



ADVENT OF WONDER

Growing your faith through the Christmas season



BY PASTOR GREG MCKELVEY

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December 1

Christmas in the Real World

Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?'
Genesis 3:13

Christmas often serves as a time when people seek solace in the celebration, endeavouring to momentarily escape their worldly concerns. Like Adam and Eve, we sometimes aspire to transcend our human limitations, attempting to centre the world around ourselves, yet this undertaking proves futile. The true essence of Christmas extends far beyond a mere respite from life's trials. It transcends the simple pursuit of joy. Christmas carries with it the message of a divine solution to our predicaments. This message has its origins as early as Genesis 3 when sin first enters history, and God begins to unveil His merciful plan. Jesus does not turn a blind eye to the realities of our world; instead, He comes to mend and restore it.

*Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel
O Come Emmanuel*

- What aspects of life feel like they are weighing you down at the moment?
- How can you grow in your appreciation of God's grace during the advent season this year?





December 2

The First Christmas Message

So the Lord God said to the snake, 'Because you have done this, 'Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers, he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.'
Genesis 3:14-15

The initial glimpse of Christmas emerges immediately following the fall of humanity. The moment sin enters the world, God unveils His remedy. He discloses His blueprint, which takes the form of a person – the woman's offspring, destined to endure a bruised heel but ultimately to triumph over Satan by crushing his head. The narrative of Christmas underscores that, in the face of sin, God's response is not one of abandonment but rather an outstretched hand extended in grace. Jesus, born to a virgin, crucified on a cross, and resurrected three days later, emerges as the conqueror of Satan, sin, and death. This is the heartwarming message of Christmas.

The celebration of Advent is possible only to those who are troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect, and who look forward to something greater to come.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

- Spend some time reflecting on your sin and God's forgiveness.
- Which people in your life are struggling and would benefit from a reminder of God's grace?





December 3

This is the One

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah

Matthew 1:1

Matthew initiates his biography of Jesus by presenting a genealogy. He deems it crucial for the reader to grasp the historical context of Jesus' advent. Right from the outset, Jesus is introduced as the **Messiah**, the anointed one, the promised redeemer of God's people. He is the individual they've all been ardently awaiting. As we step into the advent season, allow your attention to be fixated on Him—He is the one you've longed for.

The Lord is coming, always coming. When you have ears to hear and eyes to see, you will recognize him at any moment of your life. Life is Advent; life is recognizing the coming of the Lord

Henri Nouwen

- What significant experience of waiting have you had in your life?
- What can you do this advent to help you focus your attention on Jesus?
- How can prayer help?





December 4

Son of David

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David
Matthew 1:1

The second title given to Jesus in this introduction is the "Son of David." For the people of Israel, the reign of King David represented the golden age of their nation, a time of peace and prosperity when they believed they were faithfully following God's anointed leader. David's rule was seen as the pinnacle of what a king should be. However, the child about to be born in Bethlehem is not just another king like David; He is far greater. This new King, Jesus, doesn't merely match David's legacy—He surpasses it in every way. He is the King we have all been longing for, the one who brings a kingdom where life flourishes as it was always meant to. Under His anointed rule, we find true life, peace, and the fulfillment of God's promises.

Most people want Jesus as a consultant rather than a King
Tim Keller

- In what ways do you try to be king of your own life?
- Why is Jesus a better king?





December 5

The Seed

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham
Matthew 1:1

The third description of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew is that He is the "Son of Abraham." This title connects Jesus to the biblical figure Abraham, who was chosen by God in Genesis 12 to be the father of a great nation. God's promise to Abraham was that his descendants would bring blessings to all nations. While the nation of Israel was a part of this promise, in Jesus, it finds its ultimate fulfillment. Jesus is not merely a descendant of Abraham; He is the embodiment of God's historical promises, not only to Abraham but also to all of humanity. He is the "seed" of our hope, representing the culmination of God's plan for salvation and blessing for all people.

God never made a promise that was too good to be true.

Dwight L. Moody

- What experience do you have of God fulfilling promises in your life?
- Which promise do you need to hold onto in faith right now?





December 6

Remember Grace

Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,

Matthew 1:5

The genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew is unique because it includes four women, which was uncommon in genealogical records of that time. Notably, the first woman mentioned is Rahab, a former prostitute who aided the Israelite spies in Jericho. Her story serves as a powerful reminder that God's grace knows no boundaries. Despite her past, Rahab's faith and loyalty to God led to her salvation and that of her family. This inclusion underscores the idea that God's grace and redemption are available to all, regardless of their background or circumstances.

*Oh, perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.
To God be the Glory, Fanny Crosby*

- How have you experienced God's grace in your life this year?
- How can you extend grace to others during this season?





December 7

Provision for Everyone

Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,

Matthew 1:5

The second woman mentioned in Jesus' genealogy is Ruth. She was a Moabite and initially not considered one of God's people. However, she placed her trust in God based on the influence of her stepmother, Naomi. Ruth's story illustrates God's extraordinary provision and protection in the lives of those who choose to follow Him.

Ruth's inclusion in Jesus' family line highlights an essential aspect of God's plan throughout history: to draw people from all nations to Himself. Ruth's journey from being a Moabite outsider to becoming a part of Jesus' lineage symbolizes the inclusivity of God's grace. It serves as a reminder that, as we reflect on the birth of Jesus, we can see God's provision for all people, regardless of their nationality, background, or culture. The message is one of universal acceptance and the invitation for all to come to God through faith.

Depend on it. God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply.

Hudson Taylor

- How has God provided for you in your life?
- How can you be part of God's provision for someone else today?





December 8

No more shame

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife
Matthew 1:6

In Matthew's genealogy, Bathsheba, referred to as Uriah's wife, highlights King David's sin of adultery and murder. David's actions, including impregnating Bathsheba and orchestrating Uriah's death, are reminders of human imperfection. Yet, Matthew includes this story to emphasize God's grace. Despite David's grave sin, God's plan of redemption continued, showing that through Jesus, we are freed from the shame of our own failures. Jesus' birth is the fulfilment of God's promise to offer forgiveness and redemption, removing the shame of our sins through His grace and mercy.

Guilt says I've done something wrong; ... shame says there is something wrong with me. Guilt says I've made a mistake; ... shame says I am a mistake. Guilt says what did I did was not good; ... shame says I am no good.

John Bradshaw

- Do you experience shame for past sin?
- How does Jesus deal with our shame?





December 9

A diverse family

and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah

Matthew 1:16

Matthew's genealogy is far more than a simple list of names; it is a richly woven theological tapestry. By tracing Jesus' lineage back to Abraham, Matthew affirms both His royal heritage and messianic identity. However, the inclusion of Mary, a young and seemingly humble woman, disrupts conventional expectations. Her role as the mother of Jesus transforms the genealogy from a mere patriarchal record into a profound divine narrative.

This lineage serves as a microcosm of human experience, reflecting both faith and imperfection. It spans eras of prosperity and exile, triumph and sorrow. The diversity within this genealogy mirrors the complexities of the human condition that Jesus came to redeem. The presence of women such as Rahab, a Gentile, and Ruth, a Moabite, challenges traditional ethnic and religious boundaries, hinting at Jesus' mission to a world divided by such distinctions. Ultimately, the genealogy stands as a powerful testament to God's redemptive love, showcasing His ability to use unexpected people to achieve His eternal purposes.

In God's family, there are no outsiders, no enemies.

Desmond Tutu

- What stands out to you from the family line of Jesus?
- How can you grow in love for people who are different to you





December 10

King of Kings

Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

Matthew 1:17

Matthew's careful division of Jesus' ancestry into three segments of fourteen generations each is a deliberate and profound literary and theological strategy. This numerical structure, culminating in the number associated with David's name, serves as a powerful affirmation of Jesus' royal lineage. It's as if Matthew is orchestrating a sacred symphony, with each group of fourteen names functioning as a movement, progressively building toward the climactic event: the birth of the Messiah.

By using this numerical framework, Matthew elevates the genealogy from a simple ancestral record to a prophetic blueprint. It acts as a coded message to his Jewish audience, signaling that the long-awaited King has come. The number fourteen, intrinsically linked to David, functions as a royal cipher, emphasizing Jesus' legitimate claim to the Davidic throne. Thus, Matthew's gospel opens with a masterful mathematical composition—a numerical symphony that announces the advent of a new and divine kingdom and the birth of the ultimate King.

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come
Let earth receive her King!
Joy to the World*

- How difficult do you find it to submit to authority?
- How do you need to submit to Jesus' rule today?





December 11

The Power of the Spirit

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.

Matthew 1:18

Mary's conception of Jesus through the Holy Spirit represents a moment of profound significance. This same Spirit, who was active at the creation of the world, played a crucial role not only in the miraculous birth of Jesus but also in empowering His ministry. The Spirit descended upon Jesus at His baptism, marking the beginning of His public ministry with divine authority.

The Holy Spirit's role did not end with Jesus' earthly ministry. At Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out upon the early church, empowering believers and marking the birth of the Christian community. This divine presence continues to reside in believers today, guiding, comforting, and transforming them. The ongoing indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a source of immense joy and encouragement. It means that we are not alone; we are continually filled with the Spirit's power, receiving His guidance and experiencing His transformative work in our lives. This continuous presence of the Holy Spirit is a profound testament to God's ongoing commitment to His people, offering strength, wisdom, and comfort as we navigate our spiritual journey.

Without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing. We are as ships without wind. We are useless.

Charles Spurgeon

- Where do you need to see the power of the Holy Spirit at work in your life?





December 12

Trust and Obey

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.

Matthew 1:18-20

In these verses, we observe three key traits of Joseph's character. First, he was faithful to the law. Second, he sought to extend grace to Mary in a difficult situation. And third, he displayed obedience to God's word when directed by the angel. Joseph's significance lies not in power, fame, or popularity, but in his willingness to heed God's word and trust His guidance, even in an obscure and challenging situation. It underscores the idea that in God's perspective, significance is often found in the humble and faithful obedience of individuals rather than in worldly status or recognition.

I believe Christians often perceive obedience to God as some test designed just to see if we're really committed to Him. But what if it's designed as God's way of giving us what's best for us?

Craig Groeschel

- When in your life have you needed to trust God in a complicated situation?
- What can you learn from the example of Joseph?





December 13

Salvation

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 1:21

The angel instructs Joseph to name the child Jesus, explaining that he will save the people from their sins. The name Jesus carries far-reaching meanings—deliverance, rescue, and salvation. This baby, miraculously conceived, comes with a clear and powerful mission. We, as humans, are enslaved by sin and desperately need deliverance. We wander lost and need someone to rescue us. We are on a path to destruction and need salvation. The Christmas story is more than just the birth of a baby; it marks the entrance of the Savior into our world, bringing hope, redemption, and a promise of new beginnings. It reminds us that in our deepest moments of despair, there is a light that guides us back to safety and a love that offers us salvation. The arrival of Jesus signifies the dawn of a new era, where grace and mercy prevail, and where every soul can find its way back to the divine.

A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes...and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside, is not a bad picture of Advent.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

- When did you first become aware of your sin and the salvation offered in Jesus?
- What does the forgiveness of Jesus mean to you?





December 14

Immanuel

All this took place to fulfil 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').

Matt 1:22-23

God's eternal plan has been to intimately dwell with humanity. This divine communion began in the Garden of Eden, where God walked alongside Adam and Eve. Sin shattered this idyllic relationship, yet God's desire for closeness persisted. The tabernacle and temple served as tangible symbols of His presence amidst His people. However, the advent of Jesus marked a radical shift. Isaiah prophesied, "Immanuel, God with us," a reality fulfilled through Jesus' incarnation. By becoming human, God the Son entered our world, bridging the chasm of sin and restoring our broken relationship. This ultimate act of love demonstrates God's unwavering commitment to be eternally with us.

If we could condense all the truths of Christmas into only three words, these would be the words: 'God with us.'

John MacArthur

- What difference does it make to know that God is always with you?
- How does Jesus fulfil the role of the Old Testament tabernacle and temple?





December 15

Magi

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

The Magi were wise men, probably from the region of Persia. By observing a star, they discerned the sign that the King of the Jews had been born. The only other book of the Bible that mentions Magi is the book of Daniel. When Daniel and his friends were exiled in Babylon, they were educated alongside the Babylonian wise men. While all the other Magi failed to interpret the king's dream, God granted Daniel success, setting him apart and establishing his influence.

Hundreds of years after Daniel's time, the Magi, influenced by the legacy of Daniel's wisdom and perhaps his prophecies, recognized the significance of the star and embarked on a journey to find the newborn King. Their arrival in Bethlehem to worship Jesus illustrates the far-reaching impact of Daniel's faithfulness and the fulfillment of God's plan. It also underscores a profound truth: the King of the Jews came not only for the Jewish people but for Gentiles as well. The presence of the Magi at Jesus' birth foreshadows the inclusive nature of Christ's mission, emphasizing that salvation through Jesus is available to all, regardless of their background or nationality.

Advent is a journey towards Bethlehem. May we let ourselves be drawn by the light of God made man.

Pope Francis

- What influence have your ancestors had on your life?
- In what ways can we see God in world around us?





December 16

The Other King

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

Matthew 2:3

Matthew takes significant effort to underscore the kingship of Jesus throughout his gospel. Now, we are introduced to another king—Herod—who becomes deeply unsettled when the Magi speak of a new king's birth. While the arrival of Jesus is a monumental event that fulfills countless Old Testament prophecies, Herod does not join in the celebration. Instead, he is filled with fear and hostility. The reason for this is clear: Herod perceives the newborn king as a direct threat to his own power and authority. In Herod's mind, there can only be one true king, and he is determined to keep that title for himself.

This narrative invites us to reflect on our own hearts. Just as Herod felt threatened by the arrival of Jesus, we too can be tempted to resist His kingship in our lives when it challenges our sense of control and autonomy. Jesus is, without a doubt, the greatest blessing we could ever receive. Yet, that blessing may elude us if we view Him as a rival rather than a redeemer. Instead of guarding our power like Herod, we are called to embrace Jesus as the rightful King, trusting that surrendering to His rule brings not loss, but immeasurable gain.

The whole duty of man is summed up in obedience to God's will.

George Washington

- Why is Herod threatened by the news of Jesus' birth?
- In what ways do you find it difficult to submit to God's authority?





December 17

Two Kings

When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."'

Matthew 2:4-6

The stark contrast between Herod and Jesus is a profound reminder of the true nature of power and kingship. Herod, with his palace, reputation, wealth, and political influence, appeared formidable. In contrast, Jesus was born in humble circumstances, a seemingly insignificant baby in the little town of Bethlehem. He was weak, helpless, and born into poverty.

However, the narrative highlights a crucial truth: true kingship and power lie with Jesus. Herod's fear, despite all his worldly assets, underscored that there was only one genuine King, and nothing Herod or anyone else could do would change that. Jesus, lying peacefully in the manger, represented the embodiment of divine authority, a power that far surpassed any earthly wealth or influence. This sharp contrast continues to resonate as a timeless message about the nature of true leadership and the enduring significance of Jesus as the ultimate King.

Top of Form

The question is not whether God broke into the universe as a king. He did. The question is: What kind of king is he? What difference would his kingship make for you?

CS Lewis

- What does the contrast between Herod and Jesus teach you about Jesus' kingship?
- How is Jesus a better king than anything the world offers?





December 18

The Good Shepherd

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

Matthew 2:6

This prophecy of Jesus' birth proclaims that insignificant Bethlehem will produce a ruler. Not just any type of ruler but one that will 'shepherd' God's people. The Old Testament is full of shepherding imagery. For instance, Psalm 23 beautifully illustrates this relationship, where David declares, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." This verse captures the essence of God's guidance and provision, showing how He leads His people to rest and refreshment.

God's people are like sheep - in need of care, protection and provision. The religious leaders were often bad shepherds, who exploited the sheep. The prophecies speak of a better shepherd who will one day arrive. Jesus is the truly Good Shepherd, who cares for his sheep and leads them into life.

Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love.
Hamilton Wright Mabie

- Why is Jesus described as a shepherd?
- How has Jesus shepherded you throughout your life?





December 19

Empty Words

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.'
Matthew 2:7-8

Herod's deceptive words, in which he feigned a desire to worship the newborn child, sharply contrast with his true intentions to eliminate any potential threat to his power. While his words may sound virtuous, his heart exposes his sinister motives.

This scenario serves as a reminder during the Christmas season. We often hear phrases like "Jesus is the reason for the season," but it's essential to examine whether these words are genuinely reflected in our hearts and actions. Do we speak of worship while secretly desiring something else? Herod's story cautions us to ensure that our hearts align with our words, so that our intentions and actions genuinely reflect the spirit of worship and reverence this Christmas.

An empty religion will betray itself in relationships
Amy Layne Litzelman

- What examples can you think of where words have not matched the inward reality?
- How can you focus your attention onto Jesus this Christmas?





December 20

Celestial Worship

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

God announces the birth of his son in a variety of ways. He sends Gabriel to Mary. He sends a choir of angels to a group of shepherds. And He puts on a celestial light show to direct the Magi. The billions of stars and galaxies in the universe have followed predictable patterns and paths for millenia. These movements, processes and planetary conjunctions produce something that the Magi notice.

These men were accustomed to searching the skies for wisdom, but it is unlikely that they were 'seeking' God specifically. He meets them where they are, he speaks to them in their language. These men may have never encountered anyone who would tell them about the true God. So He weilds gigantic spheres of gas that are light-years away to draw the attention of these men towards Jesus! He uses the universe to highlight an incredibly significant event happening in an unbelievably insignificant place.

The star-preaching is all about Christ. We do not know what the color of the star was, nor the shape of the star, nor to what magnitude it had attained; these items are not recorded, but what is recorded is of much more importance; the wise men said—"We have seen his star." Then the star which the Lord will use to lead men to Jesus must be Christ's own star.

Spurgeon

Allow this story to draw your attention upwards. As the Psalmist says - the heavens declare the glory of God. We can allow the created universe around us and above us to teach us about Him.

This story should also give us a humble appreciation of God's great love for us. He graciously reached out to the Magi using something they could understand. This is yet another image

of what his happening in the incarnation of Jesus. He is reaching out to us, drawing near to us. He entered the world speaking our language. He came to reveal God to you.

*For outlandish creatures like us, on our way to a heart, a brain, and courage,
Bethlehem is not the end of our journey but only the beginning - not home but the
place through which we must pass if ever we are to reach home at last.*

Frederick Buechner

- Take some time to slow down and look up at the stars - how does it make you feel?
- In what ways has God reached out to reveal himself to you over the last year?
- How does your celebration of Christmas help you to experience the revelation of God?





December 21

Great Value

Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11

The wise men give Jesus gifts. These gifts are notable for their value. Mary and Joseph were not wealthy. In Luke 2 they bring an offering of two birds to the temple which signifies their poverty. Why would these wealthy, wise men from a distant land give gifts of such value to this child? Because they have found something of greater value.

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Matthew 13:44-46

These parables that Jesus tells many years later help to illustrate what the Magi were doing by offering their gifts. In the parable, the man sells everything he has to buy the field with great **joy**, because he knows the treasure contained in the ground.

This man suddenly found something that transformed his whole outlook on life. The treasure restructured his values and priorities. It altered his goals. The treasure revolutionized the man.

Jon Bloom

The pearl merchant sells everything he has for one pearl, because of its great value. The Magi recognised that value of their gifts was eclipsed by the worth of Jesus. They lay their treasures down with joy because they have found the greatest treasure.

Christmas celebrations have the ability to distract us with bright, shiny objects that we assign great value to. Take this opportunity to remind yourself of the greatest value that lies in the manger at the heart of the story.

You become like what you worship. When you gaze in awe, admiration, and wonder at something or someone, you begin to take on something of the character of the object of your worship.

N. T. Wright

- In what ways does the world influence the things we value?
- What gifts do you need to lay at Jesus' feet?
- **Pray that you would be reminded that Jesus is your greatest treasure over this holiday season.**





December 22

Gold - Fit for a King

Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11

The first gift given to Jesus by the Magi was gold. This represents kingship. Again and again, Matthew has drawn attention to Jesus as king. Gold would normally be found adorning palaces, it is the posession of the wealthy. But here, it is presented to a poor couple in humble accomadation. The gift of gold shows us that not everything here is as it seems. You wouldn't look twice at this young couple with their son, but maybe you should. A king has stepped down from his heavenly throne and stepped into our world.

Once in our world, a Stable had something in it that was bigger than our whole world.

CS Lewis

In 1 Kings 10, the Queen of Sheba visits Solomon. She is astounded by his wisdom and prosperity and gives him great gifts. These gifts, however impressive, are not in the same league as Solomon's great wealth and he gives her more than she brought. In Matthew 12, Jesus describes himself as 'one greater than Solomon'. Like the Magi and the Queen of Sheba, we offer up everything we have. Not because he needs it, not because it purchases anything, but because He is worth it. And, like the Magi and the Queen of Sheba, we will find that we are given much more in return.

*Cast your deadly "doing" down
Down at Jesus' feet;
Stand in Him, in Him alone,
Gloriously complete.*
H.S. Thompson

What can I give Him, poor as I am?

*If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.
In the Bleak Midwinter*

- What is the significance of the gift of Gold?
- How can you honor God as your king today?
- Take some time to reflect on all that God has given you this year
- How is God calling you to be generous to others this Christmas?





December 23

Frankincense - Our High Priest

Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11

The second gift given to Jesus was Frankincense. Incense was a major part of temple worship in the Old Testament. Priests used incense as they carried out their worship - Jesus came as our great high priest. He forgives our sin, cleanses us and bestows God's blessing upon us. As you prepare to celebrate Christmas, rejoice that you have a great high priest who is able to sympathise with you (Hebrews 4:15).

When old companions, old lusts, and sins crowd in upon you, and when you feel that you are ready to sink, what can save you, sinking sinner? This alone - I have a high priest in heaven, and he can support in the hour of affliction. This alone can give you peace - I have a high priest in heaven. When you are dying - when friends can do you no good - when sins rise up like spectres around your bed - what can give you peace? This - "I have a high priest in heaven."

Robert Murray M'Cheyne

Incense also signified the presence of God in the holiest part of the temple - Jesus is God's presence living among us. As you prepare to celebrate Christmas, remember that you do not have to go anywhere or achieve anything to enter into God's presence. You are united to Christ and He lives in you through His spirit. Wherever you go, you are in His presence!

Nothing bothers the devil more than a Christian delighting in God's presence.

AW Tozer

Another use of Incense was to symbolise the prayers of the people ascending to heaven. Jesus arrived as the answer to those prayers and is seated at the right hand of the Father right now interceding for us! As you prepare to celebrate Christmas, come before God in prayer - He always listens and will do immeasurably more than we can ask or even imagine (Ephesians 3:20)

Let your thoughts be psalms, your prayers incense, and your breath praise.
Charles Spurgeon

- What is the significance of the gift of frankincense?
- How can you enjoy God's presence today?
- Spend some time praying to Jesus, your great High Priest!





December 24

Myrrh - Born to Die

Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11

The third gift given to Jesus was Myrrh. Used as an anointing oil, specifically for dead bodies, this gift pointed forward to Jesus' death. The child receiving these gifts, the true King, the great High Priest, was on a road towards suffering and death. That is how he would fulfill all the prophecies and promises. That is how our sin is forgiven and we are clothed in His righteousness. It is impossible to think of the birth of Jesus without also thinking of his death. The crucifixion was not an unfortunate accident, it was the reason He came. For you.

However late you think you are, however many chances you think you have missed, however many mistakes you feel you have made or talents you think you don't have, or however far from home and family and God you feel you have traveled, I testify that you have not traveled beyond the reach of divine love. It is not possible for you to sink lower than the infinite light of Christ's Atonement shines.

Jeffrey R. Holland

On Christmas Eve, we can find deep and lasting joy in the Savior who was born for us, lived a life of love for us, died in our place for our sins and was raised to life, conquering Satan, sin and death. The joy of the first Christmas does not fade over time. He is still alive. He is still with us. The joy of the Christmas season can increase every year as we grow in our understanding and experience of who Jesus is and what He's done.

And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling, how could it be so? It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes or bags. And he puzzled and puzzled 'till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more.

Dr. Seuss

Slow down in the middle of the busyness of these holidays and turn your attention once again to the love of Jesus. That is the reason we celebrate.

- What is the significance of the gift of Myrrh?
- How can you praise Jesus as your Savior today?
- Spend some time in prayer for your friends and family, that they would know and enjoy the love of Jesus this Christmas





December 25

Bow Down and Worship

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him.

Matthew 2:11

At the end of their long journey, the Magi meet Jesus. They rejoice. These men are noted for their great wisdom but the thing that causes them great joy is Jesus. Wisdom is a gift from God and should lead us towards adoration of Jesus, just as it did for the Magi. These wise men **bow down** and worship Jesus. In a culture where children did not have a high status, the sight of foreign noblemen bowing down to a child would have been shocking. But these men recognized who Jesus really was. They humbly bowed the knee before the child who spoke the Universe into existence.

This Advent we look to the Wise Men to teach us where to focus our attention. We set our sights on things above, where God is. We draw closer to Jesus... When our Advent journey ends, and we reach the place where Jesus resides in Bethlehem, may we, like the Wise Men, fall on our knees and adore him as our true and only King.

Mark Zimmermann

So many traditions have become associated with our celebration of Christmas. There is nothing wrong with decorations, gifts and food. We can enjoy all of them. But the most central activity of our Christmas celebration should be the same as the Magi all those years ago – to bow down and worship Jesus.

The very heart of worship, as the Bible makes clear, is the business of expressing, from the depths of our spirits, the highest possible honor we can offer before God.

R. C. Sproul

To worship Him today, fix your eyes on Him.
To worship Him today, lay your burdens down at His feet.
To worship Him today, receive His grace once again.
To worship Him today, allow His love to flow through you towards others.

*O Come let us adore Him
Christ the Lord
O Come Let Us Adore Him*

- How has meeting Jesus changed your life?
- How can you worship Him today?





December 26

God Speaks, We Listen

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.' So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'

Matthew 2:13-15

After the Magi leave, the danger of Herod still looms large. However powerful Herod seems, he cannot thwart God's plan. Again Joseph is spoken to in a dream. Again, he is obedient to God's word and the family flees to Egypt, ensuring Jesus' safety. The protection of Jesus in this event involved God's direct intervention and Joseph's obedience. Throughout history, this is how we see God at work - He speaks and His people obey.

When you yield yourself in complete and whole-hearted obedience to God, He can do great things through you.

Jim George

- How is God speaking to you today?
- How can you respond in obedience?





December 27

Real Hope in the Real World

When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

Matthew 2:16-18

When Herod realises that the Magi have ignored his instructions, he explodes with violence. He is willing to cause unimaginable suffering to eliminate any threat to his throne. Scenes like this ground the Christmas story in the real, broken, painful world. That is exactly why he came - to deal with that pain and suffering. After the highs of the Christmas celebration, if the real world brings you back to Earth with a thud - remember that Jesus is with you in the midst of the brokenness.

*God is not dead; nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail,
The right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men.*
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

- Where are you experiencing the brokenness of the world in your life?
- How does Jesus bring hope to that situation?





December 28

Death

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.' So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel

Matthew 2:19-21

Joseph's unwavering obedience to God's messages in his dreams, even on this third occasion, demonstrates his deep confidence in God's word. Meanwhile, the passing of Herod, who had sought to harm Jesus, serves as a stark reminder that all the earthly power and authority ultimately cannot shield anyone from mortality. Every ruler, king, and leader throughout history has faced death. However, there is one exception - Jesus, who conquered death and offers us the promise of resurrection and eternal life, a remarkable gift that transcends all worldly power and authority.

*Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"
Hark the Herald Angels Sing*

- What are the differences between Herod the king and Jesus the King?
- How does Jesus' death and resurrection transform our view of death?





December 29

Fear and Faith

But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.

Matthew 2:22-23

The biblical character Joseph exemplifies faithful obedience to God even in the presence of fear. When Joseph and his family return to Israel, he experiences fear, though the nature of his fear remains unspecified. Nevertheless, his commitment to following God's word remains resolute. In the Gospel of Matthew, God communicates with Joseph through dreams, offering guidance and reassurance amid life's challenges. In this instance, the family settles in Nazareth, a pivotal step in fulfilling the prophecy that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene. Joseph's story teaches us that obedience to God can coexist with fear, and that God's guidance will lead us to where we are destined to be.

We're not called to live by human reason. All that matters is obedience to God's Word and his leading in our lives. If God says go, we'll go. If he says stay, we'll stay. When we are in his will, we are in the safest place in the world.

Brother Yun

- What fears do you have about obeying God?
- When have you trusted God despite your fears?





December 30

Obedience in Obscurity

So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Matthew 2:23

The example of Jesus, who was born in the obscure town of Nazareth and lived in relative anonymity for his first thirty years, teaches us important lessons. Nazareth wasn't known for having a good reputation, as reflected in Nathaniel's question in John 1:46: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Jesus didn't pursue worldly fame or success; instead, He remained obedient to His Father's will, only beginning His public ministry when the time was right. His life underscores the value of obedience to God, even when it feels like we're living in obscurity. We can trust that following God's path is the best choice, just as Jesus did, regardless of our circumstances.

Obedience to God is the pathway to the life you really want to live.

Joyce Meyer

- Do you struggle with feeling a lack of significance in your life?
- How can you grow in your desire to obey God?





December 31

Repent and Recieve

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

Matthew 3:1-2

This passage marks our first introduction to John the Baptizer in Matthew's Gospel, as his conception and birth are recorded in Luke. Here, he bursts onto the scene with a powerful and straightforward message: "Repent." This call to repentance is particularly timely as we approach the end of the year. As you reflect on the past twelve months, you will likely encounter a mix of highs and lows—moments of joy as well as times of struggle.

When your mind lingers on the ways you may have fallen short or missed the mark, it's important to bring those feelings before God in repentance. Acknowledge your shortcomings, but also open your heart to the grace and forgiveness He freely offers. This practice of repentance is not just about recognizing our failures; it's about embracing the opportunity for renewal and transformation.

God's mercy is new every morning, and that promise extends to every year as well! As you close out this year, remember that no matter what has happened, you can start anew with God's love and grace guiding you into the next chapter. Let John's message resonate in your heart, encouraging you to turn toward Him and experience the freedom that comes from true repentance.

Four marks of true repentance are: acknowledgement of wrong, willingness to confess it, willingness to abandon it, and willingness to make restitution.

Corrie Ten Boom

- What sin do you need to repent of?
- What evidence of God's grace have you seen in the last year?



January 1

Prepare the Way of the Lord

This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: 'A voice of one calling in the wilderness, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.
Matthew 3:3

John the Baptizer is identified as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, heralding the coming of Jesus. His mission was clear: to prepare the way for the Messiah and to direct the people's attention toward Him. As we stand on the brink of a new year, it prompts us to consider how we can also prepare the way for Jesus in our lives.

What steps can you take to ensure that Jesus directs your path this year? Begin by allowing your focus to settle on Him today. Spend time in prayer, asking that He remains the central, focal point of your life throughout the coming months.

Consider establishing practices that keep you grounded in your faith—whether through regular prayer, reading Scripture, or engaging in community worship. Reflect on how you can intentionally point others toward Jesus, just as John did. By making Jesus your priority, you open your heart to His guidance and grace, paving the way for a year filled with purpose and divine direction.

When God is at the center of your life, you worship, when He's not, you worry.
Rick Warren

- How can you 'prepare the way' for Jesus this year?
- What are your prayers for this year?

