

24

*Days of*  
**ADVENT**

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# Welcome!

24

DAYS OF

ADVENT

Welcome to 24 Days of Advent!

This resource was created to help you lead your family to a purposeful and intentional preparation for the celebration of Christmas.

It is hard for us as adults to keep Christ centered in our hearts during the busyness of the Christmas season. For children, it is all the more difficult. Retailers launch their ad campaigns, holiday movies talk incessantly about Santa and gifts, and of course all their friends begin to talk about the stuff they want to find under the tree.

But this year can be different. This year, your family can be different.

We've developed a weekly rhythm to help you do this during the Advent season:

**Sunday:** Throw an Advent party. This isn't a formal affair — just a simple way for you to kick off each week of Advent with people you care about and introduce your family to what you'll be talking about during the week.

**Monday–Friday:** Explore the devotional. Each day's devotion contains ways to bring the truth of God's Word into your child's daily life in natural, easy ways. There are also follow-up suggestions to remind your child later of the things you've explored together.

**Saturday:** Get encouragement and inspiration to keep going. We've included some words of encouragement for you in the journey. As the parent, you carry the primary responsibility to disciple your children. And we are in your corner.

Here are some things you can do to prepare your own heart as you begin the Advent journey:

- Pray. Ask God to open your heart to be able to speak His truth into the hearts of your children.
- Be sensitive to what God is doing. Use this guide as a starting point, but be willing to follow the path where it might lead. Answer questions. Pray together. Discuss God's Word. God will use you in the life of your child if you will stay open to His leading.

**BUT THIS  
YEAR CAN BE  
DIFFERENT.  
THIS YEAR,  
YOUR FAMILY  
CAN BE  
DIFFERENT.**

# December 2013

24

DAYS OF

ADVENT

- Expect to make mistakes. You won't get it all right. You might miss a day. You might say the wrong thing. You might get asked a question you don't know the answer to. That's OK. Remember, a righteous man may fall seven times, but he rises again (see Proverbs 24:16). When you make a mistake, don't get down on yourself. Instead, get back up and start again.

We're praying for you as you undertake this endeavor to lead your family into an ever-growing relationship with Christ. Experts say that it takes a mere 21 days to form a habit, so if you'll simply commit to following these routines through the Advent season, you will have developed the habit of leading your family spiritually. That is a habit you will reap the rewards of for generations to follow.

You can do this!

The 24 Days of Advent Team

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# December 1

1

DAY

Each year at Christmas time, we look back and celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ as a baby in a manger. We remember the birth of that baby as the beginning of a life that would eventually end on a cross and a resurrection three days later that would mark victory over sin and death. This truth is what we celebrate on Christmas, and while it may have marked the beginning of Jesus' time on earth, was not the beginning of God's plan. God had a plan long before He ever created mankind and long before that fateful night in Bethlehem. God had a plan to send His Son to be the Savior of the world, and parts of that plan were revealed throughout the Old Testament in the form of prophecy. The Book of Isaiah, the prophet, was written about 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, but it is often called the fifth gospel because it includes so much about the coming birth and life of Jesus. This week, we will look at some of those amazing prophecies God gave to mankind hundreds of years before that first Christmas in Bethlehem.

**"WHILE IT  
MAY HAVE  
MARKED THE  
BEGINNING OF  
JESUS' TIME  
ON EARTH,  
WAS NOT THE  
BEGINNING OF  
GOD'S PLAN."**

Make predictions in the morning about what will happen throughout the day. Around the breakfast table, give everyone a few slips of paper and a pencil. Encourage each person to write one thing on each slip of paper he/she thinks might happen! Ex: Jackie will brush her teeth before bed. Or, John will eat a sandwich for lunch. Or, Mom will put gas in the car. Fold up all of the papers and put them in a bowl. At dinner, open the slips of paper one-by-one! Have fun determining which predictions came true.

# December 2

# 2

## DAY

**Read:** Isaiah 9:6-7

**Respond:** Every good story has certain elements: a theme, plot, structure, setting, and of course characters. A group of some of the best storytellers - Pixar - developed a list of rules on how they would tell stories. One of the rules is that all stories would follow this path:

Once Upon a Time...  
Everyday, ...  
One Day, ...  
Because of that, ...  
Because of that, ...  
Until finally...

If you watch any of their movies, you'll see a start, something typical happening until one day there is a change. Then a cascade of things happens until they are resolved.

**Sounds simple.**

But what if you only see a small piece of the story? What if you only see what happened on one day in the story and missed how the story started?

Spend some time with your family and play a storytelling game. Pick one person to be the storyteller. The storyteller's job is to pick a movie the family has seen together and choose a small part of the story to share. Maybe they will pick the beginning of the movie, or one day in the middle, or the main conflict when the good guy meets the bad guy - let them choose. Allow the storyteller to tell their small piece of the movie's plotline. The goal for the family will be to figure out the movie the storyteller describes. The goal for the storyteller is to stump the family.

Here's the point: knowing only a small chunk of a story can lead people to misunderstand what is happening in the story.

If you are familiar with the Christmas story, you have probably heard Isaiah 9:6-7 and know that the verses are referring to Jesus. But what if you had never heard about Jesus' birth?

**KNOWING ONLY A SMALL CHUNK OF A STORY CAN LEAD PEOPLE TO MISUNDERSTAND WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE STORY.**

# December 2



2

DAY

Spend some time talking about what people might have thought Isaiah 9:6-7 was about BEFORE Jesus was born.

**Remind:** Continue to play the storytelling game throughout the day. Have fun trying to stump one another!

# December 3

# 3

## DAY

**“... A  
REDEEMER  
THAT WOULD  
SAVE  
HUMANITY  
FROM ITS SIN  
AND DISOBE-  
DIENCE.**

**Read:** Isaiah 11:1-5

**Respond:** To fully understand the Christmas story and the prophecies in Isaiah, we need to understand the larger love story.

God's Story begins in a beautiful garden. God had created everything: the land, the water, the trees, fish, birds, and even people. He created Adam and Eve to be in a relationship with him, to live with Him and His creation, and He loved them very much.

Sadly Adam and Eve sinned against God. So God told them to leave the beautiful garden and the relationship that they once had with them. But that was not the end of the story. God promised that one day a redeemer would come - a redeemer that would save humanity from its sin and disobedience.

Quickly the world became so corrupt (it only took 10 generations!) that God decided to destroy all people - except Noah and his family. Several generations after the flood, a descendant of one of Noah's sons, Shem, would hear from God and be given a three-part promise. This man, Abraham, was told that he would 1) receive land, 2) he would have many descendants, and 3) the whole Earth would be blessed through his family.

This was an incredible promise! God was going to rescue the world through Abraham's family. The birth of Jesus is still many generations away and the story continues as God's people, Israel (the family of Abraham's grandson Jacob), continue to multiply and find themselves in a cycle of forgetting about God, returning to Him and being rescued by him. In the midst of this cycle, Israel appoints a king. The second king, David, is the son of Jesse.

Summarize the story of Israel for your family, how has God redeemed your family? What part do you play in God's Story?

**Remind:** In the next 24 hours, pick up on the theme of God's Story and remind your family of God's redeeming work in your lives.

# December 4

4

DAY

A MODERN  
EQUIVALENT  
WOULD  
"ROLLING  
OUT THE RED  
CARPET."

**Read:** Isaiah 40:3-8

**Respond:** One of the principles of interpreting God's Word is to look for something striking. What jumps off the page when you read these verses?

Note the two messengers crying out. In ancient times, monarchs would send heralds before them when they traveled. The job of the herald would be two-fold. First, they would literally clear the path, making the road safe and easy to navigate. Verse 4 talks about this work of "making the valleys higher and the mountains lower." A modern equivalent would "rolling out the red carpet."

Also note the "crying out in the wilderness." You may remember that the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites and were led out of Egypt by a man named Moses. Still, God's people did not fully trust Him; they grumbled and disobeyed so they spent 40 years in the wilderness of the desert crying out in the wilderness.

As was mentioned yesterday, even after reaching the Promised Land, God's people would follow Him only for a while before returning to their wicked ways. Then calamity would strike and they would again cry out for his help...this cycle of sin, suffering, repentance and deliverance would happen over and over again.

As a family, share about a time when you needed help and were 'rescued' from a specific situation. As you respond together, focus on verses 6 and 7 and allow your family to reflect on what Isaiah means when he talks about people being like grass or flowers.

**Remind:** Throughout the day, help your family consider the cycle of disobedience and recovery that we tend to find ourselves in - physically, emotionally and spiritually. Our trust in God and in one another can be seasonal - just like the flowers and the grass.

# December 5

# 5

## DAY

**GOD SENT  
HIS SON OUT  
OF GREAT,  
IMPASSABLE  
LOVE.**

**Read:** Isaiah 40:9-11

**Respond:** It's time to get out some creative materials! Gather paper, crayons or markers, and/or pencils.

Have each person in your family draw a picture of a conquering hero. Allow imaginations to run in any direction, it could be a knight, a cowboy, a superhero, a general, or even mom & dad - let each family member decide. Once the drawings have been completed, allow each person to share about their hero. What are the hero's strengths? What makes this hero special or unique?

Up to this point in our Family Advent journey, we've read in Isaiah that the Messiah would be a conquering hero. Isaiah 40:9-11 reinforces this theme of a Messiah, both powerful and victorious in battle. However, a different picture emerges in these verses of a Messiah that loves His people, gently gathering them into His arms.

This picture of the loving Messiah is a strong reminder that our Heavenly Father did not simply send His Son to right wrongs; God sent His Son out of great, impassable love.

**Remind:** As you walk through the day, take inventory of the times when you act or make a decision out of love for your children and family. Call out those actions with a simple, "I did this because I love you." Remind your family that your loving actions reflect God's loving action to send us the Messiah.

# December 6

# 6

## DAY

**Read:** Isaiah 61:1-3

**Respond:** What's your favorite story? That story has a main character. Luke Skywalker. Atticus Finch. Jean Valjean. Katniss Everdeen.

Think about this as a family: How often do you consider yourself the main character of YOUR story? How often do your children do the same?

We can easily fall prey to a narrow focus. We see ourselves as the most important actor in every scene. Our opinion matters more than anything else. Whether we're five or fifty, sometimes we just act like full-tilt divas.

But the truth is we're not the main character of this story. God is. As we better understand God's Story, we come to understand that we cannot be the lead and we can rest in the knowledge that we were never created to be.

This week we've looked at the larger story of God redeeming His creation, in addition to exploring the more narrow expectations that people in ancient Israel had of the coming Messiah.

This passage is the one that Jesus reads in Luke 4:18-19 to proclaim that He is the Messiah. In His reading, Jesus stops mid-sentence after the word "favor." In doing so, He divides his work into two advents. One that begins with the Christmas story and one that will begin with His return. During the first advent, Jesus came to preach, to heal, and to proclaim. At the second advent this same redeemer will come to bring judgment.

For us, we live between the two. That's our part in God's Story.

**Remind:** As parents we get to help our children see that they are part of something bigger - part of God's Story. When the opportunities arise today, talk with your children about what their part might be given the things that you have discussed this week.

**"... TWO ADVENTS. ONE THAT BEGINS WITH THE CHRISTMAS STORY AND ONE THAT WILL BEGIN WITH HIS RETURN."**

# December 7

7

DAY

Anticipation. This is the season - our kids feel it as the toy commercials crowd their television shows, we feel it as our time ticks away to buy and wrap. This week, you made a choice to pause, slow your pace, and to create anticipation through the prophecy of a birth foretold.

As parents, we are no strangers to the anticipation of a coming child.

But we read that this child will be different - Wonderful Counselor. Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace. Shoot of Jesse. Sovereign - and yet a shepherd. This child will make an eternal difference - not just in history, but in YOUR story.

By creating this rhythm and space for your children to wonder and anticipate what is to come, you have begun to pull back the veil on what is to come in God's Story - God's plan to redeem His creation.

Keep working to redeem this season for your family.

**THIS CHILD  
WILL MAKE  
AN ETERNAL  
DIFFERENCE  
- NOT JUST  
IN HISTORY,  
BUT IN YOUR  
STORY.**

# December 8

8

DAY

Over 2000 years ago, an angel appeared to a young, engaged girl telling her she was pregnant with the Son of God. The Bible tells us that Mary was selected even though there was nothing unique or divine about her. Nonetheless, we can learn much from Mary's response to the news that she would give birth to the Son of God. Mary demonstrated the kind of heart every one of us should emulate when it comes to our relationship with Jesus. As we approach the celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ this week, we will take some time to learn more about His mother's reaction to the news of His coming.

Celebrate the start of a new week with a dance party! Choose your family's favorite Christmas songs, gather together in the living room, and play the music. When the music starts, dance! When the music stops, yell, "Jesus is born!" Have fun dancing and celebrating Jesus's birth together!

**"MARY DEMONSTRATED THE KIND OF HEART EVERY ONE OF US SHOULD EMULATE ..."**

# December 9

# 9

## DAY

**Read:** Luke 1:30-37

**Respond:** Some of the first Christians in Africa took their personal time with God quite seriously. They even had separate places where they went to be on their faces before God. In time the paths leading to where they prayed were trampled down by frequent use, making the path clear to all. If a believer regularly missed their time with God, the grass would begin to grow back, and all who saw it would know that believer's devotion was lacking. The other believers would kindly provoke that believer to prayer by saying, "Brother, the grass grows on your path."

We are busy people. Living in this digital age, we always have texts, calls, or e-mails chirping at us at all hours of the day and night. The Christmas season makes it worse. There are parties to attend, gifts to buy, people to see, meals to prepare, trips to plan, and more. All too often, grass begins to grow on our path.

Take time this season to reflect. Are you giving Christ the best of your time, or are you offering only what's left over? Are you setting aside time to reflect on God and His Word, or are you letting the grass grow on your path?

As a family, take a few moments to unplug. Turn off the TV, put the cell phones away, sit together, and read the Christmas story together. As you read, ask this question: "Lord, what are you saying to me from your Word?"

**Remind:** The next time your family eats a meal together, unplug. Turn off the TV and the cell phones. After a time of great conversation (and hopefully a lot of laughter), reflect on how your family was able to connect better free of distractions. Point out that the same thing is true for your time with God

**ARE YOU  
GIVING  
CHRIST THE  
BEST OF  
YOUR TIME,  
OR ARE YOU  
OFFERING  
ONLY WHAT'S  
LEFT OVER?**

# December 10

# 10

## DAY

**MARY CHOSE  
TO BELIEVE,  
TO TRUST,  
AND TO PUT  
HER FAITH  
IN GOD, EVEN  
WHEN IT  
CONTRADICT-  
ED ALL HER  
PLANS.**

**Read:** Luke 1:38

**Respond:** I remember my 16th birthday. My family didn't do anything spectacular, but what I remember was going to the DMV to take my driver's license test. The only thing on my mind was the freedom of the road, the opportunities to go as I pleased, and the exciting things the future held!

Thinking back to the care-free mindset I had as a teen, I appreciate Mary's position even more.

Mary, only a young teenager, was engaged. She had responsibilities and was beginning a new life with Joseph. I'm sure her mind was full of all the things to be done. Being mother to the Savior of all probably didn't even make it on the list. Yet, in the middle of the night, an angel showed up with a message that would forever alter Mary's life.

I wonder what went through Mary's mind at that moment. How would her family react? What about her plans? Regardless, in an instant, Mary made a powerful choice. She told the angel, "May your word to me be fulfilled."

Mary chose to believe, to trust, and to put her faith in God, even when it contradicted all her plans. She chose to believe God's plans were infinitely greater than hers. Do you trust God when His plans contradict what you have in mind?

As a family, listen to the Christmas song, Mary Did You Know? What thoughts would have flooded your mind if you had an angelic visit like Mary's? Would you have responded the same way? What can you do to develop a believing heart?

**Remind:** Tonight, pray with your children before bed. As a family, ask God to show you what he wants you to do as a family. Commit to having a believing heart that will trust Him completely.

# December 11

# 11

## DAY

**SHE HAD A  
HEART  
THAT WAS  
OBEDIENT TO  
GOD'S DESIRE.**

**Read:** Luke 1:39-45

**Respond:** Lord Alfred Tennyson wrote a poem entitled Charge of the Light Brigade. While it depicts a vicious battle, the second stanza presents a telling look into the hearts and minds of the soldiers:

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"  
Was there a man dismay'd?  
Not tho' the soldier knew  
Someone had blunder'd:  
Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do and die:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.

The soldiers knew they were being sent into battle because someone had blundered. Someone else's mistake sent them on a life or death mission. Yet without argument, they stood obediently and faithfully plowed ahead.

Likewise, when the Master asked Mary to take on a task she didn't ask for, she accepted it joyfully and without complaint. She had a heart that was obedient to God's desire.

How do we respond when God deals with us about something we don't want to face or assignment we don't want to take on? Do we adopt the attitude of the good soldier?

Today, as your family shares a meal, ask each person to discuss the most difficult thing they've ever had to do and what gave them the strength to accomplish it. How can we find the same resolve to play the part God has given us?

**Remind:** Play a game of Simon Says with your family. As you go, make the requests progressively more complex. Discuss with your children that in the same way you have to pay careful attention and follow every direction in the game, you have to do the same thing with God by being quick to listen and quick to obey.

# December 12

# 12

## DAY

**IT'S ABOUT  
LAYING  
OUR ENTIRE  
HEART AND  
LIFE DOWN  
BEFORE THE  
LORD IN  
HONOR OF  
HIM.**

**Read:** Luke 1:46-56

**Respond:** The New Testament was originally written in Greek, and despite translators' best efforts, sometimes things get lost in translation. For instance, look at the word "worship." What does "worship" mean? The Greek word for "worship" is proskuneo. From that, we get the word prostrate, which means to fall down on your knees and touch the ground with the forehead as an expression of profound reverence.

Worship isn't about a song. It's not music. It's about laying our lives prostrate before our maker, totally surrendered to Him. It's about experiencing His presence and work in our lives. It's about acknowledging who He is and His supremacy in our lives. It's about laying our entire heart and life down before the Lord in honor of Him.

Mary knew what this meant. She so revered God that she submitted her heart, gladly accepted the role He asked her to play, and then worshipped God during the most difficult season of her life. Her worship wasn't limited to words. Her worship was an expression of her entire being. Can we give God the same? Can we worship God entirely?

Today, as your family is together in the car, ask your kids for different reasons we worship God. Use this as an opportunity to discuss the real reasons and purposes of worship.

**Remind:** Tonight, before you go to sleep, gather your family together. Take a few moments and worship God together. Put on your favorite worship song (especially if it's one your children know well), and express your love to the Father.

# December 13

# 13

## DAY

**MARY HAD  
A CHOICE:  
BELIEF OR  
DOUBT. THERE  
WERE NO  
OTHER  
OPTIONS.**

**Read:** Philippians 3:17

**Respond:** Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. – Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

Reading through the Christmas story, few things stand out as much as the extraordinary faith of Mary. An angel showed up with a message that God had a plan for her life. While that, alone, is impressive, Mary's faith in God is more remarkable. God gave her an impossible assignment. Even though she wasn't married and couldn't have a child, she was to give birth to the Son of God. The impossibility of the situation didn't bother God.

Mary had a choice: belief or doubt. There were no other options. In that moment, she made the choice of a lifetime. She trusted God, despite the impossible nature of what God was calling her to do.

What are you facing today that seems impossible? Is there a financial situation that seems hopeless? Maybe there is a something the doctor has said is terminal. What about that family member who is far from God? When we face these situations, we have a choice to make. We get the same choice Mary did. We can trust God in the face of extreme difficulties, or we can allow fear to dominate our thinking.

As a family, think back over the times God has come through for you. Begin a scrapbook commemorating all those things God has done in your family.

**Remind:** Tonight, as your family prays together, record the things you're asking God for in your scrapbook. Keep this as a journal of your prayers, recording when God answers prayer. Use it as a constant reminder that God hears and answers our prayers.

# December 14

# 14

## DAY

This week, we saw the heart of a young, ordinary girl turn into the heart of the mother of the Most High. We saw a girl troubled by the greeting of an angel and questioning the choice of her as mother of the Messiah develop into a young woman worshipping and rejoicing at what the Mighty One has done for her.

Luke 2:19 says, "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." Did you do that this week? When you were challenged to unplug, put down your electronics, and engage with your family, did you take time pondering the goodness of God in your life and treasure those things in your heart?

While your phone is still put away, take time to remember and celebrate what God is doing in your family. Recount those moments that were not caught in a digital image but treasured deeply. Rejoice in what God is doing in your heart and in the hearts of your children.

**"... A YOUNG,  
ORDINARY  
GIRL TURN  
INTO THE  
HEART OF  
THE MOTHER  
OF THE MOST  
HIGH."**

# December 15

# 15

## DAY

God could have chosen to send His son into the world however He wished. Jesus could have come as a full-grown conquering hero. Instead, He chose to come as a baby, born in a manger. Last week, we focused on Mary's reaction to the news of the coming Christ. In addition to Mary, there were a number of other players that first Christmas. This week, we will look at some of those people like Joseph, Caesar Augustus, the shepherds in the field, and the angels who sang of the glory of God. These other participants and their stories give us a glimpse into the character of God.

Invite a few "characters" to your house for Sunday dinner. Have fun eating dinner with your family's favorite stuffed animals, toys, dolls, army men, etc... Set a place around the table for the characters by creating a place setting with each person's name. While you are eating together, ask the characters questions: What is your favorite part of Christmas? Who are your favorite characters in the Christmas story? Have fun as a family answering the questions for the characters!

**JESUS COULD  
HAVE COME  
AS A FULL-  
GROWN  
CONQUERING  
HERO.**

# December 16

**Read:** Luke 2:1-3

**Respond:** Has there ever been a time when nothing you could do or say would help a situation? We would say that things were “out of our control.” The beauty of the Christmas story is that God displays for His people His control, which is His sovereignty over all of creation as the Savior of the world was born.

The stage was set and the time God had appointed for his Son to be born had come. However, at the time, Joseph was living near his soon-to-be- bride in the town of Nazareth, the “not prophesied” birthplace of the coming King (Micah 5.2). So before the time came for the baby to be born, how would God get Mary and Joseph to the town of Bethlehem in time? God was in control. Through a divine census, God used the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus to issue a decree throughout the land that each person would return to his or her hometown. For Joseph, that meant that he would head to Bethlehem with Mary.

It’s easy to overlook these few verses and not see God at work in the birth account of Christ. However, with a closer look at the beginning of the story beginning back in the book of Genesis, we can see how God was at work, in control, and sovereign, bringing about the greatest gift the world would ever know.

How is God working silently in the details of your life and your family this advent season? This is an important discussion to have with your family. Together, call upon the ways God has been at work in the life of your family. Maybe God provided in some special way financially, or gave courage at school to address a situation, or allowed a friendship to form or be renewed. Talk about this together.

**Remind:** As you proceed throughout the day, keep the discussion going. Encourage your children to be watchful for the places where God is at work.

# 16

DAY

“... WE CAN SEE HOW GOD WAS AT WORK, IN CONTROL, AND SOVEREIGN, BRINGING ABOUT THE GREATEST GIFT THE WORLD WOULD EVER KNOW.”

# December 17

# 17

## DAY

**“WHAT IS ONE SILLY THING AND ONE SERIOUS THING YOU WOULD WANT TO DO AS KING OR QUEEN OF A NATION?”**

**Read:** Luke 2:4-5

**Respond:** Imagine what it would be like to be born of a kingly heritage. Maybe your family dates back to European ancestors of royalty. Talk about this together: If you were a royal leader of nation, what would you want to experience? What is one silly thing and one serious thing you would want to do as king or queen of a nation?

For Joseph, his great, great ancestor was King David, the great King of Israel. Talk about pressure! However, this lineage began before Joseph was even born. It was God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to bless and multiply their family as God's chosen people. One day, God told King David that much like he kept his promises to his forefathers, the kingly crown would never depart from David's line. Ultimately, God was preparing a family line that would welcome the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Unlike any king the world had ever known before Him, Jesus came to earth as a king worthy of worship, honor and praise. But Jesus was also a humble king. He was a king who loved to relate to His people. Jesus was also a loving king who desired to care for His people who chose to die for the sins of His people.

Christmas is a celebration because the true King was born into our world, but Christmas is also the anticipation that the Great King would eventually lay down His life for His people.

**Remind:** Look for moments today when there needs to be forgiveness in your family and recall the truth that Jesus, the Great King, laid down His life for our sin so we could have forgiveness and be free from sin.

# December 18

# 18

## DAY

**"FROM THE  
MOMENT  
THE ANGEL  
INFORMED  
MARY ABOUT  
GOD'S PLAN  
FOR HER TO  
CARRY BABY  
JESUS, MARY  
DISPLAYED  
... HER  
HUMILITY..."**

**Read:** Luke 2:6-7

**Respond:** No room. When you're on a trip, having a place to stay is pretty important. Can you remember any trips you've taken when there was no place for you to stay? Share those stories with the family.

As Mary and Joseph made their way to the doors of the inn, asking if there was a place for them to stay while they were in town for the census, we cannot help but wonder what went through Mary's mind as she heard the innkeeper tell them that there was no room for them in the inn. As God's chosen mother of the Savior for the world, it would be natural for us to think that she was entitled to at least a nice room with a king-size bed and a large TV so she was comfortable in the last stages of her pregnancy. But Mary humbly follows God's leading as the innkeeper informs them of a place to stay with the animals. It would be in a feeding trough where she would first lay the Savior of the world, not a crib or a bed with fine linen or rich cloth. From the moment the angel informed Mary about God's plan for her to carry baby Jesus, Mary displayed time and time again her humility to do as God wished.

How many times do we feel entitled to something from God? How often do we expect God to do things for us, such as answer our prayers for a family member, make ends meet so we can pay the bills, have food on the table for our family, or give us a good grade on a test? Maybe we feel that if we do the right things then God will help us out. God chose Mary to be the mother of Christ because He knew her heart; He knew she was humble and desired to do as God had planned.

Plant this thought in your family before you leave this devotional: What does humility look like this week in your heart as you serve God and your family? Is God asking you to follow Him in a special way right now? Listen to the Holy Spirit as a family.

**Remind:** Depending on how your family responded to the questions above, look for opportunities later in the week to talk about the ways the Holy Spirit is prompting them to serve others or take action.

# December 19

**Read:** Luke 2:8-20

**Respond:** It's hard to keep a good secret. Talk about the last time someone told you something exciting but said, "Don't tell anyone!" It's normal to want to share good news with everyone. The night the angels appeared to the shepherds in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night they were told of some very good news. Thankfully, for the shepherds, their instructions were not to keep the news quiet.

Two things stand out for us in today's passage. First, after the angels proclaimed Christ's birth, the shepherds were intrigued enough to want to journey to Bethlehem to find out if what the angels had said was true. Christmas is a wonderful time of ministry to those who have never heard the true story of the birth of Jesus.

Secondly, as the shepherds reached the place where Christ was born, we read "they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child." The good news of Jesus' birth was too much to keep hidden; the shepherds desired to tell everyone about what had happened to them. How has Jesus changed your life? Maybe he did a long time ago, maybe he just did recently. Regardless of when we found faith in this Jesus, we should always desire to share the good news of who He is and what He has done for us with others. How can you share about Christ's birth with someone this Christmas?

**Remind:** Take a moment to think about who God has placed in your life to share this story with and consider inviting them to a Sunday Advent Celebration at your house or to a Christmas Eve service at your church.

# 19

**DAY**

**CHRISTMAS IS A WONDERFUL TIME OF MINISTRY TO THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD THE TRUE STORY OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS.**

# December 20

**Read:** Luke 2:9-14

**Respond:** Wait a minute. We have already read this before. We read this yesterday. Why are we reading this again?

Yesterday, we focused on the shepherds in the story, and today we will focus on the angels. What do you think about angels? What do they look like? What do they do?

Angels are fascinating. Some people have expressed very real encounters with angels in their lives, and some people have only read about angels in the Bible. But two purposes are always consistent when angels appear in God's Word. Angels serve as God's messengers, and they bring glory and praise to God.

In today's passage, we read about the angels appearing to the shepherds in the fields. The angels tell the shepherds about a child who has been born in the city of David, which is Bethlehem. The angels also praise God for the birth by singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." God's promise to send a Savior to the world had finally come true. There had been many times and long periods where God's people had thought that he had forgotten His promise, but God was still there preparing the time for Jesus to be born.

The birth of Jesus is a great way to worship God for His provision (what God has given) and His character (who God is and what God is known for). It was this baby who would one day live to die for the very people He had come to save. But Jesus was much more than a baby; He was God Himself who had come into the world. It is for this reason we sing, "Joy to the world, the LORD has come."

**Remind:** Let's face it. You're going to hear Christmas music today. When Joy to the World or Angels We Have Heard on High comes on, sing it loud. Embarrassingly loud.

# 20

## DAY

**GOD'S  
PROMISE TO  
SEND A  
SAVIOR TO  
THE WORLD  
HAD FINALLY  
COME TRUE.**

# December 21

# 21

## DAY

Caesar Augustus, Joseph, Mary, the Shepherds, and the Angels - each of these had a role in the moment we have all held our breath waiting for. Ruler of an Empire. Carpenter. Simple teenage girl. Smelly shepherd. Majestic announcers. 400 years of waiting for a Word from God are over - the story is turning, and all are characters in the Big God Story. But guess what? So are each of the members of your family! Each member of your family will play a part in the turning of a story as you raise your kids to know and love God. With each day this week, as you have taught them an attribute of God as seen in these characters, you are teaching them that they can know more about God, and that He knows each of them intimately.

What do you learn about God from each person in your family? Make a list and be encouraged - tell your kids how you see the very image of God in them, and praise the Creator who knit them together and brought them into your family of characters.

**EACH  
MEMBER OF  
YOUR FAMILY  
WILL PLAY A  
PART IN THE  
TURNING OF  
A STORY AS  
YOU RAISE  
YOUR KIDS  
TO KNOW  
AND LOVE  
GOD.**

# December 22

# 22

## DAY

The events and people we have been looking at all month are not from some made-up story or fairy tale. They actually existed in human history at a specific time and were participants in one of the most significant events in the history of mankind—the first Christmas. History is about people and events, but it also includes another important component—the place(s) where these things happened. The events of the first Christmas happened in real places like Nazareth, Jerusalem, and, of course, Bethlehem. To truly understand the events of that first Christmas, we need to understand something about the places where everything happened.

Give each person in your family one helium-filled balloon and permanent marker. Take time to write your family prayers on each balloon. Encourage each person to write/draw on his/her balloon thanking God for His Son, Jesus. When each person has finished, go outside and say your prayers. Then, release the balloons to the heavens. As you watch the balloons disappear, thank God for Christmas and for coming to earth for all of mankind.

**TO TRULY UNDERSTAND THE EVENTS OF THAT FIRST CHRISTMAS, WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND SOMETHING ABOUT THE PLACES WHERE EVERYTHING HAPPENED.**

# December 23

# 23

## DAY

**“... IT’S OFTEN  
EASY TO  
BECOME  
CAUGHT UP  
IN WHERE  
YOU ARE AND  
LOSE SIGHT  
OF WHERE  
YOU WILL BE  
AT THE END  
OF THE TRIP.**

**Read:** Luke 2:1-7

**Respond:** Has your family ever had the experience of taking a long trip? Usually, these trips take a lot of planning and preparation. There’s packing and re-packing the car, loading up with supplies, filling up the tank with gas, and finding the perfect toy or book to take with you for the journey. Long trips can be stressful!

For Joseph and Mary, long trips, like the one they took to Joseph’s hometown of Bethlehem, were not uncommon. It might seem like a lot to you and me, but taking the approximately 75-mile trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem on foot would not have been unusual for the couple.

On this particular trip, however, Mary was very pregnant with Jesus. The burden of making such a demanding trip would have no doubt been very difficult for both Mary and Joseph. Yet, in the midst of all the stress of the trip, the Savior was born, and in an everyday place!

When you’re on a long trip, it’s often easy to become caught up in where you are and lose sight of where you will be at the end of the trip.

As a family, make time for a spontaneous trip today (it doesn’t have to be a long one!) that everyone will enjoy. While you travel, take turns thanking God for the journey we are on as Christ followers, even with all its ups and downs. When you arrive at your destination, celebrate together and thank God that, because of the sacrifice of Jesus, each of us can reach our eternal destination.

**Remind:** At the end of the day, think back on all you’ve done and everywhere you’ve been in just one day. Pray specifically for each family member and an area of his or her journey that might be difficult at this time.

# December 24

**Read:** Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:1-11

**Respond:** In many Christmas scenes, we see pictures of the Magi (sometimes called the Wise Men) huddled around the manger immediately after Jesus' birth. The passage we just read, however, notes that the Magi arrived some time after Jesus' birth (around 2 years) and, later, that the family were now living in a house.

The Magi had heard many prophecies of the Messiah (or Savior) told over time (although likely not the one found in Micah), and they followed a star in the sky to find this promised ruler. Another long journey! Their search eventually led them to a young boy—Jesus. They bowed down, worshipped him, and presented him with important gifts.

Have you ever heard the phrase “Don't judge a book by its cover”? It means that we should be careful not to judge other people based only on their outward appearance. Some might have looked at this young child, Jesus, and easily ignored him, but the Magi recognized there was something more—they had found the Savior in disguise! Many Jews of that time had expected that the Messiah would grow up to be a powerful king who would drive out the Romans who controlled Israel. They certainly didn't expect that the Messiah would be a child born in a manger, the son of a simple carpenter and his wife.

Play a game of charades together as a family. Instead of choosing a famous character or celebrity, take turns acting like a family member. You'll find that you won't always guess right the first time!

Remind each other that first impressions aren't always the best, and they don't always help us to know what a person is truly like. There might be someone in your life who has been misjudged. Maybe it's someone at school who always sits alone in the lunch room because no one else wants to sit by him, or maybe it's a coworker who everyone told you to avoid because she's a gossip. It's important that we take time to get to know people, even if they appear to be very different from us.

# 24

## DAY

**“REMIND EACH OTHER THAT FIRST IMPRESSIONS AREN'T ALWAYS THE BEST, AND THEY DON'T ALWAYS HELP US TO KNOW WHAT A PERSON IS TRULY LIKE.”**

# December 24



24

DAY

**Remind:** At the end of the day, ask family members this question: Is there anyone in your life that you might have misjudged before really getting to know him or her? Have family members write down the names of these people on a piece of paper, and spend some time quietly asking God to help them start fresh with that person. After everyone has prayed, tear up the paper together to symbolize your family's commitment to starting fresh with people.