



JOURNEY TO  
**BETHLEHEM**

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Advent Devotions  
Way of Grace Church

# Introduction

While retailers want us to prepare for Christmas beginning in September, for centuries, Christians have prepared to celebrate the birth of Christ during a season called *Advent* (which begins the fourth Sunday before December 25<sup>th</sup>). Advent is a time of both remembrance and anticipation; anticipation, not only for Christmas, but also anticipation for the Second Coming of Jesus. And this happens as we remember and celebrate His first coming.

This small study guide is a kind of ‘Advent roadmap’. You/your family may already have some Advent traditions in place, but I hope all of us will integrate this simple resource into our Christmas season. In connection with a Sunday morning teaching series of the same name, this booklet is meant to take you on a ***Journey to Bethlehem***.

No, there’s no airline ticket on the last page. This *Journey* takes place through God’s word, through reading, discussion, and prayer, as we travel to Bethlehem with the characters of the Christmas Story. Isn’t it interesting that none of the key individuals of this account actually begin in Bethlehem? Even the ‘locals’, the shepherds, have to travel into town from the fields outside of town (Luke 2:8, 15). Maybe the carol writer understood this movement when he penned his invitation: “Come to Bethlehem and see, Him whose birth the angels sing.”

My great desire is that not only will this *Journey* be a wonderful time in God’s word for you/your family, but that you will continue a similar devotional journey in the New Year! How wonderful it is for individuals and families to regularly read, consider, and discuss God’s amazing word. I’ve listed some resources in the back of this book to help you do just that in the New Year.

Are you ready to begin the Journey to Bethlehem? Let’s go!

Stepping out in faith with you...

*Pastor Bryce*

# DAY 1—Getting Started

**Read About It:** Psalm 119:103-105

## **Think About It:**

Do you like to travel at night? Some do and some don't. One of the challenges of traveling at night is obvious: it's dark! While Christmas is often called the "season of light", the light we need most is the light of God's word. Because of sin, the ways that often seem right to us are so often the ways that lead to danger (Proverbs 14:12). Our *Journey to Bethlehem* can only have one road map: God's word. Only God can show us the way and shine His light into our hearts.

## **Talk About It:**

Here are some questions to talk about:

*How would you feel if you were stuck in a dark place and your flashlight went out? If someone came along and gave you a new one, how careful would you be with it? Do we think about God's word that way?*

*Christmas means  
the beginning of  
Christianity—and  
a second chance  
for the world.*

-Peter Marshall  
(former U.S. Senate chaplain)

## **Pray About It:**

Ask God to give you clear eyes to see the light of His word, and an open heart to respond to the guidance of Scripture.

## **For KIDS!**

On the inside of the back cover you will find ideas for creating a "Star of Bethlehem" board that you can use with this study. Parents, in light of some of the suggested activities, you may want to have a bag/bin ready, filled with paper, construction paper, crayons/markers, scissors, and tape.

# DAY 2—Meet the Magi

**Read About It:** Matthew 2:1-12

## **Think About It:**

While the Magi probably arrived months after the birth of Jesus, they probably traveled the farthest of all the individuals who made the *Journey to Bethlehem*. We don't really know how many Magi came. Traditionally, people think there were three Magi because there are three gifts mentioned here. And even though these 'wise men' lived long ago and in a very different culture, they are still "pictures of grace", given by God for our instruction and encouragement. Remember, *wise men* still seek Jesus Christ!

*We three kings of Orient  
are, bearing gifts we  
traverse afar;  
Field and fountain, moor  
and mountain, following  
yonder star.*

-We Three Kings  
(Christmas Carol)

## **Talk About It:**

Here are some questions to think about:

*Have you ever thought about the fact that the figurines in a nativity represent real people? Why is this important to remember? What stood out to you most from this story about the Magi? Why? What stuck with you from Sunday Morning's message about the Magi?*

## **Pray About It:**

Thank God for the journey of the Magi and pray that He would use their story in your life, to help you on your *Journey to Bethlehem*.

## **For KIDS!**

If you've created your "Star of Bethlehem" board, then move the Magi character(s) one space toward the center of the star. That's one step closer to Bethlehem! If you're feeling silly, pretend you're riding a camel around the room (make sure to include sound effects).

# DAY 3—Dwelling in the Darkness

**Read About It:** Matthew 2:1 and Isaiah 9:1, 2

## Think About It:

While sometimes called “wise men”, the more literal term *magi* tells us that these men were from Persia and devoted themselves to things like astrology and sorcery. In fact, the same word (*magos*) is translated “sorcerer” in Acts 13:6, 8. (our word “magic” comes from this word) You see, God sent His light to men who were lost in the darkness of worldly knowledge and sinful practices. But God has done the same for us by fulfilling the prophecies about the Messiah. Praise God for His “Sunrise”! (Luke 1:78, 79)

## Talk About It:

Here are some questions to talk about:

*You may not practice magic or look to the stars for guidance, but how are we still like the Magi? If sin brings spiritual darkness, where should we look for light?*

*O come, Thou  
Dayspring, come and  
cheer, Our spirits by  
Thine advent here;  
and drive away the  
shades of night...*

-O Come, O Come,  
Emmanuel  
(Christmas Carol)

## Pray About It:

While it might sound contradictory, ask God to always help you ‘see’ the darkness. Even when we have the “light” (John 8:12), the darkness still has a way of trying to creep back in.

## For KIDS!

Move the Magi one space closer to the center of your “Star of Bethlehem” board. Go slowly and be careful, but try to walk across the room with your eyes closed. How hard is it to walk “in the darkness”?

# DAY 4—We Have Seen the Light

**Read About It:** Matthew 2:1, 2 and II Corinthians 4:4-6

## Think About It:

It's not quite clear how the Magi connected it with the promised Jewish Messiah, but the light of God's star was undeniable. God had come to these men, while still in their darkness, and had revealed His guiding light. How wonderful that God, by His grace, intervenes in our lives to show us His light! And there is no light brighter than "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ"! Has God intervened in your life with His light? Praise God that He can open the eyes of *magi* like us!

*O Star of wonder, star of  
night, star with royal  
beauty bright. Westward  
leading, still proceeding,  
Guide us to thy perfect  
light.*

-We Three Kings  
(Christmas Carol)

## Talk About It:

Here are some questions to talk about:

*Knowing what we know about the Magi, why did God use a star to draw them to Christ? What "light" do we need to see? What are some ways that God brings us that light?*

## Pray About It:

Praise God for His gracious intervention and pray that you would never neglect His guiding light.

## For KIDS!

The Magi are getting closer to Bethlehem! Move them one space. Using paper and crayons/markers, draw a picture of what you think God's star looked like. When finished, post it on the wall or on the fridge!

# DAY 5—Following in Faith

**Read About It:** Matthew 2:2 and Mark 8:34, 35

## Think About It:

The Magi may have travelled almost 1000 miles to reach Jerusalem. And back then, there were no airplanes. Not even a train! The trip would have taken many, many months, it would have been expensive, and there was always the danger of robbers. So what drove these men forward? Faith! God always calls us to respond to His light with faith. And genuine faith is willing to sacrifice and endure, because it believes that, through Jesus, the Lord of the stars is “for us”, no matter what challenges we might face.

## Talk About It:

Here are some questions to talk about:

*Do you think the Magi were scared about following this new star? Why or why not? What did they believe about the star? What journey does God call us to take when He reveals to us the light of Jesus?*

*The Lord is glad to open the gate to every knocking soul. It opens freely; its hinges are not rusted. No bolt secures it. Have faith and enter at this moment through holy courage.*

-Charles Spurgeon

## Pray About It:

Ask God to strengthen your faith, that you might always stay committed to seeking Jesus Christ.

## For KIDS!

Move the Magi one space closer toward the center on your “Star of Bethlehem” board. Make up a story from the Magi’s journey. Have everyone help out. Where did they stop? Who did they meet along the way? What would they have said about their journey?

# DAY 6—Tempted to Worldly Wisdom

**Read About It:** Matthew 2:1, 2 and I Corinthians 1:26-31

## Think About It:

Here's something curious. If the star was really leading the Magi (which it was (vs. 2, 9), how did they end up in Jerusalem? Could it have been that these Magi stopped looking at the star and simply assumed the "King of the Jews" would have been born in the capital city, maybe sleeping snugly in a royal nursery, surrounded by attending servants and amazing treasures? How wrong they were! You see, even when we follow God's light in faith, we can still slip back into thinking like the world thinks. Can you relate?

*Christmas is about  
a baby, born in a  
stable, who  
changed the world  
forever.*

-John Maxwell

## Talk About It:

Here are some questions to talk about:

*How can we fall into the same trap of worldly wisdom? How did the reality of Jesus' birth run contrary to what any of us might have expected concerning the birth of a king? Why did God do it this way?*

## Pray About It:

Praise God for overturning the world's wisdom, and ask Him to help you keep your focus on the light of His word and the light of Christ.

## For KIDS!

How many spaces have the Magi moved? Well, move them one more space! Kids, ask your parent(s) to tell you about some of their most valuable treasures. Are their answers different from the world's idea of treasure?



# DAY 7—Worshipping with Joy

**Read About It:** Matthew 2:3-11 and Romans 10:9-13

## Think About It:

The visit of the Magi was unlike any other ‘new baby’ visit. When a couple has a baby, it is very common for family and friends to stop by and offer their congratulations. It is very common for visitors to hold the baby and say, “Ah, so cute!”. But what is not common, what is unthinkable, is that a visitor would fall down and worship that baby. But the baby the Magi sought was not at all common. He was the King! He was worthy of their worship. And their gifts simply affirmed the genuineness of their adoration.

## Talk About It:

Here are some questions to talk about:

*Do you think the Magi were disappointed when they finally found Jesus? How do you know? If we confess Jesus as “Lord/King”, how should our response to Him be similar to the response of the Magi (v.11)?*

*Joy to the world,  
The Lord has come.  
Let earth receive  
Her King!*

-Joy to the World  
(Christmas Carol)

## Pray About It:

Praise God for the King He sent and pray that you would always give everything to Jesus in a spirit of joy.

## For KIDS!

Move the Magi one more space. They have arrived in Bethlehem! As a family, sing all or part of the carol, “*Joy to the World*” (see back). Afterwards, talk about your favorite line or phrase from the song.

# DAY 8—Redeemer or Rival?

**Read About It:** Matthew 2:12-18

## **Think About It:**

While the story of the Magi ends with joy, sadly, the story of King Herod ends with jealousy. While Herod pretended to share in the Magi's desire to worship the new King (v. 8), eventually, his actions confirm that he really saw Jesus as a threat. And he did horrible things in order to get rid of the One he believed to be a rival to his throne. While Jesus did not want Herod's earthly throne, He called, and still calls, everyone to submit to His loving rule. How about you? Are you rejoicing like the Magi, or resisting like Herod?

*Why art thou troubled,  
Herod?...Heaven's King...  
comes not to rule in  
wrath, but serve in love;  
Nor would he this thy  
feared crown from thee  
tear, But give thee a  
better with himself  
above.*

-Richard Crashaw

## **Talk About It:**

Here are some questions to talk about:

*How did God protect the Magi and the baby Jesus?  
How do people usually react when they feel like  
someone is trying to take something away from  
them? Why should we receive Jesus instead of  
resisting Him?*

## **Pray About It:**

Ask God to give you a soft heart at all times and the eyes to see the goodness of Jesus' leadership.

## **For KIDS!**

Using paper, crayons/markers, etc. to create a royal crown. What color will it be? Will it have jewels? When you are done with it, don't put it on your head, but place it by your nativity scene or on the Christmas tree. Then read Revelation 4:9-11 to see the very same thing!

# DAY 9—Meet the Shepherds

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

## **Think About It:**

While the Magi had the farthest to travel to Bethlehem, the shepherds had the shortest trip. They were working right outside of town, in the fields surrounding Bethlehem. But did you know that shepherds were not well-regarded in Jesus' time? Most people thought of them as riff-raff and thieves. So why would God send a heavenly birth announcement to guys at the bottom of the social ladder? Does it point to God's grace for even the despised, and/or to the fact that this newborn was the "Lamb of God"?

## **Talk About It:**

Here are some questions to talk about:

*What would be the best and worst parts of being a shepherd? What stands out to you in this story of the shepherds? What stuck with you from this sermon this morning?*

*The appearance to these humble men... symbolized the destination of the gospel for all ranks and classes.*

-Alexander MacLaren

## **Pray About It:**

Praise God that His grace extends to all, and ask Him to always keep the reality of Christ's birth fresh in your heart.

## **For KIDS!**

On your "Star of Bethlehem" board, move the shepherd one space. If you are feeling especially silly, pretend you are one of the shepherd's sheep. How do sheep stand? How do sheep eat? How do sheep sound?

# DAY 10—Filled with Fear

**Read About It:** Luke 2:8, 9

## **Think About It:**

Have you ever asked, “Why were the shepherds so afraid?” Was it because they were startled by light on a dark night, or innumerable voices when there had only been calm and quiet? Or was it because the angel was mighty in appearance? Well the main reason had to be that this angel was the “angel of the LORD”, and that the glory that shone was the “glory of the LORD”. As sinners, as those who have broken God’s loving commands, it can be scary when the Judge of all the earth shows up.

*Silent night;  
Holy Night.  
Shepherds quake  
At the sight.  
Glories stream from  
Heaven afar.*

*-Silent Night  
(Christmas Carol)*

## **Talk About It:**

Here are some questions to talk about:

*What would have been your first thought if you were a shepherd and saw these things? Why would a sinner be scared in God’s presence? Can you fear the Lord (Prov. 1:7) and have confidence before Him at the same time? How? (cf. Hebrews 4:14-16)*

## **Pray About It:**

Ask God to regularly remind you that He is a great and awesome God, and that He rightly judges and will judge sin.

## **For KIDS!**

The shepherds are getting closer to Bethlehem. Move the shepherd one space on your “Star of Bethlehem” board. Share something that frightens you or a story in which you were scared.

# DAY 11—The Comfort of Good News

**Read About It:** Luke 2:10-12 and Romans 8:1

## Think About It:

Like healing cream on a stinging burn, good news can bring comfort to a heart filled with fear. This is especially true when our fears are rooted in the reality we are rebels before a great and awesome God. Notice how the angel comforts the shepherds: 1) he speaks of “good news”, that will 2) bring “joy” and not sadness, and that will be 3) for all the people (not just some). And the news, of course, is that God has not come in judgment, but has sent a Savior. There’s no better way to banish fear than the “good news”!

## Talk About It:

Here are some questions to talk about:

*When you get scared, what kind of news would bring you comfort? Does the Good News of Jesus speak comfort to any and every fear? If so, how? If not, why not?*

*The birth of Jesus is the sunrise of the Bible... From this point a new day began to flow very silently over the world —a day of faith and freedom, a day of hope and love.*

-Henry Van Dyke

## Pray About It:

Praise God for the comfort of Jesus Christ, and ask Him for that comfort even now, in the face of any present fears.

## For KIDS!

Move the shepherd one more space on your board! Kids, ask your parents to share a story about when some good news helped relieve their fears.

# DAY 12—His Glory and His Gift

**Read About It:** Luke 2:13, 14 and I Corinthians 10:31

## Think About It:

The whole point of Christmas is not family, or gifts, or decorations, or charity, or tradition, or church, or even the story of Christ's birth. The whole point of Christmas is to glorify God. The fact that Jesus came into our world is not an end in itself. He was born for the glory of God. He lived for the glory of God. He died and rose again for the glory of God. And so when the angels break into praise and cry "Glory to God in the highest!", they are setting the pace for all of us, that we too would glorify Him in light of the gift of Christ.

*Hark the herald  
angels sing, "Glory to  
the newborn King;  
peace on earth and  
mercy mild, God and  
sinners reconciled!"*

-Hark the Herald  
Angels Sing  
(Christmas Carol)

## Talk About It:

Here are some questions to talk about:

*What does it mean when a person tries to glorify himself, or when a movie or game glorifies violence? Do these usages tell us anything about what it means to glorify God? How can we glorify Him in all we do?*

## Pray About It:

Pray that God would give you a heart in the days to come to glorify Him, in all you do, in response to the reality of Christ.

## For KIDS!

Bethlehem is just up ahead! Move the shepherd one more space! If it's okay with your parent(s), see how loud you can declare the words of the angels in Luke 2:14. Just make sure the doors and windows are closed!

# DAY 13—Hearers and Doers

**Read About It:** Luke 2:15, 16 and James 1:22-24

## Think About It:

How would you respond to this heavenly birth announcement? Some might step back and say, “I need some time to process all this.” Others might respond, “Maybe too many ‘night shifts’ is causing us to hallucinate.” But there are two key words that characterize the shepherds’ response to God’s message: “go” and “haste”. They believed the angel’s message, and because they believed, they wanted to go quickly to see the Savior. Shouldn’t we do the same, receiving God’s word and responding to God’s word in faith?

## Talk About It:

Here are some questions to talk about:

*What was the shepherds’ response when the angel first came? What was their response when the angels left? How can you explain the change? Is knowing God’s word important? Is it enough?*

*Come to Bethlehem  
and see, Him whose  
birth the angels sing.  
Come adore on bended  
knee, Christ the Lord,  
the newborn King.*

*-Angels We Have Heard  
on High  
(Christmas Carol)*

## Pray About It:

Pray and ask God to help you be a doer of the word, and not only a hearer.

## For KIDS!

Move the shepherd one more space on your “Star of Bethlehem” board. As a family, sing part or all of the carol, “*Angels We Have Heard on High*”. (see back)

# DAY 14—Making Known the Saying

**Read About It:** Luke 2:17, 18 and Romans 1:16, 17

## Think About It:

At first it seems like the shepherds, after seeing the baby Jesus, are simply recounting their heavenly experience to Mary and Joseph. But notice what verse 18 says, “**all** who heard it”. That sounds like more than two people heard the shepherd’s report. Whether people from the nearby inn had come to help the pregnant mother, or the shepherds spoke to people beyond the stable, the wonderful reminder here is that the shepherds were not ashamed of the message they had been given. They knew it was God’s word!

*Go tell it on the  
mountain, over the  
hills and everywhere.  
Go tell it on the  
mountain, that Jesus  
Christ is born.*

-Go Tell It on the  
Mountain  
(Christmas Spiritual)

## Talk About It:

Here are some questions to talk about:

*Were the shepherds ordered to tell others about the message they received? If not, why were they “making known the saying”? How does this help us in terms of our motivations for sharing God’s message about Jesus?*

## Pray About It:

Ask God to fill you with the wonder and excitement of the message about Jesus, and from that heart, to help you share this with others. Take time to pray for those in your life who need to hear this message.

## For KIDS!

Move the shepherd one more space. The shepherds have made it to Bethlehem! Now pretend you are one of the shepherds. Without looking at the Bible, tell everyone else the story about what happened to you!



# DAY 15—Leaving Changed Men

**Read About It:** Luke 2:20 and II Corinthians 5:17

## **Think About It:**

God loves to change us! That doesn't mean we always like change. In fact, some people don't want anything in their lives to change. They actually get upset when things change, even small things. But God wants us to see how much we need the change only He can bring. The shepherds who began their night in fear and worry were now leaving the stable in faith and worship. Only God's word can change people like that. Only the reality of Jesus Christ can transform shepherds into servants of the Lamb.

## **Talk About It:**

Here are some questions to talk about:

*How would you explain the change we see in the shepherds' lives? Does God still change people like this? How is our journey toward Christ like the journey of these shepherds?*

*Hail the Sun of  
Righteousness! Light  
and life to all He  
brings, Risen with  
healing in His wings.*

-Hark the Herald  
Angels Sing  
(Christmas Carol)

## **Pray About It:**

Praise God that He still changes lives, and ask Him to work out His change more fully in your life.

## **For KIDS!**

Kids, work with your parents in creating a drawing of the shepherds finding the baby Jesus. What will their faces look like? How many shepherds will there be? Did any sheep come along?

# DAY 16—Meet Joseph

**Read About It:** Matthew 1:18-25

## **Think About It:**

It's interesting that the Bible tells us relatively little about Joseph. After the birth of Jesus, and one episode from when Jesus was twelve (Luke 2:41-52), Joseph simply disappears from the Bible. Given that Jesus' mother Mary is alone when Jesus hangs on the cross (John 19:26, 27), it seems likely that Joseph had already died. But we are not told when or how, or even if this is so. But the fact that less ink is spent on Joseph does not minimize his important role. What God does reveal is always exactly what we need.

*Father show me where I  
fit into this plan of yours.  
How can a man be father  
to the Son of God? Lord,  
for all my life I've been a  
simple carpenter. How  
can I raise a king? How  
can I raise a king?*

Michael Card  
(from "Joseph's Song")

## **Talk About It:**

Here are some questions to talk about:

*What stands out to you from this story about Joseph? What stuck with you from this morning's message about Joseph?*

## **Pray About It:**

Thank God for Joseph and for how the Lord used him in His purposes.

## **For KIDS!**

On your "Star of Bethlehem" board, move Joseph one space toward Bethlehem. Joseph is usually pictured with a beard. What do you think his beard looked like? Try making one and see how it looks on you.

# DAY 17—The Promised King

**Read About It:** Matthew 1:1-17

## **Think About It:**

Before Matthew even gets to the story of Joseph, he does something interesting: he tells us about Joseph's family tree. Why is this so important? Well, the genealogy in 1:1-17 is important for a couple reasons. First, it serves as a reminder of men like Abraham and David, and God's promises to them (Genesis 12:1-3; II Samuel 7). Second, it tells us that Jesus is, in fact, the fulfillment of those promises, the promised offspring of both men. Praise God that Jesus has fulfilled the promises and prophecies given long ago!

## **Talk About It:**

Here are some questions to talk about:

*Why is it important for us to know that God has fulfilled His promises? Can you think of one or two promises God has given to you through Jesus?*

*Yet in thy dark streets  
shineth, The  
Everlasting Light. The  
hopes and fears of all  
the years, Are met in  
thee tonight.*

-O Little Town of  
Bethlehem  
(Christmas Carol)

## **Pray About It:**

Thank God that He is always true to His word, and that His timing cannot be delayed and His purposes cannot be undone.

## **For KIDS!**

Move Joseph one more space on your board. Kids, ask your parents to tell you more about your own family tree. What are some ways God has been faithful to your family, from generation to generation?

# DAY 18—When We Don't Know

**Read About It:** Matthew 1:18, 19 and John 12:35

## Think About It:

How painful it must have been for Joseph to know that Mary, his fiancée, was pregnant, but not know how it happened. Who was the child's father? What had happened to Mary and her promise to be his wife? Joseph did not yet know that God was at work. And while he still tried to honor God by 'divorcing' Mary quietly (a "betrothal" was a legal agreement), in his ignorance, he was going the wrong direction. What a picture for us of everyone who is painfully walking without the knowledge of God's work.

*O come, O come,  
Emmanuel, And ransom  
captive Israel, That  
mourns in lonely exile  
here, Until the Son of  
God appear.*

-O Come, O Come,  
Emmanuel  
(Christmas Carol)

## Talk About It:

Here are some questions to talk about:

*Why was Joseph going to divorce Mary quietly?  
What happens to us when we don't know or don't  
remember God's work?*

## Pray About It:

Ask God to give you a hungry heart that desires to understand, more and more, His work of salvation.

## For KIDS!

Joseph is almost to Bethlehem! Move him one more space. Have someone draw Joseph with their eyes open, and at the same time, someone draw him with their eyes closed. How messy do things get when we can't see?

# DAY 19—When We Do Know

**Read About It:** Matthew 1:20 and Ephesians 1:16-19

## **Think About It:**

Even though Joseph's life seemed to be speeding toward a painful cliff, one dream changed everything. The one statement in verse 20, spoken by the angel, helped bring clarity to all of Joseph's questions. He might not have fully understood the "how" and "why", but knowing the "who" made all the difference. Like his ancestor of the same name (Genesis 50:19, 20), Joseph knew God was behind this situation that was at first so painful. And if God was behind it, Joseph could rest assured that God would work it all out.

## **Talk About It:**

Here are some questions to talk about:

*Why was Joseph told he should not be afraid to go ahead with the wedding? Even though we have God's word, do we always know the specific "how" and "why" of our challenges? Can we always know the "who"?*

*Enough of fears and  
doubt...your deepest  
ground for fear is  
taken away by Him  
who comes as the  
Prince of Peace!  
Fear not!*

-Theodore Christlieb

## **Pray About It:**

Thank God for how He enlightens our hearts to show His plan of salvation through Jesus.

## **For KIDS!**

Move Joseph one space. He's arrived in Bethlehem! Play a game of "Hide-and-Seek", having one person hide. After the game, talk about what would be different if everyone knew the hiding place at the beginning. That might not sound fun, but what if the person was not hiding, but was actually lost?

# DAY 20—The Hope of a Savior

**Read About It:** Matthew 1:21-25 and II Corinthians 5:14, 15

## Think About It:

The words “salvation” and “motivation” should always go together in the Christian life! When Joseph was told that God would fulfill His promises and save His people through Jesus (*Jesus* is Greek for the Hebrew *Yeshua* (in English, *Joshua*), meaning, “The LORD saves”), he obeyed without hesitation. The reality of God’s saving work through Jesus should also motivate us to obey without hesitation. Why? We love because He first loved us and sent Christ for us. And if we love, Jesus said we will obey Him (John 14:15).

*“Immanuel”, God with us in our nature, in our sorrow, in our lifework, in our punishment, in our grave, and now with us, or rather we with him, in resurrection, ascension, triumph...*

-Charles Spurgeon

## Talk About It:

Here are some questions to talk about:

*Why was Joseph supposed to name the baby Jesus? How do we know that all of this was according to God’s plan? What are good and bad motivations for obeying God?*

## Pray About It:

Thank God that He sent Jesus to rescue us. Ask God to make this Christmas season a time of growing in obedience.

## For KIDS!

See if you can come up with a Christmas word for every letter in Jesus’ name (for example, “J” is for joy!)

# DAY 21—Meet Mary

**Read About It:** Luke 1:26-33

## **Think About It:**

Even though we will look together at Mary's journey this Sunday morning, let's prepare our hearts by beginning to consider her story today. Notice first the similarities to Joseph's story. But second, look again at the amazing things mentioned in verses 32 and 33. Not only will this child be “great”, not only will he reign on the “throne of his father David”, but his reign will be “forever”, for he will be called “Son of the Most High”. Has there ever been a king like this? Isn't this the kind we need? A “forever” King and a “forever” kingdom!

## **Talk About It:**

Here are some questions to talk about:

*See if you can find all of the similarities between this passage and the story of Joseph in Matthew 1:18-25. How is Jesus different from the kings of the Old Testament? Why do you think Mary was troubled by the angel's greeting?*

*Who can add to Christmas?  
The perfect motive is that  
God so loved the world. The  
perfect gift is that He gave  
His only Son. The only  
requirement is to believe in  
Him. The reward of faith is  
that you shall have  
everlasting life.*

-Corrie Ten Boom

## **Pray About It:**

Praise God that Jesus came to give us eternal life under His loving leadership.

## **For KIDS!**

Even though Mary made the journey with Joseph, let's move her on your “Star of Bethlehem” board. Move her one space. Also on your board, write down the different things we learn about Jesus from the angel's words in this passage. You might use the different corners and different colors for each.

# DAY 22—Power to Do the Impossible

**Read About It:** Luke 1:34-38

## **Think About It:**

One of the greatest reminders given to us at Christmas is the reminder that God's power is not in any way limited by what we believe is possible. Mary asked, “How will this be...?”, and Gabriel went on to tell her of how the power of God will work inside her. She will conceive! Amazingly, no man was necessary, “for nothing will be impossible with God” (v. 37). If only we would remember how God wants His power to work inside us. If only we would respond as Mary did: “let it be to me according to your word.” (v. 38)

*Would that  
Christmas last the  
whole year  
through (as it  
ought).*

-Charles Dickens

## **Talk About It:**

Here are some questions to talk about:

*Can you think of some other ways that God has demonstrated His incomparable power? What are some things we, deep down, wrongly think are impossible for God? How should Gabriel’s words encourage us?*

## **Pray About It:**

Thank God that, in Christ, His power is at work for our good. Ask Him to help you remember that truth at all times.

## **For KIDS!**

Move Mary one more space, then play a game of charades! Think of something *powerful* and try to get your family to guess what it is by acting it out. Remember, you can’t speak or point to objects in the room.



# DAY 23—Meet Jesus

**Read About It:** John 1:1, 14

## **Think About It:**

It's clear from his choice of words that John wants to take his readers back to the opening words of the Bible (Genesis 1:1). He wants them to understand the Christmas story began long before there was a Bethlehem or a Caesar Augustus. The son of Mary was and is the Son of God, and as the Son of God, He existed right there "in the beginning". But the Son is one with God, and therefore is rightly called "God". Through this "Word", God spoke creation into place. And through this "Word", God speaks new life into us.

## **Talk About It:**

Here are some questions to talk about:

*Why is it important that John begins his Gospel before the traditional Christmas story? How do you know from these verses that "the Word" is Jesus?*

*Jesus was God and man in one person, that God and man might be happy together again.*

-George Whitefield

## **Pray About It:**

Thank God and praise Him that His Son became like us in order that we might become like Him.

## **For KIDS!**

She's getting closer to Bethlehem! Move Mary one more space. While John takes us back to "in the beginning", have everyone in your family share their earliest Christmas memory.

# DAY 24—How a Big God Works

**Read About It:** Luke 2:1-5

## **Think About It:**

A convenient coincidence? Mary and Joseph, who live in Nazareth, are forced by the requirements of a census to travel 70 miles south to Bethlehem. And as we saw in Matthew 2:4-6, Bethlehem is precisely where the Messiah was supposed to be born according to Micah 5:2. Coincidence? No, providence! That is, God was at work, even moving the heart of the Emperor and the gargantuan gears of the Roman Empire to fulfill His word. Shouldn't that inspire faith in us, that God can work to fulfill His word in our lives as well?

*...All the mammoth political forces...are being guided by God, not for their own sake but for the sake of God's little people...God wields an empire to bless his children.*

-John Piper

## **Talk About It:**

Here are some questions to talk about:

*Why did Joseph have to travel to Bethlehem? Did the Romans know they were helping to fulfill an ancient prophecy? Do you think God works in the big and small circumstances of your life to fulfill His word? How do you know?*

## **Pray About It:**

Praise God that He is God over all things, and pray for the eyes to see His hand at work in all of your circumstances, good and bad.

## **For KIDS!**

Move Mary one more space. She's arrived in Bethlehem! Mary is traditionally shown traveling to Bethlehem on a donkey. Find an open space and have donkey races (on all fours)! Do you think that donkey was tired?

# DAY 25—The King in a Trough

**Read About It:** Luke 2:6, 7

## **Think About It:**

For most today, the word “manger” is a Christmas word. We often forget that a manger is a feeding trough for animals. Isn't it strange that one who would be “great...and called the Son of the Most High” (1:32) is first laid in a smelly food box? But in both His birth and death, Jesus defines true humility. This Christmas, may we learn once again that God so often works in ways that force us to reject worldly wisdom and human strength, and trust Him instead; even when that means trusting and worshiping an infant king laying in an animal trough. Merry Christmas to you and yours!

## **Talk About It:**

Here are some questions to talk about:

*What kind of animals might have been in this stable? How do you think it smelled? If King Jesus was born in a stable and laid in a feeding trough, what might God want us to remember this Christmas (and all the year through)?*

*Maker of the sun, He  
is made under the  
sun...Unspeakably  
wise, He is wisely  
speechless. Filling the  
world, He lies in a  
manger.*

-Augustine

## **Pray About It:**

Thank God and praise Him for Jesus, the greatest gift of all. Ask God to help you always remember that this baby became the man who died for us and rose again from the dead.

## **For KIDS!**

Take time to talk together about what God taught you this Christmas on your *Journey to Bethlehem*.

# **Devotional Resources for the New Year**

## **Long Story Short: Ten Minute Devotions to Draw Your Family to God**

By Marty Machowski

## **The Gospel Story Bible: Discovering Jesus in the Old and New Testaments**

By Marty Machowski

## **Wondrous Works of God: A Family Bible Story Book**

By Starr Meade

## **The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every story whispers His name**

By Sally Lloyd-Jones

## **Big Truths for Young Hearts**

By Bruce Ware

## **Training Hearts, Teaching Minds: Family Devotions Based on the Shorter Catechism**

By Starr Meade

## **Mighty Acts of God**

By Starr Meade

## **God's Mighty Acts in Creation**

By Starr Meade

## **God's Mighty Acts in Salvation**

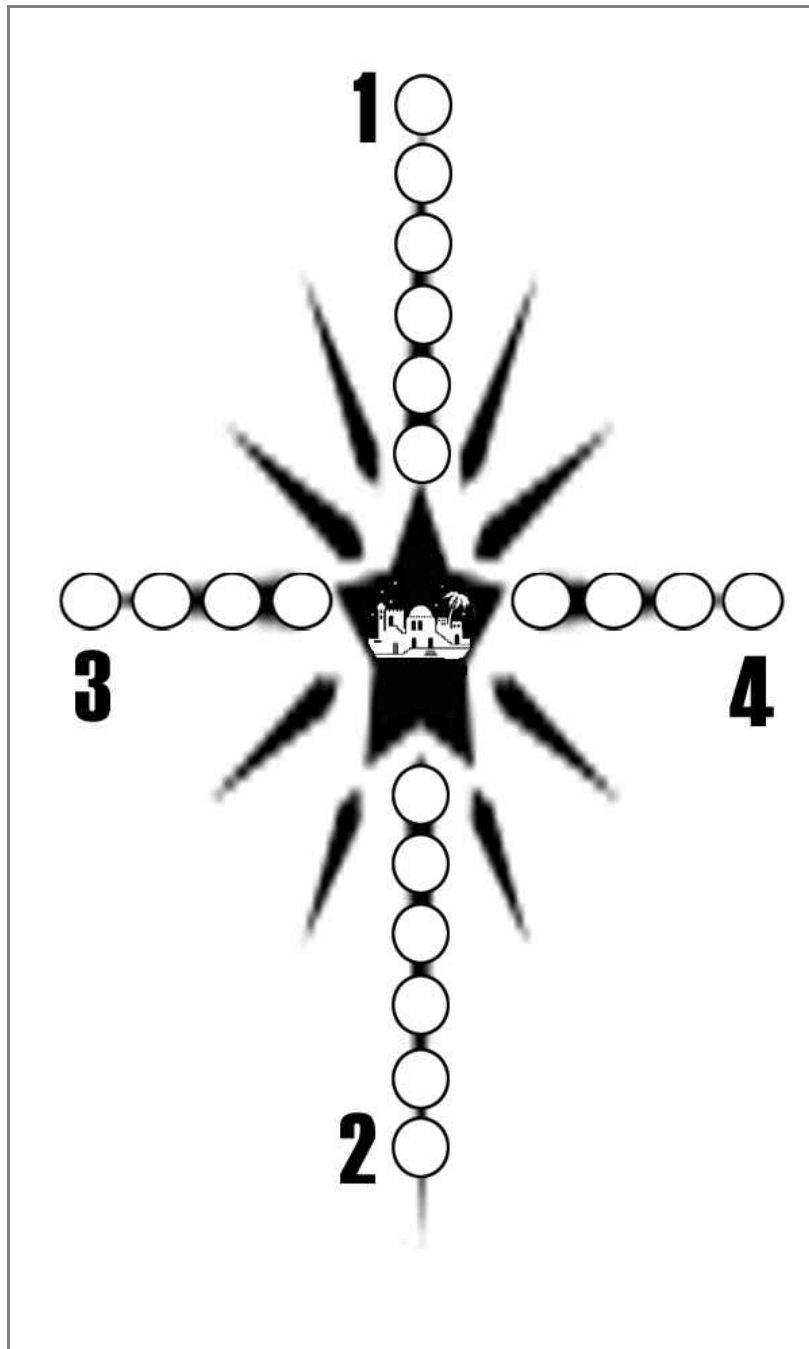
By Starr Meade

## **The Big Picture Story Bible**

By David R. Helm

# “STAR OF BETHLEHEM” BOARD

On a piece of poster board or a large sheet of paper, create a ‘game board’ similar to the one you see below. Use the figurines from a nativity set, or cut them out from the back of the inside cover. Start by placing each character on the following numbers: 1) magi, 2) shepherd, 3) Joseph, and 4) Mary. Place the baby Jesus in the center of the star. The “For KIDS” section for each day will include instructions about moving these pieces. And have fun creating the board, using colors, stickers, or whatever else might fit.



# SOME CHRISTMAS CAROLS

## Joy to the World

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let every heart prepare Him room,  
And Heaven and nature sing,  
And Heaven and nature sing,  
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!  
Let men their songs employ;  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders, and wonders, of His love.

## Angels We Have Heard on High

Angels we have heard on high,  
Sweetly singing o'er the plains,  
And the mountains in reply  
Echoing their joyous strains.

chorus:

Glo-----ria in excelsis Deo,  
Glo-----ria in excelsis De-----o.

Shepherds, why this jubilee?  
Why your joyful strains prolong?  
Say what may the tidings be,  
Which inspire your heav'nly song?  
(chorus)

Come to Bethlehem, and see  
Him whose birth the angels sing;  
Come, adore on bended knee  
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.  
(chorus)

# THE CHRISTMAS STORY

