

Advent 2018



“The days are coming,” declares the Lord,
“when I will fulfill the good promise I made to
the people of Israel and Judah. “In those days
and at that time I will make a righteous branch
sprout from David’s line; he will do what is
just and right in the land. In those days Judah
will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safe-
ty. This is the name by which it will be called:
The Lord Our Righteous Savior.”

Jeremiah 33: 14-16



Overview of Advent

Every year at Christmas we prepare our schedules, our homes, and our finances for the holiday season. We buy gifts, attend parties, bake cookies, and make family plans. Advent is our opportunity to prepare our heart, mind, and spirit for the coming of the newborn King. Advent gives us space to pause and remember the promises God made through the prophets, and the fulfillment of His promise found in the manger.

Rather than just being rituals or traditions, Advent stirs within us eager expectation as we wait and prepare to receive Jesus, who came to bring life to the dark and broken places of our lives. We remember God's generosity in giving His only Son so we could be rescued. Advent also focuses our heart on the hope that Christ will come again as we live now in the waiting for His second coming.

Scripture is full of verses which urge us to remember what God has done by pausing our full and ever-busy lives to sit before Him with grateful hearts. Our hope for your family this Advent is that, instead of feeling busy and overwhelmed, you would be filled with God's promises and rejoice that He has fulfilled those promises in Jesus.

HOW TO USE THIS ADVENT BOOK

This guide includes five weeks of material. There is a devotional for you, as parents, to do on your own, and a weekly family plan to help you focus on the Advent themes with your kids.

We encourage you to read through the Family Activities sections ahead of time so you can gather any supplies you'll need. Our goal in creating this resource is for it to require little prep time. However, we have included a craft option each week if you'd like to do one. The activities are geared toward preschool and elementary kids, but are not limited to those age groups.

During your family time, we suggest you read through the family devotional and then do your Family Activity - which you have chosen ahead of time - together as a family.

Advent begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas - this year on December 2. There is a special family devotional for Christmas, and a section for the week following Christmas.

OPTIONAL ADVENT WREATH

This popular tradition comes from Scriptures that teach us that Jesus is the Light of the World (Matt. 4:16; John 1:4-9, 8:12). There are five candles, one to represent each week/theme of Advent and a fifth candle, called the Christ candle, that is lit on Christmas Eve to represent Jesus' first coming.

If you choose to do the Advent Wreath, put it in a prominent spot in your home so your children are reminded of the purpose of Advent all month long.

A FEW TIPS TO HELP YOU SUCCEED

- Choose a day of the week for your Family Advent and mark it on your family calendar now (before things get too busy!).
- The Reflect section of the Family Advent is meant to be a conversation starter for your family. As you talk and ask questions it will naturally provide great opportunities for teaching as you discuss!
- Read through the Family Activity section for each week to gather any supplies you will need. Don't be afraid to think outside the box! Maybe your family will want to come up with your own ideas of how to live out the Advent theme of the week.
- Check out our Pinterest page  www.pinterest.com/wccwk for ideas on how to create an Advent Wreath or several of the activities listed in the Family Activity sections.
- In the Family section, we use excerpts from the Jesus Storybook Bible. If you have this Bible at home we'd encourage you to read the whole story, but it isn't necessary for the Family Time. We also have videos of each of the Bible stories from the Jesus Storybook Bible linked on our Pinterest page.

WEEK 1

Magi

DECEMBER 2 - 8

December 2

THE MAGI

by Jon Furman

Lead Pastor at Beaverton Christian Church



*I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel...
Numbers 24:17*

For over a thousand years the people of Israel read from the book of Numbers and pondered the mystery contained in Chapter 24. The prophet Balaam had seen a vision of a coming ruler, but the day of his royal arrival was distant. It makes me wonder, "How deeply do we investigate what we wonder about today? How far are we willing to travel to experience the transcendent? How much would we be willing to give to discover the truth?"

Two thousand years ago there was a group of people living in the Middle East who made it their life's work to search out secrets and map out mysteries. They were called Magi, and their position within their own culture was that of counselor, researcher, and observational scientist. As Merlin was to Arthur, so were the Magi to the kings of their day.

The Gospel of Matthew reveals that when a "wandering star" appeared in their night sky that mystery sent them to the Hebrew scriptures. There they pieced together the clues, dropped everything, and set out to find Jesus.

Those Scriptures gave a new clarity to their knowledge and a new purpose for their lives – it transformed their understanding of their place and their season. This is something we still experience today, if we are also willing to "sell out" in pursuit of the Jesus mystery.

The research and sacrifice the journey demanded meant setting aside time and spending significant resources in order to pursue the experience of being in His presence. They were willing to go any distance and pay whatever price in order to pursue the most important person.

This means that whatever anyone else expected of them that first Christmas season went on hold in order to pursue something better. People probably expected they'd be around in order to answer their questions. People probably expected they'd spend their wealth in town to stimulate the economy. There were soldiers, servants, and other dependents who wanted to spend those trekking months on their own aspirations. The Magi were willing to make those sacrifices and confound expectations, and to reorder their worlds. They were desperate to experience the transcendent wonder of Christ during that first Advent.

So let's ask ourselves again, this Christmas, how deeply do we investigate what we wonder about today? How far are we willing to travel to experience the transcendent? How much would we be willing to give to discover the truth?

Father, give us the insight to apply our knowledge to the pursuit of Jesus this Advent season. Jesus, please send us courage by the Holy Spirit to serve Your expectations only. Spirit, please fill us with the wonder and joy that comes from being in presence of God this Christmas.

December 3

THE MAGI

by Chris Davis

Founding Member of Hope City Church



After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.
Matthew 2: 9-11

Myrrh? Whaaat??

Can't I give gold? Or silver even? I'll bring silver...

BUT MYRRH?!?

God, if I could declare His majesty with gold! His deity with frankincense! But His death?? Lord, He was practically just born and now I am prophesying HIS DEATH?... again?... with myrrh?

But then again it has been said before, many times. Even before the foundation of the world this was Your plan; for Him - and for me...

FUR!!!

That's what You said! It makes so much more sense!!... NO? Not fur? Still myrrh?

But isn't there another way? Does He truly have to give His life to save our nation? Our world? But God, what a beautiful plan it is, woven through with Your love, mercy, and acceptance of us. God, I'll do anything to be a part of that plan. Even if it's the hard part; even if it's the myrrh.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How has God called each of you to fit into His plan?
- What is a practical step you can take to begin living out your role this week?

Lord, I accept my role in Your plan. I am simply overwhelmed that You would choose me to live out Your love in this world. Though a small part I may play, it's worth my whole life to play it. Thank You.

December 4

THE MAGI

by Angie Rettmann

Director of Family Ministry at Willamette Christian Church



Read Matthew 2:1-12

I love to imagine the journey the Magi took to visit the newborn King. Scripture says they traveled quite a distance to visit Jesus. Their gifts were intentional: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold is a precious metal still used today for valuable jewelry, decorating our fingers, ears, necks and wrists. Frankincense is burned as incense, meant to fill the air with a sweet aroma. Myrrh, also a type of incense, is used for medicinal purposes as well.

Collectively, they travel to visit Jesus and worship Him. Individually, they offer Him gifts of value, specific and timely. Each gift speaks to their wise understanding of who He was and why He came. Typically, when a baby arrives we buy gifts that are practical and temporary. Diapers, pacifiers, blankets, clothing that fits them for a short time, cribs they will sleep in for just a year or two. These gifts are necessary for a season, while the gifts of the Magi serve a different purpose altogether. They are extravagant; they communicate value and worth. It says in Scripture when the Kings arrived they bowed down and worshiped Jesus before presenting their gifts.

When I present gifts to loved ones, my desire is to delight and surprise them. Sometimes it's hard to find the perfect gift and more times than not I find myself wanting to give a gift that is lasting, one that reflects the value of the person I am gifting. Shopping through stores fails to satisfy my desire for something meaningful. In recent years, I have taken more time to consider the person I am gifting; who they are, how they live, what kind of impact they have on my life. I find myself writing a heartfelt card or meaningful letter that expresses my true feelings towards them. This gift of words communicates value and worth.

During the hustle and bustle of Christmas planning and preparations, consider the opportunity to offer in lieu of a gift a letter, an acronym of their name, or a specific word of affirmation. What value can you communicate through the old-fashioned art of card making? If we consider the gifts of the Magi, we can't help but see their intention was to highlight the recipient, focusing solely on His value and worth to them.

December 5

THE MAGI

by Tom Vice

Campus Pastor at Hope City Church



After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship Him."

Matthew 2:1-2

We have a couple of nativity sets. There's the nice vintage porcelain set that belongs to Mommy. I think baby Jesus is missing a leg in that one. Then there's the Playmobil set where you can take the beard from Joseph and put it on Mary - not that I'd ever do that. Between both sets, I think my son's favorite piece is the camel. Now, I'm no rancher, but at most stalls I expect the cows, sheep, and maybe even a donkey - but what stall has a camel? That feels like a surprise, but we all know where they come from - the Magi! I'm still waiting to break it to my kids that they weren't even there that night. When did they show up? We know it took them up to two years after Jesus was born. I'm sure Mary wasn't hanging around that stall for that long. Why does Matthew tell us this part of the story?

Here's a long answer. It begins with a God who has always been in pursuit of mankind. The big story of Scripture is one of a God who has given chase to a human race that has been running from Him since the very beginning. It is amazing how many stories of Scripture tell of God taking the initiative with man. All these stories have their foundation, their beginning, in Genesis. The very first account of God coming to the garden "in the cool of the evening" was after Adam and Eve had sinned. It's those famous words that have set everything in motion: *when they heard God walking in the garden they hid* (Genesis 3:8). It is there we witness how God will always respond to us and our brokenness - to our sin: He comes near. Always. In this story, even Magi (astrologers and astronomers) recognize God has come near and come to worship!

Advent reminds me that the initiative will always be with God. Some say this story is some sort of example of how mankind should come and search out God, bringing Him our gifts. The problem with that thinking is the Magi wouldn't even have known to come unless they had seen the star that the Creator of the stars had put in the sky. They wouldn't have known unless God had taken initiative to draw these men from so far away.

Advent is not about what I bring to the manger - it is an opportunity to respond. Sometimes I feel distant from God. Most of the time it is because I've yelled too much, said too much, or _____ too much. I don't know if my natural response is to always worship. My tendency is to cringe in fear and shame. This account of the Magi is what makes Advent so amazing and wonderful - God does something incredible to get mankind's attention. He takes the initiative, even with men who didn't attend church on Sunday mornings. Advent reminds me that He didn't come to crush evil and dispel darkness. No, Advent reminds me that He came to find us. He came to draw near to us. He came to call out to us. He came to say to each of our hearts, "Where are you?" He uses everything from stars in the East to roosters in a courtyard to get our attention.

I wonder, where are you this Advent? Are you with me, cringing in fear and shame? Are you struggling with doubt and disappointment? Are you full of pain and anger? How far are you from this baby being born? Advent reminds me that God can cause a star to rise and will wait for me to respond – even if it takes me nearly two years to get there. That's what makes the Magi so special. That's what makes a camel at a stall so incredible – it is proof that He hasn't given up on us. Advent is proof of His love for us. Advent is proof that He has come near.



“After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.”

Matthew 2:9-10



December 6

THE MAGI

by Dan Ferguson

Missions & Care Pastor at Beaverton Christian Church



Read Matthew 2:1-12

The story of the birth of Christ is good news. It was planned long ago by God, announced ahead of time years before it happened, and came as no surprise to many in the actual story. One such group was the Magi from the east. Tradition tells us the Magi, also referred to as the Wise Men, were a group of distinguished foreigners who visited Jesus after his birth, bearing gifts for the newborn child.

The gifts had meaning. Gold is the king of metals, a gift fit for the king of men. Frankincense is the gift for a priest, the one who would open the way for men to God. And finally, myrrh, the spice used to prepare a body for burial, a gift fit for the one who would die for men. These were the gifts of the Magi. Gifts, even at the cradle of Christ, that would testify of the newborn baby Jesus and His advent as the one True King, the perfect High Priest, and the Supreme Savior of men. This was the great expectation, not just for the Magi in that day, but for all mankind. Rejoice in wonder of God's faithfulness.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Why do you think God included the story of the Magi and the gifts they brought Jesus in the Advent account? How is that an encouragement to you?
- Which of the three gifts helps you better anticipate the Second Advent of Christ? Why?
- When you think about the gifts the Magi brought the baby Jesus, what gift(s) could you bring to Jesus this year as we look expectantly to the celebration of His birth?

December 7

THE MAGI - JOYFUL ANTICIPATION

by Brenda Houlihan

Community Life at Willamette Christian Church

Think of a time when you had to patiently wait for something or someone to arrive. Maybe you were going on a trip, someone was visiting, or you were expecting something to arrive in the mail. Waiting is hard - especially when we know what is coming is amazing. It's hard to sleep. It's hard to eat. It's hard to focus on anything, because all we think about is what is coming; we wait with anticipation, joyful anticipation.

Now, imagine that you are waiting for a sign, a simple signal in the stars, of someone's arrival. You don't know where or when - just that the Messiah, the King of Kings, is coming. Imagine the anticipation.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the One who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him."

Matthew 2:1-2

On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:9

These faithful men from the east, called Magi, anticipated the Messiah's birth and waited, joyfully anticipating the coming of the King and Savior. We don't know how many there were, where exactly they came from, their history and story, or the exact nature of their understanding of the coming King. All we know from Scripture is they waited faithfully and expectantly for a Savior-King and, at the first appearance of the star signifying His birth, left their homes and their country, and traveled from the east, potentially a great distance, in order to worship Him. Jesus was not born in a palace birthed by a queen; He was born in a humble manger surrounded by livestock, to a Jewish girl of little means. The circumstances of our Savior's birth are humble and these men were presumed wealthy based on the gifts they presented, yet they worshiped Christ and recognized Him as their King and Savior.

Did they know that Christ would reconcile all?

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

Ephesians 2:13-20

In Ephesians 2, Paul shares that Christ reconciled the division between Jew and Gentile, welcoming ALL to God's table. Christ changed everything. Is that what the Magi knew? Did they have all the details of what the Messiah would do? Or did they just know God had a plan, and that when the star appeared, they needed to obediently follow it?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- In what areas of your life do you have great expectations? Is there something or someone you have been waiting for?
- What does it look like to simply worship Him and the reconciliation that His birth, life, and death has provided?



“In coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”

Matthew 2:11



December 8

THE MAGI

by Denise Chapman

Childrens Director at Hope City Church



On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11

While I know history shows it probably didn't occur this way, I love the traditional take on this story. Three wise men ornately adorned, kneeling in a stable with gifts fit for a king. The juxtaposition of the stable smells, the animals, the noises, mud and straw with the elaborately dressed royalty. It's both beautiful and messy.

O'Henry's *The Gift of the Magi* tells the story of two newlyweds, Jim and Della. Because they have no money, they each sell their most prized possession to buy extravagant gifts for the other. Jim sells his watch to buy Della hair combs. Della sells her hair to buy Jim a new watch chain. The story is both poignant and wonderful. I love how it doesn't wrap up neat and tidy like a TV sitcom. In the end, the couple has fewer valuable materials than when they began. For what good is a watch chain without a watch? What good are hair combs without hair? But their material circumstances are overshadowed by the intangible sacrificial love for one another. Their story is both beautiful and messy.

Often things feel more messy than beautiful. Last year my family was supposed to go to the beach after Christmas. I had visions of a quaint cabin and long walks on the beach. Instead, we all got sick, it rained the entire time and the place smelled. But if I look just past the mess I can see the beauty. The sickness kept things low-key, with lots of lazy naps. The rain kept us inside playing board games together, and the smell... well, it just smelled. You see, finding the beauty isn't about ignoring or denying the mess (smell). The mess is still there. Sometimes you just have to hold your nose long enough to look up and realize the beauty around you in spite of the mess.

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

- Think back on a messy family holiday. Can you reframe anything in it as beautiful?

To End Week One

OPTIONAL ADVENT WREATH

Have one person in your family light the first candle on your advent wreath.

Have one person read the following Bible passages aloud:

All the stars and the mountains and ocean and galaxies and everything were nothing compared to how much God loved His children. He would move heaven and earth to be near them. Always. Whatever happened, whatever it cost Him, He would always love them. And so it was that the wonderful love story began...

Jesus Storybook Bible - "The Beginning: A Perfect Home"



This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.

1 John 4:9

REFLECT

God's great love for us begins with His creation. God made the world full of His beauty for us to enjoy and give Him praise. All the flowers, mountains, waterfalls and beaches hold no comparison to how much God loves us. While the Bible is a historical document, it is also a love story about a God who goes to great length to have relationship with His people. As we begin Advent and think about Jesus' birth, remember that God gave Jesus out of His great love for us. When life is hard and things don't go our way, we can take comfort knowing that God is with us and loves us. He made our world and everything in it and cares even more about each of us than all of creation.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What are some things you love that God created?
- What is something that you learned this week?
- What have you seen God do this week?

RESPOND / FAMILY ACTIVITY IDEAS

- Make an Advent wreath together. 
- Have a kid-friendly nativity set up in a prominent place in your house for your kids to play with throughout the Advent season.
- Make your own unique nativity scene - on the wall, with rocks, with peg people. 
- Bring out a wrapped gift for your kids to see and leave it in a visible spot this week. Remind your kids of the anticipation that builds as we wait for something special, just like God's people waited for Jesus to come. Open the gift together next week when you do your Advent time.

WEEK 2

Shepherds

DECEMBER 9 - 15

December 9

THE SHEPHERDS

by Carly Brauer

Outreach at Hope City Church



And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

Luke 2:8-10

Have you ever felt out of your league? You know, that uncomfortable ache in your gut where you simply feel like maybe you've been given a task that is just a bit "over your head?" A task that someone smarter, more talented should be fulfilling? Guess what?!? I am having those thoughts as I am writing this now.

However, we serve a God who reminds us that this is not how we were created to think of ourselves. As we look at the book of Luke, we see that our beautiful King Jesus reveals Himself, before any others, to shepherds. Simple outcasts who some may call ill-equipped are the chosen few whom the Savior of the world gifted with His presence.

Shepherds are a lot like some of us today. I think if we look at this group of people, entrusted to spread the news that the Savior had been born, we see some pretty incredible traits. We see servant leadership, dwelling in rough conditions while tending to their flocks, attending to the young and sick, defending them from prey, and searching them out when lost. Shepherds are far from kings, far from rich or the particularly gifted and were perhaps in "over their heads," but as the Scripture unfolds we see they were exactly who were needed and were perfectly designed for the task.

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

- How can you trust God's plan and let go of your own?
- How can you shepherd others - tend to, care for, support - in this season?
- Who comes into your heart and mind?

God, thank You for being the ultimate shepherd. Thank You for seeking us out, watching over us and guiding us throughout our lives. Lord, we ask that You place hope, courage and perseverance in our hearts as we continue to share the great news of the gospel.

December 10

THE SHEPHERDS

by BJ Quimba

Campus Pastor at Beaverton Christian Church



And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Luke 2:8-12

What do you think it felt like to be a shepherd in this story? A shepherd lived his life outdoors and was comfortable in his surroundings: with the sun and rain, the trees and streams, the grass and dirt. Their job was to watch over their animals, making sure they had enough to eat and protecting them from predators. Shepherds moved their flocks from time to time, but the scenery didn't change much.

Imagine that suddenly from the night sky appeared a sight more incredible than anything people today have ever seen in a movie! The Bible says they were terrified to see an angel light up the field with God's glory. I'm sure we would have been pretty scared, too! But the angel made sure to let them know everything was ok. Actually, everything was great! The shepherds stopped feeling scared, and were instead filled with joy and excitement!

Do you think that anybody from that time would have loved to experience what the shepherds experienced? A fisherman? An innkeeper? A teacher? A king? But God chose to share the good news about Jesus' birth to these shepherds first. What a special gift! People love sharing good news and bringing joy to others, and God wanted these shepherds to have that opportunity.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What did the angel say would bring “great joy” to everyone?
- Why do you think God chose to share the good news with a shepherd and not a king?

Dear God, thank You that You think we’re important. You don’t look at the stuff we have or the things we do. You made us, and that makes us important to You. You want us to have good lives and help others live good lives too. We know that the best thing in life You have given us is Jesus. Help us to share the good news about Jesus so that others can have the same joy that You’ve given us. Amen.

December 11

THE SHEPHERDS

by Jessica Chesbrough

Executive Assistant at Willamette Christian Church



But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

Luke 2:10

ASK EACH MEMBER OF THE FAMILY THESE QUESTIONS

- What is your favorite thing about the Christmas season?
- What is your favorite Christmas family tradition or event to do with other people at Christmas?

When the angels appeared before the shepherds to tell them about Jesus' birth, they said to them that they "bring you (the shepherds) good news that will cause great joy for all the people." The news of this new baby born wasn't just special for one mom and one dad who loved Him. This baby was different. This baby was God's chosen Son who came from heaven to earth to save His people. Who are His people? All of us! Jesus came for all people. It doesn't matter how smart you are, how much money you have, how old you are, what country you live in, or anything! Jesus came for all.

And yet Jesus also came individually for each of us. In the next verse, Luke 2:11, the angels tell the shepherds, "today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you." The shepherds weren't anyone special to the rest of their community. They weren't in charge and didn't make a lot of money, but God chose them to be the first ones to hear about Jesus. Why? Maybe because God wanted to make it known that everyone is special to God, no matter what other people think.

The Bible tells us that we are wonderfully made by God. Another time Jesus says that even the hairs on our head are numbered. Isn't that amazing? God loves you so much that He knows exactly how many hairs are on your head!

When you answered with your favorite part about Christmas, your favorite was probably different than other people in your family. That's because each of us is different, and God made you in your own special way. Jesus came to earth because He loves you and wants a relationship with you.

But Christmas is also for all of us. During Christmas we gather together to celebrate. Maybe you love baking cookies with friends or attending Christmas Eve services or a school music program. Jesus also came for everyone - all people! This season we get to tell others about God's amazing love that He would send Jesus to all of us.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What's something you can do to spend time with Jesus this Christmas season?
- What's something we can do as a family to share with others that Jesus came for all?

December 12

THE SHEPHERDS

by Halea Vice

Ministry Lead at Hope City Church

Whenever I reflect on the night of Christ's birth, I am reminded of how God demonstrates throughout Scripture His pattern of inviting people to be part of His miraculous story and to experience firsthand the fulfillment of His promises. As Mary and Joseph are enduring their experience of labor and childbirth, the angel of the Lord visits some shepherds so that they, too, would be able to experience firsthand the fulfillment of the Savior being sent to God's people. At first they were afraid; this reaction of fear was the common response seen throughout Scripture whenever God or His angels spoke to people. But after the angel reassured them not to be afraid, they were given good news, the message that would "bring great joy to all of God's people":



Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests."

Luke 2:11-14

Imagine how they must have been awestruck and in shock, assuring each other that what they had just witnessed and experienced wasn't a dream, but indeed real! Then look at their reaction, how they immediately set off to see firsthand what the Lord had told them about.



So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Luke 2:16-20

I can't help but ask, "Why?" Why would these shepherds, men without social rank or status (often described as social outcasts and outsiders) be the ones to bear witness and proclaim what God had done and was doing on that miraculous night? They were simply going about their nightly work routine of guarding sheep when God invited them, welcomed these that so many rejected, to experience God fulfilling His promise of sending a Savior, the Messiah, to His people, or indeed to the whole world! What an honor, what a privilege, given to shepherds.

This story encourages me as a follower of Christ because, in reality, my story is quite similar, minus the angels. I, too, was just a regular person, not from a religious or socially elite home, when God, out of His grace and mercy, chose to show up and reveal His Son, the Savior, the Messiah, to me. At first, I was afraid, until God's peace and love reassured me that I was safe and accepted by Him. Then, I got to hear and experience His good news, His peace, and His unfailing love. I, like the shepherds, was not looking for Him nor expecting Him to show up in my life. But once He did, I couldn't help but share my experience with others. The shepherds told their story of what happened that miraculous night, the people were astonished, and Mary, we are told, kept this story close to her heart. Then the shepherds went back to their flocks, but now, they were praising God for all they had heard and seen.

As we enter this Christmas season, it is easy to go through the motions or get distracted and busy with our daily life of tending to our flock, but let us take time to be reminded and to praise God for all we have heard, seen, and experienced as followers of Christ. Let us be reminded of the miracle that He is our Savior and has and will continue to fulfill His promises in our lives. May we share our stories and experiences with our children, with our families, and with our friends and loved ones. May we also pray for those who have not yet encountered Christ as Savior, as their Messiah, that they too may experience His peace, hear His good news, and respond to His love.

December 13

THE SHEPHERDS

by Cliff Reynolds

Care Pastor at Willamette Christian Church



And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."... So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Luke 2:8-12, 16-18

God speaks to us in everyday life. While we are going to school or playing with our family or friends, He gives us great news to share with others. The shepherds were watching the sheep in their care like they do every night. Nothing seemed unusual until God's angels showed up! They had incredible news for the whole world, and God chose the shepherds to hear it first. As soon as they heard the good news, they hurried off to tell others.

When God does something in your life, do you tell others? The shepherds might have been worried about how people would respond to their news, but they went anyway. And the people were amazed! I think people would be amazed to hear your story. The shepherds just told what they saw and heard. That is all God is wanting us to do - share what God is doing in our life. This season of Advent I encourage you to be like a shepherd. Tell someone about Jesus' birth. I think you will find that it will be an amazing experience.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Are you amazed that God speaks to us every day? What has He been telling you?
- Who are some people you know who haven't heard the good news about Jesus? What do you think will happen if you tell them?

Dear God, help us to be excited about what You are doing in our lives. Give us the wisdom and courage to tell others how much You love them. This Advent season help us to share the real reason we are celebrating Christmas - Jesus' birth! Amen.

December 14

THE SHEPHERDS

by Eric Thompson

Elder

"Peace on earth..."

You're sitting, watching over sheep that probably belong to someone else. As you try to stay awake at night and make sure no thieves or wolves come to disturb the sheep. Your mind is drifting. Up walks a man, or so you think. He begins to talk to you. You notice something powerful about him, and are drawn to listen carefully to his message. As he begins to speak, everything around him, and you and your workmates, is shining brightly. You've heard the Hebrew scriptures and realize this must be the "glory of the Lord", and this is a messenger of God. This is more than a little scary to you. It's not usual for everything to light up around you at night!

Thankfully, this messenger says "Fear not! I've brought you great news and it's for EVERYONE." You think, "Everyone? Like, you mean, even me? A shepherd?" Your heart is still pounding as he explains the Savior has been born and this is to bring peace and joy to all. "THE Savior?!" you think. The one we have been waiting for?

As though the brightness all around you wasn't enough, suddenly you notice many more people with him. They're all praising God together, saying peace has come to this earth and glory to God! As quickly as it began, they are gone. You and your friends waste no time, and hurry to see what these messengers told you about.

Look at all the amazing things Luke tells us God is up to!

First, He shows His glory. There are many instances throughout the Old Testament of the pattern of God displaying His "glory" and sending messengers (angels) to share his news. Jewish readers in Luke's day would have understood this, and understood Luke is showing us this news is so important that God Himself (by revealing the "glory of the Lord") is present for this amazing occasion.

Second, He reveals His glory to lowly shepherds. All throughout Scripture, God has shown a pattern of using the lowly and broken to restore and to show His love and greatness. Now, at the birth of Jesus, the "King of Kings" and "Lord of Lords", God sends His messengers and His glory to these shepherds.

Third, Luke makes sure we understand this baby is the One who can bring peace. Throughout Jesus' life we will see Him reaching out to the outcasts and marginalized. To the Jewish person of that day (and to us today) this fits the pattern of God proclaiming peace and justice to the orphan, the widow, and the refugee; the kind of peace that can only be realized when it's for everyone. When the angels say, "Peace on earth," people in Luke's day who understood Jewish Scripture would have known this means a complete restoration and reconciliation. All will be made right! Even today we await with great hope the day when Jesus completes this work.

As we remember the shepherds, the angels, and the arrival of our Savior, we remember the depth of His love for us and His signal that His peace was, is, and always will be for all who turn to Him. A peace which ignores our earthly status and comes first to the humble.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Have you ever felt "small" or unimportant? How did that feel? Why do you think God announced Jesus' birth to shepherds?
- Have you ever been given good news or had a fun announcement? How did it feel to share it? Did you want to keep it to yourself, or did you want to tell people?
- When we talk about peace, we often mean "no fighting." When God talks about peace, He means everything is made right for everyone. How is God's peace different from human peace?

December 15

THE SHEPHERDS

by Chrissy Davis

Students Team at Hope City Church



And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Luke 2:8-20

I love the way Sally Lloyd-Jones depicts this story in the Jesus Storybook Bible, from the perspective of a new daddy who just had his first baby boy, and wanted to tell the whole world about him and who he was going to be. Just imagine how you felt, Mom and Dad, when your first child was born. That is the very way God felt about Jesus. He sent a huge choir of angels to sing a welcome song. As Sally points out, God could have sent the angels to anyone, but chose to tell the lowly, overlooked shepherds in the field looking after the baby sheep. The shepherds, amazed and even a bit frightened by the huge army of light, the angels, rose up and left their field to go meet this amazing baby the angels had sung about. I wonder why God chose the

shepherds to be the first to meet baby Jesus, the Son of God and Hope of the World. Maybe God knew the shepherds who had been cast out and called names and viewed as unimportant needed that hope promised by the coming of Jesus so much. Maybe God knew how quickly these shepherds would welcome that hope and cling to it, the hope for a life they had not yet experienced, with the love and acceptance they might find in Jesus.

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

- What hope do you need to cling to that can only be found in Jesus, the hope of the world, the One who can give us a love and acceptance that no one else can?
- How can you as a family allow Jesus to enter in and breathe new hope and anticipation for all He has for you?

This season I pray that as you marvel at the wonder that Christmas brings, you will also marvel at Christ Jesus, who brings wonder and hope to all things, even after the tree is bare and the lights no longer glow. I pray you cling to hope and run to Jesus, just as the shepherds did on the day of Jesus' birth.

Lord, we pause to think of all the hope You have given us, the love and acceptance like no one else. Please help us to see the things we have let fade out of the light of Your hope. You restore relationships, You bring healing to our broken hearts, You show us comfort as we mourn, You bring peace to our minds, You silence lies about our worth and what makes us lovable. You know us and cherish us, just as You did Jesus that day He came to save the whole world. Amen.

To End Week Two

OPTIONAL ADVENT WREATH

Have one person in your family light last week's candle and this week's candle on your advent wreath.

Have one person read the following Bible passages aloud:



God's people cried out to God to rescue them. And God heard them. He remembered His promise to Abraham. He would look after His people. He would find a way to set them free.... God's people would always remember this great rescue and call it "Passover." But an even Greater Rescue was coming. Many years later, God was going to do it again. He was going to come down once more to rescue his people. Jesus Storybook Bible - "God to the Rescue!"

Jesus gave His life for our sins, just as God our Father planned, in order to rescue us from this evil world in which we live.

Galatians 1:4 (NLT)

REFLECT

When the Israelites (God's people) were in Egypt, they were slaves to the Egyptians. They were stuck, and needed hope that God would rescue them. God cared about their pain and struggles, and used Moses to set them free from slavery and bring them out of Egypt.

At Christmas, we get to celebrate that Jesus came to earth to be with us. But we also get to celebrate that Jesus came to earth so He could rescue us from being stuck in our sin. Even though we make bad choices sometimes, God doesn't hold it against us because Jesus died on the cross to save us from being stuck with the cost of our sin. God forgives us and loves us just as we are. He doesn't love us more when we are "being good" or "doing the right thing," and doesn't love us less when we make mistakes.

We can have hope knowing that God cares about our problems, too. Maybe you get angry and lose your temper sometimes, have said something you wish you hadn't, or got in trouble at school or at home for making poor choices. Ask God to help you not get stuck in your struggles. Ask God to show you how you can depend on Him to help you live more like Jesus with His help.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What are some things you get stuck in that you need Jesus to free you from?
- How could Jesus help you get "unstuck?"

RESPOND / FAMILY ACTIVITY IDEAS

- Play hide and seek and afterwards talk about how Jesus came seeking to save sinners.
- Have a candy cane hunt by hiding candy canes around the house, similar to an Easter egg hunt.
- Take a meal to someone who is lonely or in need to bring them hope this week.
- Share the Christmas spirit with others by going caroling at a retirement home with friends or people from your Home Community.

WEEK 3

Joseph

DECEMBER 16 - 22

December 16

JOSEPH

by Shari Swanson

Womens Community Director at Beaverton Christian Church

After Joseph learned Mary was to have a child before they were even married, he was going to quietly break the engagement. God, however, had other plans. He sent an angel to Joseph in a dream, telling him to still take Mary as his wife. The first words the angel speaks are 'do not be afraid.' Did you know those words appear over 300 times in the Bible? Here are just two examples:

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
Isaiah 41:10

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.
Joshua 1:9

There are so many things that can make us afraid, but no matter what, God gives us the same encouragement: Do not be afraid. Easier said than done if that's all you focus on in these verses.

What helps us to not be afraid is based on what God is going to do, not what we can do. He tells us we can be brave because He will strengthen us, He will hold us, He will go with us wherever we go. Wherever!

When you are at school and are afraid of that one child who always teases and threatens you, you can know you are not alone because God is there holding you, strengthening you, never leaving you. When a family member gets super sick and you are afraid of what's going to happen, you can know you are not alone because God is there holding you, strengthening you,

never leaving you. When you have a big project due that includes making a presentation in front of all your classmates, you can know you are not alone because God is there holding you, strengthening you, never leaving you.

Do the scary things magically go away? No, they don't. Think of Joseph. Once the angel came to him and told him to not be afraid, was Mary suddenly no longer pregnant? Nope. Still pregnant. But Joseph trusted God was speaking to him through the angel and, because it was God speaking, Joseph knew he did not need to be afraid.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What things are you afraid of?
- Share about a time God helped you to not be afraid.

RESPOND / FAMILY ACTIVITY

Choose either the verse from Isaiah or the one from Joshua, and do one or more of the following to help you memorize it:

- Use crayons, markers, and/or paint to write it out or draw a picture.
- Create hand motions to help you remember it.
- Create a rebus (a puzzle using words and numbers, sometimes called a pictogram puzzle. Rebus puzzles use pictures, symbols, and letters to represent a word or words.).
- Come up with your own idea.

Father, we thank You that You know we can easily become afraid, and so You tell us You'll be with us. Help us to always remember how faithful and trustworthy You are.

December 17

JOSEPH

by Zach Steele

Elementary Lead at Willamette Christian Church



Read Matthew 1:18-25

We all have plans and dreams for our lives. I wonder how Joseph thought his life would play out, what his expectations were. Joseph had a steady job as a carpenter, was respected in his community, was a man who followed God's law, and was engaged to marry a nice girl, Mary. I imagine he thought, "My life has been pretty ordinary up to this point, but soon I'll be married!" I'll bet Joseph looked forward to raising his family, teaching his kids how to make tables, chests, and other wooden things. "If I love God, work hard, and raise my family to do the same, I will have a full, satisfied life," thought Joseph. This is when his world started to change.

"Mary is pregnant?" Joseph wondered, "Where did this baby come from?" Imagine his shock and sadness as he pondered his next move. Because Joseph was a merciful man, he thought, "I will call off the marriage but not make a big deal. I care about Mary, and I don't want to embarrass her in front of everyone." Joseph wanted to show kindness to Mary and protect her, even though he was devastated. I imagine Joseph cried out to God, wondering what would happen to his life and his future. God brought him an incredible answer:



But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."

Matthew 1:20-21

What a crazy dream! An angel and a God-baby! Not only did an angel appear, but the angel brought huge news that changed everything for Joseph and the whole world. Do you know who your great, great, great, great, great, great (14 times) grandfather was? I don't, but Joseph did! His 14th great grandpa was King David. This was very important because hundreds of years earlier, God made a promise to his people that one of King David's sons would be king forever. Mary's baby was this special king. He was from God, and he was going to save all of us from our biggest problem: our broken relationship with God because of sin. This baby's name, Jesus, literally means, "God saves!"

Joseph knew what to do next: listen and obey. He took Mary to be his wife, and waited with great wonder and anticipation: "Who will this baby be?" In an instant, Joseph's ordinary life became incredible. Joseph expected he'd raise his kids to make tables; God knew Joseph would raise the most important person who ever lived. God spoke and Joseph obeyed. This choice changed the rest of his life!

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What dreams or expectations do you have for your life?
- If God were to ask you to do something crazy, what would you do, and why?
- How can you obey God this week?

God, thank You for Joseph's example of how to listen and obey. Christmas is an amazing reminder that Your plans are greater than we could ever expect or imagine. Help us to be courageous as we learn what You ask us to do, and do it! Thank You for sending us Jesus and for adopting us as Your children. Thank You for inviting us to be a part of Your story!

December 18

JOSEPH

by Marty Miranda

Students Pastor at Beaverton Christian Church

Have you ever received a gift for Christmas that you didn't want? One Christmas morning, as my family sat around the tree, passing out the gifts to open one at a time, a present was handed to me in a big rectangular box with gold, gleaming wrapping paper. I was certain the box contained something incredible, so I tore into the wrapping paper with ferocious excitement, and opened the box only to find... wait for it... socks. Now, I was fairly certain that socks were for kids on the naughty list, but I had been super good that year. I felt deceived. I knew in that moment that the correct response was to say thank you and to be grateful, but from deep within me, the words came out... I couldn't help it: "SOCKS? YOU GOT ME SOCKS? I HATE SOCKS!" My mom's jaw dropped, and my dad gave me that stern look I only got when I knew I crossed the line. But I couldn't help it. The gift wasn't what I wanted.

When Jesus came from heaven to earth to seek and to save the lost, not every heart was ready to receive him. To many people, Jesus wasn't who they wanted, and wasn't what they expected. In Matthew 1:18, we read about a man named Joseph, who was engaged to a woman named Mary. Joseph didn't know it, but God had a very special gift He wanted to give the entire world through Joseph and Mary. But Joseph didn't understand or want the gift at first. Let's read the story:



This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

Matthew 1:18-19

At first, this gift of Jesus that God wanted to give the world seemed like an inconvenience to Joseph, and he didn't want it! But look what God said to Joseph in the next few verses:



But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel", which means "God with us".

Matthew 1:20-23

Joseph realized Jesus was the best gift of all, because He came to save His people from their sin, and to be with us forever.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Talk about a time you received a gift you didn't want. What was the gift, and how did you respond?
- Why is Jesus the greatest gift we could ever receive?
- What's one way you can share the gift of Jesus with other people this week?

December 19

JOSEPH

by Jenn Becker

Home Communities Coordinator at Willamette Christian Church



This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

Matthew 1:18-19

Each December I try to put myself in Joseph's shoes. The few verses that tell us about him provide just enough information for me to imagine the mental and emotional roller coaster he rode in a very short amount of time.

I imagine Joseph, like most stand-up Jewish men, had some basic life expectations. He'd earn a living working with his hands, soon he'd marry a kind, God-fearing Jewish virgin named Mary, and they both looked forward to raising children in God's ways. Perhaps he even had dreams of teaching them to be proud that the Messiah was to come from their very own bloodline... someday.

We aren't told the details of the day that Joseph's expectations were drastically altered. We don't know who told him that Mary was with child. We don't know his knee-jerk response to her belief that she carried the long-awaited Messiah. All we know is that Joseph had just and righteous character, and he was prepared to remove himself from "the situation" quietly for Mary's sake.

I wonder if he was angry. I wonder if he was hurt, or felt betrayed. I wonder if he asked, "Where are you in this, God?", "What do I do, Lord?" or "God, why did you let this happen?" I wonder how many times he thought, "This is crazy! Is Mary crazy?" I wonder if, in the very depth of his being, he heard a whisper of truth. Was his spirit connecting to the ancient plan? Did he have that gnawing feeling telling him to pay attention and look beyond the surface? Perhaps, "what if Mary's words are true?" was the thought that kept Joseph restless that night.



But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Matthew 1:20-23

One day all of Joseph's life seems straightforward, each goal and plan lined up neatly. The next, his fiancé is scandalously pregnant with the Messiah, causing all plans, ideas and expectations to be shattered. Soon after, a celestial being makes its undeniable way into his dreams and tells him that he, the steady, calloused carpenter, has been chosen to watch over the Savior of the world. Can you imagine Joseph coming to the realization that the culmination of all of the family stories, history, and promises of faith were being placed under his care? How could he have ever dared to expect this? We will never fully know how Joseph processed the incredible events that came his way. But we do know how he responded to them.



"When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus."

Matthew 1:24-25

Once Joseph left his bed that day he obediently became the protector of the Christ child. Not once, but throughout Jesus' childhood, Joseph responded with obedience. He continued to shift his plans and expectations to something far beyond what he ever imagined. What a wild ride. What appeared to be the worst and most scandalous of circumstance was in fact the fulfillment to the greatest expectations of all.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Remember a time in your life when expectations were interrupted by chaotic or unbelievable circumstances. How did God use those circumstances in your life to bring about something far beyond your expectations?
- What is something God is asking you to do in response to a current situation? What expectations is He asking you to exchange for His?



“Cast all your anxiety on Him
because He cares for you.”

1 Peter 5:7



December 20

JOSEPH

by Brandon Reynolds

Community Life Pastor at Willamette Christian Church

Do you ever think about how Joseph had the opportunity to hold and care for baby Jesus? How unique and special it is that a parent gets to care for their child. That is why God sent Jesus - through Jesus, God is able to care for all of our needs. There are few times in a parent's life when they feel they truly get to hold their child. I will never forget the moments of holding my four kids.

When we think of the Christmas story, Mary and Joseph, the barn and the hay, have we ever seen Joseph actually holding baby Jesus? Jesus is always in the manger. But I am sure Joseph got to hold baby Jesus. When you hold your child, you feel you need to provide for them, guide them, protect them. God does all of that for us.



Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.

1 Peter 5:7

The Christmas season is all about receiving the gift God has given the world, and as we unpack God's gift to us, at the heart of it we see His deep desire to care for us in all the ways we need to be cared for. As you see all of the lights on houses and ornaments on trees, and eat all of the cookies and extra desserts, it is all a big celebration that our Heavenly Father cares for us.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How are you letting God hold you?
- Who, this Christmas season, needs your support and care?

RESPOND / FAMILY ACTIVITY

Parents, share first with your children what you are anxious or nervous about, and how you hope God will take care of it. Then ask your child the same, and spend a few minutes praying for those things.

December 21

JOSEPH

by Alyssa Tischler

Preschool Lead at Beaverton Christian Church

"He's a chip off the old block."

"No wonder she's so talented; you know who her parents are!"

"It's in his blood."

"She was born singing, just like her mom."

We all have things in common with our parents: a favorite type of pizza, the same snort when you laugh really hard, a similar eye color. Father and son are both excellent cooks. Mother and daughter are math fiends! The things we share with our family members are unique - a special God-given bond. Those traits can be passed down from generation to generation, perhaps even through 14 generations. Matthew 1:1-17 shows us exactly that. All 14 generations leading to Joseph, the father of Jesus.

Abraham, Isaac, Solomon, Rahab, Boaz, Ruth, even King David were all part of Joseph's family tree. David, Joseph's great great great great GREAT grandfather, is an especially important part of his story. Yes, King David, the very same David who battled the giant Goliath when he was a boy! To say David was brave and courageous is an understatement! He trusted in God to give him the strength and means to protect the Israelites when no one else could. He didn't run away from being used by the Lord for something more. He gathered five stones, made himself a slingshot, and held his head up high.



David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied."

1 Samuel 17:45

David was courageous, and Joseph certainly took after his grandfather.

Mary and Joseph were engaged to be married, ready to start a life together. All of a sudden Mary became pregnant and Joseph didn't know what to think or do. Leaving Mary quietly was the safe and easy answer, and that's almost what Joseph did, until God called him to something more.



But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."

Matthew 1:20-21

A dream with an angel of the Lord telling Joseph exactly what to do! Would Joseph take the easy way out by ignoring what God said, or would he be courageous and brave by trusting in the Lord?



When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a Son. And he gave Him the name Jesus.

Matthew 1:24-25

Joseph was courageous. Choosing to be brave and trust in the Lord, just as his great grandfather had - it was in his blood. Because of their bravery, the greatest gift of all came into the world, to share the same courage as the Savior of the world - baby Jesus was born.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Can you think of any traits you share with your family members?
- How has God helped you use those traits for His greater good?
- Can you think of a time when you needed God-given courage? Is there anything you'd do differently next time?

Lord Jesus, thank You for our family and all the special things we share. Please help us to know what You want for us, and to be brave like Joseph and David to do Your will. Thank You for giving us baby Jesus on that first Christmas day, and help us to focus on Him this Christmas time. Let us not be distracted, but to focus and be expectant for Your hand in our lives.

December 22

JOSEPH - A "SUPERHERO" FOR GOD

by Laurie Hatch

Guest Services at Willamette Christian Church

Who likes superheroes, the characters in comic books or movies who fight the bad guys and do what's right? The heroes with their superpowers who can fly, leap tall buildings in a single bound, swing from a spider web, have x-ray vision, and have a magic shield to protect them, or the heroes who swoop in with their capes flying behind them to rescue the damsel in distress. These heroes are famous and loved by people, because they do what's right, care about people, and save them.

Have you ever thought of Joseph as a superhero? It doesn't seem likely, because not much is said about Joseph in the Christmas story. He isn't really famous. Joseph doesn't wear a cape or have a superpower. He wears a robe, and his only superpower is that he is a good carpenter - or is it? He may not have a superpower, but he does what's right, cares about Mary, and is obedient to God. Couldn't those be superpowers?

Let's look at the story in Matthew 1:18-21:

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save his people from their sins."

Matthew 1:18-21

So Mary, Joseph's fiancée, was with child before she and Joseph were married. Joseph had every right to leave her. He could save himself from the shame and embarrassment. In those times, Mary would have been an outcast for this. She could have been stoned and possibly die. But Joseph loved Mary and cared deeply for her safety, so he showed super strength of character and power and stayed with her.

While Joseph was deciding what to do, an angel of the Lord came to Joseph in a dream and told him to stay with Mary and not to be afraid to marry her, because their son, Jesus, would save the people from their sins. So Joseph obeyed God, and again showed his "super" power to do what is right. By following God's wishes, Joseph helped fulfill God's plan of giving birth to Jesus, His son, who would save the world from sin.

Joseph obeyed God, protected and loved Mary, and raised Jesus as his own so He could save the world. Sounds like a superhero to me.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How could you be a hero for God?
- What superpowers do you have? How can you use them to help others?
- What other superheros do you see in the story of the birth of Christ?

To End Week Three

OPTIONAL ADVENT WREATH

Have one person in your family light the candles from the last two weeks and this week's candle on your advent wreath.

Have one person read the following Bible passages aloud:



You've been stumbling around, like people in a dark room. But into the darkness, a bright Light will shine! It will chase away all the shadows, like sunshine. A little baby will be born. A Royal Son. His mommy will be a young girl who doesn't have a husband. His name will be Emmanuel, which means "God has come to live with us." He is one of King David's children's children's children. The Prince of Peace.
Jesus Storybook Bible - "No More Tears"

*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

John 14:27

REFLECT

A long time before Jesus was born, there was a man named Isaiah. He told the people what God wanted them to know. He prophesied (told) of the coming of Jesus a long time before Jesus was even born. This week, we celebrate that what Isaiah said really happened! Isaiah called Jesus the Prince of Peace. As we get closer to Christmas, let's pause and remember those in our family, city, or world who need to know or be reminded of the peace Jesus offers us.

Isn't it inspiring to hear stories about people who bring peace? People who give up money to sponsor a child or donate their birthday gifts to children in the hospital, or groups of people that build houses and clean schools. These people bring light into a dark world.

We can be peacemakers every day through the choices we make. Maybe it's how you treat a friend at school, how you share with your brothers or sisters, or how you say hello to the person bagging your food at the grocery store. God's light will shine through you when you bring peace in what you say and do.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Share about someone that has inspired you by the ways they brought peace to others.
- Read Matthew 6:3-4 as a family and brainstorm answers to this question, "How can we be peacemakers and offer God's peace to those in need?"

RESPOND / FAMILY ACTIVITY IDEAS

- Do acts of kindness - pay for someone else's coffee, go to the store and put shopping carts away, do yard work for a neighbor, donate new or gently-used toys or clothes, take treats to the police station/fire station/hospital, etc...
- White crayon activity - give your kids a piece of white paper and a white crayon. Explain that they can create a secret message, special drawing, or anything they'd like! After they are finished, give them watercolor paints to paint over their white paper. The white crayon will come through the paint. Remind your kids that just like the crayon can be seen through the paint, God's light shines through them when they are peacemakers.
- Write thank you cards to people you know who are peacemakers. Have your kids write the message, or draw pictures or add stickers to the cards if they are too young to write.

WEEK 4

Mary

DECEMBER 23 - 24

December 23

MARY

by Shelli Gravdahl

Childrens Director at Beaverton Christian Church

In Luke 1:26-38, Luke tells us that God sent the angel Gabriel to tell Mary she would have a son, and He would be called Jesus. Can you imagine how Mary must have felt? She was not married, and had no relations with any man. She must have been overwhelmed. The Bible says "troubled," but Mary trusted God, answering Gabriel, "I am the Lord's servant, may Your word to me be fulfilled." Wow! How strong Mary's faith was! Luke tells us in Luke 1:39-45, that Mary hurried to see her cousin Elizabeth, where we hear Mary's response to Elizabeth's acknowledgment of Mary's pregnancy. It has been called "Mary's Song."



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

Luke 1:46-55

Mary is blessed, not because of who she is, but because God chose her as the mother of Jesus, to bear and raise Him. Mary also knew that this would be a fulfillment of God's covenant. What a humbling experience that would be for Mary. Knowing these things, I have to wonder what it would be like to be Jesus' mother. To know that the Creator of all things would come to earth as her son, to be held, and raised by her, a young Jewish woman, a commoner without nobility, knowing that the story wasn't about her, it was about Jesus. This passage was truly Jesus' song, sung by his mother, Mary.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Does this passage give you new insights into God's choosing of Mary to be Jesus' mother? Mary was a humble servant of God and a dedicated student of the law. She understood what prophecy was being fulfilled by the coming of Jesus.
- How do you respond to God calling you? Would you be willing to be like Mary and answer, "I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled?"

December 24

MARY

by Ginger McHenry

Womens Community Director at Willamette Christian Church

When I think of Mary, I think of faith and surrender. Ridiculous faith. Radical surrender.

A young woman, in a small village, visited by God's messenger angel, whose life was upended.



But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; His kingdom will never end."

Luke 1:30-33

Son of the Most High, the throne of His ancestor David, His Kingdom will never end, Son of God... those were all Messiah cues to Mary's Jewish ears. Those words held great weight and anticipation for her.

Nevertheless, her response to this news never fails to confound me.

"I am the Lord's servant. May Your word to me be fulfilled." Yes. I will. May everything You've said about me come true. Yes, with very limited information. Yes, with only a fraction of understanding. Yes, without knowing exactly how it will alter my dreams, my future, my family. Just, yes. My life is Yours, Lord. So, yes.

I don't think these were the plans Mary had for her life. She probably didn't expect to give birth in a stable, to be visited by angels and shepherds, to flee for her life, to host Magi, to raise God in the flesh, to give up her son to the needy sin-soaked world, to weep at her son's crucifixion, to worship a resurrected Savior. But she did expect to live a life that did not belong to her. It was for someone else, for this Son, for her God.

Ridiculous faith. Radical surrender. Yes, Lord. May Your word to me be fulfilled.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What expectations am I carrying into this season that the Lord might be asking me to release?
- What would it look like for me to live a "May Your word to me be fulfilled" kind of life, with radical faith and ridiculous surrender? How would my Christmas celebration look different?

To End Week Four

OPTIONAL ADVENT WREATH

Have one person in your family light all of the candles on your advent wreath.

Have one person read the following Bible passages aloud:



And there, in the stable, amongst the chickens and the donkeys and the cows, in the quiet of the night, God gave the world His wonderful gift. The baby that would change the world was born. His baby Son.

Jesus Storybook Bible - He's Here!

Everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Luke 2:3-7

REFLECT

It's here! The moment all of Advent has been building toward – the birth of Jesus – has finally arrived! Tomorrow is Christmas day, and your family will open presents, eat a meal together, and celebrate your traditions. As you open presents and watch family members open the presents you chose for them, remember that God has given each of us the greatest present. We have hope, joy, comfort, peace and love because God came down to earth and became human just like you and I. Jesus lived a perfect life and understood our pain and struggles, and then gave up His life for us when He died on the cross. And if that wasn't enough! Jesus rose again three days later and lives, inviting each of us to know Him and have a relationship with Him.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What is something you've enjoyed this Christmas season?
- Give word gifts to each other - have each person share something they love about the other people in your family.

No Family Activity ideas for today – enjoy Christmas Eve with your family!

Christmas Day

THE NATIVITY REVISITED

by Kellie La Follette

Womens Community at Willamette Christian Church



Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:9-11

After a tour of the Holy Land in 1223 AD, Francis of Assisi returned home to Greccio, Italy. He was so inspired from the visit he set up the first known nativity scene on Christmas Eve that year. Saint Francis recreated the original nativity scene in a cavern, with a wax figure of infant Jesus. Costumed people played the parts of Mary and Joseph, and a live donkey and ox were there on loan. Local shepherds took part by watching over their sheep in nearby fields. Magi were not mentioned as part of his display. From that Christmas Eve night, the popularity of a nativity scene spread to every church in Italy and to the homes of believers around the world, including ours.

When my mom was a little girl, she painted a ceramic nativity set. Each year as December approached, our hearts sparkled with excitement as we brought that same nativity set down from the attic and unwrapped each piece with care. However, this special tradition often included a twist of mischief. In my mind, there is "a correct way" to arrange the nativity. The sheep and shepherds go on the right while the kings and camels go on the left. Everyone knows it is "supposed" to be that way. Right?

My little brother took considerable delight in moving a shepherd and placing it over on the kings' side, or any of several other sorts of switches. Then he would watch from around the corner to see how long it would take me to notice. Sometimes he even placed a camel or sheep in the stable where the donkey goes. Can you imagine? Many years have passed since those days. Now during our family Christmas gatherings, you can hear this story retold with lots of laughter and embellishment as we remember how my brother would send this tradition - revering girl's head spinning. But now I'm wondering if my brother may have been on to something, and whether we all may need to reconsider our portrayal of the nativity scene. Maybe the Magi and camels shouldn't kneel on the left side after all.

If we wish to depict the real nativity scene, the three Magi that I insisted must be on the left were not present for the birth of Jesus. Scholars believe their long journey had them arriving up to two years later. It is possible that Jesus could have been a toddler in His childhood home in Nazareth when they arrived. If that doesn't have you thinking enough, the Bible also doesn't specify how many Magi came. It may not have been three. (Matthew 2:1-12)

So, if we set up our nativity in a cavern and provide extended time for an unknown number of Magi to arrive, who should go on the left side of our display? I'm wondering if we should have figures made to represent Simeon and Anna.

Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple to present Him to the Lord, according to the laws of Moses. When they arrived, Simeon and Anna were among the first to see baby Jesus. Instantly, they recognized Him as the Messiah. Simeon took Jesus into his own arms and blessed God, and blessed Mary and Joseph, too. Anna, who had been praying and fasting for 84 years, broke into an anthem of praise to God. They joyfully shared with everyone the Old Testament prophecies Jesus' birth fulfilled. For decades Simeon and Anna prayed for the Messiah to come. Now He was right before them. God had answered their prayers. (Luke 2: 22-40)

Maybe we should expand our nativity scene to include a temple where Simeon and Anna could join in blessing and celebrating Jesus' birth. Perhaps the traveling Magi should be displayed across the room to show they were on the way.

One Christmas, a five-year-old came for a visit. She asked for permission to touch the nativity, and then rearranged everything. I watched, biting my tongue and trying to restrain my "type A" tendencies. Her first step was to place baby Jesus into an open space. She continued to arrange all the rest: Mary, Joseph, the Angel of the Lord, kings, shepherds, camels, sheep and the donkey in a circle around baby Jesus. When she finished, I asked her why she had arranged the figures that way. She replied like I should have already known, "That way everyone can see and be close to Jesus." We can learn so much from the wisdom of children. Of course everyone wants to see and be near Jesus!

Hundreds upon hundreds of years of tradition, and this sweet child may have captured the true essence of the nativity for the first time since Saint Francis. The nativity is a tool to help us remember that Jesus came so everyone could see and be close to God.

How will you arrange your nativity this year?



“If we condense all the truths of Christmas into only three words, these would be the words: ‘God with us.’ We tend to focus our attention at Christmas on the infancy of Christ. The greater truth of the holiday is His deity. More astonishing than a baby in the manger is the truth that this promised baby is the Omnipotent Creator of the heavens and the earth!”

John MacArthur



Merry
Christmas!

December 26

Have one person read the following passages aloud:



And the King says, "Look! God and His children are together again. No more running away. Or hiding. No more crying or being lonely or afraid. No more being sick or dying. Because all those are gone. Yes, they're gone forever."
Jesus Storybook Bible - "A Dream of Heaven"

To all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.

John 1:12

REFLECT

Christmas is over, and we are entering a new year excited to see what it will hold. In 2019 you will have your birthday, enter a new grade in school, maybe make some new friends, and learn so many new things. There are some things we know will happen in 2019, and so many things we just don't know yet. Waiting and anticipating is a good thing. Just like we spent the whole month of December waiting for Christmas to come, we now wait because Jesus promised that He will come again. Just like God's people waited for Jesus to be born, we are waiting for Jesus to come make all things new. We don't know exactly what that will look like and what it means, just like we don't know what the new year holds, but we can wait knowing it will be good.

So what should we do while we wait? The Bible says that those who receive Jesus will become children of God. God gave the best gift ever when He gave Jesus to the world. Think about your favorite Christmas present you got this year. Could you imagine opening it, being so excited you got it for Christmas, and then just leaving it in the box and not using it or playing with it? In the same way, because we've been given Jesus, the best thing we can do is receive Him into our lives and live with Him.

What are some ways you can live with Jesus? Maybe it means reading your Bible, getting to know someone at school who is lonely, praying for people who don't know Jesus, or the way you talk to your family members. When we do things, both big and small, to follow Jesus we grow closer to Him.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Have each person share a gift they enjoyed receiving this Christmas.
- Ask your kids, "What are some ways you can live with Jesus?"

RESPOND / FAMILY ACTIVITY IDEAS

- As a family, reflect on last year and/or write New Year's resolutions. Use the template on our Pinterest page for ideas. 
- Have a family New Year's celebration. Whether you ring in the New Year together or make a special breakfast on New Year's Day, spend some time as a family celebrating the start of 2019.
- Think of people you and your children love. Make a prayer jar and place popsicle sticks inside that say the names of family, friends, and neighbors. At dinner (or a time your family gathers) choose a stick from the jar and pray for that person. 

Advent
2018