//Advent Devotional
By Claire Mummert

MUMMERT
ADVENT: THE COMING KING
Kirkfield Baptist

How to Use this Guide

When using this guide, we recommend that you work through the material in this way: Read the passage, Read the devotional, Do the craft.

Consider jounraling the things you are learning along the way!

As you look through this guide, you will see that there is a craft or event attached to each of the devotionals. Some of them require baking, some are crafty, and some will need planning. While these are intended to be fun and a useful tool, feel free to skip any of these that do not work for you. The crafts can be done by anyone but their primary purpose is to help engage our younger participants. Have kids do the craft while you read it aloud!

Wednesday, December 1 | In The Beginning: *Remembering The Word*

John 1:1-5

Welcome to this advent season. I admit that I feel the need for this time to reflect and remember more than ever before. Advent means "coming" because this is a season where we await the coming of Christ. We await His birth. This is a time where we intentionally slow down our schedules to focus on Him. Many of us have been stressed beyond measure this year and see no end in sight. We see no light at the end of the tunnel. We have watched the brokenness of the world run deep. It would be easy to decide to become numb to the world and all that is in it, but let's take a different path.

Let's take a note from God our Father and lean into the pain of the world, reminding the world that there is light, and that God is in control.

God had been silent from His people for hundreds of years and even before that watched His creation, His people, run from Him and dissolve into brokenness. And now He knew it was time. He always planned to send His Son as Savior, but He knew the moment had finally arrived. The time to reach down into the brokenness and provide the ultimate way out. The way to healing, forgiveness, and right relationship with the Father. So, He went back to the beginning to show us how this plan was always the plan. Begin today's devotion by reading the entire Scripture passage.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God."
Let us not doubt the deity of Christ. He is fully God and that is why only He could bridge the gap between us and the Father. No amount of work on our part could reach the heavens, as the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11) so beautifully illustrates. It takes deity. God sent Jesus into the world to reveal Himself to us. The Word. Immanuel. He was God, He was with God, and He existed forever. God sent His son to bridge the gap, to heal the world, to forgive, to live perfectly, to bring redemption, to show us the mind of the Father.

"Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." 1 Timothy 3:16

This also shows us Christ, fully God, yet fully distinct. Hebrews 1:3 “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”

“All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” Through Christ all things were made. From the highest angel to the lowliest bug, it was all made through Him. He cares about it all, He was part of creation. Romans 11:36 reminds us that “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.” He knows people to their deepest degree, so when He becomes a man, we know He not only cared for us already, but fully understands us. In Him was life. And light! “That they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him. Yet He is actually not far from each one of us,” (Acts 17:27). This light draws us to the Father, that we might run to relationship with Him and then serve as His light to the world.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” The darkness has not overcome it. The darkness cannot comprehend it. This True Light, this light of God, cannot even be understood by the darkness. He who is out to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10) whose pride and desire to be like God removed him from heaven, cannot understand this pure light. It cannot understsand this healing, forgiving, perfect, loving light; this light that cannot be tainted.

God always planned, from the beginning of creation, to save us from ourselves. He created us through Christ, sent His Word to us, and gave us a ray that could not be dimmed. He is drawing us to Himself! He wants relationship, He wants healing, He wants His glory to be made known. So, don’t drown in the brokenness of your life and the world. Don’t allow the darkness to overcome. Run to the Father! Run to Christ who is a light for your soul that the darkness cannot ruin. Be His mirror to the world, His lamp in the midst of brokenness. Be about the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18).

Family Craft Idea | Advent Wreath Craft

Welcome to your first craft of the guide! This craft is to help get you ready for advent and to give you a chance to explain to the people who may do this alongside you about the meaning of the season!

Younger Children
Cut out strips of paper, 3 purple and 1 pink, for the four candles representing the four Sundays in Advent. Glue these strips onto a piece of construction paper. Draw and cut out four yellow or orange flames and glue them at the top of each candle. Have an adult paint the child's hand green and put two prints, facing away from each other, at the bottom of the candles to resemble a wreath.

Older Children
Cut out strips of paper, 3 purple and 1 pink, for the four candles representing the four Sundays in Advent. Glue these strips onto a piece of construction paper. Draw and cut out four yellow or orange flames and glue them at the top of each candle. Have the children collect leaves and have an adult help hot glue them to the bottom of the candles to resemble a wreath.

Take time to explain the meaning of the Advent wreath and candles to your children. Use the explanation from Crosswalk to help if needed!

https://www.crosswalk.com/special-coverage/christmas-and-advent/advent-wreath-candles-understanding-the-meaning-history-tradition.html

Thursday, December 2 | The Broken Yoke: *Prince of Peace*

Isaiah 9:2-7

I think for some of us this holiday season is full of family and love. It's about Jesus, lights, family time, and the season feels so magical. But for some of us, this season is hard. It is a painful reminder of things lost and broken relationships. Or maybe you are somewhere in the middle. But the good news of this season is that love came down for you. For all of you broken, tired, and sick. You are the ones Jesus came to save!

"And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physicial, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Mark 2:17

So today's passage just hits right into the middle of this brokenness. Into the middle of the tired and downtrodden. It is a reminder that you are not alone in this dark place. Let this season show you some light.

For ***"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness on them has light shone" (Isaiah 9:2).***

Read the whole passage! God has come for you and is sending a light, His outstretched hand in your darkness. He sends healing, He sends relationship. The Jews of this time period have lived under the yoke of oppression and are now receiving the promise of Messiah. The promise of deliverance. He fulfilled His promise to multiply the nation of Israel (verse 3), and now He is promising to fulfill the covenant made in Eden. "He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). Messiah is coming at last. With each generation beginning with Seth the whole of God's people have been waiting and watching this line for the Messiah and here we have Him prophesied again.

"For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire."
God is ready to release us from burden. The Jews were slaves at this time and were looking for relief. When we meet the Messiah, when we encounter Jesus, does He not lift our burdens? He does not promise an easy life, no, but He does promise to come alongside, carrying our burden on His own shoulders.

Matthew 11:28-30 reminds us, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

And then comes the best part, and I hold my breath a little bit. ***“For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (v6)***. That child who is foretold here is no longer a future promise. It has been fulfilled! He has come. And I just want to shout His names as I read them out loud. I want to spread this news! I want to sing the Hallelujah Chorus for all to hear. I don’t want to make this my next Pinterest project, I want to tell my neighbors. Did you know, friend? Did you know that the Prince of Peace has come?

In the midst of the brokenness, terrorism, racism, brutality, families being ripped apart, violence, refugees, and so much more happening on a large or small level, the Wonderful Counselor is here. The Prince of Peace has already come! Oh, sweet world, are you listening? You don’t have to live in the bottom of your brokenness because the Savior has come to lift you out. He has come for the lowly and He will spread His peace.

“Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”
His peace shall have no end! He will uphold justice and righteousness! Is this the yearning of your heart? Do you long for light and peace? For justice and righteousness? The world is broken, but ultimately these things have come in the person of Jesus Christ.

Don’t miss this light. Hear the yearning in this Scripture and look to Christ in this season. He is holding out His hand. He will take your brokenness upon Himself and carry you through this. He will bring peace, justice, and righteousness that has no end.

Family Craft Idea | Cinnamon Applesauce Ornaments

Take some time as a family to make this recipe, cut out ornaments, and talk together about Jesus' coming in the Bible! Make sure to remind your kids that He has already come and that they can have a relationship right now. They don't have to wait for the Messiah - He is here!

Recipe:

1 1/4 cup Cinnamon
1 1/4 cup Applesauce

Mix these two together completely to give you a stiff cookie dough consistency. Add more cinnamon or applesauce as needed.

Roll out a quarter of the dough at a time between two pieces of plastic wrap until it is about 1/4" thick

Remove the plastic wrap and cut out the ornaments using cookie cutters! A straw or skewer works well to poke a hole at the top for twine, string, or a hangar.

Bake the ornaments at 200 degrees for 2-3 hours. They should feel dry and hard to the touch.

Now you can paint them, decorate them, or leave them - however you choose! Now hang them on your tree and they will make your house smell amazing! These do not spoil so you can store them and use them again the following season.

Friday, December 3 | The Branch: *Prophesy Fulfilled*

Isaiah 11:1-10

What an honor God bestowed on Isaiah. He told him the future of the world with Jesus at the center. And, indeed, Jesus is the focus of God's plan for the world.

In Isaiah 10, God spoke of judging nations by way of the metaphor of chopping down a forest. He continued with this metaphor in chapter 11, referring to the royal house of Israel as a stump. The line of David would be cut down when Israel went into exile. The stump is Jesse, King David's father. **"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit"** (v1). The prophetic word of the Lord is that, out of Jesse's line, would come another king, a shoot or branch, that would be the greater David. This is a prophecy of the Messiah, Jesus.

The New Testament shows us this prophecy fulfilled. Matthew 1 traces the genealogy of Jesus, the son of David, who was the son of Jesse. He ended the genealogy with the birth of Jesus, "who is called Christ" (Matt. 1:16). Christ is the transliteration of the Greek word "christos", which is a translation of the Old Testament word for "anointed" or anointed one. "Messiah" is our transliteration of that Hebrew word.

"And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him..."
Read verses 2-3. Then we are told things about this Messiah. First, the Spirit of the Lord shall rest on him. He would be anointed with the Spirit. This prophecy was fulfilled at Jesus' baptism. Matthew recorded the event. The Spirit of God descended like a dove and came to rest on him (Matthew 3:16).

The Father said the Spirit would endow the Son with three specific things:

1. ***wisdom and understanding;***
2. ***counsel and might; and***
3. ***knowledge and the fear of the Lord. (v2)***

With wisdom and understanding, Jesus would lead His followers to know and obey God. With counsel and might He would carry out the mission given to Him by the Father. With knowledge and fear of the Lord, Jesus would do the will of

the Father completely. In fact, He would delight in this fear of the Lord (v3), enjoying the holiness and might of the Father as a holy and devoted Son.

Jesus, as the descendant of David, was the promised king (2 Samuel 7:14-17). He inaugurated, or began, His kingdom while ministering on Earth. His first message was "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). He said, "the kingdom of God has come near to you" (Luke 10:9). But Jesus did not complete His kingdom work, for He came the first time to save rather than to judge.

But God gave Isaiah an even greater vision of the kingdom. For God revealed that the day would come when Jesus would judge and rule the nations. ***"He shall not judge by what His eyes see, or decide disputes by what His ears hear, but with righteousness He shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth..." (v3-4).*** He would destroy the wicked with His word, the "rod of his mouth" and "breath of his lips" (Is. 10:3-5). This will occur when Jesus returns, resurrects the faithful and judges the world.

Then the Lord revealed even further into the future. After the resurrection and the judgment will come a new earth, a restored creation, inhabited by believers of all the ages in the presence of the Lord. Isaiah described it as a time when predator and prey are no longer at odds (v8). It will be a time when children need not fear any animal, when there will be no hurt or fear (v9). Revelation 21 describes this new creation even further.

The scope of the prophecy given to Isaiah is breathtaking! Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, God described Him to Isaiah. More than two thousand years later, we still await the completion of the kingdom, the return of Christ and the new earth.

Yes, Jesus came to earth as a baby as we celebrate during Advent and Christmas. As the faithful waited for Him then, we await His return now. This Jesus who lived for us and died for us will return for us.

Family Craft Idea | Red & Green Meal

For this craft, decide on a meal in advance that is entirely made of red and green items to make the colors feel festive. Have your family help you prepare the meal as you read through and talk about the devotional together. Some examples of red and green food are listed below.

Red: strawberries, raspberries, apples, pomegranate, cherries, watermelon, bell pepper, new potatoes, tomatoes, enchiladas

Green: avocado, apples, grapes, kiwi, pears, artichokes, lettuce/spinach, asparagus, broccoli, brussel sprouts, green beans, celery, cucumber, zucchini, edamame, celery, peas, basil, some pastas, some sauces, enchiladas

Saturday, December 4 | The Branch of David: *Jehovah Tsidkenu*

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Behold. The days are coming.

David's throne had been filled with corrupt leaders after the reign of Solomon and they fiercely needed relief. And now, God makes a promise – ***"I will make a righteous Branch of David sprout; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the Earth. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety…"*** And everyone will be saved!

Can you imagine feeling that desperation? Can you imagine the deep need for relief? When I hear this prophesy, I can absolutely identify with that feeling. When I look at the climate of our world, I see the need for righteousness. I see the need for justice. I see the need for salvation. And I feel desperate.

But when I think about the Lord…reprieve. Solace. Peace. Assurance. ***"…and this is the name by which it will be called: the LORD is our righteousness."*** Jehovah Tsidkenu is the Hebrew word for 'the Lord is our righteousness' and He is that place of safety, solace, and peace. It doesn't change the current climate, but it gives the people, it gives us, one thing that we did not have before. It gives us one thing to hold tight to.

Hope.

God sees His people, even now, reaching out for Him with straining muscles. He hears His people calling out with hoarse cries. And He gives hope. A branch will spring up. A righteous branch! A just branch! And He will save us all! And He will be such an embodiment of this that you will call Him, "The Lord is our righteousness." And His name. If they had only known His name, His very powerful name. His name is Jesus.

See, even though God was giving them hope, they would have to wait for it. This is Jeremiah and there are still a whole host of other prophets to come and events to happen. Then there would be the long silence before this hope would ever fully enter the world. And even then, the people would not recognize it.

They would look at this star, this baby, this young man, this teacher, and they wouldn't see the truth. Some would, of course. Some would flock to Him with their presents, their troubles, their belief, their trust. But some would not. Some would turn from Him. Herod would try to kill Him, the Pharisees/Sadducees would try to test Him, the people would try to make Him into something He wasn't, and

in the end most of them would cheer for His death.

God sent a hope, but they did not see it.

The promised root of Jesse! But the better news is, He didn't need us to believe in Him to be who He was. Who He is. He took on all the mistakes, all the sin, and He died. He allowed that crowd to send Him to the most brutal death, so brutal that even Roman historians refuse to give detailed accounts. And then He did the most hopeful thing ever. He came back.

He didn't stay dead; the weight of sin could not hold Him. Death was slain forever. Destroyed. And He saved us just like Jeremiah said He would. He didn't just save the Chosen People of Israel, but He fulfilled the promise to Abraham of blessing the nations by saving them as well. He came not just as hope and salvation for Israel, but for all of us.

So let's not be like Israel this season. Let's not miss this hope. Let's look to that just, righteous branch of salvation and cling to Him. He has come. And He's coming again.

He is Risen Indeed.

Family Craft Idea | Paper Snowflakes

Paper Snowflakes are a fun and easy way to add some Christmas decorations at your house. For this craft, you will only need a few items.

Supplies:
Paper
Scissors

Make sure that you start out with a square sheet of paper. If you are using traditional printer paper that is a rectangle, simply fold the top left hand corner to meet the opposite side of the paper. It will now look like a 90 degree triangle at the top and a rectangle the width of the paper at the bottom. Cut off this long rectangle and unfold to create a square.

Taking your square, fold the upper left hand corner to the bottom right hand corner to fold the paper in half diagonally. With the tip of the triangle facing down, fold the traingle in half so that the left hand corner touches the write hand corner. Then, fold this triangle into thirds. It is okay if this is not perfect! Try not to stress!

With the triangle's tip facing down, cut shapes out of the left and right sides, making sure that the paper never receives so many cuts that it is no longer connected. Unfold and see your creation!

For templates, check out www.firstpalette.com/printable/snowflake.html

Sunday, December 5 | Zechariah & Elizabeth: *Living Expectant*

Luke 1:5-10

Today is a day full of anticipation. This is a setup. What is to come? We are at the very beginning of the Gospel story and we are looking for Messiah, yearning for Messiah, when we meet Zechariah. Now he's clearly not the Messiah and his wife, Elizabeth, isn't either, but we do know that they are Godly people. Righteous people. We also know that they have no children.

Have you ever noticed how God loves to use what's "impossible" to accomplish His will?

"They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. And yet they had no child, because Elizabeth was infertile, and they were both advanced in years."
So, when I hear that they have no children, a light turns on in my mind. Something is coming. God is about to do something impossible for this couple.

In fact, this is a common motif that the Bible uses to set the stage for His work. Sara is barren and had no child before the promise of Isaac in Genesis 12, Rebekah feels similarly in Genesis 25, Rachel cannot conceive in Genesis 29 before having several children, Hannah pours out her heart to God over her infertility in 1 Samuel 1 and conceives Samuel, the wife of Manoach is barren before she conceives Samson (Judges 13), and here with Elizabeth.

And each time, we see God doing an incredible work. This is a sign post.

"Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God...he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord..."
Zechariah is about to go before the Lord, an honor but also something a bit scary. The fear of the Lord was real, especially to the priests who went before His presence. An unholy priest would not be tolerated by the Lord.

So, we have this man about to go before the Lord. We have this righteous couple with no children. And we sit, and we wait. Because something is about to happen.

Something exciting.

Family Craft Idea | Poinsettia Painting

Today we are going to have fun making a Poinsettia and getting to do some painting. Here is what you will need:

Red Paint
Green Paint
Yellow Paint (optional)
Sponges (2-3)
Scissors
One sheet of paper

Take your sponge and cut it to resemble a poinsettia leaf. Let kids help you or just do it yourself, either way try to have fun with it!

Dip your cut out sponge in the red paint and dap it on the paper in the shape of a poinsettia. Continue to add as many red petals and green petals/leaves as you like! When you are finished, you can add a yellow circle sponge print in the middle for the finishing touch.

Monday, December 6 | Elijah Comes: *Make straight the way*

Luke 1:11-17

In some ways, this passage reflects all my hopes and dreams for every Christmas. It may sound weird since this passage is not directly Christ-centric but sit here with me.

"And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him."
Zechariah is standing next to an altar when the angel appears, and He is troubled! He is scared! For some reason he isn't just scared, the most common response to a fiery being stand before you, but he is also troubled. My guess is, he's not positive this is good news at first. Why would an angel be visiting him as he sacrifices? This would easily disquiet his soul and probably cause him to worry that his sacrifice was not acceptable or that he was unclean. Yet, it was such good news. And here's where Christmas is embodied for me.

First, a dream that felt impossible is fulfilled, we got those signposts yesterday. Christmas frequently feels like a magical time. I wish it felt like this year-round, but at Christmas people give sacrificially, they love unconditionally, they forgive, they think of others, they elevate the less fortunate, and more. Many dreams are fulfilled because people begin to act as they were always meant to. It is magical. It is sacred. It is heaven come to earth.

"But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard...And you will have joy and gladness and many will rejoice at his birth."
This moment is full of joy, gladness, and rejoicing. Though we are just beginning to see the unfolding story of the promised Messiah, we are already seeing that Christmas is a season full of joy. We are meeting the one will make way for the Messiah. The promised "Elijah" who will be the voice "crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord" (Isaiah 40:3; John 1:23). The Israelites are finally getting the Messiah promised, we are finally going to meet the one who brings us into a salvific relationship with God. And it started with Zechariah and Elizabeth getting to see God working in the impossible by bringing them their son, John.

"And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit..."
As they talk about how they are to set John apart for God's service, there is this intense devotion to God. And here we have the second thing I love about Christmas. At Christmas, people everywhere think on Christ more than at any other time of the year. More than even Easter, I would say. We lament the commercialization of Christmas, but don't you think that God foresaw that? When else does the larger population willingly listen to music about Christ, attend church services explaining the Gospel, look at motifs of Jesus put out on the lawns of their neighbors, and more. Christians come out of the woodwork to do Advent, reading the Bible every day and celebrating the truth of the Gospel with their children. It's a time of devotion that we don't see any other time of the year! It's a time when we, like John, begin to see ourselves as set apart and intended for a purpose. We may not live off the land, eating locusts, like John, but we do find ourselves focused in worship.

"...and he will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the father to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."
Lastly, they are told that John will be the forerunner of Christ. He will be Jesus' Elijah. As Christians when we read and look forward to the birth of Christ in advent, we should be looking forward also to the second coming of Christ. This is not the end! And we should become the people preparing the way for Him to return. We should take up this dedication to tell the world about Him and prepare them for life with Christ as King. We are not meant to have the knowledge of the end, who wins the battle, and let other people fight for the losing side. We are meant to passionately spread His love, His message, His glory wherever we have opportunity. We are intended to take the invigoration we get from this season and let it carry us through the year, celebrating His birth, life, death, and resurrection all year long.

Family Craft Idea | Christmas Tree Plates

Supplies:
Paper plate
Green Paint
Scissors
String
Ornament Paint (optional), Craft Paper (optional), Paper Clips (optional), Hole punch (optional)

Begin this craft by painting the paper plate green and allowing it to dry. Once the plate is dry, cut the plate into a spiral. Use different colored paints to put thumbprints around the spiral or cut out and decorate small circles or ornaments then attach them via paperclips to the Christmas "tree". Put the string through the center of the spiral and allow it to hang, looking like a Christmas tree.

Tuesday, December 7 | Zechariah & Elizabeth: *God at Work*

Luke 1:18-25

All throughout the Old Testament, God loved to use the unlikely. Sampson, Balaam, Leah, Moses, Abraham - God can do anything and use anyone. When Zechariah asks this question, I sort of laugh. ***"How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years."*** Hadn't he read the story of Abraham? Of course he had. Nothing is impossible for God and He even brought forth His chosen people from this exact type of situation. God's got this.

Then, Silence.

"And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time."
Zechariah's condition is mirroring the way that God is working in Israel. God had spoken to them, sent them prophets, done all these things, and they still did not believe. Take time to read Psalm 78 and recount the work of the Lord. This is a glimpse into what God has done for His people. So, He gave them silence. They sat in silence while they waited for the coming. The coming of the Son. And Zechariah is now waiting in silence until the coming. The coming of his son.

"And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision..."
The people are probably just as worried as Zechariah was when he encountered the angel. But they quickly realized that Zechariah had seen a vision. They move from concern that God found their sacrifice unworthy to a feeling of expectation and excitement. They realized just as Zechariah did that God was about to do something and that His name would be made great.

We are just like the people of Israel; we are just like Zechariah. Forgetful.

We get overwhelmed, worried, anxious, and more. We forget to trust and to look for those places where God is showing us that He is about to do a great work. We forget that God is continually working all things for good (Romans 8:28) and for His great name (Psalm 96:2-4).

Instead, let's take a note from Elizabeth. "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people." She responds to what God is doing with gratefulness and with hope. She sees God at work. Look around this season and see it for yourself. Be filled with gratefulness and hope.

Family Craft Idea | Popsicle Snowflakes

This craft is very easy and is customizable whether you want to buy some items or use things on hand. You can use it as decorations around the house or as an ornament.

Supplies:
Popsicle Sticks
Liquid Glue or Hot Glue (glue sticks will not work)
Decorations: ribbon, markers, pom poms, glitter, etc

Glue the popsicles (about 4) into a snowflake pattern. Once they have dried, enjoy decorating them! If you prefer them to be a color other than their natural wood, it can be useful to color them with markers in advance.

Wednesday, December 8 | Favored One: *Following God's Plan*

Luke 1:26-38

The time has finally arrived for us to begin to utter the name of the Messiah in Scripture. We get to see God working and we finally hear the name chosen for the Christ. It's time. The moment here. Everything is becoming real now. All this yearning, hoping, praying, looking, and sacrifice is coming to fruition. Gabriel has just spoken to Mary and I could cry because hope is about to break its light into the world with a force nothing can overcome. God is coming to Earth. His kingdom come on Earth as it is in Heaven.

As the present-day church, we love to look at the people in the Bible and reprimand them for not wanting to wait or for having so little faith. We know the end of the story, so we struggle to understand their impatience. But it was not as though the Messiah was promised in one day and delivered in the next. In fact, the people of God have been waiting for His promised Son since the covenant made with Adam as he was exiled from the Garden long before Jesus actually arrived on the scene. Multiple generations of Jews have been praying and begging for God to send the Messiah, yet no one is expecting this moment and this King.

Mary is just a teenage girl, engaged to a man, doing her normal work when an Angel appears to her. Can you imagine what that would be like? You feel like the most normal person, nothing special, nothing exciting about you, doing your work, and an angel shows up. This is no children's storybook with a sweet halo and a light glow. This is not touched by an angel and there is no odd spotlight from above. This is a Messenger from Heaven. This is fire and light. The angels do not have to continually say, "do not be afraid" because they are surprising. They are made of fire and radiating the glory of the presence of the Lord. They are Moses' face unveiled. And the first thing the angel say to Mary is that she is a ***"favored one".*** God has seen her and knows her. God is calling her to a great task.

And Mary is afraid! She is troubled, she is worried about what will happen next. But rather than punishment, she receives the greatest gift. He's coming. He's coming through her. And suddenly this very ordinary teenage girl becomes part of salvation history. ***"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God."***

All of the sudden she is no longer just cooking and cleaning, she is carrying the fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants. She is watching prophesy come true. And she has a front row seat! Mary did you know?....yes!

After the fear, what is her first response? She feels unworthy. But she does not sit in the emotion and allow it to overtake her. She does not allow herself to run from the Lord. She doesn't know how this will come to be, but she believes. ***"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."*** She has to be scared, she has to have many more questions, but she focuses not on herself, but on God's glory. She is His servant first. Nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37).

As the present-day church we have something that Mary did not have, we are something that Mary was not. We are a Temple for the Lord (1 Corinthians 3:16). God has put His Spirit inside of us and called us His Royal Priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). We can look at that and respond with fear. We can hear God say that to us and feel unworthy or inadequate. Or, we can choose to trust in God's plan and say to Him, "not my will, but your will be done." We can say, ***"I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."*** We can choose to give over control to the Creator who has plans far bigger than we can imagine, all for His name and glory.

Family Craft Idea | Pinecone Ornaments

As you decide when to do today's devotional and are looking at the craft, schedule a fun walk with your family to gather your most important supplies - pinecones! You can choose to talk through the devotional as you walk and gather or as you make the craft, it's up to you!

Supplies:
Pinecones
Paint (any colors) & Paint brushes
Glue
Pom poms, string, and other fun things (miniature ornaments)

After gathering your pinecones, you will want to clean them if you are going to use them inside. Soak them in warm water with a small amount of soap or give them a half warm water and half vinegar bath. This will remove particles, bugs, and sap from the pinecones.

Paint the pinecones whatever color your children and you choose, allowing them to dry. Then, glue the pom poms and other pretend ornaments onto your pinecone to create a Christmas tree effect! Add string to the top to make them an ornament, string them on a ribbon to create a garland, or set them on the table as a centerpiece.

Thursday, December 9 | Joseph: *Trusting God's Plan*

Matthew 1:18-21

I love how matter of fact this passage starts. As if what is about to transpire is normal and will make easy sense to all readers. "So this is what happened..." But instead we get a supernatural experience, something no one expected or was quite ready for (despite all the clues)!

"When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit."
Joseph, like Mary, is living a normal life as far as we can tell. He's doing his best to abide by what is spiritually and culturally correct. He's a good man. And then one day, his fiancée gets pregnant. Now being engaged or betrothed in the Ancient Near East was as good as married as far as the rules for faithfulness go. An engagement was just the time to prepare the house and the feast. Breaking an engagement was an incredibly scandalous ordeal. A betrothed woman who had "played the harlot" was to be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:23-24).

"And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly."
Joseph's fiancée is pregnant and while he is a kind man, he is also a just man. He decides, out of his grace, to send her away quietly rather than bring the wrath of everyone upon her but also not to give her a second chance. He has no designs to heap shame upon her, yet he also has to save his own reputation. He is not willing for her to be stoned, but he is not willing to ruin himself either.

But the good news of the Lord is that God works His plan fully and never leaves His people alone. God had a plan just as He always does. So, He sends an angel to Joseph in a dream.

"...do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit"
God takes care of Mary and Joseph. He provides a way. He allows for the virgin birth without scandalizing Mary and marring the name of Jesus. He brings the line of David into the picture with Joseph's adoption of Jesus. He provides for Mary by giving her a stable family. God's plan takes care of everyone. And all He asks is for Joseph to trust.

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from sins."

It's not a light calling. Joseph is being asked to trust God and be a part of God's plan to save His people from sins. This is a huge calling. And you may not be Mary or Joseph in your life, but God still has a plan for you. And His plan for you matters. You may be afraid, it may not make sense to you right now, but God is at work. What He wants is for you to trust Him. So much of the story of the Bible is God's people trying to do things in their own power only to discover that if they would trust God, He would take care of them and work all things for good (Romans 8:28). As we head into this season of worship and waiting, let's give Him control and allow Him to reveal His plan rather than following our own.

Family Craft Idea | Cookies and Kindness

As you discuss Joseph and God's plan, go ahead and pull out your favorite Christmas cookie recipe (or just any cookie recipe). Spend some time making and decorating cookies together as you discuss God's plan. Then, take cookies to your next door neighbors, spreading God's love for your neighbor this season. The recipe below is found on AllRecipes.com in case you would like a sugar cookie recipe!

Ingredients:
1 1/2 butter, softened
2 cups sugar
4 eggs
1 tsp vanilla extract
5 cups all-purpose flour
2 tsp baking powder
1 tsp salt

1. Cream the butter and sugar until they are smooth, light, and fluffy.
2. Beat in eggs one at a time just until combined and add vanilla
3. Stir in flour, baking powder, and salt, then
4. Chill the dough for at least one hour (up to over night)
5. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees
6. Roll the dough on a floured surface to 1/2 inch or 1/4 inch thick and cut out shapes with cookie cutters, place the cookies 1" apart on an ungreased cookie sheet and bake 6-8 minutes (allow them to cool fully before icing)

Icing:
1 cup confections sugar
2 tsp milk
1/2 tsp almond or vanilla extract

Wisk the ingredients together and ice the cookies!

Friday, December 10 | Immanuel: *God With Us*

Matthew 1:22-25

"Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel"
Matthew is quoting Isaiah 7:14 here and while the context can be confusing upon first read, Isaiah is showing God's plan to send a deliverer named Immanuel. And that means, "God with us."
The virgin birth is already exciting and miraculous in and of itself, but we are seeing an even bigger thing happening here. We are seeing that God is going to come down to His people.

When Adam and Eve allowed sin to enter the world, the relationship between humanity and God broke. The problem was that they could never do enough, follow the law well enough, or pray enough to earn their way back into relationship. Sin would still exist and separate them from God. It would take God coming down in the form of a man, Jesus Christ. Fully God and fully man (Philippians 2:1-11). This is the only way that relationship could be restored. This is the only way to have permanent healing between people and God.

So, when you read the world Immanuel, it should excite you. It is cause for the utmost celebration. God has come down! God is in the business of healing the world!

This reminds me of Abraham in Genesis 15. One of the times God reiterates His promises to Abraham, He requires Abraham to cut many types of animals in half and line a pathway with them. He is making a covenant with Abraham and this type of covenant comes with promises and consequences. This would signify that, if I break this covenant between us, let it be done to me as has been done to these animals. But Abraham never walks through the animals as he should have done to take on his side of the covenant. Instead, he has a divine experience. God sends a symbol of Himself through the animals alone. It is as if God was saying, I will take on both sides of consequences. So, when Abraham broke this covenant, when the people of Israel do not stay faithful to God, God is the one who takes on the consequences even if the fault was not His.
He is promising Himself as the sacrifice for sin for us even in Genesis. He is already showing us that He will have to come and sacrifice Himself.

Immanuel, God with us.

We see this echoed in scripture over and over through the events with Abraham and Isaac, God provides the sacrifice. Through the sacrificial system and God's presence on the mercy seat. Through prophesy after prophesy about the nature and servanthood of Christ.

And Joseph gets up from his dream and he obeys and we are thankful, but the real message here is so simple and so profound at the same time. **"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believed in Him would not perish but would have everlasting life (John 3:16)."** God created you and loves you. He loves you so much that even though a relationship with you will cost Him His Son and will make Jesus, who was perfect, endure the unendurable, He does it anyway. And Jesus won't stay dead, He comes back and He will come back again in the future to make all things new (Revelation 21) all because God has promised to be with us. He has promised to reconcile us. ***"For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)."*** Prince of Peace. He will be God with us, Immanuel.

Family Craft Idea | Cinnamon Stick Stars

Today's craft is going to smell amazing and make your house (or at least a room) full of the scent of Christmas. You don't even need very many supplies!

Supplies:
Cinnamon Sticks (increments of 5)
Hot Glue Gun
Hot Glue
Ribbon
Addition decor (optional)

Have an adult handle the hot glue gun and glue the first two cinnamon sticks into an upside down V shape. Once dry, glue a cinnamon stick from the bottom right hand point, pointing the other end of the stick to the far left hand side to resemble the left hand point of the star. Glue the cinnamon stick cross piece now from the left hand point of the start to the area that will be the right hand point. Lastly, glue a cinnmon stick from the right hand point of the star to the bottom left hand point of the V. This will make a star!

Glue a ribbon to the top of the star to make it an ornament! Now you can make more stars and/or add small decorations to the ornament such as small pine needles, holy berries (fake), etc.

Saturday, December 11 | Mary & Elizabeth: *The Best News*

Luke 1:39-45

What do you do when you receive awesome news? There's someone you call. Who is it? I can think of my first three calls without even blinking. The difference is that Mary didn't have a cell phone or even a landline. There were no telephones, social media, communication apps, and even a letter was quite the ordeal. So, after Mary has received the most incredible news of her life and has realized that her fiancée will not send her away, she packs up and heads to see Elizabeth. While many translations interpret their relationship as "cousins" the original word really only tells us that they are related. We don't know how they are related, but they are obviously close knit.

When the two women see each other, they are overjoyed because they both have some incredible news to share. Not just good, fun news, but life-altering, God-given news. They are both lit by the Spirit. Before the news can even be shared, however, John, from within Elizabeth, already knew he was meeting His Lord and leaped inside her. We know from Luke 1:15 that John was already filled with the Holy Spirit and we can easily assume that Jesus was as well. The Holy Spirit inside them allowed them to recognize the other even in the womb. And Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and they have this incredibly spiritual moment. They go from giddy friends to a holy moment, blessing and worshiping as is right in the sight of the Lord.

Elizabeth hasn't even met Jesus yet, but she feels this depth of blessing over being near Him in the womb and sees the immense favor that has been bestowed upon Mary. What a beautiful moment. Because even more than sharing the fun giddy, jump up and down feeling with your favorite person, how remarkable to share this spiritual connection. And to know that their sons will share a spiritual connection. This story has some parallels to the story of Jacob and Esau in the womb. However, while Jacob and Esau create a power struggle between themselves, here there is no tension. John already realizes his role in comparison to Christ. John leaped for joy! John will lead the way for Jesus, becoming His Elijah.
Prepare ye the way of The Lord.

This is exactly how we should respond to meeting Christ. Blessing! Joy! Trust! Wonder! How am I so favored? This is the echo of everyone who comes into

contact with Christ. This is the response of all who get to come into God's plan. And this is Luke's desire for you.

Luke (and I share the sentiment) wants for you to have an encounter with Christ, to find yourself a part of God's plan. To experience joy that is beyond fathoming, peace that is overwhelming, blessing in pain, complete trust, and wonder at the depths of His love, forgiveness, and majesty.

And Christmas makes it a bit easier, doesn't it? There is incredible music, light displays, prayer times, candle-light services, special sermons, blog posts etc that make it simpler for us. But this blessing, joy, trust, peace, and wonder does not end on December 26th. Christ's birth is no less exciting, His life no less perfect, His death and resurrection no less redemptive. He is still the same. And He deeply desires that relationship with you. Not just a box checking, keep Him in your pocket for a rainy day kind of relationship, but an exciting, overwhelming, stretching, joyful relationship. He wants to change your life. Let Him.

Family Craft Idea | Popsicle Snowman

As you head into craft time today, really try to enjoy your family/friends and not put any pressure on this time. If you complete it, great, if not, also great. Try to really enjoy the season and what you are learning in this devotional rather than putting any pressure on this time.

Supplies:
Popsicle Sticks
White Paint
Black Permanent Marker
Small triangle of orange paper
Small red ribbon or small piece of paper or washi tape
Other ribbon (any color)
Hot Glue
Hot Glue Gun

Kick off this craft by painting your popsicle stick white to get started on your snowman.

After it dries, use the Black Permanent Marker to draw eyes, a mouth, and three buttons on its torso. Glue on the orange nose as well.

Next, glue the red ribbon or red paper like a scarf around the 'neck' of your snowman. You can also use washi tape here if you would like!

Lastly, glue the other piece of ribbon to the top and let your snowman become an ornament!

Sunday, December 12 | The Magnificat: *God's Love and Mercy*

Luke 1:46-56

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

Sometimes when we talk about Mary, it's easy to make her untouchable. She is Christ's mother. She is extra holy somehow. But this song that she sings makes it easier to identify with her. She feels humble in the midst of everything going on. She feels just like we would, like she doesn't deserve the attention God has given her. She is probably even insecure in light of this blessing. How can I raise the Son of God? She is absolutely obedient, but she also knows the implications for this if Joseph had not saved her. She knows she will be blessed, but she also knows she didn't earn this blessing.

"My soul exalts the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has had regard for the humble state of His bond-servant; For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed."
Where does she turn in this moment of wonder? To worship. Many people call this exclamation of joy, The Magnificat, which means "my soul magnifies the Lord" because not only does she say something to this affect but she is speaking as a vessel for the Lord, not boasting in herself. She sees the significance of what is happening to her and cannot do anything but turn to the Lord in worship!

"And His mercy is to generation after generation..."
She sees her participation as not only a blessing but a mercy. She sees how God is answering the cries of His people that began in the Garden of Eden and continue until now. She sees the deep and abiding mercy that He bestows upon His people and the great work He is beginning here in the birth of Christ. She then begins to enumerate more of His great work. He ***"scattered those who were proud...brought down rulers...exalted those who were humble...filled the hungry...sent the rich away empty-handed...He has given help to His servant Israel".***

She sees His work and how He exalts the lowly and brings down the self-righteous. And looking at it altogether she sees that it is all ***"in remembrance of His mercy"***. His great and beautiful mercy.

Let's remember that the definition of mercy is 'not receiving what you were due in the way of punishment.' She is looking back through the lives of her forefathers

and seeing the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And she sees His mercy. This is the message of the Old and New Testament. God love His people so much that no matter how far they run from Him, He still loves them and has mercy on them. He creates pathways to come to Him so much so that He sends His Son as a sacrifice that His people might have relationship with Him!

She enumerates His glory and majesty. He has done great things, He is holy, merciful, strong, just, helpful, and present. These are exactly the things she is going to need to get through what is coming. Because in this incredible moment, God is speaking this song through her. He is showing her that He will be with her throughout everything. Worship is so often a praising of the Lord but also a reminder to us about the truth of God. The most often made promise in the whole of the Bible is that God will be with His people. He has given her joy unprecedented, and He will be with her in the coming times that will be joyful and yet painful also. Maybe she doesn't even fully realize it in this moment, but God is already showing Himself faithful for what is to come in the ministry and death of Christ. And He is showing Himself faithful to you too. He will be with you. He will have mercy. He will guide you in all that is to come.

Family Craft Idea | Dried Orange Garland

Today's craft is fagrant and is especially fun because you can enjoy whether you are with children or doing this just for the adults in the house.

Supplies:
Oranges
Whole Bay Leaves (optional)
Cinnamon Sticks (optional)
Twine
Needle or Paperclip

Start off by drying your oranges. Cut oranges slices about a 1/4 inch thick and bake them at 200 degrees for about 4 hours, turning them over every hour. You can even turn off the oven and let them sit in the oven overnight after baking them if they do not feel quite done to your liking. (This process also works for apples if you want to create more variety)

Take your twine and a needle or paperclip and begin threading the pieces on your garland. You can go in any order you desire, but one suggestion is: cinnamon stick (tie a knot around it or drill a hole), orange slice, 8 (or your desired amount) bay leaves, orange slice, bay leaves, orange slice, cinnamon and repeat.

You can be as creative as you want to! Hang this garland over the fireplace or somewhere fun and enjoy the scent of the season.

Monday, December 13 | O Little Town: *God Sees the Lowly*

Micah 5:2-5

God is pretty into the unexpected. He loves to use the little, the lowly, the unlikely. He sees the invisible and He knows the hidden ones. I think back to the story of Leah and Rachel in Genesis 29. Jacob didn't want Leah, but he was tricked into marrying her. Jacob loved Rachel more Leah's entire life. No matter how many sons Leah gave him, Rachel was highly favored. But God saw Leah. He never left her or forgot about her. When Leah had Judah, she finally realized that while Jacob did not love, notice, or see her, God did. When she had Judah, she named him to say, "this time I will praise the Lord". And through Judah, not through Joseph or Benjamin (Rachel's sons) would the king come. Jesus Christ would come through Leah. And much like Leah, He would not be what the world expected.

So, when Micah talks about Bethlehem, the little town, unlikely to be noticed or chosen, God is doing exactly what He loves to do. He is going to bring the arbiter of peace, the one who is not quite who the world expected, from a line no one would have thought, through a place no one would have noticed. God is using the little, lowly, and unseen to make up the most important history in existence. Matthew 1 enumerates the line of Christ through David, showing person after person who was not considered worthy by the world, including David himself. And while it's exciting to see where Christ will come and to get a glimpse into the birth of Christ and it's even too wonderful that all this was known before the birth of Christ, it also speaks an incredible message to us.

Do you feel like you are this person? Are you the unseen one that God could never use? Well breathe it in, friend, God would love to use you.

"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."
Noah doesn't know how to build a boat, Rahab was a prostitute, Ruth was a widow from a Gentile country, Abraham was most likely a pagan, Sarah had doubts, David was an adulterer and a murderer (not to mention the youngest and smallest), Leah wasn't chosen, Jacob was a coward, Josiah was a child when he became king, Gideon was hiding. God chooses the unlikely. God sees and

God knows. He has a plan that only He could accomplish.

So hear this. He knows you. Even if you're hiding from Him. He hears you. Even if you aren't voicing your prayers. He sees you. Even if you feel invisible. And He desperately wants you to know it. He wants you to see who you are in His eyes and He wants to use you for greater things than you could imagine. He is all about the unlikely.

Family Craft Idea | Handprint Wreath

Today's craft is more in line with the devotional than is typical because you were created in God's image and that is why He loves you and wants to use you. So, we are going to use your hands, made by God, to make a wreath.

Supplies:
Construction Paper (Preferably green and red)
Pencil
Scissors
Ribbon
Glue

This craft is quite simple. Trace your hand over and over on red and green paper. Glue the hands together and then attach a ribbon so you can hang your wreath. You can glue them together with all of your hands facing in a clockwise/counterclockwise direction or you can glue them with the heels of your hands facing inward and your fingers facing outward. Either way, you will have a cute wreath when you are done!

Tuesday, December 14 | No Place At the Inn: *Unexpected Times*

Luke 2:1-7

Take a deep breath because the day we have been wanting is here. Jesus has been born. The silence between God and His people has been broken by the cry of a baby. A baby born to save the world.

But it's not what we thought it would be. It's not what anyone thought it would be. My kids finally got to turn the little wooden piece of our nativity set from the empty manger to a full one, but I can see on their faces even that it's not quite what they thought it would be. Bethlehem is not the place of kings and a manger is not the cradle of deity. But as we talked about before, God loves to use the unexpected. He loves to surprise the world.

"And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them at the inn."
Guess who else probably didn't expect for things to go exactly like this, Mary and Joseph. Mary is at the very end of her pregnancy and having to go on foot (or donkey which doesn't sound much better) hundreds of miles to register in Bethlehem. It's not the family filled situation most mothers would hope for. It would have been more typical that her family and/or friends would have either acted as midwife or helped the midwife with their duties. But here, there were no midwives or doctors, no sonograms or machines to tell you everything is okay. But God was still present, and He still had a plan.

You see, God never wanted His Son to be born the standard way. God wanted to reach out to the little town and decide who would meet His Son one by one. God wanted the glory here and He would make a statement in each aspect of His Son's entrance into the world. He is not bound by our expectations.

Another perspective on this situation comes from a book called Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes by Kenneth E. Bailey. The author posits that it would have been deplorable and almost impossible that no one from the town of David would take in someone from the line of David. Looking at the translation of the original languages and cultural context, they believe that it was a family's house that Mary and Joseph stayed in, not a hotel or barn. And that this family had no room in their side room, the room for guests. But, in this time period the main

room, the family room also had a section that was fenced off for the animals to sleep in and their mangers were actually stone and set into the floor of the main room. In this version of events, Mary and Joseph would have actually had Jesus in the presence of this family, sleeping next to the animals as well. She may have had the help of other women in the household as well.

This perspective is fascinating, but the great news is that it doesn't change God's plan or purpose at all. We don't have to know the exact details to understand that God specifically orchestrated and chose the way His Son would enter the world. He still defied expectation. And He brought the most beautiful present into the world in the place where few people were looking. And He broke the silence. And He broke sin's hold. And He began crushing Satan's head. And the fabric of the world is changed. The crimson thread that has run through it is now weaving a more incredible tapestry than anyone could have predicted or imagined.

Family Craft Idea | Coffee Filter Angel

The craft for today may feel a little more complicated if you have younger people participating, so make sure you come with lots of patience and help!

Supplies:
3 basket style coffee filters
2 cotton balls
Silver or gold ribbon (or the color you choose)
2 pipe cleaners (recommend silver and gold)
Scissors
Hot Glue Gun
Hot Glue

Place the two cotton balls into the center of one coffee filter and begin to form it around the cotton balls for the angels head.

Gather the center of the next coffee filter and put the point of its center next to the cotton balls. Bring down the outer most coffee filter and tie it (enclosing the cotton balls and the point of the second coffee filter) with silver or gold ribbon.

You should now have the head and body of your angel!

To add wings, fold the remaining coffee filter in half and then fold it length wise accordian style. Tie a pipe cleaner around the wings and make a loop with the extra part to hang as an ornament. Trim the ends with scissors.

Make a halo out of the remaining pipe cleaner, leaving a stem.

Hot glue the halo to the back of the angel and then hot glue the wings to the back of the angel as well. Now you have your ornament!

Wednesday, December 15 | The Shepherds: *God leads*

Luke 2:8-12

I love these shepherds. I love that they are normal and probably pretty gross. They live outside...all the time. Their feet are caked with mud and dirt, they smell like animals. Anyone who has spent time at a petting zoo can attest that shepherds are the salt of the Earth. I can assure you that these shepherds were no magical people. Not people that would be considered worthy of the anthem of angels.

But let's look into something a little different than the typical view of the shepherds as outcasts. Let's look at how God loves to not only use shepherds but describe Himself as a shepherd. First, Abraham, Moses, and David all spent time as shepherds and became the great forefathers of the faith. God is clearly doing something in His use of shepherds. God is showing His people that, much like those He sets in power over the people, He is the great shepherd.

Genesis 49:25 calls God a Shepherd for Joseph "From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel)". Ezekiel 34:12 talks about how God "will care for [His] sheep and will rescue them from all the places". Psalm 23:1 reminds us that "The LORD is my shepherd, I will not be in need". Matthew 2:6 is just the beginning of speaking of Jesus as a shepherd to lead the people of God. This metaphor clearly matters because it relates to the character of God and what He says about Himself. He cares for us, leads us, protects us, and sacrifices Himself for us.

So, when God chooses the shepherds to tell His big news, maybe we should not be as surprised as we typically are. When the angels grace them with a choir and then they are directed to be the first on the scene to meet Jesus, maybe we should see God making another statement about not only His character but the character of this baby they are going to go worship. He will be a shepherd for His people. He will be a shepherd for you.

Family Craft Idea | Pipe Cleaner Candy Canes

As we think about the shepherds, it is always fun to do an activity with candy canes or shepherd's crooks. Today's craft only has two pieces of supplies as well!

Supplies:
Pipe cleaners (red and white)

Twist the two differing colors together to make a swirl. Bend the swirl in the shape of a candy cane or shepherd's crook. You can use these to decorate your Christmas tree or just put them in fun places around the house!

Thursday, December 16 | **The Glory of the Lord:** *Unveiled Faces*

Luke 2:13-14

After reading today's Scripture, take a moment and try to imagine this scene. While me may not know exactly what an angel looks like, much less a multitude of heavenly host, we do know from verse 9 that ***"the glory of the Lord shone around them"*** which is what terrified the shepherds. They are messengers from the Lord and they reflect His glory. This can easily take us back to Exodus 34 where Moses encounters God up close and his face shines so greatly that he must wear a veil to cover it when he speaks to the people. It is only when he is with God that he can keep his face unveiled. The glory of the Lord was shining through him!

And much like Moses bringing the tablets and the law to the people, the angels come here as messengers before the Lord to inaugurate His plan and to rejoice in worship to Him over it. When we see angels in the Bible, the first thing people do is feel fear. In fact, the second part of verse 9 quoted above says, ***"and they were terribly frightened"***. One angel was enough to inspire fear but these shepherds are seeing a multitude! A host, an army of angels! ***"[13] And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army of angels praising God and saying, [14] Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among people with whom He is pleased"***

And their sheer presence burns their song into the heart of everyone they encounter. GLORY TO GOD! PEACE ON EARTH! And the truth of that worship would erase out of the mind of shepherds all other concerns or thoughts. Because that's what true worship is. A burning of the heart. A focus of the whole self.

And this is what Heaven will be like. Surrounded by the sounds of God's creation all joining in unison to worship Him. This is a celebration! A foretaste of God's kingdom on Earth. A glimpse into Heaven. Because just like the angels cannot contain their worship in this moment, neither will we when we enter into His kingdom fully.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 reminds us, ***"[17] Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. [18] But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."***

Read verse 18 again. Unveiled faces. If we have relationship with the Lord, if we have accepted His gift of salvation and given over control of our lives to Him, then we have the Spirit living in us. This means that we are living in the presence of the Lord. This means that we are as Moses going before God, we are as shepherds beholding the glory of the Lord, and we have this every day. But we do not need to veil our faces! We are being transformed more and more into those who reflect His glory to the world and that is intentional.

While we may not be terrifying angels when others encounter us, we should be those who reflect the glory of the Lord and bring forth His worship wherever we go. We have unveiled faces.

Advent may already be more than halfway finished, but our work as ambassadors and reconcilers of the Gospel is never done. Did you know that the word advent is related to our word adventure? This is the greatest adventure you could undertake. What an incredible adventure for Joseph and Mary, the shepherds, the wise men, and everyone else who encountered Christ from then on. And this adventure hasn't ceased just because Jesus has gone up to sit at the right hand of the Father. It's now. And you can be a part of it.

You can join in this incredible adventure by giving your life over to Christ now. Having a relationship with Christ isn't just about good times and feeling better and the magic of the Christmas season, it's about letting Him be in control, getting the glory no matter where you are in life. It's going to be hard, but it's going to be worth it. And just like these angels bursting forth with the message of Christ, you can be His messenger to the world.

Family Craft Idea | Christmas Tree Sleepover

For today's time together, it is not so much of a craft as it is an intentional time together. Tonight, if you are able, have a sleepover next to the Christmas tree.

Spend some time making it feel really cozy and comfortable together, deciding together what would make it feel special and fun. Then, as you wind down to sleep enjoy the light of the tree and the glow on the ornaments and let a little bit of the magic of Christmas and the calm of the moment settle over you.

Take time to read the devotion or even just pray in this moment and be reminded that the real magic of Christmas is the glory of the Lord coming to earth in the Son of God.

Friday, December 17 | Obedience: *The Shepherds meet Jesus*

Luke 2:15-18

Yesterday we got to talk about how we are messengers of the Lord much like the angels and now we see that the shepherds are going to mirror this same response to being in God's presence. However, where yesterday we talked about the glory and adventure of it, today we are going to talk about obedience.

"When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'"
The shepherds have just been told the news of their life. They have witnessed a host of angels in worship, reflecting the glory of the Lord. It would be easy to need a moment to collect and even process what you had just seen. While we do not know the exact timeline of how long it was between the angels leaving and the shepherds making this decision, the impression we get from the text is that their decision was immediate. Much like Mary and Joseph's obedience that we have seen over the last couple weeks, the shepherds respond with an urgent desire to go and see what the Lord just told them about. And while God did not specifically say, "go see this", His messengers did say, ***"And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger"*** (Luke 2:12). The idea that they would go see the baby is clearly implied.

"And they came in a hurry..." The shepherds do not take time to organize their thoughts or work out their schedules. They don't check with anyone else in the area, they go to see the child. They go to see what the Lord has done. They understand the need for prompt obedience.

"17 When they had seen Him, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18 And all who heard it were amazed about the things which were told them by the shepherds."
I'm guessing that the shepherds told Mary and Joseph the story, but it sounds like they told anyone they came into contact with! They would likely have been familiar with the verses in Deuteronomy 6 and 11 that say, "You shall take these words of mine to heart and to soul...speaking of them of them when you sit in your house, when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up (11:18-19). They would know that God expected them to treasure the Word He had already written down for them in the Torah but they would have also realized

that this revelation from God about His Son should be shared with equal if not greater fervor! They probably would have shared just out of the overflowing joy of this great news! This reminds me of the Christmas Carol, O Holy Night.

A Thrill of Hope / The weary world rejoices / For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn /
Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices! / O night divine, O night when Christ was born

God has always been about giving His people hope and reconciling them to Himself. He has always wanted them to share that news with the world wherever they go. And this new hope would have overwhelmed the shepherds into spreading the news.

End your time today by listening to O Holy Night and taking in the worlds, going about the rest of your day in worship to the Lord.

Family Craft Idea | Handprint Jesus in a Manger

For today's craft, you will make baby Jesus and put Him in a handprint manger. Talk to your children, family, friends, or whoever does this craft with you about Jesus' birth and about how God held Jesus in His hands. We know that God also holds each of us in His hands too!

Supplies:
Brown paint
Yellow Paint
Black Marker
1-2 pieces of construction paper
Glue
Paint brush

If you are an adult or a teen, paint your own hand, but if there are younger children, consider having an adult paint their hand and help them to place it on the construction paper.

Once the hand print has dried, paint on some yellow "hay" for baby Jesus to lay on in the manger (your hand).

Cut out a circle and an oval from the remaining paper. The circle is the head of baby Jesus and the oval is the swaddling cloths He was wrapped in. Draw a face on the baby and color Him (or use colorful construction paper). Glue baby Jesus onto the yellow hay after the paint has dried.

Saturday, December 18 | Responding to the News: *Word and Worship*

Luke 2:19-20

Today is officially one week until Christmas. Hopefully, you are getting to rest because all the decorations are up, the presents are purchased, the kids are off school, maybe you are even tak-ing some time off of work. We love to let the Christmas season push us into busyness and stress. I encourage you to start this devotion with an extended prayer time. Ask God for the peace that He has promised to us. Ask Him for rest and to let go of the pressures we put on ourselves in this season.

"But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart."
Thus far, we have season Mary tell the good news to others, we have seen her respond with praise and worship, and we have seen her follow God's plan in obedience. But in verse 19, we are getting a different look at Mary. She is taking a breath, she is processing this experience, she is pausing. Much like how we can get caught up in all the trappings of Christmas that the world tells us we need for this season, it would have been easy for Mary to get stuck in a whirlwind by all that has happened. It has been a tumultuous nine months for her. She has finally given birth and has seen incredible things happen that proclaim her Son as Messiah. She is already looking forward and knowing that more miraculous things are to come. But rather than jumping to the next thing, she stops to treasure these things and ponder them. She is committing these moments to memory much like any new mother would but so much more so and she is considering the great implications of what has been started today.

"And the shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told to them."
Everyone who encounters the truth of Christmas is prompted to respond. When someone is genuinely confronted with the fact that God sent His Son into the world for us, they cannot help but act. Mary responds to the incredible work that has happened by treasuring all these things to process and to remember for the future. The shepherds respond much like the angels they had just seen, in worship. They continue to spread the news just as they did on their way to meet Jesus, but they also go back to their fields praising the Lord. We don't know if they did this verbally or in song but can't you image the shepherds walking back to their fields echoing the words of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among people with whom He is pleased." It may have been a

journey full of songs of praise much like the Israelites leaving Egypt and finally leaving the wilderness. They are following God out of suffering and into light.

In this final week, spend time like Mary to treasure these words in your heart. Take time to re-member them and process all that God has done. Then, go forward in word and worship!

Family Craft Idea | Homemade Marshmallows

Today, we are going to stop and make homemade marshmallows together. As you gather the supplies, consider gathering fun kinds of hot chocolate as well so you can put your marshmallows to the test right away! You could put cinnamon or peppermint in your hot chocolate to give it a seasonal feel.

Ingredients:
3 packages of unflavored gelatin
1 cup of ice cold water
12 oz sugar (1 1/2 cups)
1 cup light corn syrup
1/2 tsp salt
1 tsp vanilla extract
1/4 cup powdered sugar
1/4 cup cornstartch
Nonstick spray

Directions:
1. Place the gelatin into the bowl of a mixer with 1/2 a cup of the ice water. Set aside.
2. Heat 1/2 cup of the water, sugar, corn syrup, and salt covered on high 3-4 minutes. Uncover and continue to cook until the mixture is 240 degrees (7-8 minutes). Remove from the heat.
3. Put the whisk in the mixer on a low speed and slowly poor the sugar syrup down the side of the bowl into the gelatin mixture. Once added, increase to high speed until it becomes thick and lukewarm (12-15 minutes). Add vanilla at the last minute!
4. While this is mixing, combine the powdered sugar and cornstarch in a bowl. Spray a casserole dish with cooking spray and then add the sugar/cornstarch mixture. Move the pan around to coat the bottom and sides, then return the extra to the bowl for later.
5. Once ready, pour the mixture from your mixer into the casserole dish. Spray cooking spray on a spatula if you need to use it to help the mixture spread out. Dust the sugar/cornstarch mixture over the top just enough to lightly cover and save the extra.
6. Allow them to sit 4 hours or overnight. Then, turn them out on a cutting board and cut them into 1 inch squares. Dust them with the remaining sugar/cornstarch mixture and you're done!

Sunday, December 19 | God Provides: *The Magi on the Move*

Matthew 2:1-2

The Magi continue to be an interesting and sometimes mysterious part of the Christmas story for many people when, at its core, it is a story about God's provision, God's presence, and God's plan. The Magi came from the east and are typically thought of as wealthy though the Bible never calls them 'kings'. But their gifts and their station make people think that they are of great means. They are also people who study the stars and are on the lookout for the coming Messiah or at least the next king. There are many schools of thought about why they are looking, but that is not our focus today.

These astronomers or scholars or whatever school they belong to have seen a star and know that this is God's way of guiding them toward the new king. When they travel to find the new king, they immediately go to Jerusalem because it is the city of the king. They go to Herod since he is the current king and they inquire, ***"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."***

We could spend another day talking about obedience here because the Magi, like Mary and Joseph and the shepherds, are following God's call even though they may not know all the details. They have come from such a long distance that Jesus is now over a year old and have come to Jerusalem not knowing what they would find or who. They obey.

But let's also look at God's provision. While we do not know exactly what the 'star' was that the Magi followed, we do know that God had written in the heavens the announcement of His Son. God provided a way for the Magi to find Jesus just like He provided a way for the shepherds. He is guiding the Magi to this place and will continue to guide them further in the next few devotionals.

God is also present. He is with them in this venture. And He has a plan. He has designed the heavens in this way, He has brought the Magi for a time such as this. He is orchestrating all things for His great name and glory.

We will see more of God's provision, presence, and plan in the coming days just as we have seen it in the days before now. Take some time today, however, to see these things in your own life. See how God is drawing close those that are far

off. Those with little other access to God and the worship of Him. Just as God has guided the Magi to this place, He is guiding you. Just as He was present with them, He is present with you. And just like God had a plan for the Magi, He has a plan for you. He is drawing you to His Son, Jesus, and He is doing it incredible ways. Take time to notice this today and thank Him for it.

Family Craft Idea | Origami Stars

Today we are going to make origami stars to celebrate the Magi or wise men following the star to Jesus. The instructions below are for a simple star that is accessible for any age, but there is a web address below that for a more complex star if you are interested in more of a challenge!

Supplies:
Colorful Paper (or Origami Paper)
Scissors
Ruler

Cut your paper into a long strip. Make sure that the colorful side of your paper (if only one side has color) is up. Bring the right end of the paper over and down. Bring that same end up and over the rest of the paper and pull the end through the loop, gently pulling to tighten a knot.

Continue to adjust the paper and flatten it until the knot starts to resemble a pentagon. The end of the strip on the left shold be the long end while the end on the right should not be much longer than the knot itself. Fold the excess paper from the right side into the knot to continue that pentagon shape.

Fold the left sided end behind the pentagon, keeping the bottom edge aligned. Continue to wrap this strip around the pentagon, contouring it to each side. (Up and to the left, behind and down, up and to the right, etc) Fold until you have only a small section left and tuck the end into the inside pocket of the pentagon.

Now finlate the star by pressing your index finger and thumb to pinch in the sides of the pentagon so that the points become the points of the star. Rotate the star and do this on all sides.

For pictures and more instructions visit: https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/make-origami-lucky-stars-4107161
For a more complex star visit: https://www.homemade-gifts-made-easy.com/5-pointed-origami-star.html

Monday, December 20 | Herod is Troubled: *Vying for Control*

Matthew 2:3-6

Unlike the responses that we have seen from Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the Magi, we are now seeing our first person who will dissent and be displeased by the entrance of Jesus on the scene. The Magi first approach Herod because he is the king, living in the city of the kings and they are looking for the new king. It makes practical sense that they would come here first; however, Herod is not aware of this new king.

"When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."
Herod is looking for power and is willing to do anything to keep it, he is not watching for the Messiah. In fact, even though he rules over the Jews, he is not a Jew himself. He does not come from generations of waiting for this good news, he only cares for himself and his position. But it says that he is not the only one troubled. All Jerusalem is troubled with him! They may have been troubled because this new king was an unknown, they may misunderstood, they may have been troubled because of Herod's response. Regardless, this has created quite a stir.

"For from you will come forth a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel."
And Herod consults his people to find out more about the new king and finds out that he will be born in Bethlehem. But even more he finds out that this new king will be a ruler and ***"will shepherd My people Israel."*** Herod still does not care about the coming Messiah nor does he go to see what the truth of this is all about but continues to home in on the idea that his rule is about to be contested.

In this story, we love to see ourselves as the Magi, looking for the king. But occasionally we find ourselves in the position of Herod. It's an uncomfortable feeling to be sure. Much like the Pharisees later in Jesus' life, Herod wants to be in control. Herod wants to call the shots and have his plan be paramount. We do this same thing! We want to tell God the plan and have Him consent. We want to do it our way. We are obsessed with power and control in our own lives, our kids lives, and the lives of those around us. We can find ourselves more like Herod in this moment than we would prefer.

As we said yesterday, when people are confronted with the truth of Christ, they will respond. Herod responded in anger, insecurity, and stress. He was not willing to hand over control of his life or his kingdom. And while Jesus never made a claim to governmental control, He does make a claim to our lives. He does tell us that He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. He does show us that if we will relinquish this control to Him, that He will give us the most abundant life possible, following after Him. It's time to let go of that control and instead, follow God's plan. Take on the path of the Magi. Follow after Jesus and lay your life at His feet. He will not disappoint.

Family Craft Idea | Noodle Christmas Trees

Today's craft requires a lot of hot glue so make sure if you decide to do this with small children, they stay safe against the glue. This should be a fun craft for any age and will give you a cute decoration!

Supplies:
Cone or thick paper to make cone
Conchiglie (shell) Pasta
Farfalle (Bow tie) pasta (optional)
Spray Paint (silver, red, or green typically)
Hot Glue Gun
Hot Glue

Take your cone or quickly make some thick paper into a cone and glue it together. Put a layer of hot glue across the bottom and quickly add the shells with the openings pointed up and the end glued to the tree so that he other pointed end is facing outward. Continue in this way on the entire cone.

If you would like to add a "star" on the top, glue a piece of bowtie pasta to the top.

Spray paint the entire project and you have a beautiful Christmas tree!

Tuesday, December 21 | True Worshipers: *He is nearby*

Matthew 2:7-8

Have you ever been caught in a situation that felt tenuous and possibly dangerous? That is where we find our Magi today. Herod is fuming and is hatching a plan to find out more about this king and most likely to murder him. Herod was known far and wide for such atrocities so we can easily speculate that Herod had malicious designs on Jesus from the moment he heard about Him. Herod, plan in mind, brings the Magi to himself and asks more questions about the star.

"Go and search for the child. When you find Him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him."
If it were someone else uttering this same phrase, we might suspect them of truly wanting to know more about the Christ. But we can also realize that Herod or any of his people could easily have gone with the Magi but chose not to go. Herod is trying to manipulate the situation for his underhanded desires by pretending to be a true worshiper.

While we may not set out to end the life of Jesus, we do occasionally find ourselves as pretenders. We find that the lights aren't as bright as we were hoping, the music isn't as festive, and the time is not as magical. We find ourselves looking for all the trappings of Christmas, of worship, of devotion and mimicking those behaviors but not really engaging.

It takes more than words or actions to be a true worshiper of the King. It takes a heart change. It takes faith and devotion. It takes surrender. It takes the true study of His Word. It takes communication with the Father.

It would be easy to go through all of the motions of Christmas especially with only a few days left until the big day. It would be easy to open presents, and watch movies, and more but never actually engage with the true story of Christ come to earth. Immanuel, God with us. See, Herod missed the entire point of Jesus coming down, but you don't have to. You can run to Him.

"...that they would seek God, if perhaps they might feel around for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each of us (Acts 17:26-27)."
And when you run to Him, He is not far away; He is right there and He wants relationship with you. He wants you to experience the genuine truth of His love, grace, and mercy. ***"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you (Luke 11:9)."***
Reach out to Him today and ask Him to show you where things have gotten in the way of your true worship.
Ask Him to help you draw near.

Family Craft Idea | Salt Dough

We have made a lot of ornaments over this advent devotional so for today's craft you can choose to make them an ornament, a keepsake, or a fun knicknack for around the house. We are going to make salt dough and then you can easily turn it into almost anything!

Ingredients:
4 cups flour
1 cup table salt
1 1/2 cup water

Mix all the ingredients together in a bowl using a wooden spoon and then ultimately using clean hands to help it to come together into a dough ball

Knead it a few times until it is soft and pliable, about 3-5 minutes. This is the step where you can add food coloring if you want the base dough to be a certain color.

To help with sticking, roll out the dough between two layers of parchment paper or wax paper and consider only rolling a section at a time to make it easier to work with.

Cut out shapes, add stamps, etc and transfer your shapes to a parchment paper lined baking sheet. If you have a small child, a hand print is always a popular choice!

Bake at 250 degrees for 2-3 hours, checking every 20 minutes after the 2 hour mark.

Remove and allow them to cool before painting them or adding other acoutrements. Seal with Mod Podge if desired!

Wednesday, December 22 | Meeting Jesus: *Provision, Plan, Presence*

Matthew 2:9-12

When we last saw the Magi, we were talking about how their story is one of God's provision, presence, and plan. We are really seeing that come forth in this beautiful and sacred moment they share with Jesus.

"...and behold, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on ahead of them until it came to a stop over the place where the Child was to be found." God is once again providing for them a path to Himself through His Son. We saw yesterday that God is not far off, He wants to be found by those who seek Him! He wants relationship with His Creation! The Magi got to have a star or planet or some kind of celestial sign to show them the path to Jesus, but you have the gift of His Spirit. Jesus tells His disciples that the Spirit, ***"will guide you into all truth"*** (John 16:12-15). God may or may not choose to use the heavens to speak of His present to you, but He has sent His Spirit who is always at work to draw you closer to God. God is a God of provision.

"When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And after they came into the house, they saw the Child with His mother Mary; and they fell down and worshiped Him."
God is present. God was present before the birth of His Son, He was at work with His people in the world. But God shows up in a new and physical way in the birth of Jesus. God knew the price of the separation caused in the Garden and He showed up to pay it. He never leaves us on our own, He is present with us. Through His Son, and through His Spirit, He is with us. Matthew 28:20 is Jesus reminding His disciples of just that: ***"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."***

But God has been promising to stay close to us since He rescued His people from captivity. Deuteronomy 31:6 shows God telling His people, ***"Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or in dread of them, for the Lord your God is the One who is going with you. He will not desert you or abandon you."*** This is reiterated in Hebrews 13:5 because it is still true in the present. God is with you.

"Then they opened their treasures and presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And after being warmed by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the Magi left for their own country by another way." We could spend an entire day talking about the significance of the different gifts and their representations of kingship, deity, and death, but we can also look to this verse to see God's plan. God had a plan for the Magi when He brought them to see Jesus. God was not surprised by Herod nor confused into action. God had a plan from the beginning. He has known since the Garden that He would make a way to Himself through His Son and has been at that work ever since. In Genesis 3:15 He tells the serpent, ***"And I will make you enemies of you and the woman, And of your offspring and her Descendant; He shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise Him on the heel."*** God already knew what He was going to do. And just as He makes a plan for the Magi and provides for them again, He has a plan for you. You are not forgotten or unseen. God is at work to make His name great and to spread His good news and He wants to use you. He sees you, knows you, and has a plan for you. Have courage, and trust in His provision, presence, and plan.

Family Craft Idea | Puppy Chow Trail Mix

Today's craft is extra fun because it is edible! Make this to have a fun snack for today and/or save it for tomorrow's activity and make it extra special!

Ingredients:
1 cup semisweet chocolate chips (standard or dairy free)
1 cup creamy peanut butter (or creamy nut butter/seed butter of choice)
5-6 cups Rice Chex Cereal
1-2 cups powdered sugar

Melt the chocolate and nut/seed butter together on the stove top or in the microwave until it is smooth.

Put the cereal in a bowl or large ziplock bag. Pour the chocolate mixture over the cereal and stir if you use a bowl or shake if you use a bag until it is evenly coated.

Pour in your powdered sugar (make sure the mixture is not too hot at this point) and stir the mixture in a bowl or shake it in the bag until it is evenly coated. Delicious!

To make this into a trail mix, wait for the Puppy Chow to completely cool and harden before adding any additions. Choose your add-ins and mix them in when ready. (ex: Pretzels, Mini Marshmallows, Nuts, M&Ms, & Popcorn)

Thursday, December 23 | A Nazarene: *He Understands*

Matthew 2:19-23

If you have the time, take a minute and read Matthew 2:12-15. God is continuing to provide a path for His Son by warning Joseph in a dream to leave Egypt. Herod is about to commit unspeakable crimes to try and end the life of the future king. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus all stay in Egypt until today's passage, Matthew 2:19-23.

"...an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph..."
This seems to be a frequent way that Joseph has heard from the Lord during these chapters. Joseph is listening for the Lord, in tune to what He is hearing from the angel and is consistently obedient to God's instructions. God had greatly protected Jesus and His family by sending them to Egypt but now it is time to return. It seems that Joseph is given instructions in two different dreams and is told exactly where he should take his family.

This is no accident. Joseph didn't end up in Nazareth because it seemed convenient. He took his family there because it was God's will. Verse 23 tells us that ***"This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'"*** While the root of this prophecy is a deeper subject, the real purpose of their relocation to Nazareth was to do more of the unexpected. He would be from a place that people held in contempt. He would not come onto the scene in kingly garb from the city of the kings. Jesus would come humbly, from Nazareth.
Jesus entered into the world as an outcast.

Jesus is fully God and fully man. He experienced all that we would experience. He has known hardship, He has known persecution, He has known pain. When we go to Him, He understands us. Hebrews 4:15 reminds us that ***"we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things just as we are, yet without sin."*** He has been pushed out by the people He loved most, disrespected, abused, hated.

And God knew that we would go through this and would need to feel like we did not call out to a God who was far away and without understanding. He knew that for ultimate forgiveness, He needed to send His Son to have the human experience and to do so perfectly.

"These things I have spoken to you so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." John 16:33

From the beginning, Jesus humbled Himself to be born in the likeness of men (Philippians 2) and live the life we live and do so perfectly. He does not do this to throw it in your face or taunt you with your insecurities. God did this so that we can go to Him and know that He understands us and that He can guide us in the right way. He does this so that we can have courage like the verse in John 16 points out because Jesus has already overcome the world. And, in Him, we can too.

End this time in prayer to the Lord. Remind yourself of how He has experienced those same emotions and hardships you experience. Ask Him to work in you and to show you each new step that you might overcome these things for the glory of His great name.

Family Craft Idea | Christmas Lights Tour

It's time to get out of the house for a bit. Take any leftover puppy chow trail mix you still have, consider making hot chocolate or apple sider in a thermos to make the time feel even more special. Head out near or far and take in some beautiful Christmas lights while listening to Christmas music. Enjoy some pure joy.

Places in Houston:
Sugarland Holiday Lights
River Oaks
Woodland Heights
Spring Shadows
Prestonwood Forest
Johnson's Christmas Corner
Christmas in Katy
Pecan Grove

Friday, December 24 | The Word Became Flesh: *Grace & Truth*

John 1:14

Today is the last day of our time together in advent and tomorrow is the big day, Christmas. We have seen Mary learn about her role in the birth of Christ. We have seen Joseph's obedience in all things. We have seen shepherds come and Magi worship. We have seen Herod try to regain control. And all of this culminates in a big truth most perfectly expressed in John 1:14.

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

The Word became flesh. Further back in this chapter, starting in verse 1, it says, ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of mankind. And the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it."*** The 'Word' here is, in fact, Jesus. We see that Jesus is fully God, that He existed before time began, that He was integral to the creation of all things.

Yet, He became flesh. He allowed Himself to be made into a human so that He might dwell among us. We have talked about the passage in Philippians 2:5-11 already but go look it up and read it again. He humbled Himself to become in the likeness of man so that he might dwell among us. We studied Isaiah 7 and Matthew 1 earlier to see that God sent His Son to be Immanuel, God with us. He sent Himself!

"...and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."
We can truly say that over these last twenty-four days, we have seen His glory. We have witnessed just a piece of His glory and we continue to see it into the present. Where do you see Him and His glory in your own life? And we have seen Him full of grace and truth. Grace is receiving something you didn't earn/deserve and that is exactly what happened when we were give Jesus.

We can read the Old Testament and see that the people of God did not deserve to be sent Jesus. We can look at our own life and see that we do not deserve it either. But He is full of grace for us.

And He is truth. In a time where information is limitless, but truth is harder to nail down, we can always be confident that Jesus is the embodiment of truth.

The best news about all of this, is that none of it is in the past tense. The Word, Jesus, is still at work. He is preparing a place for us and will return one day to make all things new and set all things right. We already know that He wins. And He is still at work in grace and truth, sending us His Spirit to guide us, to illuminate the Word to us, and to help us when we don't have the words. He is still working, and He will not stop.

In the "how to use this guide" section of this booklet, we mentioned that journaling can be a helpful tool in processing and retaining what you are hearing from God. Go back through that journal now and remind yourself of all the He has done and continues to do.

Merry Christmas!

Family Craft Idea | The Christmas Story

Today there is no craft, but an activity. We have read the Christmas story in pieces throughout these 24 days. Take time to read it once all the way through whether you are by yourself or with friends/family.

If there are children involved and you have been doing these together, consider having them act out the story and helping them with it by reading along with them.

Luke 1 & 2; Matthew 1 & 2

Merry Christmas!

Advent is from the Latin word adventus which means “coming”. This season is one where we prepare and anticipate the coming or birth of Jesus Christ. This daily devotional follows prophecy, the days leading up to the birth of Christ, and all those who visited Him. This devotional will take you day by day so that you can be expectant, celebrating the gift of Jesus each day.

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Claire Mummert is the Adult Ministry Resident at Kingsland Baptist Church and has been working in ministry since 2010. She is a teacher, writer, and excellent copy editor. She wants to help equip and develop leaders at Kingsland who are empowered to use their gifting to teach the Bible in life-changing ways.

In addition to serving at Kingsland, Claire is a wife, mother, baker, and bibliophile. She earned a BA in Communication from Texas A&M, a Master of Divinity with Concentrations in Biblical Languages and
Student Ministry from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and she is currently working on her Master of Theology in Old Testament

Claire and her husband, Cal, have 3 children. When not reading, researching, or teaching, Claire enjoys camping/backpacking, running, and baking/cooking. She is passionate about learning new languages and enjoys a good road trip.

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