



# THE ADVENT Journey

Continual Day March 21 to Sept. 23

We are so excited for this Advent Season. We have been praying and planning for this time of year since early summer. We are proud to offer a church-wide Advent study created by individuals in our own church family who have felt the tug on their hearts to write and develop this devotional/study guide.

Our hope is that you will embark on this journey through the Advent season by not only reading the daily devotionals, but using the prayers created, the questions asked, and seeking to interact with others as they also journey through this season of expectation and joy.

We will focus on the devotionals in our small groups, Sunday School classes of all ages, and even use the devos as a guide for preaching. The reflection questions will be used in personal study and our study time together.

### **Here is what we ask.**

- 1. Read the daily devotionals.**
- 2. Interact with the daily questions.**
- 3. If you are not already a part of a Small Group or Sunday School Class, join one during this time (and hopefully you love it and will stay past Advent), so you can discover with your group where God is speaking to you through this season and the reflection questions.**

Blessings During this Advent Journey,  
Gary Green, Teila Lee, and Rev. Becky Clark

## *The Journey Begins*

We all remember trips we took at Christmas time, such as traveling to our grandparents' houses, to aunts and uncles, close friends, or back to our parents to spend the holidays with them. I'm sure if we think about it there are many cherished memories made.

The Christmas story is full of journeys. Mary and Joseph journeyed to Bethlehem, then later to Egypt, still later to Israel, and finally settled long-term in Nazareth. Wise men (kings or Magi) traveled from the east to see this newborn king and offer gifts to him. Also, shepherds traveled, although only a short distance, to see the baby the angels announced to them.

Advent is a time for us to journey as well, not just to family and friends, but a spiritual journey to prepare our hearts and minds to remember, celebrate, and to deepen our relationship with God. Let us travel together during these days of Advent that lead to Christmas. Where will your journey of the spirit take you? What impact on our lives will this journey have as we reflect on God's great gift to us, his Son?

Consider keeping a journal during this Advent seasons of what these devotionals bring to mind and what God is saying to your heart and spirit each day.

*Prayer: God who loves me so much, send your Holy Spirit to guide me on this Advent journey and open my heart anew to your call on my life.*

## *God is the Story*

Luke 1:26-30 NLT

The Christmas story is full of wonderful and interesting characters, such as Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, the Wise Men, Herod, the shepherds, the angels, and even the Star of Bethlehem. To Christians around the world these characters are so well known that they may know the story of each character by heart.

Yet, who is the main character of this story and thus of this journey? For myself, Joseph has always interested me. His faith, goodness, and obedience are an inspiration. Who most interests you each year when you once again read these familiar stories?

But is Joseph or some other person the main character? Certainly, we focus on baby Jesus as we should, but it is God who is the main character, made flesh in his son, Jesus Christ. God, who out of love came to this earth through his son - Emmanuel - God with us! God came to earth to show us how to live, how to love one another, be the sacrifice for our sins, and to defeat death for us so we can have eternal life. God is the star of this story! Indeed, God is the main character of the whole bible.

It is through the Christmas story that we learn just how much our Heavenly Father loves us. As we make this journey together, we should always keep our focus on God.

*Prayer: God of grace and glory, help me in my journey through Christmas to rediscover the depths of your love for me.*

## *Reflection Questions*

The angel tells Mary, "Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you." Mary was troubled and wondered what kind of greeting this could be.

Have you ever received news that troubled you and wondered what was going on?

---

---

---

---

Emmanuel - God with us is a promise to remember.

How does knowing God is with you help you walk forward on the journey like Mary?

---

---

---

---

# *Preparing Our Hearts*

1 Peter 1:13 NIV

As we dive into our Advent journey, there is one very important thing we need to do first: prepare our hearts. For many, the time of Advent is about preparing our homes for the season. Many of us will get a tree for our home—whether it's one we cut down, buy at the store, or even an artificial tree stored in the attic. We will put the tree up, hang lights, place ornaments, and, finally, put the topper on the tree.

Besides the tree, you may put out nativity scenes, get your yard Santa out, put lights up around your house, and decorate the inside of your home with bright Christmas colors. We take time to prepare our homes for the season. Why wouldn't we take the time to prepare our hearts to hear and receive from God during this time as well?

It's a proven fact that the more we prepare for something, the better we are at it, or the more focused we become. While we may know about the season of Advent and understand that it's the time to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, do we really take the time to focus our hearts? God doesn't want you to waste this time. He wants to speak to you now, but we must be ready to listen. We must tune our hearts and our ears to hear His voice.

So today, take a few moments to sit in a quiet place. Take a deep breath in, and as you do so, ask God to prepare you for the Advent season. Ask God to clear your eyes, ears, and hearts so you can fully receive him. Preparing will allow us to hear His voice more clearly during this time. By the end of Advent on that beautiful Christmas Day, I hope you can look back and see where your heart was more ready to receive the Messiah than ever before.

*Prayer: Father, prepare my eyes so I may see you.  
Prepare my ears so I may hear you. Prepare my  
hands so I may receive you. Prepare my heart so I  
may love you even more.*

# *Reflection Questions*

Share how you prepare for Christmas.

---

---

---

---

What are some of your favorite traditions?

---

---

---

---

When going on a trip or journey, it is important to plan and pack the necessary items. Prepare means to make something ready to use. How will you prepare your heart to experience Jesus this advent season?

---

---

---

---

## *Zechariah's Journey*

Luke 1:5-22 NLT

Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were on a painful personal journey. In all their years of marriage, they had not produced a child, and now, in their old age, it seemed impossible. To be without a child, specifically a son, in their culture, was particularly shameful. Many felt it was a curse and showed that your sin was great, since God did not grant you a child. It also meant there was no heir to inherit and no family to pass on tradition and the family name.

One day, while performing his priestly duty of burning incense at the altar in the temple, an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah and delivered some good news that Elizabeth would bring forth a son and he would be named John. The appearance of an angel is its own great miracle, but God had to orchestrate all the pieces to come together for this part of Zechariah's journey. You see, Zechariah was one of 18,000 Levitical priests at the time, and of those numbers, lots were cast to determine who would serve in the Holy Place for a week at a time. Zechariah made it through those 18,000 men and through the casting of lots to have the opportunity to serve in this very special task. God was guiding Zechariah's journey, positioning him into the place and the time that he would be most open to hearing the news of such a miracle, and to prepare for the next part of his journey.

What was Zechariah's reaction to these miraculous words given by a God who positions himself to be best heard? Fear, and then doubt. Even in the impossible of how the message was orchestrated to be delivered, he lacked belief. That unbelief, even in the face of the miracle of the delivery of the news, marked a new road in his journey. Gabriel, the angel, declared that Zechariah would be unable to speak until the child was born. For nine months he was unable to convey with words what he experienced, and the joy and excitement he must have felt for the impending birth of his child.

Zechariah's current spiritual journey was one of quiet reflection and anticipation. He traveled from pain and loss to fear and doubt, and finally to faith and belief in what only God can do. At the naming of his son, 8 days after his birth, Zechariah grabbed a writing tool and indicated that "his name shall be John" and at once, his "mouth was opened, and his tongue set free."

What journey will you undertake this Advent season? Will it lead to deeper relationship with Christ through a greater willingness to believe in God's words and commands? Will you seek quiet time to reflect and commune with God?

*Prayer: God, I believe. Help me in my unbelief.*

## *Reflection Questions*

Zechariah traveled from pain and loss to fear and doubt to faith and belief.

Have you experienced a painful personal journey?

---

---

Did you receive a miracle on your journey? What was your reaction?

---

---

Where do you find yourself during this advent season? Pain and loss? Fear and doubt? Faith and belief? This is a wonderful time to share what God has done in your life?

---

---

## *Elizabeth's Journey*

Luke 1:5-7; 23-25 NLT

Elizabeth's personal journey of pain and loss is not the first we have heard in the biblical story. In the first chapter of the book of Samuel, we read a similar story. Hannah was ashamed by not having conceived a child, so she prayed to the Lord to give her a son. In return, she would dedicate him to the Lord's service. God answered that prayer, and Samuel, one of the great prophets, was born.

The Lord is about to show up in Elizabeth's journey too! What seemed impossible and hopeless to Elizabeth, was possible and hope-filled to God. God would meet Elizabeth where she was on her journey and then guide her on a new path on that journey. When the glorious and miraculous news came that Elizabeth was with child, her heart was transformed from broken to joyous.

She acknowledges the Lord's kindness, and that he has removed her disgrace. She gives all glory and honor to God for the miracle of her child. Soon, she will learn that her child is even more significant than just God removing sin and shame and replacing it with deep joy. This child she carries will also be a prophet, like Hannah's son. But his role will be the last prophet who will herald in the coming of the Messiah. He will speak the words of the Lord and prepare the people of God to hear that the kingdom of God draws near.

Elizabeth's journey is filled with heartache, loss, and pain. But it's also filled with hope, compassion, grace, mercy, and so much more than she could have ever imagined. That's what God wants to extend to us as we journey with Him—more than we could imagine if we would but trust Him to hear our cries and know our hearts.

Where might the journey this Advent season be hard for you? Where could you seek to draw closer to the Lord so he can

extend more than you could imagine if you would only believe his desires to do so?

*Prayer: God, open my heart to be willing to praise  
You in the difficult parts of the journey, believing that  
it's only part of the whole journey.*

## *Reflection Questions*

Verse 25 says, "The Lord has done this for me." What is the "this" in your life that the Lord has done?

---

---

---

---

For Elizabeth, God answered her prayers and made possible what seemed impossible.

## *Mary's Response*

Luke 1:26-38 NLT

For a Christian to hear the name “Mary” recalls this wonderful person whom God chose to bring His son into the world. There have been all kinds of words spoken and written about Mary, as well as many images created of her. Mary’s reaction to the angel’s message sets an example that we should follow. Perhaps it is the most important response anyone can give God.

The same angel, Gabriel, who appeared to Zechariah, also appeared to Mary. After hearing the message, Mary responds, ‘How can this happen? I am a virgin.’ Unlike Zechariah, who, despite being a priest, doubted God’s message, Mary isn’t doubting but asking for an explanation of how it would happen. Gabriel’s answer was, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.’ He then proceeds to explain that her baby will be holy and called ‘the Son of God.’ He also informs her that her long barren cousin, Elizabeth, is pregnant, proving that Mary’s pregnancy, just like Elizabeth’s, will be an example of God’s creative power, and that nothing is impossible, and there are no boundaries with God.

Mary’s response to God is pure faith and obedience. Some of the greatest words ever spoken are from Mary: “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” Zechariah’s first response was doubt, but Mary’s response was faith that led to obedience.

Mary’s response should be our response when God calls us to follow Him: faith and obedience. Through prayer, worship, and Bible study, our faith is built, and obedience is joyful.

*Prayer: Oh God, thank you for Mary. Lead me to respond in faith and obedience to the messages you send to me.*

## *Reflection Questions*

Mary's response to the message from the angel is one we should follow. She responded with "How will this be?" Then later she says "I am the Lord's servant." How are you responding to God this advent season?

---

---

---

---

After all, he sent Jesus, his one and only Son, just for you. Are you going to respond with, "How will this be? I am your servant. May your word be fulfilled"? Or will you be like Zechariah and doubt the message from God?

---

---

---

---

Faith leads to praise and doubt leads to silence.

# *A Mother's Journey*

Luke 2:19; 41-51 NLT

As a mother, I often wonder how Mary could so gracefully journey this road the Lord has led her on. While her physical journey to motherhood and the journey to Bethlehem as a nine-month pregnant woman must have had their challenges, what I wonder more about is her spiritual journey. For nine months, did she ponder the words of the angel? Did she try to break them apart and decipher the future meaning of them? Did she struggle with the words of God as she thought about the potential future for her child?

The Bible doesn't record much about Jesus' childhood and Mary as a mother. What we do know from a short story recorded in Luke about Jesus and his family in Jerusalem for one of the main Jewish festivals is that Mary was frantic when she realized Jesus had 'gone missing.' It turns out Jesus was in the temple with the religious leaders, listening, and asking questions. When he was finally found, he proclaimed that he would always dwell with his father. All these things Mary heard, saw, and learned as a mother to the Messiah, she 'pondered in her heart.'

What does it mean to ponder in your heart? Well, I believe it means constantly placing your heart's desire up against that of the Lord's. The things Mary didn't understand or struggled with, she placed against the heart of God.

Mary's journey was one of a parent coming to terms with the fact that her son had a much bigger purpose, and she had to release him to that purpose, trusting him to the One who loves him even more than she ever could.

*Prayer: Lord, help me to see your heart, to seek your will, and to bring to you my struggles and questions. May my heart match yours.*

## *Reflection Questions*

Mary's heart is a heart of complete surrender to the Father. The things in her heart were that of the Father. When Mary pondered these things in her heart she thought carefully.

What will you ponder this Advent season?

---

---

---

---

What things in your heart do you need to place against the heart of the Father?

---

---

---

---

## *A World of Money & Power*

Luke 2:1-5 NLT

In the United States a census is taken every ten years to provide equitable representation in the U.S. congress and state governments. The census was not to be a burden on anyone. I can remember when a census taker came to my family's home to get an accurate count of the household. Today a form can be filled out online.

This was not the case at the time of Jesus' birth. A census was a hardship, as people were required to journey back to their ancestral town or city. There could be problems along the way, such as robbers and weather issues. Also, it was time consuming and costly. For Joseph and a very pregnant Mary this was very likely no picnic.

For what reason would Rome call for a census? To collect taxes so the Roman government could control its empire, which included Israel. This was a cruel action by the Romans who cared very little about any inconvenience caused by the census orders. They needed money to build a strong military, continue to become a powerful empire, and defeat their enemies.

Thus, Jesus was born into a world where two of the greatest evils of the time were playing out: desire for money and power. Is our world any different today? Are these two evils not still a problem for us? Jesus came into the world with humility to bring peace and love to us. To show us a better way. Jesus' kingdom would not be one of military or economic power, but a kingdom of the heart that loves God. Our Advent journey clearly leads to a choice. The world's way, or Jesus' way.

*Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for showing us a better way than living a life of greed and power. Guide us in sharing this better way with the world.*

## *Reflection Questions*

Our advent journey leads to a choice. The world's way, or Jesus' way.

Think about the things on your mind. Do you think about them the world's way, or Jesus' way?

---

---

---

---

The world's way focuses on control, money, and power, which leads to stress, confusion, and feeling overwhelmed. Jesus' way is filled with love and peace, which leads to rest, clarity, and more peace.

---

---

---

---

## *Joseph's Journey Begins*

Matthew 1:18-25 NLT

Over the next days we will explore Joseph's part in the Christmas story. Did Joseph ever dream he would have such a choice? Mary, Joseph's intended wife, finds herself pregnant and Joseph is not the father. Therefore, Joseph must choose, in his way of thinking, between divorcing Mary quietly or having her stoned to death as his legal right under Jewish law of not coming to the marriage pure. At least in normal circumstances this would be legal, but these are not normal circumstances.

You may have heard or read the tale of Christmas so many times that maybe you never really thought about how Joseph could have chosen to have Mary stoned. Joseph could have understandable anger, be disappointed, and his righteousness could turn into self-righteousness. Just imagine the looks, judgment, and ridicule he would have to endure from his community when Mary's pregnancy becomes known. Purity in all areas was a tenant of the Jewish faith.

Joseph was a righteous man, but he could not see beyond those two choices. Then God sends an angel to offer another choice: one perhaps Joseph never thought of. God tells him to go ahead and take Mary as his wife; it's part of a bigger plan God has for the salvation of the world.

Our journey of life is full of choices. Look to God to provide the option that is the best, even if it was not a choice originally considered. During this Advent season, what are some choices you are faced with? Now ask God to reveal the best choice for how to proceed.

*Prayer: Holy Spirit, guide me to the most God honoring choices in my life.*

# *Reflection Questions*

We have three choices in life when we are faced with a situation: 1. Our Way, 2. The World's Way, or 3. God's Way. God's ways are always part of a bigger plan.

Isaiah 55:8: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.

Share a time when you have chosen your way, the world's way, and God's way.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## *Joseph's First Dream*

Matthew 1:20-25 NLT

Have you ever been accused of living in a dream world? Maybe you are unaware of what is happening around you because you are drawn into your own world of imagination? Joseph was not in his little dream world but experiencing real messages from God through an angel. These messages guided him through his future journeys.

Why dreams? Joseph lived in a time and culture where dreams were accepted as an avenue for God to communicate with his people, albeit through messengers. God knows our personalities and the best way to get our attention to pass on instructions to us. God may choose to put an idea in your brain; He may speak to us through other people, through something we read, or through being with God in prayer. We, like Joseph, need to be open to how God speaks to us by way of the Holy Spirit.

Yesterday's devotional revealed how God told Joseph he should take Mary as his wife, that it was all part of a much bigger purpose. Yet, Joseph was still under stress as he might have thought to himself, 'I am to be the Messiah's earthly father, and I will be responsible for Jesus' safety, upbringing, and education.' This is an awesome responsibility!

The fact that God cared enough to communicate as clearly as he could with Joseph speaks of God's character and love for his people. The journey with the Lord is filled with uncertainty and questions, but we can be assured that God wants to guide us.

*Prayer: Holy Spirit, let me be open to your messages and let me obey with confidence in God's plan as Joseph did.*

# *Reflection Questions*

God Speaks! He knows our personalities and the best way to get our attention. How does God speak to you?

---

---

---

---

What is He telling you?

---

---

---

---

How does it help you on your spiritual journey? (for example... God speaks through song. He reminds me of his faithful love. This helps me on my journey to trust Him even when I do not see the whole picture.)

---

---

---

---

## *Dream #2 for Joseph*

Matthew 2:3-15 NLT

I do not know about you, but I have never had someone trying to kill me or any of my family members. So, it is hard for me to understand what Joseph was feeling—the fear and worry—when he experiences a second dream that warns him about a plot to kill his son, Jesus.

King Herod was so paranoid about losing his throne and the power that went with it that he would murder anyone he perceived to be a threat. Once again, as discussed earlier, the world Jesus was born into was full of evil. People were power hungry and money hungry, just like today.

Once again, Joseph has a dream that reveals God's plan to keep Joseph's family safe and sustain them. Joseph is told to go to Egypt. Why Egypt? There are Jewish settlements established there years before, and/or God wanted Jesus' life to parallel Moses' by coming out of Egypt, allowing people to identify Jesus as the Messiah. Another major reason for the call to Egypt is because, multiple times in the Old Testament, the Lord referred to Israel as His son. What a parallel to make—that Israel was God's chosen children, and now His own son would come out of Egypt to save His people.

Where would Joseph get the money to live in Egypt until the return to Israel? Many scholars believe the gift of gold given by the Magi was the source of revenue for Joseph. God always supplies for needs, even when we may not realize it at the time.

God's message through the dream doesn't just tell Joseph to flee, but provides specific instructions of where and why. So, Joseph was sent on a journey by God for protection of his family and to play a part in God's plan for salvation.

*Prayer: Holy Spirit, let me be open to your messages and let me obey with confidence in God's plan as Joseph did.*

## *Reflection Questions*

God provides! We can trust His ways. He promises to go before us and to be with us where he sends us.

Are you ready to be sent by God to where he chooses with faith and confidence?

---

---

---

---

Are you ready to trust the journey He has prepared to fulfill His purpose?

---

---

---

---

## *God Continues to Communicate*

Matthew 2:19-23 NLT

Joseph has two more dreams where important instructions are given. First, to go back to Israel with Mary and Jesus because the threat to their lives is over—Herod is dead. Then, after Joseph arrives back in Israel, he is directed to go to Nazareth because of potential danger from Archelaus, Herod's son. God is working out His plan, as Jesus would be 'called a Nazarene.'

What a remarkable series of journeys for Joseph's family. Go to Bethlehem, then Egypt, back to Israel, to end up in Nazareth. What about us? Whether we have lived and worked in many different places or lived our whole life in one place, we are all on a spiritual journey through life. Are we allowing God to lead and guide us on this journey? What would happen if we did let God lead our lives?

God has a plan for us all as He invites us to join Him in working out His good purposes in the world. God's plans may be daily, or long-range, or both. What is God calling us to do today, and what does He call us to do that may involve a longer commitment, a bigger journey? Work this out in prayer and Bible study with God.

*Prayer: God, thank you for guiding my life and asking me to join you in fulfilling your purposes.*

# *Reflection Questions*

God has spoken to Joseph through dreams to give instructions.  
He continues to speak to us and give us instructions.

How has God spoken to you?

---

---

---

---

What did He tell you to do?

---

---

---

---

*Attune Our Hearts*

Matthew 1:24-25; 2:14, 21-23 ESV

As we have looked at each telling of Joseph's encounters with God through dreams and angels, the common theme we see is Joseph obeying what he hears. Scripture never records that Joseph hesitates, stops to ask more questions, argues the instructions, or throws in the towel when the directives are hard. Joseph does as the Lord guides.

I've often wondered how Joseph could have such faith and obedience. What does he know about following the Lord that I haven't learned yet? What experience has motivated such faith? What history of God's character does he lean into to believe so clearly? I admit that in the face of the trials he had to endure I'm not sure I could respond the way Joseph does. I would like to think I could, but I won't know until I'm at that point.

What I believe is that Joseph was taught at a young age to be attuned to the truth of God's words. As a Jewish male, his childhood would have been filled with learning the Torah—the first 5 books of the Bible. He would have memorized large chunks of those books. And while memorizing is one thing, believing what you have memorized is another. In Joseph's case, it would seem that in his learning and listening to the story of God and His people, he became attuned to the character of God. He learned through the stories that God's word was true and trustworthy, and while he may not have always understood why God did what He did, what he likely learned was that God was consistent.

Journeying with God is about more than following; it's more than doing what He says. It's about being attuned to God's heart and trusting His words. Knowing the God of the story is one thing; trusting Him reveals we can trust Him more. It's a cycle. As we attune our hearts to God's heart, we trust. As we trust, we attune our hearts even more. As we attune,

we trust more. Do you see it? This is how Joseph could follow God's directives. This is how Joseph could step into obedience. He was attuned to God's heart.

*Prayer: Lord, help me to attune my heart to yours.  
Help me to hear your words spoken in love and lean  
into trust.*

## *Reflection Questions*

Joseph likely memorized large chunks of the Torah since he was a Jewish male. Memorizing scripture is different than believing scripture. Share the promises/scriptures that you have memorized and believe. Why are these important to you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## *The Mystery of Joseph*

Luke 2:41-42 NLT

As we conclude our look at Joseph's journey in God's plan, we read in Luke chapter 2 the only story recorded of Jesus' childhood. Jesus was mistakenly left behind in Jerusalem. After a frantic search by his parents, he was found in the temple. After this story, Joseph is never mentioned again in the story of Jesus. So, what happened to Joseph?

Here are two possibilities:

1. He died before Jesus' ministry began. If this was the case, Jesus would surely understand the grief of losing someone so important in his life. This fact combined with his passion and death on a cross would mean Jesus understands our grief and can bring us comfort.
2. Joseph lived to see Jesus' death on the cross but it is not mentioned in the narrative. Why? Joseph played his role in God's plan and now the focus is on Jesus and not his earthly father.

What happened to Joseph is a mystery. What is not a mystery is Joseph's righteousness, integrity, and obedience to God. All of us should be guided by Joseph's example. We should all give thanks if we complete our life's spiritual journey and calling as Joseph did.

Spend some time reflecting on Joseph. The bible may not tell us everything about Joseph, but what it tells us is enough.

*Prayer: Thank you God, for Joseph. Help me to follow his example of faith and obedience.*

# *Reflection Questions*

As you read about Joseph this week, what are some things God has revealed to you about Joseph?

---

---

---

---

How does Joseph's example of following God help your walk with Christ?

---

---

---

---

Share what following Christ looks like in your life.

---

---

---

---

*The Lord Knows*

## Psalm 139 NIV

When I was about 6 or 7, my family traveled to Tennessee to spend Christmas with my aunt, uncle, and cousin. I worried the whole drive to Tennessee and in the days before Christmas Eve that Santa wouldn't find me so far from home. This meant, in my little heart, that I wouldn't get any presents from him.

That night when I went to bed, I remember talking to God and asking Him to make sure Santa knew I was in Tennessee at my aunt's house and not at my home. That way, he knew where to bring my presents. I mean, I hadn't sent him a letter earlier in the month telling him about this new destination. I knew God could get the message to him though!

I guess he did, because the next morning I woke up to presents from Santa! My worries about Santa finding me were taken care of and I was reminded by my older brother that "God, Santa, the Tooth Fairy, and the Easter Bunny always know where we are!"

Beyond the fact that God always knows where we are, He always knows our hearts. The Lord knows how we entered into this Advent season. For some of us, we may feel hurried and rushed during this time. For others, we have so many details to get through that we haven't stopped yet to really BE with God. Still, others of us may be in a place of loss or pain, and it makes connecting this season with hope extremely difficult.

No matter where we are, God knows. There is great comfort in that fact. He knows us intimately. He knows every hair on your head, every wrinkle on your face, every pain in your heart, and everything you wrestle with. He knows because of His love for us/you. God will always seek you and He will

always find you. As you journey through this Advent, rest in the fact that God knows you. He wants to know you. He loves everything about you!

*Prayer: Lord, thank you for loving me so much that you desire to know me intimately. Help me to have the same desire to know you better.*

## *Reflection Questions*

What are you most thankful for that God created?

---

---

---

When we stop and allow God to search our hearts, do we see evidence of desiring more of Jesus during this Advent season?

---

---

---

---

## *The Innkeeper*

Luke 2:6-7 NLT

Who is the Innkeeper? The Bible doesn't tell us much about him or her. In fact, the Bible doesn't even clearly mention an innkeeper, just that there was no room at the inn for Joseph and a very pregnant Mary.

Over the years there has been speculation about the innkeeper and what kind of man he was. One view says he was uncaring and unmoved by this couple's predicament and let them stay in a cave where the animals rested just to get them out of his hair. He probably charged the same rates as a regular room. That old scrooge!

The other view of the innkeeper is the opposite. He is caring and loving and did his best to help the family find lodging when Bethlehem was so overcrowded by the census. A good-hearted soul who created something for them out of nothing.

Which view do we take toward the innkeeper? How we answer that question may give us insight into how we view the world. If we see the innkeeper as an uncaring person who could have treated Joseph's family better, maybe that is how we see the world. The world, its people, and its institutions, cannot be trusted and there is little to be optimistic or hopeful about. Our world view is sour.

On the other hand, if our view of the innkeeper is the opposite, then we are more likely to see people as caring and with good hearts. There is much good in the world among people and institutions.

How does our imagination picture the innkeeper and is that a reflection of our world? What journey does that view take us on? Is it a journey of distrust and keeping everyone at arm's length, or is it a journey of hope and taking the risk to help others? Yes, the world can be cruel, but will we be part of Jesus' promise to overcome the world?

*Prayer: The great loving act of sending Jesus to me should help me love the world. Give me the heart to do what you call me to do, God.*

## *Reflection Questions*

How do you view the innkeeper? Caring/loving or uncaring/unmoved by a woman who is about to give birth?

---

---

---

---

We are given opportunities daily to meet others needs and to love those that God created. How are you responding?

---

---

---

---

## *What about the Inn?*

Luke 2:7 NIV

There is much debate about the inn or lack of an inn where Jesus was born. As we talked about yesterday, this detail of an inn is only very briefly mentioned in the birth narrative. Even our Innkeeper is never mentioned directly. So, where could Jesus have been born?

Believe it or not, there is much debate about the inn because it could have been a variety of things. Since our author gives us so little detail, we are left to speculate on where exactly Jesus was born. Many homes during Jesus' time were two stories, with the bottom used more like a barn for the most valuable animals at night. This allowed the families to bring their animals in on cold nights and keep them safe from predators. The family would sleep on the second floor, and many had an 'upper room' for guests. So, our 'inn' could be referring to someone's home OR even a hotel-like residence. It could be that Jesus was born in the downstairs room with the animals surrounding him, as many of our nativity sets portray. This theory would make sense with our wood manger, which was often used for animal feed..

But there are many who posit that Mary and Joseph weren't just downstairs but sent to a cave right next to the "inn." The people of Bethlehem were known to keep their animals in caves that were connected to or at least close to their homes. They would even dig out a "trench" in the rock to place food and feed. It could be that instead of a warm lower level of a home, Mary and Joseph greeted baby Jesus in a cave and placed him in a rock trench.

No matter where you land on the Inn debate, the main point is that our Savior arrived in sub-par conditions with as little fanfare as possible. A simple space became the Throne Room of God at the birth of the Messiah. This arrival would set the stage for his ministry and his purpose. Our Savior's journey with us is not about the best and boldest, the most cushy and

blingy. Our humble Savior came to meet us in the muck and mire of our lives. He has come for the broken and lost, the abandoned and unloved. He has come for the ones who have it all and the ones that have nothing. He came in human form to meet us where we are so he can lead us where we are meant to be.

*Prayer: Lord, thank you for meeting my heart wherever it is. Thank you that it doesn't matter where I've been only where I can go with you.*

## *Reflection Questions*

Luke 2:7 says there was no room in the inn. Think of “the Inn” as your heart. How can you make room for Jesus daily?

---

---

---

---

## *Levitical Shepherds*

Luke 2:6-18 ESV

Did you know that there are 2 theories about the shepherds that are visited by the angels and visit Baby Jesus? Over the next two days we are going to look at both theories and what either can tell us about the journey and about the Messiah.

Let's start with the Levitical Shepherds. According to Jewish law and tradition, it was forbidden to keep sheep so close to a town unless they were special sheep. If these are special sheep, then they need to be shepherded by special shepherds—Levitical shepherds—who tend the flock used for sacrifices in the temple in Jerusalem. This would mean that if these were Levitical Shepherds, they have just been informed of the NEW sacrificial lamb, the FINAL lamb, the perfect sacrifice!

Just in case the Levitical Shepherds didn't put it all together at that moment, there was one other key to reference: the swaddling clothes. Again, we must look at Jewish tradition and context where sacrificial lambs were bound in swaddling clothes to protect them from injury, since law required them to be blemish-free. The Levitical Shepherds were in charge of making sure the lamb stayed free of defect so it could be an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord.

If the shepherds the angels visit in the field are these special Levitical Shepherds, then once they journeyed to see the baby in the manger, they would have put all the pieces together. The angels tell of the Savior, the one who will come to SAVE the people of God—the perfect sacrifice. The sign for them to be sure was the swaddling clothes, a tool they knew intimately because they used it all the time to wrap baby lambs to keep them pure and safe from harm.

Sometimes the journey isn't so much about the places we go, but when God uses the things, we are familiar with to teach us something new. He can turn an idea we have known for

so long on its side and help us to see it a new way, with new eyes, in a new light. If we are listening.

*Prayer: Today, Lord, help me to listen to you and see the gift of your Son in a new light. Reveal how you are working and have been working to get me to where I am now, so I may rejoice in the journey.*

## *Reflection Questions*

The angels told the shepherds about baby Jesus being born. In verse 15 the shepherds said, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see."

When you heard about Jesus the first time or when you hear about the things that he has done, how did you respond?

---

---

---

---

During Advent, are you moving closer to the manger and looking at Jesus face to face?

---

---

---

---

# *Lowly Shepherds*

Luke 2:6-18 ESV

Yesterday, we explored the idea that the shepherds could have been special Levitical Shepherds. Today, we look at the traditional theory that these shepherds, to whom the angels announced the birth of Christ, are lowly shepherds. What would be the difference?

During the times of the Patriarchs, shepherding was a noble occupation that had the potential to create great wealth. Over time, the status of shepherding dropped, and by the time of Jesus, it was no longer a noble job but found to be one of the lowliest trades. In fact, they were officially labeled “sinners.”

If, in fact, these shepherds are your normal, everyday shepherd, known by society as the lowest on the social and caste system rung, then it brings even more significance to the fact that the birth of the Messiah was announced to them first. Jesus came to restore the lowest to a place of worth. His whole ministry would be centered around the outcast and marginalized.

We must also consider that some of the most key followers of the Lord started as shepherds, that the Lord was termed a ‘Good Shepherd’ often in scripture, and that Jesus will identify himself with shepherds often in his ministry.

No matter where you fall on the shepherd theory, what the Lord shows us is that the journey to the Messiah is about what the Messiah does for us. He is the sacrifice for our sins, He is the one that visits the sinner and the outcast. He is the perfect lamb and the one Great Shepherd.

*Prayer: Today, Lord, help me to listen to you and see the gift of your Son in a new light. Reveal how you are working and have been working to get me to where I am now, so I may rejoice in the journey.*

## *Reflection Questions*

The shepherds went with haste and found Mary and Joseph. Then they told others about Jesus. Are you sharing the news of Jesus with others?

---

---

---

---

Is there someone you are praying for to receive the news about Jesus after you told them what he has done in your life?

---

---

---

---

## *The Light*

Matthew 2:1-2 NLT

The star is a main character in the Christmas narrative as a representative of the guiding light of Christ. Many Christmas trees are adorned at the top by a star to remind us of the first star. Lights on a tree are also a key element to decorating the tree. These elements of light remind us of the light of the world that came down that Christmas day.

It is a tradition to sing Silent Night at Christmas Eve or Christmas Day services. At the appointed place in the song the attendees raise a lighted candle in an otherwise dark place of worship. The symbolism and beauty of that moment for many...is pure joy! The light of God shining and overcoming darkness is clearly understood.

God sent us THE light, Jesus Christ, out of pure love for us.

*Prayer: Today, I acknowledge that you are God. You have always had a plan and purpose to save me, to redeem me, to heal me, to bring me wholeness. I walk in that gift, fully, today.*

# *Reflection Questions*

In your life, are you following God's light or are you stumbling around in darkness?

---

---

---

---

How can we shine the Way for others to see and understand that the darkness will never win because of Jesus' love?

---

---

---

---

## *The Star*

Matthew 2:1-12 NLT

“When you wish upon a star...”; “Star light, star bright...”. Through songs, poems, or star-watching, stars have always fascinated us. The star that guided the Magi was certainly one of the ‘stars’ of the Christmas narrative.

What was this star? Some believe it was a comet, others think it was a convergence in the sky of two stars whose lights combined even though they were far apart in the sky. Still others believe it was a special star that God created for that special occasion. Regardless of the star’s origin, the Magi understood its importance and followed it to find Jesus so they could worship him and bring him gifts.

The star’s purpose was to provide light—guiding light! That is what Christmas is all about. The guiding light, the eternal light, has come to guide us in building our relationship with God, listening to the Holy Spirit, and helping us build loving relationships with others. The light also guides us to loving service.

Take some time and remember ways Jesus has guided you in the past and be thankful.

*Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for being my light in a dark world. I love you and will continue to seek your guidance.*

## *Reflection Questions*

Jesus is the Light of the World. How has He been a light in your life?

---

---

---

---

How has he provided light for you during a dark time?

---

---

---

---

## *Who are the Magi?*

Matthew 2:1-12; Isaiah 60:3-9; Psalm 72:10-11 NIV

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that the Magi “come from the East,” following a star to bring gifts to the Messiah. But who are these Magi, and why do they want to see the Jewish Messiah?

Magi or Wise Men is a vague term our author uses because there is little to be known about these men. Magi in Greek means “one of a learned and priestly class,” but that doesn’t tell us if it was a Jewish priestly class or another god’s priests. They most likely were some type of astrologists of the time who studied stars, which was believed to give information about gods. The exact location they traveled from is also unknown, which means we aren’t sure of their ethnicity either. Persia is the most likely guess. Some also believe instead of astrologers, they were kings of a certain area. This could be a valid argument, as it was a custom of the time for kings to send or bring gifts to new kings.

Did you know that many bible scholars also believe there were between 2 and 12 magi instead of the 3 we typically think of? We count based on the gifts they brought.

The truth is that the Magi are another mystery in our story. What we can surmise is that they studied stars and could tell when a new star appeared in the sky. That star signaled to them that a new king had come. So they gathered gifts and journeyed by following the star to find Mary and Joseph with Jesus- the new King of the Jews.

Scripture tells us they were “overjoyed” when they arrived and they “bowed” down and worshiped Jesus. These men who were not Jewish, not part of the promised people, recognized the new king and gave him honor with gifts and worship. So many unexpected people were the first ones to worship the Messiah. It wasn’t the Jewish leaders, the teachers of the law, the richest of the people of God, or the most influential. The

first to recognize and worship our messiah were animals in a stable, shepherds in the field, and magi from distant lands.

Jesus came to unite a world that was fractured. He came to show us the depth of love the Lord has for us. He came to sacrifice his own life for our sins so we can draw near to the Lord. This is the message he came to spread and asks us to participate in as his followers.

*Prayer: Lord, help me to see your people today. Help me to worship you with abandon so others may know you, especially during this season of Advent.*

## *Reflection Questions*

The Magi were told to go and search diligently for Jesus, by Herod. When the Magi found Jesus, they fell down and worshiped Him.

When you see the works of Jesus, how do you respond?

---

---

---

---

Are you seeking Him in your daily life?

---

---

---

---

*Gifts*

Matthew 2:10-12 NLT

The Magi's gifts have been much discussed over the years. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh were costly items. Bible scholars have concluded that the gifts represent Jesus. Gold is a gift for a king, frankincense was commonly a gift for a god or deity, and myrrh was a spice to anoint and/or prepare a body for burial. The Magi's gifts should make us question what gift(s) we bring to Christ, our King.

Of the many beloved Christmas hymns, "In the Bleak Midwinter" includes one of the most moving and challenging verses:

*What can I give him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.  
If I were a wise man, I would do my part.  
Yet what I can I give him, give my heart.*

Is there any better gift to give Jesus? When exchanging and opening gifts this year, remind everyone that these gifts are a reminder of the gifts brought by the Magi. Make sure you emphasize the gift we bring to Jesus—our hearts. Our whole heart, our whole being, including our love for him and others. That is the proper direction for our Advent journey.

*Prayer: I want to give my whole heart to you, loving God.*

## *Reflection Questions*

There is so much still unknown about the Magi who follow the stars to visit the New King. Mystery can bring excitement. What is easy about Advent is to do the same old thing every year, missing that God wants to reveal something new each time. In this Advent season, where are you looking for new mystery?

---

---

---

What is something in the story of God's Son being born that you want to learn more about?

---

---

---

What breaks your heart the most today about our fractured world?

---

---

---

How can we bring Jesus into that brokenness to heal it?

---

---

---

## *The Reindeer*

Hosea 12:6 NIV

When I was little, we had these beautiful reindeer ornaments we put on our tree every year. Each reindeer had a name of Santa's famous reindeer who led him on his Christmas Eve adventures across the land to deliver gifts to children. Those ornaments were my favorite ones on the tree. As we got closer to Christmas Eve, I would move them from the bottom of the tree up closer and closer to the top, signifying they were getting closer and closer to taking off and bringing Santa on his journey to my house...with gifts!

It was the anticipation of Christmas Day that led me to continue this tradition. As I moved the reindeer ornaments closer and closer to the top, I got more and more excited. The excitement of Christmas Day and what Santa would bring was one of the most fun parts of Christmas for me. Did he get my letters with my "what I want" list? Was he going to be able to bring me that fancy barbie doll that was sold out all around town? Could his elves make a cabbage patch doll that really did look like me? And how would he deliver it all when we didn't even have a fireplace???

Anticipation—it's an emotion that can lead us to such joy! The build-up gets our hearts moving, our palms sweating, and our bodies swaying. Advent is about the journey of anticipation. As Christ followers, we know that Christmas Eve is coming, and the birth of our Savior is near. But how often do we allow ourselves to really anticipate that? Do you get excited about celebrating our Savior's birth? OR, do you get so bogged down in holiday details that you miss the anticipation?

Anticipation causes us to be more alert, to watch more carefully, to listen more intently. As we creep closer and closer to Christmas Day, let God get a hold of you and let your anticipation grow, for the Savior is about to be born, and God's love is about to overflow in a simple manger!

*Prayer: Lord, help me find the joy of anticipation during this season. Help me to find the joy of waiting and watching as you prepare my heart to receive your son.*

## *Reflection Questions*

Scripture tells us we can honor God with our words and actions.

What gifts do you bring today to honor God?

---

---

---

---

What gifts have others given you that have meant the most to you? Why?

---

---

---

---

*Simeon and Anna*

Luke 2:21-38 NIV

The gospel of Luke mentions two people who have been on a very long journey of waiting for the Messiah to come. Both Simeon and Anna encounter our baby Messiah at the temple. As was custom, Mary and Joseph travel to Jerusalem to give an offering for Jesus' birth and for ritual cleansing of Mary after childbirth. Led by the Holy Spirit, Simeon is moved to be at the temple when they come. It is highly likely that Simeon is a priest, though scripture doesn't name him as such, but he performs the rituals of sacrificing the offerings Mary and Joseph bring. It also tells us that Simeon had been waiting faithfully for the Messiah. That long waiting was rewarded with him being able to set eyes on the new Savior and even holding him and speaking words of praise over him.

Not only had Simeon been on a long journey of waiting, but so had another person, Anna. We are told that Anna was a prophetess, which was unusual, but she had been waiting for a LONG time for the "redemption" of Israel. In that waiting she prayed and fasted regularly, as well as visited the temple for worship. She was also rewarded for her faithful waiting by setting her eyes upon Jesus and giving thanks to God for his presence.

Waiting is a huge part of a journey. As much as a journey is the actual movement, it is also about planning and waiting for the right time to move. Yesterday we talked about anticipation and how anticipation can help us to open our hearts more to receiving the gift of Jesus. Waiting is much the same thing. But one of the differences is that waiting creates perseverance, and it calls us to listen more carefully. Both Anna and Simeon served the temple in Jerusalem. They not only believed the promises of God, but they taught others about them. That didn't mean they had a fast track to what God was doing. They waited with their eyes focused on the Lord for many years before the Lord revealed himself and his plan to them.

As we wait on the Lord we must also focus on listening and worshiping. This is how we will make it through the waiting, and it will enhance our worship. On Christmas Day the waiting is over, the Savior is born, and that waiting we endured will bring about even more depth of worship!

*Prayer: Lord, sustain me in the waiting. May I embrace the waiting so that it leads me to deeper worship.*

## *Reflection Questions*

Have you heard the saying, “worship while you wait?” That is exactly what Anna and Simeon did. They were waiting for the Messiah and worshiped and believed God for what He said He would do. Not only were they worshiping while they were waiting, but they were serving God in the temple.

As you wait on something God has promised you, do you worry and doubt or worship and serve while you wait?

---

---

---

---

## *Resurrection*

Winter Solstice/Longest Night

John 11:17-44 NLT

For many people Advent and the Christmas season are not times of happiness and joy, but a time of grieving and a sense of loss. Especially for those who have lost a loved one since the last Advent season. I have lost both of my parents, and the first few Christmases after their deaths were mixtures of joy and sadness.

Because of faith, God will lead us through this sadness with his great love for us. Christmas is a celebration of the coming of the one who will be our sacrifice for sins and who will conquer death for us through faith in him. Jesus understands our pain.

In our scripture today it says, “Jesus wept.” He comforts Martha, raises Lazarus, and clearly demonstrates that he is the “resurrection and the life.” Grieving is natural, but within that sadness is a deep inner joy and confidence of the knowledge that our loved ones are resurrected with Christ.

Our journey through grief to joy centers on the one born to Mary and Joseph. When we celebrate Christmas, remember what Christ has done for us. Jesus loves us that much!

*Prayer: Creator of all things, holidays can be painful but fill me with the joy of the good news that the Messiah is coming. Indeed, he is here!*

# *Reflection Questions*

Fun Fact: The shortest verse in the Bible is verse 35, "Jesus wept."

This season of Advent may be a time of sadness but also filled with joy. Discuss how one can experience joy and grief at the same time.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# *Christmas Cop*

Psalm 32:1-2 NLT

One of my favorite Christmas memories was when the family gathered at my grandparent's crowded house. There were not enough beds (sound familiar?) so some of us young people had to sleep on pallets on the floor while a few lucky ones slept on couches. My brother and I slept on one of the pallets in the same room where the Christmas Tree was located. Our cousin, Mark, slept in the same room, but was lucky enough to snag the couch.

My brother and I decided Mark was destined to become a cop because of his determination that night to see Santa laying out the presents under the tree while using a flashlight he brought with him. (By the way, Mark would eventually become a policeman and served with distinction on S.W.A.T. in Houston, Texas.)

After the lights went out in the room, Mark used his trusty flashlight hoping to reveal Santa in the act, to no avail. This went on for several minutes. My brother warned Mark that if he did not stop turning the flashlight on Santa would not come. Mark continued turning it on and off until sleep overtook him.

The next morning proved priceless! My brother and I woke up first and laid on our pallet waiting for Mark to awaken to see his reaction. When Mark's eyes opened, he beheld possibly the worst sight imaginable- no gifts from Santa were under the tree! The look on his face was unforgettable. It seemed to scream, "I have kept Santa away. I have ruined Christmas for everyone and how can I face the family?!"

My brother and I did everything we could not to laugh, for in the adjoining room in chairs were the kids gifts neatly organized by "Santa." When Mark discovered the chairs, he smiled in relief.

Read again Psalm 32:1-2. That was Mark's journey that morning: joy, forgiveness, cleared of guilt, and redemption. His relief was evident. That is all our Christmas journeys as well. Jesus is here, offering forgiveness and joy to all who embark on a journey of faith and obedience to him. We can find relief from our sins through the babe of Christmas.

*Prayer: Jesus, thank you!*

## *Reflection Questions*

Forgiveness is freely given because of what Jesus did for us on the cross and we can experience FREEDOM!

What sin do you need to give to Jesus so that it can be buried, and you can be raised to life in freedom?

---

---

---

---

*Joy*

Luke 2:8-11 NLT

Christmas is about God's love for us through Jesus. His birth, life, crucifixion, and resurrection is not just ordinary news, and not even good news, but great news that brings great joy to all people. How will this news spread to all? Through us, Jesus' followers. We must do our part in sharing the gospel. Christmas would not be complete without singing "Joy to the World." The first line of each of the 4 verses is what we need to proclaim to the world:

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come.  
Joy to the world, the Savior reigns.  
No more let sin and sorrows grow.  
He rules the world with truth and grace.*

That is the story, the truth, the promise, and the love of God. Is our journey leading to great joy because of this great news? Journey back in your memory to a time when you experienced great joy because of God's love for you, and share the experience with someone.

*Prayer: Joy to the world! I love you, God, because you love me so much!*

# *Reflection Questions*

When have you experienced great joy because of God's love for you? Share your experience with someone.

---

---

---

---

## *Christmas Eve*

Every family or individual has traditions they look forward to renewing on Christmas Eve. When I was younger and my family gathered at my grandparents' home, I would find time to go into the room where the Christmas tree was located and sit in the chair next to the tree. It was simply a time for me to be with God. I would be grateful for God's gift of Jesus and the gift of family. As I sat in the glow of the lights of that beautiful tree, I let God's light of love wash over me and I just let myself "be" with God.

You may be part of other Christmas Eve traditions. Some people trim the tree that night, others open gifts, some drive around and look at Christmas decorations, many attend church services, and others do acts of service that night to illustrate God's care for everyone. Some do a combination of the above. Whatever your tradition on Christmas Eve and even Christmas Day, make Jesus the center of it all.

Let everyone know that Christmas lights remind us that Jesus is the light of the world, exchanging gifts is to remind us of the Magi who brought gifts to Jesus and that Jesus gives us the greatest gift. Attending church services is very fitting, as Jesus needs to be worshiped by His believers, and acts of service to others in love witnesses to the Savior's care for us all.

Regardless of how we spend Christmas Eve, we all need to be sure we keep "Jesus as the reason for the season."

*Prayer: God and Father of all, let my traditions open me up to the real meaning of Christmas.*

# *Christmas Day*

## Isaiah 53 NLT

Christmas Day has arrived at last! Where has your faith journey taken you this Advent season? To a better understanding of God? A deeper relationship with Jesus? Perhaps a new call to action to further the Kingdom of God? Hopefully to all of these things and more!

Let us share one last journey to bring better focus to this day. During the Napoleonic wars of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, Napoleon, Emperor of France, was making war on Austria. A certain Austrian town came under interest, and he wanted to capture it. As the town had no strong defense forces guarding it, Napoleon ordered a small part of his army to break away from the main force and journey to the town to seize it. The French forces arrived on Christmas Eve and prepared for the attack the next day.

As news reached the town of the approaching French forces, panic spread as the town people feared the worst. The local minister told the people to be unafraid and have faith. (Oh, don't these words sound so familiar to us? The angel spoke these words to so many of our Christmas story heroes.) The minister suggested that on Christmas Day the people follow their normal Christmas tradition of coming to church for the annual Yuletide Service followed by the ringing of the church bells to celebrate Jesus' birth.

On Christmas Day the people of the town came to worship as they did each year while the French prepared for the attack. Then at the end of the service the church bells began their joyous ringing. The French commander misunderstood the meaning of the bells and thought they signaled the arrival of an Austrian army coming to save the town. The French retreated because the commander felt a superior force awaited them. THE TOWN WAS SAVED!

Christmas is about one important truth: God loved us so much he sent his son to live among us, die for our sins, and be raised so death can be overcome. Emmanuel - God with us - has come and WE ARE SAVED!

Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph, the innkeeper, shepherds, Magi, and Mary all undertook journeys in one form or the other, and thus all played a role in God's plan to save His people through Jesus, His Son. The Austrian town's journey from fear, to faith, to salvation, to joy is much like many in our Christmas story and maybe ours as well.

So, this Christmas Day...

RING THOSE BELLS!

## *Closing Reflections*

Reflect on the journey of Mary and Joseph bringing the Messiah of the World into the world.

Who do you relate to the most during this Advent journey?

1. Zechariah - did you move from pain and loss to faith and belief?
2. Elizabeth - did you have a prayer answered?
3. Joseph - did God ask you to do something and you responded in obedience?
4. Mary - did you surrender your life to God and his plans for your life?
5. Innkeeper - did you make room for Jesus in your life?
6. Shepherds - are you growing closer to God and seeing His mighty wonders?
7. The Magi - are you searching for God and when you find him bringing your best gifts to lay at his feet?

*Heavenly Father,*

*You are the God of miracles as seen over and over in the Bible. This Advent journey has given us an opportunity to reflect on our lives and has been life changing. Thank you for coming to Earth, loving us, and saving us from our sin. We surrender our lives and our plans to you as Mary did so long ago. Drive out the distractions so that we can make more room for you in our heart. We want to remember the truths we have learned this season and walk confidently in your love. Give us opportunities to share your love and mighty works with others daily.*

*Amen.*