Jesus, in whose name I pray, Amen.*

## Week 1 | Day 2 | Genesis 6–8

After sin entered the world bringing ruin and death, you might be tempted to ask: “What would have happened if God had decided right then and there, to just walk away?” What would the world have looked like if God had not determined to send a Redeemer, if he had just turned his face away and left the world to go its own way? Interestingly enough, we are given a glimpse of what that would have looked like in these chapters. Genesis 6:5 shows that, left to himself, sinful man continues in the ways of sin. God looked at his ruined creation and he saw only wickedness and evil. Certainly, being a holy and just God, he could have decided to wipe out all that he had created and begin again. But . . . he had made a promise! He had promised that he would solve the sin problem through one who would be of the “seed of the woman” (Gen. 3:15). So, God chose a man — a man named Noah. We don’t know much about Noah except that God chose to grant him and his family grace, while he gave everyone else justice. What was God doing? He was saving a family so that his promise would not be broken. And at the same time, he brought justice to the wicked who had multiplied on the earth. Certainly Noah was not perfect; in truth, he deserved to perish along with everyone else. Yet, God provided a means of salvation from judgment — the ark! Today, as we reflect on the provision of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, we can thank God that, while we too deserved justice, he granted us mercy, and saved us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

### Prayer

*O gracious and loving Father — I thank you that you have granted me your mercy, and have not pursued me with your justice. I thank you that, like Noah, I have found grace in your eyes. And I thank you that you have sent Jesus, my Savior, my Ark, to deliver me from all that my sin deserves. O Father, fill my heart with the joy of knowing Christ, that I might live in light of your forgiveness, and walk in keeping with your love, so that others might come to love you too. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

## **Week 1 | Day 3 | Genesis 12:1–8**

We have seen God’s promise to send a “he”, of the seed of the woman, through whom he would cleanse the stain of sin. But just how would God accomplish this, since it was evident that, left to themselves, mankind soon ran to wickedness, and away from God? After the flood, God moves into human history and intentionally chooses a man — Abram — to be the father of that line or “seed” through whom his Savior would come. In this passage, we see God’s great sovereign choice of Abram and the promise made to him. Notice, that from the very beginning it was God’s plan that through the Savior “all the nations would be blessed.” While Abram was to be the father of the nation of Israel, even more importantly he was to become the father of the faithful — that company of people from all the families of the Earth, who would find God’s blessing of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. As we celebrate this season of Christmas, let us thank the Lord for his promise, for his faithfulness to keep his promise, and for his wonderful love that sought us out so that we might enjoy the eternal blessings of that promise.

### **Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, I thank you for your wisdom in bringing to us a Savior, through whom all who believe, in every nation under Heaven, can find forgiveness and acceptance before you. O Lord, as I celebrate Christmas this year, help me to see the world as you see it. Open my eyes Lord, to the fact that, through Jesus, you have showered your blessings on all the families of the Earth. In his name, Amen.*

## The Gift of the Present

### FIRST SIGHT

There He lay, unmoving, silent,  
as all the world wondered.  
The Babe, the Christ, The God of Intent,  
midst straw, by flesh encumbered.

His angels knew, had rapture sung;  
Dark sky with light had broken.  
The shepherds too were overcome  
when the impossible was spoken:

“He is here! Come, run, and see!  
The Eternal One has come to time!”  
Never, oh never, will be  
an event so authentically sublime!

Great joy! Praise, adoration unending!  
They drew near with unfettered joy.  
Great change! Awe! Nothing pretending,  
as they looked on their Christ — Mary’s boy.

### MY SIGHT

Can you identify with such emotion?  
Does your soul produce song after song?  
Or has time severed joy from devotion,  
and made Christmas for you much too long?

I must confess this year I’m under  
the drab, dull blanket of repetition.  
The truth is: I’ve ceased to wonder  
at the majesty of Christ’s incarnation.

“Buy this, wrap that! Go there and here!”  
Is the goal of it just to be finished?

THE PROMISE OF GOD

And subtly, do I no longer care  
that my will to rejoice is diminished?

Here's the problem that needs overturning:  
The word became flesh and then  
we, the preachers who boast great learning  
simply turned it into words again.

Ah, is there a way to rekindle the song?  
To recapture the wonder, the mystery?  
And transcend the routine that moves us along?  
To, as at first, be in awe of his majesty?

HIS SIGHT

“Here He lays, in glory resplendent:  
Let all the world rejoice in wonder!  
My Son, by eternal grace is sent  
to break sin's chains asunder!”

“My angels know, with rapture they're singing;  
Their anthems ring out today!  
The shepherds too a message are bringing;  
Hearken hard to what they say.”

“He is here! Come, run, and see!  
The eternal one is come to time!”  
He has come to you in the here and now:  
An event authentically sublime!”

Great joy! Praise, adoration unending!  
Fill you heart with unfettered joy.  
Great change! Awe! Nothing pretending:  
Gaze today at your Christ — Mary's boy.

“So if you can raise no true celebration;  
If the clutter of Christmas obscures the way;  
Think in the present tense; hear the angelic elation:  
‘Christ, for you, is born — today!’”

## Week 1 | Day 4 | Deuteronomy 18:15–19

As the nation of Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land of Palestine, their leader Moses sought to prepare them for the challenges they would encounter. He reminded them of God's faithfulness to them in bringing them out of Egypt. He reminded them that God had revealed himself and his commands to them at Mt. Sinai when he gave them his law. In this text, Moses is reminding the people that he had been appointed as God's representative to the people. As such, he was the first prophet. But now — as they waited to cross the Jordan and enter Palestine, Moses tells them that he will not be going with them. To calm their fears, he announces that God will raise up a prophet like Moses, from among them, who will have the very words of God in his mouth. Here we see the beginning of the office of the prophet — that appointed individual whose privilege it was to reveal the things of God to man. When Jesus came, he often proclaimed that he was the one who had the words of God (John 4:25; 8:28; 12:49,50), and the apostles came to believe that Jesus was the fulfillment of Moses' proclamation in Deut. 18:15 (see: Acts 3:23; 7:37). Today, as we look back through history, it is clear that Jesus was the great prophet of God; he is the full and final revealer of who God is and what God commands. As we celebrate the birth of Christ, we must also see that Mary's son was God's great self-revelation to a blind world. As the author of Hebrews states it:

God, after he spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the world. And he is the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his nature, and upholds all things by the word of his power.

(Hebrews 1:1–3a)

### Prayer

*Heavenly Father, today I thank you for sending Jesus, through whom I can come to know you, whom to know is life eternal. I thank you Lord for not leaving our world in the darkness of sin. I thank you for sending the light of the knowledge of the gospel by which we can see your face, and know your grace, and be changed from rebels into sons and daughters of the king. This Christmas season, I thank you for sending Jesus, our great prophet, for hearing him I hear you, and knowing him I know you, and loving him, I am loved forever by you, both in this life and the next. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

**Week 1 | Day 5 | Psalm 110; Hebrews 4:14–16; 9:11–14; 10:11–18**

Psalm 110:4 makes it clear that the One whom God promised to send as a solution to the chaos of sin — the “he” of Genesis 3:15 — would occupy two offices besides that of prophet. He would be a priest and a king as well. Even as Jesus was the divine fulfillment of the prophetic office, so also did the Old Testament priesthood look forward to its completion in the incarnate Son of God. In his role as prophet, Jesus came revealing God to mankind and bringing knowledge of how man could enjoy relationship with his creator. But the role of the priest was different. According to the Old Testament law, it was the duty of the priest to represent the people before God. A holy God could never allow sinful people into his presence. How then, could the people come before him to seek his favor and find forgiveness for their sins? In his mercy God laid out a plan whereby one would represent the many, the priest representing the people. This priest had to first make a sacrifice for his own sins, purify himself according to the law, and then enter into the holy place of the Tabernacle to stand before God and represent the people. However, this system had definite limitations! First, because the priests were sinners themselves, they could never present the perfect sacrifice. And it became apparent over time that the sacrifices they presented did not do away with sin, for they had to present them over and over again. This is the reason God sent us the Great High Priest — Jesus! The readings from Hebrews show that not only did Jesus come to reveal God to us, but also to bring us to God. He is the perfect priest, and he offered the perfect sacrifice for sins — himself. As we celebrate his birth, may we as well celebrate the wisdom of God in sending a priest who could bring us to God, perfectly, completely, and eternally.

**Prayer**

*Our gracious heavenly Father, I know that I have done many things that displease you. I know my heart is prone to sin, and that I have no right to your mercy. And yet, I praise you for the forgiveness and acceptance that is mine through Jesus Christ, my high priest, who knows both you and me perfectly. Thank you for forgiving my sins, and for granting me life. Help me to see, as I celebrate the birth of your son, that his life is the source of mine, so that this Christmas I may celebrate with great joy, and worship in truth the incarnate Son of God, my prophet and my priest. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

## Week 2 | Day 1 | Psalm 2

As we have seen in Deuteronomy 18, Moses proclaimed that God would send a prophet who would bring the very words of God. In Psalm 110, we saw that this prophet would also be a priest and a king. Today's reading, Psalm 2 declares that God will set up his king as the divine answer to the sinfulness and rebellion of mankind. When Israel had entered Palestine, it did not take them long to begin clamoring for a king. They looked at the surrounding nations and saw that each one had a king who led them and fought their battles for them. They went to Samuel, the prophet of God, and demanded that they be given "a king just like the nations." And that is what they got — a king just like the other nations had! God's desire was that Israel have a king, not like those of the nations, but a king after his own heart. After Saul failed to honor God, David became king. David delighted in the law of God, and God made a promise to David that he would never lack for a descendant to sit on his throne. In this Psalm, we see that God's promise went beyond the establishment of a merely human dynasty. Verse 8 describes God's king as having authority over the "very ends of the Earth." But no Old Testament king every had such a kingdom! It is clear that, even as Moses was the beginning of a prophetic office which found final fulfillment in Jesus, so also the Davidic dynasty finds its divine fulfillment in Jesus, the Son of David. The last verse of the Psalm declares the wise path: Do homage to the Son! This son — Jesus — whose birth we celebrate during the Christmas season is God's great king, before whom all the Earth must bow. He is the one to whom has been given all authority in Heaven and in Earth (Mt. 28:18), and it is our great privilege as his people, to worship and adore him as our prophet, priest and king, and the great Savior of the world.

### Prayer

*O Heavenly King, I come humbly into your throne room to praise and thank you for your wisdom in ruling over all things. You have ordered all of time and history so that, through it all, your glory still shines, and your grace still saves. I thank you Lord for forgiving me, and for bringing me into your kingdom where my sins have been forgiven and my life made new. And now I ask that you would make me a willing servant of yours, and a loving example of your love for our world, by your grace and for your glory, Amen.*



## Week 2 | Day 2 | Ezekiel 34

The Old Testament was a testament of promise. God promised that he would mend what sin had broken, by sending the Messiah. Over the centuries, God showed his waiting people that this Messiah would fulfill the offices of prophet, priest, and king. In the reading for today, we see that this king would also be a shepherd. In verse 23, God proclaims that, like David, Messiah would be a shepherd-king. This speaks to the heart of Messiah for his people. He would come as one who cared for his people, who fed them, and led them, and nourished them, and protected them. In verse 11, we are treated to an exciting detail regarding this shepherd — he was to be God himself! Imagine if you were reading this in Ezekiel's day. Would it have hit you that the Messiah, the coming one, the solution to sin who was of the "seed of the woman" would as well be God? When Jesus came he announced that he was the Good Shepherd. His hearers could not have missed the implication. He was declaring that the one promised in Ezekiel was standing right before them (see: John 10:11-18). Peter certainly understood this, and it became part of his teaching concerning Jesus. In 1 Peter, a book written to those believers who had begun suffering persecution for their faith, Peter wrote:

And he Himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by his wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls. (1 Peter 2:24,25)

### Prayer

*O precious and loving Lord, you are the Great Shepherd of the sheep, the one who cares for us like no one else. I praise you for your love, which led you to leave all the enjoyments of Heaven to come to Earth to live among us. I marvel at your patience with me, who like a straying sheep, so oftens wants to go my own way. And yet you love me, and care for me, and bring me back to you so that I may be renewed by your grace, and reformed according to your truth. O Lord, make this Christmas season a celebration of you, and let me give you all that I am as my greatest gift this season, in response to your great gift to me! Amen.*

## Week 2 | Day 3 | Isaiah 7:14; 9:1–7

As Israel progressed as a nation, they more and more went away from God into the wickedness of idolatry. The book of Isaiah is largely comprised of God's declaration that he was going to bring judgment upon his people. And yet, even as he moved in response to their sinfulness, he did not forget his promise to send a Savior. As we saw in Ezekiel 34, the "he" of Genesis 3:15, who was to be God's answer to the sin of Adam, was going to be himself divine. How could this be? Isaiah 7:14, later used by Matthew to explain Mary's situation, (see Matthew 1:18–23) was the first place where God told his people that his plan would call for a woman to bear the Son of God. Later, in Isaiah 9, the incarnational plan is further developed. Those who lived in the northern areas of Palestine, who were looked down on by the elite of Jerusalem, would see a great light. This light would come through a child, a son who would be born. But the amazing part is that this child, this son would be almighty God — as well he would be the prince of peace through whom the hostility of sin would be overcome and mankind granted peace with God. The Christmas season is traditionally associated with peace. And yet, we must always remember that the peace which Jesus Christ offers is found only as we recognize that he is the promised one, and that only through God's grace, apprehended by faith alone, is this peace ours to experience forever. As Paul reminds us:

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... (Romans 5:1)

### Prayer

*Our Heavenly Father, I thank you for sending Jesus, himself God of very God, so that I might live at peace with you. Lord, everywhere I look in my world I see hostility and war. The pride and sinfulness of mankind seems to make peace and harmony so difficult to establish and maintain. And yet, Father, through your work of redemption in Jesus Christ, I am forgiven, and I dwell in peace and security, accepted as your child and granted an eternal inheritance. O Lord, this is too wonderful for me to understand fully, and yet I celebrate this peace, and I bow myself before you, marveling at your wisdom, astounded by your love, and wondrously satisfied with all that you are making me to be. May this Christmas be filled with you, and may I be an instrument of your peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

## Call Me to Remember My Jesus

When, in a world gone mad, My Friend, you notice my heart grown cold.  
And the pleasures and pains of this temporal quest  
Have stopped me from running, enamored with rest.  
O then be to me a voice true and blessed;  
Call me to remember my Jesus.

Though so expected, so few understood the place of history's event.  
While the glory of God to man did appear,  
The townsfolk were numb to the happenings there,  
And at every door the message was clear:  
"We have no room now for Jesus."

He came uninvited, or so it seemed. Few even knew who He was.  
But the way that he loved those of the Fall,  
And his trumpeting offer of deliverance to all,  
Must be to my ears a clarion call  
To imitate my Lord Jesus.

He came not for comfort, all must admit. The stable says it all.  
So when my life from hardship is free  
And my goal-setting sheet is crafted to be  
A display of my longings, O Friend, challenge me  
To magnify my Lord Jesus.

He came to his own, and they turned away. Yet he continued pursuit.  
Not mocking, nor hatred; not scourging, not pain  
Did keep him from Golgatha, his message plain  
That all who would labor to seek sinners' gain  
Must die to proclaim the Lord Jesus.

So what must I do? Where must I aim? To whom shall my heart run?  
For surely the age would fill up my thoughts  
Regaling the "get to's," expunging the "oughts."  
Yet I must remember my grace-cleansed spots,  
And commune with my Lord Jesus.

“No room for him here.” What will I say, to people so pleased in their doubt?  
For surely my words will offer no light,  
And my hands no care to those without sight,  
“Til my being is formed by that Bethlehem night,  
And I come to reflect my Lord Jesus.

Thus, his truth is mine; So it must be. His life my model, my word.  
For though mankind’s circumstances seem changed,  
And scholars have the truth rearranged,  
My message is decreed, though some find it strange.  
I must witness of my Lord Jesus.

So friend, be a friend. Tell me the truth. Touch my page with your pen.  
And when I become distressed, overwrought,  
When challenge and pain overwhelm God-thought,  
Remind me that he my freedom has bought.  
Call me to remember my Jesus.

## **Week 2 | Day 4 | Micah 5:2–5a; Malachi 3:1,2; 4:5,6**

As the Old Testament era drew to a close, the promise of Messiah had not been fulfilled. God had preserved his people, despite their wickedness, and had brought them back to Palestine after a long period of captivity. Being back in the land was wonderful, but where was the Messiah? What had happened to God's promise? The scriptures had given so many clues concerning Messiah: He would be a descendant of Abram, and of David. He would be a prophet greater than Moses, a priest superior to Aaron, and a king whose rule and authority would have no end. He would come as a son, born of a virgin, and he would be God himself. And yet, God's time had not yet come. In the readings for today, we see two more important pieces of the incarnational promise. God determined that his son come to Earth and be born in a place not known for being the home of the great and celebrated. In fact, God's plan sent the creator of all things to be born in Bethlehem, a city mostly overlooked and looked down on. But, from the very beginning, God had always preferred the lowly, the humble, the weak. How fitting that his Messiah — the great servant of God — would be born in Bethlehem. A last detail from God concerning the coming of Messiah is given to us in Malachi. Here we read that God intended to send a forerunner before the coming of Messiah. This one was to prepare the hearts of the people to receive the message of Messiah. We will meet him in the very first pages of the New Testament. His name was John.

### **Prayer**

*O loving heavenly Father, as I reflect on your great faithfulness and love, I join with your disciples, and the church of all ages in praying*

*Our Father who art in Heaven*

*Hallowed be Thy Name.*

*Thy kingdom come,*

*Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread,*

*And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.*

*And do not lead us into temptation,*

*But deliver us from evil.*

*For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen*

# THE PROMISE FULFILLED

## Week 2 | Day 5 | Luke 1:5–25

The people of Matthew's day had studied the Old Testament. They knew that before Messiah could come, his forerunner had to come. Certainly Zacharias and Elizabeth knew this part of the promise. But they never dreamed that it would be their son who would prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. One day as Zacharias was performing a very honored priestly task, the angel Gabriel came to him. Zacharias listened as the angelic messenger told him that he would have a son, who was to be named John, and who would come "in the spirit and power of Elijah." The text records that Zacharias asked for a sign, a means by which he could know for sure that the angel's promise would come true. It was here that he displayed a heart of doubt and unbelief. Consequently, he was rendered unable to speak until the baby was born. During the coming months, Elizabeth and Zacharias experienced the blessings of God's promise as she became pregnant. They recognized the faithfulness of God to them, and understood that his blessing on them was a gift of his grace. Elizabeth described this as the Lord looking "with favor" upon her and taking away her disgrace. This is a good picture of what God's grace always does. It comes upon us fully undeserved, and it takes away our sin, replacing it with the joy of forgiveness, all because God is faithful to his promises.

### Prayer

*O loving and faithful Lord, you truly are the great promise keeper! And Lord, even though I am a promise breaker, and at times am like Zacharias, I thank you that you have granted me your favor, your grace, and that you have filled me with the wondrous joy of knowing that I am eternally yours, not because of my works, but only because of what Christ has done for me. I trust him fully, and I believe that you will keep your promise to me, even as you have fulfilled all your promises to us in sending Jesus to be our Savior. And I pray all these things in his wonderful name, Amen.*

**Week 3 | Day 1 | Luke 1:26–56**

As God moved to bring the promise of Messiah to fulfillment, he turned to a young Israelite girl named Mary. Her cousin, Elizabeth, was in the sixth month of her promised pregnancy when Mary received an angelic visit of her own. Luke was careful to point out that, as the Old Testament demanded, Mary was of the line of David. Imagine hearing the words Mary heard! Of all the young Jewish maidens who hoped against hope that they would be chosen to give Messiah to the world, Mary was chosen to hear these words: You will conceive ... and bear a son ... and he will be called the son of the most high! The angel went on to say that this son would be the fulfillment of the Davidic kingly line, and that his reign would be forever and ever. Though Mary was unsure of how this could happen (see vs. 34) she never doubted that this angelic message was speaking God's truth to her. Instead, she gave praise and glory to God for the favor he had bestowed on her (vs. 28, 30) and offered him a most beautiful expression of her obedient heart: Be it done to me according to your word. Did she understand what it all would mean? Could she comprehend the humiliation her pregnancy might bring to her, her family, and her intended husband Joseph? We have no way of knowing. But what we do know is that Mary was wise beyond her years, and was very knowledgeable about God, and his promises. In her song in verses 46–55 — known through history as her Magnificat — we see evidence of a mind that knew the deep things of God as well as a heart that trusted the God she knew. As the Christmas season swirls around it with all the cultural distractions and busy obligations, may our hearts retreat often to the God whose promises are real — and as Mary reminds us — the “Mighty One (who) has done great things” for us, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Prayer**

*O Lord, you who ordered all things at creation and have superintended all of history, I come to you now in awe of your plan whereby you sent your son to be born of a virgin, so that my sin might be forgiven. Lord, make my heart like Mary's so that, even when I don't see how obeying you can work for the best, I will submit my well-being to your sovereign will, and say — “be it done to me according to your word.” Help me, O Father, to trust you more completely, and to love you more sincerely, and to live for you more openly, that my life might become a channel of your grace this Christmas time, through Jesus Christ my Lord, Amen.*

## The Lord Has Come, Rejoice!

The Lord has come! My soul rejoice  
with those around, as with one voice  
we chorus with th' angelic sound  
that accompanied him from Heaven come down.

The Lord has come (my soul rejoice)  
to redeem those slain by Adam's choice.

The Lord has come! My heart in awe  
seems stilled by what the shepherds saw:  
The Babe, the Son, the Lamb, the King  
who came true life and light to bring.

The Lord has come (my heart's in awe)  
to free the slaves 'neath Moses' law.

The Lord has come! My ears can hear  
the melodies so sweet, so clear  
that adorn redemption's lyrics true,  
to gladden the heart, refresh, renew.

The Lord has come (my ears can hear)  
to release those bound by death's cold fear.

The Lord has come! My lips shall sing  
the matchless mercy of my king  
who came to us as Mary's child,  
flesh and bone, meek and mild

The Lord has come (my lips shall sing)  
to salve the pain of sin's sharp sting.

The Lord has come! My eyes with tears  
remember my sin, my wasted years  
when far away from the Shepherd's fold  
I selfishly frolicked, rebellious, bold.

The Lord has come (my eyes shed tears)  
and on me, in Him, no stain appears.

The Lord has come! Emmanuel!



THE PROMISE FULFILLED

The God of all, with man to dwell.  
Gone now all thought that I'm rejected  
whom love had long before elected.

The Lord has come, Emmanuel  
O Love that doeth all things well!  
The Lord has come! My friend, my friend  
His hold on us no lapse can rend.  
He came not only to begin  
new life in us, new hope within;

The Lord has come! My friend, my friend  
to present us faultless in the end.  
The Lord has come! Will my town see  
the Babe, the Christ now formed in me?  
Lord, use my Christmas by your grace  
to capture some of Adam's race.

The Lord has come! Let my town see  
that I am the child's eternally.  
So Christmas come, you season of light!  
Brighten our hearts, scatter the night!  
Let us on your joys now gaze  
and with your simplicity our hearts amaze.  
O Christmas come, you season of light  
and cause us in Jesus anew to delight.

## Week 3 | Day 2 | Luke 1:57–80

The birth of John to Elizabeth and Zacharias was, in a way, the first tangible installment on the Messianic promise. This one, born to a couple who had been unable to conceive, comes in fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy of a fore-runner. But, to his father, his presence signifies even more. The beautiful song of Zacharias, presented in verses 68–79 shows that John's father, this priest whose tongue had been silenced, had come to see what John's birth signified: The assurance that God's promise to send Messiah would shortly be fulfilled. Notice that Zacharias' prophecy thanks God, not for his son John, but for the coming redemption, which he speaks of as having already come. So certain is Zacharias that Messiah is near, and that redemption has come, that he speaks of it in the past tense. Notice as well that many of the Old Testament themes associated with God's promise to send a Savior are included in Zacharias' song: God has come to his people, and redemption has been accomplished; he has brought salvation through the house of David; he has demonstrated his mercy, and remembered his covenant (promise) to Abraham; he has brought forgiveness of sins, and guided his people into peace. All of these were promised in Messiah, and Zacharias now sees them with open eyes ... and describes them with a tongue now loosed in praise to his promise-keeping God.

### Prayer

*Lord, at this season of Christmas, fill me with the wonder of your great promise to send a Savior. All around me, I see promises made that later are broken; agreements and relationships seem to be less and less important in our world. And yet, Lord, your faithfulness shines like the sun, and you always show yourself to be worthy of my hope and my trust. O Father, thank you for the security I find in you, and thank you for being the rock on which I can stand, unmoved by the storms of this life, until that day when you send Jesus to us again, to deliver me once and for all from all that opposes you and afflicts your people. Until he comes, may my tongue be loosed to declare your faithfulness, and your glory. Keep me faithful I pray, until Jesus comes, Amen.*

**Week 3 | Day 3 | Matthew 1:18–25**

In this first chapter of his gospel, Matthew records the lineage of Joseph — followed immediately with a description of the events of Jesus' birth through Joseph's eyes. Even as the unexpected pregnancy had exposed Mary to public ridicule, it had great ramifications for Joseph as well. Certainly no man wants to discover that the woman who has promised herself to him as a wife is carrying a child not his own. As well, Joseph could have expected that he would become the focus of public disdain and even ridicule. The laws of the day were clear that infidelity during the betrothal period was an immediate grounds for the engagement to be broken. But Joseph demonstrated the heart of a righteous man, desiring to protect Mary from as much public pain as possible. To this righteous man, God sent his angelic messenger bearing news that certainly seemed impossible: The child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit! The very Spirit who hovered over the waters at creation (Gen. 1:2) was now part of the creative process whereby God's son was brought to Earth as a baby. But the news concerning the circumstances of Mary's pregnancy, as comforting as it must have been to Joseph, could not compare to the magnificent promise proclaimed by the angel: And he will save his people from their sins! At last, the "he" of Gen. 3:15 had come to address the chaos of sin and redeem creation from bondage to Satan. Matthew, writing to a Jewish audience, immediately reminds his readers that all this took place in order that the prophecy of Isaiah might be fulfilled. Once again, we see the sovereign and loving God faithfully superintending all things so that what he promised would be fulfilled.

**Prayer**

*Almighty God, you who made Heaven and Earth, and everything that is in them — when I reflect on the way you have ordered your world, and its history, so that all which you have promised, has happened . . . I realize just how great you are, and how insignificant I am in comparison. Lord, forgive me for doubting that you are in control, and for ever considering that I know better than you how to order my life and times. Father, give me an obedient heart like Mary's, and a trusting, and loving heart like Joseph's, so that this Christmas, I might celebrate more than just a season. Help me to celebrate a Savior — The Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.*

## Follow the Shepherds

They must have been stunned, those shepherds, that night.

They must have been awed by that glorious light  
of The Ancient of Days  
as through angels his praise  
was sent forth like rays  
from the sun on its flight.

They must have been shaken, by the message, those men,  
whose glorious meaning they did not comprehend

how God in his grace  
did descend to that place  
to save his whole race  
from their sorrow and sin.

They must have been stirred, those men, in their souls  
to taste of his holiness, as bright burning coals

did so fit their eyes  
and their frightening cries  
and their sorrowful sighs  
his praise to extol.

They must have been silent, as meekly they came  
to adore the child King, their love to proclaim

for the God born to men  
whose mind ever had been  
to atone for the sin  
for which they were to blame.

Then, we must come to, as humbly as they  
and we must come stirred, as they on that day

for God's interest is not  
found bartered nor bought  
but when he who has nought  
at Christ's feet he does lay.

## Week 3 | Day 4 | Luke 2:1–20

Perhaps no passage of Scripture brings more memories of Christmas celebration than this text from the pen of Luke. Children have memorized it for the Christmas program, preachers have read it over and over on Christmas Eve, and families have cherished it as part of their Christmas morning traditions. And, certainly in this case, familiarity breeds contentment. For there is something strangely comforting about this story. However, at first glance it doesn't make sense! The Son of God born in a place used to keep livestock? The King laid in a feeding trough? And where are all the dignitaries who ought to have welcomed the Promised One to the world? Since the beginning of time, God had been promising to send the One. The prophets had proclaimed him, the priests had taught of him, the people were awaiting him . . . so why such a humble, unceremonious, even humiliating entrance? And why the shepherds? Surely God could have let the important people, the religious elite, the leading citizens of Jerusalem and Bethlehem know so that the Child King could have been afforded the honor his birth so richly deserved! Why was the angelic choir sent to a group of men, who by virtue of their association with animals, were considered ceremoniously unclean, and largely unholy? Is something terribly wrong with this picture? No, something is terribly wrong with the way the sin-drenched world assess importance and power. This story is not comforting simply because the Christ has come and forgiveness with him. No, it is comforting because the way that he came, and the "who" chosen to welcome and extol him, reminds us that God's love is not only for the important, the high, the noble. Neither can his favor be purchased, or earned. Rather, the grace of God is for the lowly, the humble ... all those who understand their inherent weakness and inability, and come trusting only in Jesus, the Savior of the world.

### Prayer

*O wise and loving Father, I am amazed at the way you do things. I thank you Lord, that you are not influenced by what influences me; that you are not discouraged by what discourages me; and that you are always the same, no matter what circumstances and challenges surround you. Thank you Father for being infinitely trustworthy, and eternally available to all who call upon your name in humility and truth. I thank you that your grace is available to all regardless of social standing or talent. I thank you that your grace sought me out, and rescued me, and brought me to see that Jesus is not only the Savior of the world, but he is the One God promised, and sent to me! In his name I pray, Amen.*

**Week 3 | Day 5 | Luke 2:21–39**

When we read the story of Jesus's life and ministry it is immediately apparent that, despite his miracles, his healing power, his divine wisdom, and his amazing love, most who encountered him chose to reject him as Messiah. John, writing toward the end of the first century put it this way: "He came to his own, and those who were his own did not receive him." (John 1:11) Yet, God had preserved some in Israel who feared him, and obeyed him, and were confident that the promise he had made had been fulfilled in Jesus. Such a man was Simeon. Luke describes him as "righteous, and devout, and looking for the consolation of Israel." He understood the promise God had made and was diligently expecting its fulfillment. When Mary and Joseph took their baby to the Temple, as the law required, Simeon was there. The Holy Spirit directed him both to find the baby, and to recognize the amazing truth concerning him: My eyes have seen your salvation ... a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel." This man looked into the face of Mary's son, and saw salvation; he peered at the infant, and saw the infinite love of God; he held the child, and understood that the promise made in Eden, had been wondrously fulfilled in Jesus. It is always a great challenge to see these things in the signs and symbols of Christmas today. What do you see when you look at Jesus? Colored lights? Beautifully wrapped gifts? Delicious food and the warmth of family? Make it your aim this year to look and really see Jesus in them all. He is the light of the world, the greatest gift, the bread of life, and in him we are gloriously united with the family of God.

**Prayer**

*Gracious Father, I have seen your promise fulfilled in the face of our Lord Jesus. And yet, Lord, so often my eyes are distracted and I focus on that which is not a true reflection of Christ. O give me eyes like Simeon, to see in the person of the Christ child the salvation only you can grant, the consolation only you can bestow, and the communion and fellowship that only comes from participation in the Savior. Thank you, Lord, for this season of joy, and thank you for all that you have given me to enjoy — family, friends, and the traditions of Christmas. But mostly, thank you for Jesus, my Lord and God, Amen.*

## Christmas Eve | Matthew 2:1–23

The visit of the wise men — here called magi — came after the birth of Jesus, but before the family had decided to return home to Nazareth. By now Mary and Joseph were living in a house, perhaps waiting until the child and Mary were strong enough to withstand the journey north. Amazingly, these magi had begun following a new star, which had led them to Jerusalem. These men were the scientists, astronomers, and astrologists of their day. It was not unusual for them to attend the coronation of kings, or the birth celebrations of royalty. It was most probably the case that the star appeared to them long before Mary even conceived, for their journey took more than a year to complete. God had superintended even the stars to bring about his plan. When the magi found Jesus, they afforded him the respect and worship he deserved, and demonstrated the depth of their worship with gifts of expensive aloes and gold. It is not recorded how many magi visited Jesus; the tradition of three magi comes from the mention of three gifts. What is most important here is that we are treated to an incredible display of God's power and sovereign ability to bring about every detail of his plan. We have seen at every turn, that the Lord is in charge of his universe. What he wants to do, he does ... perfectly, and at the right time.

### Prayer

*Father, as I have read about these magi who went to great lengths to find Jesus, I thank you that you first determined to come to us. Lord, I understand that, unless you first loved me and reached out to me, I would not have come to love you, nor lived to prize your grace. But, Lord, thanks to your amazing love and mercy, you have come to me, and you have given me eyes to see you, and ears to hear your voice, and a heart that is now alive, and able to love you. Lord, grant me courage to seek your ways, to follow your truth, to give my life to be where Jesus is. Make me wise, and willing to worship and serve your Son, my Savior — Jesus Christ the Lord. In whose name I pray, Amen.*

## The Light of Lights

I wonder at times, when I see the lights —  
the colors, the bows, the gifts unending —  
if our eyes are blinded by the sights  
and kept from seeing all God's extending

to our world, our homes, our hearts,  
in the power and grace of a holy Son  
who, invading our darkness — our hidden parts  
brings with him a redemption won

on a cross that seems quite out of place  
amid the scenes so merry and bright,  
yet to which he turned his face,  
this royal child who, on that night

was borne from glorious Heaven above  
bringing new life to those below—  
to all who, attracted by his love  
are forgiven forever. And so

let us marvel at Christmas, and with great delight  
take in the lights, the gifts, the joy —  
for in them all, with faithful sight  
we shall see Mary's baby boy.



# THE PROMISE TODAY

## Christmas Day | John 1:1–18; 3:16

Some 60 years after Jesus' return to glory, the Apostle John encountered a great challenge. The Jewish ruling council had determined that Jews who counted themselves as Christians would no longer be welcomed at synagogues and Jewish festival celebrations. Many Jewish Christians — now 2nd generation, and never having seen Jesus — were choosing to return to Judaism rather than give up family and tradition. To this group, John addressed his gospel account. His one driving purpose was to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah of God, and that he alone was the means of salvation and forgiveness. To reject him was to miss God's only means of spiritual healing and life. John chose to present Jesus as the fulfillment of a grand Old Testament institution: The Tabernacle. When Adam and Eve sinned, the immediate consequence was that they no longer could live with God in their presence. They were sent away from the Garden, from the presence of the Lord. But God's desire was to dwell among his people. As the nation of Israel left Egypt for their journey to the Promised Land, God met them at Sinai where he gave them two kinds of instructions. First, he gave them his law to order their lives. Secondly, he gave them plans for a tent, a tabernacle, which became the symbolic dwelling place of God ... in the midst of his people. Yet, this building made with hands could not really house the almighty, and the people looked forward to the day when the almighty would live among his people. That is what John saw as fulfilled in Jesus: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Interestingly, the word John used for dwelt is the word "tabernacled." What was he saying? Only this: The creator of all things has become incarnate in flesh, in order to dwell among us. And lest any of his readers miss his point, John adds: "And we beheld his glory, as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth! In our Christmas celebration, let us not forget that our God has come to dwell with us. Emmanuel ... God with us!

### Prayer

*Father I thank you for taking the initiative in restoring my relationship with you. I know that, left to myself, I would never have found you. But you have found me, and you have loved me with an everlasting love, and your love has drawn me to you, and I rest in your faithfulness. O Lord, don't ever let me forget that your nearness is my good. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## The Day After Christmas | John 1:19–34

It is very telling that John's gospel begins with the birth of Jesus and moves on to tell the majesty of that Christ child. John's audience was facing a culture that was full of answers to the question: "Just who is this Jesus?" Some thought he was an enemy; some a good man; some thought he was a prophet, or even an Old Testament figure reborn. We face the same thing today — the 26th day of December — the day after Christmas. The wonder of Christmas will quickly fade beginning today, you watch. Already the shopping malls and retail outlets are moving from Christmas sales and decorations, to year-end liquidations. Jesus and the miracle of that night will be boxed up to be stored until next year. But it is today — while everyone else is moving on — that we must reaffirm our conviction that the incarnation of Christ stands as the centerpiece of our world view. We dare not put it on the shelf until next year. We must have a clear answer to the questions surrounding Jesus. John knew who he was, and what he came to do: Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! Truly Jesus is the gift that keeps on giving, for only his blood and righteousness can forgive sins, transform lives, and guarantee eternal life. And it is our privilege to deliver that present to our world, everyday.

### Prayer

*O loving Father, thank you for all the reflections of your glory that I have beheld during this Christmas season. I thank you for the music, and the scripture, and the children, and the gifts, and the lights, and all that makes these weeks monumental in our world. And Lord, while often I have been entranced by what our culture has done with Christmas, I thank you that this year the joy of Jesus has overwhelmed me and made my Christmas a pageant of praise to you. You are my God, and I am your child. That is the best gift ever, and I thank you for my life and my Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name I pray, Amen!*

## **Praise to Christ**

I greet Thee, who my sure Redeemer art,  
My only trust, and Savior of my heart!  
Who so much toil and woe  
And pain didst undergo  
For my poor, worthless sake;  
We pray Thee, from our hearts,  
All idle griefs and smarts  
And foolish cares to take.

Thou art the true and perfect gentleness,  
No harshness hast Thou, and no bitterness;  
Make us to taste and prove  
Make us to adore and love,  
The sweet grace found in Thee;  
With longings to abide  
Ever at Thy dear side,  
In Thy sweet unity.

Poor, banished exiles, wretched sons of Eve,  
Full of all sorrows, unto Thee we grieve;  
To Thee we bring our sighs,  
Our groanings, and our cries;  
Thy pity, Lord, we crave;  
We take the sinner's place,  
And pray Thee, of Thy grace,  
To pardon and to save.

JOHN CALVIN

## **Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of Heaven and Earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
and born of the virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended into hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended to 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 the life everlasting. Amen.

This creed is called the Apostles' Creed not because it was produced by the apostles themselves, but because it contains a brief summary of their teachings. It dates to the 4th century and has been described as setting forth the apostolic truth "in sublime simplicity, in unsurpassable brevity, in beautiful order, and with liturgical solemnity." It is provided here in order that you might join with the church of the ages in confessing belief in God and in the majesty of the incarnation.











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