

24

FAMILY ADVENT  
READINGS

# Why Christmas?

DISCOVER JESUS IN CHRISTMAS  
FROM GENESIS TO JOHN



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*Dear Friend,*

**W**elcome to the celebration of advent 2020, pandemic version. Maybe your Christmas is smaller, quieter, cozier, or lonelier this year. Or maybe this Christmas you've discovered new things about yourself or your family that makes this celebration season more meaningful than any year before. Maybe you're in survival mode, simply praying for peace and a less crazy 2021. Whatever your Christmas looks like this year, one thing remains the same: Jesus is still King. And that's worth celebrating.

This family advent reading booklet will lead you through 24 short insights into Christmas, starting on December first. These readings are simple enough for younger children, new Christians, and anyone curious about the true roots of Christmas but not sure where to start. Together we'll discover Jesus and the meaning of Christmas from Genesis to John, remembering that this tree led to that tree; that is, the Christmas tree decorated in honor of Jesus's birth must inevitably lead to the crucifixion tree and onward to the eternal hope His cross offers to you and to anyone who calls on the name of Jesus.

But before you get started, I encourage you to fill out your "This Christmas" page. Here you can record a snapshot of Christmas 2020: who was there (or who was absent), favorite activities, dreams for the new year, beloved Christmas songs, and treasured treats and traditions. Perhaps your Christmas record will become a new tradition and Pandemic Christmas will transform into an old story well told.

Merry Christmas and joy to the world anyway.

**Blessings,**

**Janet Khokhar**

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## CHRISTMAS BEGAN IN THE GARDEN

*Genesis 3:15 NKJV*

AND I WILL PUT ENMITY BETWEEN YOU AND THE WOMAN, AND BETWEEN YOUR SEED AND HER SEED;  
HE SHALL BRUISE YOUR HEAD, AND YOU SHALL BRUISE HIS HEEL.

**F**rom the very first sin that separated mankind from God, God made a plan. Christmas was on its way from the moment Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden of Eden. The Lord could have walked away from people, or started over again, but He chose to save us instead. He would save us by sending His Son, Jesus, to be born as a baby. Baby Jesus would grow up into a man and die. But death was not the end for Jesus and, because of that, death is not the end for us, either.





## FROM ONE LIFE COMES ABUNDANT LIFE

*Psalm 16:10 NKJV*

FOR YOU WILL NOT LEAVE MY SOUL IN SHEOL, NOR WILL YOU ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO SEE CORRUPTION.

**A** prophecy is when God tells a person what He's going to do in the future. In the Bible, God gave many prophecies about the Savior so we would recognize Him when He came. Jesus had to exactly match several hundred prophecies about the Messiah. No one could do this either on purpose or by accident. Only Jesus matched every prophecy about the Messiah. In this verse, the prophecy says that the Messiah, who is also called the Holy One, will not stay dead. Jesus died, but He rose again. And if God can raise Jesus from the dead, then God can raise us from the dead, too.



## WHAT KIND OF SAVIOR IS THIS?

*Psalm 118:22-23 NKJV*

THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED HAS BECOME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE. THIS WAS THE LORD'S DOING; IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES.

**A** cornerstone is the first large stone set down when builders begin to erect a stone structure, like a temple or a palace. The chief cornerstone is laid first and the rest of the building rises stone by stone from this one perfect block.

Psalm 118: 22-23 is a prophecy about Jesus, written by King David, who was Jesus's great-great-lots-of-greats grandfather. Jesus wouldn't be accepted as the Messiah by everyone. When people read the prophecies about the Messiah, they were expecting a great king to conquer their oppressors.

Their hope was understandable: When Jesus was born, the nation of Israel was ruled by a foreign kingdom called Rome. The Israelites wanted to be free and to rule their own country and they expected that the Messiah would be a powerful military leader. But Jesus wasn't what they expected, so many people didn't believe in Him. But God knew what people needed. People needed a Savior for their souls more than they needed a savior for one small kingdom.

Jesus is everything we need.



## JOB OPENING: MESSIAH. WHO QUALIFIES TO APPLY?

*Isaiah 7:14 NKJV*

THEREFORE THE LORD HIMSELF WILL GIVE YOU A SIGN: BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE AND BEAR A SON, AND SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL.

**T**his was a special sign of the coming Messiah: His mother would be a virgin. No other person in history was born in such a unique way.

Only Jesus fulfilled this prophecy.

And although Jesus was born by God's power, He was also born from a human woman, which made Jesus human, too. Jesus was both God and man. Why was it important that God became a human, too?

Two reasons: Jesus knew what it was like to be human: to suffer pain and rejection, to be hungry and tired and lonely. Since He knew what it was like to be human, He could sympathize with us and help us when we are weak.

The second reason is this: only a human can die. Jesus came to pay for our sins with His life, and to give up that life He had to be human. To live on earth so He could die, to die so we could live, and to live again so we could live forever with Him.



## MORE THAN A CONQUEROR...

*Isaiah 9:6 NKJV*

FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN, UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN; AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE UPON HIS SHOULDER. AND HIS NAME WILL BE CALLED WONDERFUL, COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD, EVERLASTING FATHER, PRINCE OF PEACE.

**T**he prophet Isaiah described what the Messiah would be like. First, Isaiah showed us that the Savior would be a child, a son. He would not be an angel or a spirit, but flesh and blood like us.

The government would rest on His shoulders—this verse is probably the reason the Israelites were hoping for a conquering king. But Jesus wasn't confined to the role of an earthly king who would rule for a time and then pass his kingdom on to his successor; no, Jesus was King of kings and Lord of lords, who rules heaven and earth. Psalms says that He owns the cattle on a thousand hills—all that exists was made by Him anyway and it all belongs to Him.

He is wonderful, mighty, eternal—a prince whose primary quality is peace.





## FROM THE SMALLEST BEGINNINGS – THE GREATEST BLESSING

*Micah 5:2 NKJV*

BUT YOU, BETHLEHEM EPHRATHAH, [THOUGH] YOU ARE LITTLE AMONG THE THOUSANDS OF JUDAH,  
[YET] OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH TO ME THE ONE TO BE RULER IN ISRAEL, WHOSE GOINGS FORTH  
[ARE] FROM OF OLD, FROM EVERLASTING.

**T**he Messiah was prophesied to come to a specific place at a specific time—God even named the little town where He would be born. That honor went to a town so small it wasn't even listed among the cities belonging to Judah.

Yet from an unimportant village would be born God's greatest gift to humanity.

Modern Bethlehem still exists today underneath new buildings that rose over the centuries after Jesus.

In that dusty, arid land a tiny baby would open His human eyes for the first time.



## A RIGHTEOUS PROMISE

*Jeremiah 23:5 NKJV*

"BEHOLD, [THE] DAYS ARE COMING," SAYS THE LORD, "THAT I WILL RAISE TO DAVID A BRANCH OF RIGHTEOUSNESS; A KING SHALL REIGN AND PROSPER, AND EXECUTE JUDGMENT AND RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE EARTH."

**T**he Messiah had to meet another condition: He would be a descendant of King David, whom God described as a man after His own heart.

God promised David that if his descendants loved and obeyed God, then David would always have a man from his family line on the throne. But many of the kings who came after King David were corrupt, forgot God, and did evil in Israel.

After that time, Israel was sometimes ruled by foreign powers, just as it was ruled by Rome when Jesus was born. But God did not forget His word. The Lord promised that a righteous King—the King of all kings—would be born from among David's heirs.

His name is Jesus.



## SUFFERING FOR LOVE

*Isaiah 53:1-4 NKJV*

WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED? FOR HE SHALL GROW UP BEFORE HIM AS A TENDER PLANT, AND AS A ROOT OUT OF DRY GROUND. HE HAS NO FORM OR COMELINESS; AND WHEN WE SEE HIM, [THERE IS] NO BEAUTY THAT WE SHOULD DESIRE HIM. HE IS DESPISED AND REJECTED BY MEN, A MAN OF SORROWS AND ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF. AND WE HID, AS IT WERE, [OUR] FACES FROM HIM; HE WAS DESPISED, AND WE DID NOT ESTEEM HIM. SURELY HE HAS BORNE OUR GRIEFS AND CARRIED OUR SORROWS; YET WE ESTEEMED HIM STRICKEN, SMITTEN BY GOD, AND AFFLICTED.

**I**t's hard to see the sweet face of a baby in this man, isn't it?

But before we can celebrate the blessed baby, we need to know why He had to be born. Isaiah 53:1-4 is a prophecy about what the baby Messiah would do when He became a man. Jesus came to this earth to bear our sorrows, to carry our griefs.

Even though we didn't know Him or understand His purpose, He clothed Himself in flesh so He could bear our punishment in His body. People in Jesus's day thought that God must be punishing Jesus because God let Him suffer and die.

But the truth is that Jesus agreed to suffer for us for one reason: love.



## HE LOVES YOU ALL THE WAY TO THE CROSS...

*Isaiah 53:5-7 NKJV*

BUT HE [WAS] WOUNDED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, [HE WAS] BRUISED FOR OUR INIQUITIES; THE CHASTISEMENT FOR OUR PEACE [WAS] UPON HIM, AND BY HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED. ALL WE LIKE SHEEP HAVE GONE ASTRAY; WE HAVE TURNED, EVERY ONE, TO HIS OWN WAY; AND THE LORD HAS LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY OF US ALL.

**C**an you imagine how one person's suffering can be good for us?

Yet God's amazing plan was to let the Messiah hurt and die in our place. The Bible says that the soul who sins will die. If we die without accepting Christ, then we have to pay for our own sins. But Jesus, wonderful Jesus, never sinned, so His soul was perfect and could hold all of our sins.

Yesterday we read about how much God loves us, which is why He sent Jesus to die for us.

But we aren't the only things God loves: He also has a burning love for justice.

So how could God be a good God and punish wrongdoing, while still forgiving sinners who deserved to die? Jesus was the answer. Jesus would die in our place so sin could be punished and we could be forgiven at the same time.

If you ever want to know how much God loves you, then read this passage in Isaiah until it sinks in: He loves you all the way to the cross.





## THE GRAVE OF A KING?

*Isaiah 53:8-9 NKJV*

HE WAS TAKEN FROM PRISON AND FROM JUDGMENT, AND WHO WILL DECLARE HIS GENERATION? FOR HE WAS CUT OFF FROM THE LAND OF THE LIVING; FOR THE TRANSGRESSIONS OF MY PEOPLE HE WAS STRICKEN. 9 AND THEY MADE HIS GRAVE WITH THE WICKED--BUT WITH THE RICH AT HIS DEATH, BECAUSE HE HAD DONE NO VIOLENCE, NOR [WAS ANY] DECEIT IN HIS MOUTH.

**T**his prophecy reminds us again that the Messiah would be killed through oppression and evil judgment, yet He was innocent. Although the Messiah's body was assigned to a common poor people's grave, He would lay in a rich man's tomb.

Jesus fulfilled this prophecy when He was murdered but hadn't done anything wrong. When people were executed as criminals in Jesus's time, their bodies were buried in a common grave, without honor and without a name. But Jesus never lay in that grave.

Instead, a brave believer named Joseph of Arimathea asked for Jesus's body and lay the Lord in Joseph's new tomb. So Jesus lay in a place of honor, just as the prophecy told us.

We can trust the truth of the Bible: Jesus was the only person in history who fulfilled Messianic prophecies.

Jesus is King of king and Lord of lords.



## WHAT KIND OF FATHER WOULD DO THAT?

*Isaiah 53:10-11 NKJV*

YET IT PLEASSED THE LORD TO BRUISE HIM; HE HAS PUT [HIM] TO GRIEF. WHEN YOU MAKE HIS SOUL AN OFFERING FOR SIN, HE SHALL SEE [HIS] SEED, HE SHALL PROLONG [HIS] DAYS, AND THE PLEASURE OF THE LORD SHALL PROSPER IN HIS HAND. HE SHALL SEE THE LABOR OF HIS SOUL, [AND] BE SATISFIED. BY HIS KNOWLEDGE MY RIGHTEOUS SERVANT SHALL JUSTIFY MANY, FOR HE SHALL BEAR THEIR INIQUITIES.

**L**ove and justice collided at the cross.

This prophecy was written over 500 years before Jesus took His slow steps toward Golgotha, where He would be crucified. God loved us so much that He was willing to let His one and only Son die.

And death wasn't enough. The Savior had to suffer. When God looked at His righteous soul as Jesus died on the cross, God was satisfied. Sin was paid for. We who love Jesus can be justified, which means that we can be found innocent.

Are we really innocent? Not a chance. But when God forgives our unrighteousness, He accepts Jesus's payment for our sins. We are free. This prophecy says that the Messiah will see His offspring.

Who is His offspring? Us! We are God's children because of Jesus.

Now we can call God our Father.



## AND WHERE WAS JESUS THEN?

*John 1:1-5 NKJV*

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD, AND THE WORD WAS GOD. HE WAS IN THE BEGINNING WITH GOD. ALL THINGS WERE MADE THROUGH HIM, AND WITHOUT HIM NOTHING WAS MADE THAT WAS MADE. IN HIM WAS LIFE, AND THE LIFE WAS THE LIGHT OF MEN. AND THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS, AND THE DARKNESS DID NOT COMPREHEND IT.

**D**oes it seem like Jesus arrived on the scene only 2,000 years ago? Where was the Son of God before then?

This verse tells us that Jesus was always there.

Jesus was the name He had on earth and it's the Name we call Him now, but He and God are one. God created everything through Jesus: the stars, our planet, nebula turning in the universe, every clear cold stream running through a mountain, lambs, zinnias, and you.

If God made it, then Jesus was there. Jesus is eternal and brought life into darkness.

We exist because He wants us to.



## EXACTLY THE RIGHT PARENTS FOR THE JOB...

*Matthew 1:1&16 NKJV*

THE BOOK OF THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF DAVID, THE SON OF ABRAHAM: ... 16  
AND JACOB BEGOT JOSEPH THE HUSBAND OF MARY, OF WHOM WAS BORN JESUS WHO IS CALLED  
CHRIST.

**J**oseph and Mary—the two most famous parents in history. The Bible tells us that both Mary and Joseph were directly descended from King David. Why is this important? Because God promised that the Righteous Branch—the Messiah—would be one of King David’s great-great-lots-of-greats-grandsons.

Although Joseph was not Jesus’s physical father, Joseph was Jesus’s legal father. This distinction was important: The law of the Israelites recognized that Jesus was legally the descendant of King David. His parents and grandparents’ names were recorded in the temple for everyone to read to prove that Jesus really was from David’s family.

Mary was also the great-something-granddaughter of the king. She was Jesus’s physical mom, so Jesus was also of the blood line of King David.

In both a legal and a physical way, God kept His promise that King David would be the forefather of the Messiah.





## WAIT! THERE ARE TWO MIRACLE BABIES?

*Luke 1:13-17 NKJV*

BUT THE ANGEL SAID TO HIM, "DO NOT BE AFRAID, ZACHARIAS, FOR YOUR PRAYER IS HEARD; AND YOUR WIFE ELIZABETH WILL BEAR YOU A SON, AND YOU SHALL CALL HIS NAME JOHN. "AND YOU WILL HAVE JOY AND GLADNESS, AND MANY WILL REJOICE AT HIS BIRTH. "FOR HE WILL BE GREAT IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD, AND SHALL DRINK NEITHER WINE NOR STRONG DRINK. HE WILL ALSO BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT, EVEN FROM HIS MOTHER'S WOMB. "AND HE WILL TURN MANY OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL TO THE LORD THEIR GOD. "HE WILL ALSO GO BEFORE HIM IN THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF ELIJAH, ' TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS TO THE CHILDREN,' AND THE DISOBEDIENT TO THE WISDOM OF THE JUST, TO MAKE READY A PEOPLE PREPARED FOR THE LORD."

**Z**acharias? I thought we were learning about Jesus.

As it turns out, Mary wasn't the only woman pregnant with a miracle. Her cousin Elizabeth was an elderly lady who was carrying another promised child. This little guy's birth was also the result of a prophecy.

God said the Messiah would have a great prophet to come before Him and prepare the people of Israel for the Messiah. John was the promised prophet. Jesus would later say that John was the most important man in history except for Jesus Himself.

John's job was to lead the people's hearts to repentance so they could be ready for Jesus's message of faith in Christ.

Is your heart ready?



## AN INVITATION THAT MADE THE IMPOSSIBLE INTO REALITY...

*Luke 1:26-33 NKJV*

NOW IN THE SIXTH MONTH THE ANGEL GABRIEL WAS SENT BY GOD TO A CITY OF GALILEE NAMED NAZARETH, TO A VIRGIN BETROTHED TO A MAN WHOSE NAME WAS JOSEPH, OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID. THE VIRGIN'S NAME [WAS] MARY. AND HAVING COME IN, THE ANGEL SAID TO HER, "REJOICE, HIGHLY FAVORED [ONE], THE LORD [IS] WITH YOU; BLESSED [ARE] YOU AMONG WOMEN!" BUT WHEN SHE SAW [HIM], SHE WAS TROUBLED AT HIS SAYING, AND CONSIDERED WHAT MANNER OF GREETING THIS WAS. THEN THE ANGEL SAID TO HER, "DO NOT BE AFRAID, MARY, FOR YOU HAVE FOUND FAVOR WITH GOD. AND BEHOLD, YOU WILL CONCEIVE IN YOUR WOMB AND BRING FORTH A SON, AND SHALL CALL HIS NAME JESUS. HE WILL BE GREAT, AND WILL BE CALLED THE SON OF THE HIGHEST; AND THE LORD GOD WILL GIVE HIM THE THRONE OF HIS FATHER DAVID. AND HE WILL REIGN OVER THE HOUSE OF JACOB FOREVER, AND OF HIS KINGDOM THERE WILL BE NO END."

**I** don't think anyone can prepare themselves to receive an announcement like this.

What reactions would we have? Fear. Awe. Confusion. Joy? Imagine a young woman kneading bread in a bowl, or repairing the hem on a tunic, or stirring a pot of stew when the sun walks into the room. The brightness of a heavenly messenger with a most unexpected announcement: she would be the mother of the promised Messiah!

As a devout Jew, Mary must have learned about the prophecies of the Messiah. How He would be a king, born in Bethlehem from a virgin. Mary was one ordinary girl among millions in Israel, yet God saw something special in her.

Through the angel Gabriel, He invited this young woman to participate in His divine plan. Mary's response gives us a clue about her faithful, courageous character: She didn't doubt God. She said yes.

Many great men of faith balked at God's invitation to participate in His plans: Moses and Gideon were both leaders and saviors of the Hebrews, but they argued with God. How could I be the one you chose, Lord? I am weak, I am lowly. Why me?

Mary could have taught these men a thing or two. When faced with God's outstretched invitation, she accepted that God could make the impossible into reality.

She said yes, and became the mother of the King of kings.



## A MAN OF COMPASSION...

*Matthew* 1:18-20 & 24-25 NKJV

NOW THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST WAS AS FOLLOWS: AFTER HIS MOTHER MARY WAS BETROTHED TO JOSEPH, BEFORE THEY CAME TOGETHER, SHE WAS FOUND WITH CHILD OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. THEN JOSEPH HER HUSBAND, BEING A JUST [MAN], AND NOT WANTING TO MAKE HER A PUBLIC EXAMPLE, WAS MINDED TO PUT HER AWAY SECRETLY. BUT WHILE HE THOUGHT ABOUT THESE THINGS, BEHOLD, AN ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED TO HIM IN A DREAM, SAYING, "JOSEPH, SON OF DAVID, DO NOT BE AFRAID TO TAKE TO YOU MARY YOUR WIFE, FOR THAT WHICH IS CONCEIVED IN HER IS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. "

THEN JOSEPH, BEING AROUSED FROM SLEEP, DID AS THE ANGEL OF THE LORD COMMANDED HIM AND TOOK TO HIM HIS WIFE, AND DID NOT KNOW HER TILL SHE HAD BROUGHT FORTH HER FIRSTBORN SON. AND HE CALLED HIS NAME JESUS.

**J**oseph is the unsung hero in Jesus's story.

Almost everything we know about Joseph comes from the birth story of Jesus and the few years afterward. After Jesus is around 12 years old, the gospels don't mention Joseph anymore.

Yet God gave him an amazing role of weighty responsibility in the Lord's great plan of salvation. Joseph's job was to love, protect, nourish, house, train and teach a child who wasn't his natural son.

We can see a glimpse of Joseph's godly character in this passage above. See, Joseph had a fiancée named Mary and he found out she was pregnant. He knew the baby wasn't his. In Israel, husbands had all the power and wives had none. A woman couldn't divorce her husband for any reason, but a man could cast away his wife for a minor infraction like burning his dinner. A woman caught in adultery could be executed.

Even though Joseph believed he had been betrayed by his future wife, he decided not to take vengeance on her. Instead, he would quietly separate from Mary so she wouldn't be publicly ridiculed.

This was a man of compassion—thoughtful, and slow to anger.

But before Joseph ended his engagement to Mary, an angel intervened and revealed God's miracle: Mary had not betrayed Joseph—she was carrying the promised Messiah.

Joseph responded just as Mary did. He didn't throw objections to his new role in history, or balk at the load he was asked to bear.

Like Mary, Joseph said yes to God.



## PERFECT TIMING...

*Luke 2:1-7 NKJV*

AND IT CAME TO PASS IN THOSE DAYS [THAT] A DECREE WENT OUT FROM CAESAR AUGUSTUS THAT ALL THE WORLD SHOULD BE REGISTERED. THIS CENSUS FIRST TOOK PLACE WHILE QUIRINIUS WAS GOVERNING SYRIA. SO ALL WENT TO BE REGISTERED, EVERYONE TO HIS OWN CITY. JOSEPH ALSO WENT UP FROM GALILEE, OUT OF THE CITY OF NAZARETH, INTO JUDEA, TO THE CITY OF DAVID, WHICH IS CALLED BETHLEHEM, BECAUSE HE WAS OF THE HOUSE AND LINEAGE OF DAVID, TO BE REGISTERED WITH MARY, HIS BETROTHED WIFE, WHO WAS WITH CHILD. SO IT WAS, THAT WHILE THEY WERE THERE, THE DAYS WERE COMPLETED FOR HER TO BE DELIVERED. AND SHE BROUGHT FORTH HER FIRSTBORN SON, AND WRAPPED HIM IN SWADDLING CLOTHS, AND LAID HIM IN A MANGER, BECAUSE THERE WAS NO ROOM FOR THEM IN THE INN.

**J**esus was supposed to be born in Bethlehem, but Joseph and Mary were from Nazareth. As often happens as prophecy unfolds, the most unlikely people become involved in God's story.

Caesar Augustus, Israel's foreign ruler, ordered everyone in all of his dominion to be counted, probably for tax purposes. No matter where people lived, they had to return to their place of birth to be registered.

So Joseph, who was born in Bethlehem, brought Mary back to the little town. God's timing is perfect and Mary went into labor and gave birth.

But isn't a king supposed to be born in a palace? Or at least a house? If not there, then under the meager protection of a rented room? Jesus, King of kings, was born one step up from the street. A shelter for animals covered the Lord of all the earth.

Jesus was born in a low place so that the lowest of humanity would know they could take refuge in Him.

Here was a king for all people.





## VERY PECULIAR GUESTS AND NEWS TOO WONDERFUL NOT TO SHARE...

*Luke 2:8-14; & 20 NKJV*

NOW THERE WERE IN THE SAME COUNTRY SHEPHERDS LIVING OUT IN THE FIELDS, KEEPING WATCH OVER THEIR FLOCK BY NIGHT. AND BEHOLD, AN ANGEL OF THE LORD STOOD BEFORE THEM, AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD SHONE AROUND THEM, AND THEY WERE GREATLY AFRAID. THEN THE ANGEL SAID TO THEM, "DO NOT BE AFRAID, FOR BEHOLD, I BRING YOU GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY WHICH WILL BE TO ALL PEOPLE. FOR THERE IS BORN TO YOU THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DAVID A SAVIOR, WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD. AND THIS [WILL BE] THE SIGN TO YOU: YOU WILL FIND A BABE WRAPPED IN SWADDLING CLOTHS, LYING IN A MANGER." AND SUDDENLY THERE WAS WITH THE ANGEL A MULTITUDE OF THE HEAVENLY HOST PRAISING GOD AND SAYING: "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOODWILL TOWARD MEN!"

THEN THE SHEPHERDS RETURNED, GLORIFYING AND PRAISING GOD FOR ALL THE THINGS THAT THEY HAD HEARD AND SEEN, AS IT WAS TOLD THEM.

**N**ews too wonderful not to share: Jesus was born! The long-awaited Messiah was here. The very heart of God in human flesh.

When our friend has a baby, she announces it to everyone she knows: she shares the wonderful news on Facebook, she calls her grandmother, she sends out postcards with the newborn's squished and puffy face gracing the front.

Jesus's birth, too, was proclaimed with an announcement by an angel. An angelic announcement is just right for a king, but it's interesting to see who received the first birth proclamation: shepherds in a field! Shepherds not related to Jesus, Joseph, or Mary. Total strangers.

This is the fourth appearance by an angel leading up to Jesus's birth. First, an angel appeared to Zacharias to tell him about the birth of the prophet John. Then Gabriel went to Mary and later to Joseph to tell them they were about to become the Messiah's parents. Those angelic appearances make sense. But why would the fourth appearance light up the sky for a bunch of men looking after sheep? Shepherds had the lowliest job in Israel, yet the King's birth was announced to them.

This Jesus, this Savior, is Lord even of the lowliest. For what man lowly esteems, God honors.

The prophecies about the Messiah said that He would shepherd His people Israel. When Jesus grew up and began His ministry, He would call Himself the Good Shepherd. Jesus came to lead us to safety and abundant life in Christ, as a shepherd leads His sheep.

Humble shepherds rejoiced that night, as we rejoice in Jesus's birth during this Christmas season.



## GIVING OUR HEARTS TO THE KING...

*Matthew 2:1-12 NKJV*

NOW AFTER JESUS WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA IN THE DAYS OF HEROD THE KING, BEHOLD, WISE MEN FROM THE EAST CAME TO JERUSALEM, SAYING, "WHERE IS HE WHO HAS BEEN BORN KING OF THE JEWS? FOR WE HAVE SEEN HIS STAR IN THE EAST AND HAVE COME TO WORSHIP HIM." WHEN HEROD THE KING HEARD [THIS], HE WAS TROUBLED, AND ALL JERUSALEM WITH HIM. AND WHEN HE HAD GATHERED ALL THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES OF THE PEOPLE TOGETHER, HE INQUIRED OF THEM WHERE THE CHRIST WAS TO BE BORN. SO THEY SAID TO HIM, "IN BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA, FOR THUS IT IS WRITTEN BY THE PROPHET: 'BUT YOU, BETHLEHEM, [IN] THE LAND OF JUDAH, ARE NOT THE LEAST AMONG THE RULERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.' " THEN HEROD, WHEN HE HAD SECRETLY CALLED THE WISE MEN, DETERMINED FROM THEM WHAT TIME THE STAR APPEARED. AND HE SENT THEM TO BETHLEHEM AND SAID, "GO AND SEARCH CAREFULLY FOR THE YOUNG CHILD, AND WHEN YOU HAVE FOUND [HIM], BRING BACK WORD TO ME, THAT I MAY COME AND WORSHIP HIM ALSO." WHEN THEY HEARD THE KING, THEY DEPARTED; AND BEHOLD, THE STAR WHICH THEY HAD SEEN IN THE EAST WENT BEFORE THEM, TILL IT CAME AND STOOD OVER WHERE THE YOUNG CHILD WAS. WHEN THEY SAW THE STAR, THEY REJOICED WITH EXCEEDINGLY GREAT JOY. AND WHEN THEY HAD COME INTO THE HOUSE, THEY SAW THE YOUNG CHILD WITH MARY HIS MOTHER, AND FELL DOWN AND WORSHIPED HIM. AND WHEN THEY HAD OPENED THEIR TREASURES, THEY PRESENTED GIFTS TO HIM: GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH. THEN, BEING DIVINELY WARNED IN A DREAM THAT THEY SHOULD NOT RETURN TO HEROD, THEY DEPARTED FOR THEIR OWN COUNTRY ANOTHER WAY.

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...)

## GIVING OUR HEARTS TO THE KING... (CONTINUED)

**J**esus's birth was a time of celebration for most who knew about it, but not everyone was happy.

King Herod, appointed ruler of Israel by their Roman conquerors, was so afraid of losing his royal position that he couldn't rejoice that he had lived to see the Messiah born into the world.

But others had come a long way to meet the Savior. The magi were educated in astronomy and apparently knew the prophecies about the Messiah. When they saw the signs, they pursued the Savior.

Astronomy records show that an unusual star appeared in the time when Jesus was believed to be born. This was a special birth, an exceptional event. Human history was about to be turned on its head. The magi pursued the Savior, found the baby, and worshiped Him. They also presented Him with gold, frankincense, and myrrh—gifts for a king.

How do we receive Jesus? As someone who threatens our own preeminence in our lives? Or as the king of our lives? This Christmas, let's ask ourselves: have we given the king our hearts? Have we made him ruler over our lives? God made all things, and everything belongs to Him.

Let us give back to Him a small portion of the grace He has poured on us.





## WHO CAN FIGHT GOD'S PLAN?

*Matthew 2:13-15 NKJV*

NOW WHEN THEY HAD DEPARTED, BEHOLD, AN ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED TO JOSEPH IN A DREAM, SAYING, "ARISE, TAKE THE YOUNG CHILD AND HIS MOTHER, FLEE TO EGYPT, AND STAY THERE UNTIL I BRING YOU WORD; FOR HEROD WILL SEEK THE YOUNG CHILD TO DESTROY HIM." WHEN HE AROSE, HE TOOK THE YOUNG CHILD AND HIS MOTHER BY NIGHT AND DEPARTED FOR EGYPT, AND WAS THERE UNTIL THE DEATH OF HEROD, THAT IT MIGHT BE FULFILLED WHICH WAS SPOKEN BY THE LORD THROUGH THE PROPHET, SAYING, "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON."

**T**he King of kings is running for His life!

Herod soon learned that the magi who found Jesus had no intention of betraying the Lord. Full of wrath, Herod set out to find the baby. Herod believed all power was his. Herod was king, and the promised Messiah was an infant who couldn't put one foot in front of the other.

But who can fight God's plan?

When Herod scoured Bethlehem to kill Jesus, he only fulfilled prophecy: Jesus was driven off to hide in Egypt until Herod died. The Bible prophesied that the Messiah would be called out of Egypt. Why would a Jewish Savior come from pagan Egypt? God in His sovereignty planned ahead to protect the baby Messiah.

God didn't allow the foolish pride of people—even a king—to stop His plan to save the world.

Not then, not now.



## CAN DARKNESS EVER SMOTHER LIGHT?

*Matthew 2:16-18 NKJV*

THEN HEROD, WHEN HE SAW THAT HE WAS DECEIVED BY THE WISE MEN, WAS EXCEEDINGLY ANGRY; AND HE SENT FORTH AND PUT TO DEATH ALL THE MALE CHILDREN WHO WERE IN BETHLEHEM AND IN ALL ITS DISTRICTS, FROM TWO YEARS OLD AND UNDER, ACCORDING TO THE TIME WHICH HE HAD DETERMINED FROM THE WISE MEN. THEN WAS FULFILLED WHAT WAS SPOKEN BY JEREMIAH THE PROPHET, SAYING: "A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH, LAMENTATION, WEEPING, AND GREAT MOURNING, RACHEL WEEPING [FOR] HER CHILDREN, REFUSING TO BE COMFORTED, BECAUSE THEY ARE NO MORE."

**C**hristmas is supposed to be joyful, right?

As we've seen so far, the events surrounding Jesus's birth were sometimes wonderful, but more often they were confusing, challenging, or frightening.

The powers of evil fought back. God's plan to save the world through Jesus wasn't going to be easy. Suffering, courage, faith and endurance would be required of this story's heroes.

Even the innocent mothers and families of Bethlehem would suffer as Herod tried desperately to keep his throne by killing the King.

Sometimes God's plans don't make sense to us. Sometimes the cost is overwhelming. Sometimes evil steps in and tries to block God's righteous work in our lives.

But no evil can overcome His goodness, just as no amount of darkness can smother the light.



## GOD SEES YOU...

*Matthew 2:19-23 NKJV*

NOW WHEN HEROD WAS DEAD, BEHOLD, AN ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED IN A DREAM TO JOSEPH IN EGYPT, SAYING, "ARISE, TAKE THE YOUNG CHILD AND HIS MOTHER, AND GO TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL, FOR THOSE WHO SOUGHT THE YOUNG CHILD'S LIFE ARE DEAD." THEN HE AROSE, TOOK THE YOUNG CHILD AND HIS MOTHER, AND CAME INTO THE LAND OF ISRAEL. BUT WHEN HE HEARD THAT ARCHELAUS WAS REIGNING OVER JUDEA INSTEAD OF HIS FATHER HEROD, HE WAS AFRAID TO GO THERE. AND BEING WARNED BY GOD IN A DREAM, HE TURNED ASIDE INTO THE REGION OF GALILEE. AND HE CAME AND DWELT IN A CITY CALLED NAZARETH, THAT IT MIGHT BE FULFILLED WHICH WAS SPOKEN BY THE PROPHETS, "HE SHALL BE CALLED A NAZARENE."

**G**od's timing is perfect.

After living as refugees in Egypt, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were safe and allowed to return home. This passage suggests that Joseph may have tried to return to Bethlehem or somewhere nearby in Judea, but the ruler in the region may have been a threat to little Jesus.

Joseph was a good father and moved his small family back to Nazareth. What might have seemed random to Joseph was another part of God's plan: The Messiah would grow up in Nazareth. The Messiah had to fulfill this prophecy, like so many other prophecies, and only Jesus fulfilled them all.

A young child has no choice where he lives—mom and dad decide where home will be. But God placed His Son exactly where He was supposed to be. We don't always know if events in our lives are random or if God's plans for us are coming together at just the right time.

Even when we're puzzled, we can trust that God sees us and knows exactly where we are.



## THE REJOICING OF CHRISTMAS IS IN THE RISEN CHRIST...

*Matthew 27:50-53 AND 29:5-6 NKJV*

AND JESUS CRIED OUT AGAIN WITH A LOUD VOICE, AND YIELDED UP HIS SPIRIT. THEN, BEHOLD, THE VEIL OF THE TEMPLE WAS TORN IN TWO FROM TOP TO BOTTOM; AND THE EARTH QUAKED, AND THE ROCKS WERE SPLIT, AND THE GRAVES WERE OPENED; AND MANY BODIES OF THE SAINTS WHO HAD FALLEN ASLEEP WERE RAISED; AND COMING OUT OF THE GRAVES AFTER HIS RESURRECTION, THEY WENT INTO THE HOLY CITY AND APPEARED TO MANY.

BUT THE ANGEL ANSWERED AND SAID TO THE WOMEN, "DO NOT BE AFRAID, FOR I KNOW THAT YOU SEEK JESUS WHO WAS CRUCIFIED. 6 "HE IS NOT HERE; FOR HE IS RISEN, AS HE SAID. COME, SEE THE PLACE WHERE THE LORD LAY.

BUT THE ANGEL ANSWERED AND SAID TO THE WOMEN, "DO NOT BE AFRAID, FOR I KNOW THAT YOU SEEK JESUS WHO WAS CRUCIFIED. 6 "HE IS NOT HERE; FOR HE IS RISEN, AS HE SAID. COME, SEE THE PLACE WHERE THE LORD LAY.

**T**he Messiah prophecies. Angelic announcements. Faith-filled men and women. A wrinkled infant sleeping among livestock. Worship, wrath, and running. Protection and praise. All of these lead to one seminal event. If we want to know the meaning of Christmas, we must look forward.

The purpose of Christmas was the cross.

And the rejoicing of Christmas is in the risen Christ.

At the moment Jesus gave up His precious life, the veil of the temple was torn in half. The veil was the symbolic separation of a holy God from sinful humanity. Jesus had probably been to the temple in Jerusalem many times and looked on this very veil, knowing that soon He would take it away forever. It wasn't needed anymore. Jesus's sacrificial death erased all that limits our personal access to God. Now, the Bible says, we can go boldly before His throne.

Christmas has no meaning without Easter. Just as God's prophecies said, the Messiah would be condemned and executed like a criminal, even though He had done no wrong. Just as God planned, the Messiah bore our sins on the cross. Just as God planned, Jesus rose from the dead and defeated death. Because He was born, we can be born again. Because He died, we can die to sin. Because He rose again, we can live forever with Him.

Christ is Christmas.



## WHAT GIFT CAN I GIVE TO GOD ON CHRISTMAS?

*John 3:16 NKJV*

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.

**C**hristmas came because God loved us. Love came at a great cost to God Himself because He didn't cast the price of salvation on us, but He bore the penalty Himself.

Love is the embodiment of Christmas. Love is what we can give back to God and share with each other. Christ's abundant love, freely offered, should be freely shared. What can we say but this? Thank you for Christmas, Lord. Thank you for the cross. Thank you for the empty tomb.

Thank you for the joy of Christmas.

*Hallelujah,  
Christ is born!*