



# Good News

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A 25-DAY CHRISTMAS AND ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

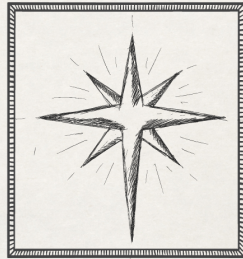
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## GREAT JOY



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 in the inn. And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

## ALL PEOPLE



Angel appears unto a Jewish woman in the night saying, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

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## Glory to God IN THE HIGHEST.

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# Good News

## GREAT JOY ALL PEOPLE

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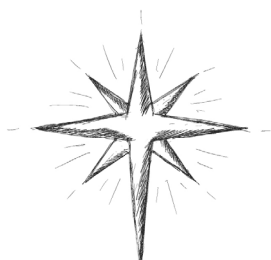
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# Table of Contents

<i>DAY 1</i> .....	2
<i>DAY 2</i> .....	3
<i>DAY 3</i> .....	4
<i>DAY 4</i> .....	5
<i>DAY 5</i> .....	6
<i>DAY 6</i> .....	7
<i>DAY 7</i> .....	8
<i>DAY 8</i> .....	9
<i>DAY 9</i> .....	10
<i>DAY 10</i> .....	11
<i>DAY 11</i> .....	12
<i>DAY 12</i> .....	13
<i>DAY 13</i> .....	14
<i>DAY 14</i> .....	15
<i>DAY 15</i> .....	16
<i>DAY 16</i> .....	17
<i>DAY 17</i> .....	18
<i>DAY 18</i> .....	19
<i>DAY 19</i> .....	20
<i>DAY 20</i> .....	21
<i>DAY 21</i> .....	22
<i>DAY 22</i> .....	23
<i>DAY 23</i> .....	24
<i>DAY 24 CHRISTMAS EVE</i> .....	25
<i>DAY 25 CHRISTMAS DAY</i> .....	26



## ABOUT THIS BOOK

Do you ever get lost in all the Christmas spirit? Sometimes it can be overwhelming to see the glistening lights on rooftops, the decorated trees in every storefront, and there is always one Christmas song that gets played one too many times...

This devotional is for you. Yes, Christmas is a time when we remember the birth of Jesus Christ. But it is also a time when we can tell others about why this humble birth was such a big deal! Over the next month, you are going to break down Luke 2:10, which says “And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” Every five days, you will look deeply into one of the five elements in this verse: Fear Not, Behold, Good News, Great Joy, For All People.

The Bible has so much to say about why the birth of Christ is important- not just at Christmas time, but all the time. Each daily devotional focuses on a passage in Scripture and gives you a short piece to read. You will find several reflection questions at the bottom of the page. We challenge you to spend time thinking about your answers, even if you don't write them down. If you have a friend who is also reading this devotional, ask them if they want to talk about the questions with you!

Most importantly, we hope that this 25-Day Christmas and Advent Devotional is a tool that grows your faith and deepens your relationship with the Lord.



# Day 1

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*“And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.’ -Luke 2:10*

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In the first five days of this devotional, you will focus on one phrase in our theme verse: Fear Not. Now, you’re probably flipping to the front of your book and thinking, “I thought this was a Christmas book... why am I reading about fear and scary stuff?” Don’t worry; we’re getting there! You see, this one verse contains all of the importance of the Christmas Story in one compact package.

In a world where so much can go wrong, there are a lot of things out there that can cause us to be afraid. Maybe you have experienced a tragedy recently that has taught you to be more careful when you go to certain places or use certain objects. You might have even heard someone say, “it’s not you I’m worried about. It’s everyone else!” (Heads up, you will likely hear this A LOT when you get behind the wheel of a car). This type of caution can be good. It keeps us from making preventable mistakes and helps us be on guard for ourselves and others. But when caution turns to fear, we can find ourselves feeling hopeless and angry. When fear rules our lives, we become obsessed with what will keep us safe. And that can lead us to put our hope in something or someone other than Christ.

In the Bible, angel appearances were not common. And when they did show up, their arrival did not always bring good tidings. For the shepherds in the field that evening, the arrival of angels probably gave off “we need to talk” energy. They would have been afraid for the flock, their lives, and their loved ones. And yet, the angel tells them not to be afraid. Why? The message that they were about to share was not one of fear, but of God’s presence on Earth, His provision for all people, and a love so great that it fills believers with joy beyond understanding.

## QUESTIONS

1. Imagine you are a shepherd and have been sent out to protect the sheep from danger. Walking in the pasture, you encounter a creature like nothing you’ve ever seen. For all you know, it could be there to eat your sheep! How do you respond?
2. What is one of your biggest fears, and how long have you been afraid of this thing?



# Day 2

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*“Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”-Isaiah 35:4*

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Of all the Old Testament books quoted in the New Testament, Isaiah is referenced most. This makes sense when considering that the words of the prophet Isaiah highlighted the coming Savior of the world. If you’ve ever been on a road trip, you know that the signs alongside the highway aren’t your destination. But they can tell you how long you have until you reach your final stop (100 miles until Nashville!) The same can be said of Isaiah’s words in the Old Testament. They are like highway signs or road maps of what is to come – which is salvation and redemption in Jesus Christ. In Isaiah 35:4, there is a promise that what is spoken will actually happen. Fear and doubt must bow at the feet of the coming Messiah (or the Promised One of God).

Be honest. When was the last time you used the word “recompense?” It’s part of your everyday vocabulary, right? Right? If so, that is impressive! But most of you reading this have rarely heard that word, let alone used it. So let’s take a closer look: “recompense” is a type of payment or compensation that is meant to make amends. The hope that Isaiah shares in the verse above is the guarantee that Jesus will come to make amends for us.

That is good news in and of itself, but there is even better news. From our modern-day perspective, we know that Jesus did come! What Isaiah prophesied came to be. Beyond that, He is coming again to one day restore all things. What an encouragement to us when our fear and anxiety are unending.

## QUESTIONS

1. In what ways can you find strength in the fact that Jesus came and is coming again?
2. There are many times in the Bible where God tells us to ‘Fear Not.’ What do you think that means?



# Day 3

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*“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”-Deuteronomy 31:6*

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There are those two words again: “Be strong.” On Day 2, the words of Isaiah commanded us to be strong and fear not. In this verse in Deuteronomy, we are told to be courageous as well as strong. Easier said than done, right? Well, there is a very specific reason this verse starts with these words.

To set the scene for you, the beginning of Deuteronomy 31 is part of a monologue that Moses is giving to Israel. He explains to God’s people that Joshua would be the one to lead them into the promised land. You would think that an adventure to a place with a name like the “promised land” would be fun. However, the journey there would be difficult. Moses does not leave them hopeless though. The focus of this chapter of the Bible is not on the hardship ahead, but on the power of God. There is a beautiful declaration that God will make a way for His people.

While you are not staring down a daunting journey into the promised land, surely you can relate to being fearful of what others might do, say, or think. A difficult life situation or just the everyday worries you face might make it difficult to trust God. God repeatedly proves His faithfulness in Scripture. His character is consistent with faithfulness. Just like the Israelites, you do not have to fear what others might do against you. Strength and courage come from knowing that God is with you, no matter what you face!

## QUESTIONS

1. In what ways have you been relying on your own strength instead of trusting the strength that comes from God?
2. How has God been faithful to you in the past?
3. In what ways does His past faithfulness encourage you as you think about the future?



# Day 4

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*“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”-Isaiah 41:10*

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Take a moment to think about the big things that cause you to feel stress right now. Your list might be long, or it may have only a few things. When Isaiah uses the word “dismayed” here, he’s getting at the idea of stress multiplied by 1,000, or “Ultra-stress”. To be dismayed means to be unsettled, overwhelmed, or disheartened. In the face of difficult situations, it is understandable that the Israelites might have felt dismayed. Especially given that they often strayed from God and searched for strength in things of the world.

Even still, God promised that His presence is enough to drive out fear. What is ultimately encouraging about Isaiah 41:10 is that God upholds by His righteous right hand. Biblically, the right hand of God signifies a great amount of strength and ability. God is all-powerful, and that is seen in detail throughout His faithfulness to His people.

The right hand of a king was also seen as a place of honor. Jesus sits on the right side of the throne of God, just as God upholds His people with His right hand. God delights in His people and is always in control, two facts that should bring you great joy. No matter what you walk through, God is the only one that can truly sustain you. Your struggles and stressors might be numerous, but your God is more powerful than anything on your list that threatens to undermine Him. You can rest in the truth that God is with you and can strengthen you beyond what seems possible.

## QUESTIONS

1. Think about what is overwhelming you the most right now. How does knowing that God upholds you by His strength reframe how you think about the overwhelming aspects of your life?
2. Is it hard for you to trust that God will strengthen you? Why or why not?
3. What is something practical that you can do to keep the power of God, instead of the struggles of life, in the forefront of your mind?





# Day 5

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*“So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”-Hebrews 13:6*

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Imagine for a moment that you have everything you have ever wanted. How would your life look? What about the nature of your spiritual life? If we look back just one verse to Hebrews 13:5, the writer warns against the love of money and the worship of “stuff.” The writer of Hebrews is speaking less about having things, and more about the state of our hearts in relation to those things. We should be good stewards of what we have – whether that is little or much - while not allowing those things to be enthroned on our hearts above Jesus.

You might be wondering what the love of money has to do with fear. It seems like verses 5 and 6 don’t fully connect. How can the writer jump immediately from the love of money to not being afraid? Glad you asked!

While on the surface it may seem as though these verses don’t fit, there is an interesting connection. Our ultimate contentment should come from Jesus, not our material possessions. Take a moment to think about what it would look like to lose everything you have. Scary, right? All of us would be afraid in that moment. While it’s easy to have comfort and security in what we own, true security comes from a God who holds everything together. If you were to lose everything tomorrow, the one thing you will not lose is a God who will never leave you or forsake you. He is the helper who is the ultimate source of comfort. Fear can be tricky and can manifest itself in many ways. But for the hope of Christ, you can face anything and say, “My God is my helper. I will not fear.”

## QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe your relationship with fear?
2. What is one area of your life that is gripped by fear right now? What is a practical step you can take today to submit that fear to God?



# Day 6

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*“And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” -Luke 2:10*

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Nope, this isn't déjà vu! We are circling back to Luke 2:10. It's time to move on to our next element of the angel's message: Behold (which means to view as special, and worthy of great praise).

There are many things that we learn to 'behold' as we grow up. When we watch movies or TV shows, there is always one character (often the main character) that is presented as inspiring and noteworthy. If you play a sport or a certain instrument, there is probably someone you look up to because they have mastered it. We are even taught to behold people who have done a great deal of good for the community, and we give out awards like the Nobel Peace Prize to try and recognize someone who has stood apart.

Still, with all of this practice beholding, we often struggle to truly behold God. In the conversation between the angel and the shepherds in the verse above, the angel prefaced the news of Christ with the word "behold." The birth of Jesus is noteworthy, world-changing, and incredible. The angel isn't just saying "check it out, there's something kind of interesting happening," instead, the shepherds are being called to worship. The angel's news is life-changing for the shepherds, and also for us!

Over the next few days, you are going to be looking at why Jesus is worthy to behold and how we, just like the shepherds and wise men, can behold Him in our everyday life, not just during the Christmas season.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is something or someone that you behold? How do you show your admiration?
2. Why do you think that the angel called the shepherds to 'behold' rather than 'listen up' or 'look here'?



# Day 7

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*“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*  
-Acts 4:12

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The birth of Jesus is a familiar Christmas story to so many people. In America, you don't have to be raised in a Christian home to know the basics of who Jesus is. He was born in Bethlehem, there was no room at the inn, there were shepherds and angels...you get the picture. The Christmas story is in plays and referenced endlessly in television programs and Christmas-themed movies.

You would think that would be a good thing. People know about Jesus. Awesome! But I think sometimes when something becomes too familiar, we take it for granted. Think about what your favorite Christmas gift has been each year for the last 10 years. Do you even remember? I'm sure you were super excited when you first opened it, but then as time went on the excitement faded. Some of those gifts may have already been donated or thrown away.

Jesus is so much more than an ordinary gift. He is the gift that keeps on giving. Have you thought about how amazing it is that a baby who was born over 2,000 years ago is still well known today?

Why do so many people around the world still celebrate the birth of Jesus? For one very big reason: He is God...with a capital G. We behold Christ because He is God. And this same baby that the shepherds beheld in the manger would grow up to be the God who defeats the grave. That's right- Jesus died, returned to life, and is still alive today!

## QUESTIONS

1. When you think of Luke 2 (the story of Jesus' birth), do you think of it more as historical facts, or as a nice story? How does this impact your faith?
2. As of today, what do you believe about Jesus? Is He worth Beholding? Why or why not?



# Day 8

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*“Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all.”-1 Chronicles 29:11*

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Okay, so we need a little context to fully appreciate the meaning of this verse. King David was approaching the end of his life. Up to this point, Israel had been worshipping God in a special tent called the Tabernacle. David, more than anything, wanted to build a house for God. So he donated a ton of resources from the treasury and also a boatload of his personal funds. And what’s crazy is that God had already told David that his son, Solomon, would build it instead of him. Yet he still financed it. Why?

From the time he was a young teen until the end of his life, David got to behold God doing remarkable things over and over again. He realized that no person or thing in the world compared to the God of the Universe. That’s why he declares God’s ownership of all things in verse 11. In Hebrew (the language of the Jewish people) to ‘behold’ means to observe. David believed because of what he saw and then he followed through by acting on what he believed.

Jesus, the One who’s birth we celebrate at Christmas, is also God. Everything David said in this verse about God the Father is true of Jesus (God the Son)!

So how do we behold Him today? By reading the history of His life in the first four books of the New Testament. By believing He is the Son of God, because He said that’s who He is. By admitting our sin and trusting Him for salvation. And also, by telling others the great news of His arrival on Earth!

## QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think God wants us to see Him for who He is? How is that a blessing to us?
2. What is the one description of God in the verse above that is most comforting to you? Why?



# Day 9

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*“So that at the Name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”-Philippians 2:10-11*

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The verses in Philippians we are looking at today start off with “so that.” Hopefully, you are curious about what comes before, and decide to read all of Philippians 2 later today! In a nutshell, it says that because Jesus was willing to die on the cross for our sins, God has given Him the Name that is above every name, so that...(and that’s where we pick back up.)

These verses are a statement, a fact, a sure thing. What does it mean? Exactly what it says. There is going to be a day when every person who has ever lived will get on their knees and admit that Jesus Christ is Lord. Regardless of what each of us do in this lifetime, there will be a day that we will come face to face with Jesus, and know without a doubt that He is God. For those of us who come to faith before, this will be a joyful occasion where we will unite with our Savior! Imagine standing beside another believer who does not speak the same language as you, or who lived hundreds of years ago.

It can be overwhelming to look so far ahead and try to picture such a large gathering of people all there for one reason. But the Bible tells us that this will happen one day, just as it promised us that Jesus would be born. At Christmas time, we not only celebrate the promises that have already been fulfilled (like the birth of Jesus), but also all of the promises that God will fulfill in the future (like an eternal life with Him). This is one of the many reasons to ‘behold’ the Lord. Not only has He fulfilled many promises to us already, but He has even more spectacular things in store!

## QUESTIONS

1. Is there anything that is competing with Jesus for first place in your life? If so, what’s so great about it?
2. Who can you pray for that is resisting the truth about Jesus?



# Day 10

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*“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me.”-John 14:1*

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By John chapter 14, Jesus isn't a baby anymore. He's an adult, and has been in the spotlight for about three and a half years. The young men He talked to in this passage were called to join Him when He started His ministry. Today, we celebrate Jesus as a baby because we have the Bible and it tells us what happened. Back then, these guys were living the Bible in real-time.

So much had happened since Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem and Jesus was born. At this point, Jesus is reaching the end of His time on Earth. He is about to go to the cross. He's giving final instructions to His disciples. And understandably, they didn't expect that this was the way things were going to go down.

So naturally, they are upset. Jesus is reassuring and comforting them. In this verse, He is telling them that He is God in the flesh. Basically saying, “Don't freak out. You trust God and you can trust Me.” And then He starts to tell them that there is a place for them in His Father's house, and that He must go there to make it ready for them and all of His followers that will one day join Him.

What gives Him the power to do this? Well, the little baby in the manger was also God in the flesh. He humbled Himself to come down here and be with us. He left Heaven for us! And now, in this passage, He's getting ready to humble Himself again and go to the cross.

Humility is important to God. We humble ourselves when we believe; we humble ourselves when we worship. We bow low to lift Him high. We worship the baby and the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world at the same time. Because they are one person. And His Name is Jesus.

## QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think it is important to remember the baby in the manger is the same Jesus who died on the cross?
2. Do you struggle to humble yourself before God? Why or why not?



# Day 11

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*“And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”-Luke 2:10*

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Good news! We are on our third element in Luke 2:10. And what is this section going to be about? The good news of Jesus Christ!

In the Church, we often refer to the Good News of Christ as the Gospel. As Christians, we believe that there is no other news greater than the arrival of Christ on Earth, His forgiveness for our sins, and His promise of eternal life. The shepherds were some of the very first to hear this good news, and they responded accordingly. In Luke 2:15, the shepherds look at one another and agree to go see this swaddled Savior.

Just like the shepherds, God has made something known to us that has indescribable meaning in our lives. Christmas is a time to highlight the beginning of Christ’s work here on Earth, but it is also a time to celebrate the fact that He is not done working! When the shepherds heard the good news, they took action. The Bible tells us that they went quickly to see Mary and Joseph. Once they were there, they told them everything that God had revealed to them about the baby (Luke 2:16-17).

Over the next few days, you will interact with what the Bible proclaims as the Good News. Challenge yourself to react in a way similar to the shepherds. Take action, and share what God reveals to you!

## QUESTIONS

1. Based on what you know right now, describe the Good News (Gospel) in 2-3 sentences.
2. What is a piece of good news that one of your friends told to you recently? Did you share it with anyone else after they told you?
3. Think of the last time you heard someone share the Gospel. Did their facial expressions or tone of voice match the “good” in the Good News?



# Day 12

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*“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).”-Matthew 1:22-23*

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One of the fascinating things about Scripture is that you get to see prophecies spoken in the Old Testament fulfilled later in the Bible. Over 700 years before the coming of Christ, the Lord spoke these words through His prophet, Isaiah. During the entrance of the gospels, we see God bring His promise to fruition!

Jesus’ birth appeared to be one of lowly means. The innocent babe held in the arms of his mother was exactly that—innocent. He was born to a virgin, a miracle only possible by the Holy Spirit’s intervention.

John 1:14 tells us, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...” Jesus embraced full humanity while also maintaining His sinless nature. The word “dwelt” can be understood as “pitching a tent.” Jesus pitched His tent among us to be with us. One of the most delightful things about our Savior is that He never despised His mission. He didn’t regret leaving heaven to come to earth. In fact, He enjoyed the company of His disciples. His heart was tenderly moved by the crowds. He stood up for the oppressed.

In the end, He was despised and rejected so that we wouldn’t have to be by the Father one day. Without the incarnation (Jesus’ coming), we don’t have the crucifixion and resurrection!

## QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Jesus had to come instead of God snapping His fingers and wiping away our debt?
2. How do you feel knowing that Jesus walked in your shoes and can sympathize with all the hard things in life?
3. If Jesus showed up for you in your worst state, what should that mean for how you treat others?





# Day 13

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*“Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” -Isaiah 40:9*

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Can you recall a time when you lifted your voice in a gleeful shout or cheer? Perhaps your team pulled out the victory in the last second, you got to go to your favorite band’s concert, or your crush said they’d go on a date with you?

All of those things are thrilling, but there is one thing that should cause us to raise our voices in celebration above all else—the good news of Jesus Christ!

All the way back in Genesis 15, God made a covenant with Abraham that He would bless his family lineage and make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. Preserving the family line was a huge deal during this time and Abraham was already old and childless. Abraham was about to embark on a journey that would change the course of history!

Out of Abraham’s line, the nation of Israel was formed. God chose Israel as His own nation. God blessed Israel and allowed them to flourish. He prohibited them from serving other gods and invited them into a relationship with Him.

Israel became a beacon of light and hope to the surrounding nations, even though they certainly weren’t perfect. In God’s providence, He promised the Messiah to come from Israel. That’s why Isaiah can proclaim with joy to “lift up your voice with strength.”

In a world that conjures fear and despair, the Messiah brings perfect peace and hope. Now that is something we can get rowdy about!

## QUESTIONS

1. What was the last thing you got really excited about?
2. When is the last time you were joyful about the things of God? If it’s been a while, spend this time going to the Lord in prayer, and asking for passionate joy for Him.



# Day 14

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*“In Him was life, and life was the light of men.”-John 1:4*

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The Trinity is one of those words that never appear in the Bible but is mentioned by implication throughout the Bible! The Trinity is the theological term to describe God (one God!) in three different persons: Father, Son, and Spirit.

One of the mind-blowing truths in Scripture is that we find out that God exists before time. In fact, He created it! Before time, there was just the Trinity and their beloved fellowship with one another. They have a perfect relationship with each other and need nothing. However, out of this overflowing love, God decided to create the world and bestow His image upon man.

Before sin, Adam and Eve had a perfect relationship with God. They were unashamed in the garden walking with God. They experienced the pure, unending goodness of God. However, perfection was abandoned when the pesky serpent lied to them and they chose to rebel against their Creator. Even in this mutiny, God decided not to give up on humanity. Genesis 3:15 is His promise to destroy the Enemy and reconcile us back to Himself (which basically means God took on the responsibility to restore the relationship that humanity damaged). The Old Testament foreshadowed the coming King. The New Testament tells us that He is Jesus.

Jesus' life was so very different than everyone else's. He gets angry and doesn't sin. He loves His enemies. He speaks and teaches about the Kingdom of God where everyone is given immense value. He gives glory to His Father. He accomplishes His Father's purposes on Earth.

Today, His life turns us into actual light. We are transformed by the work of His Spirit in us. If we know Him, He is currently in the process of dusting us off so that our light can shine that much brighter!

## QUESTIONS

1. How has Jesus changed you?
2. In what way do you think the Lord is leading you to shine your light brighter?



# Day 15

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*“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” -Mark 1:14-15*

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The Christmas season can be busy! It often involves some combination of traveling, cooking, shopping, and spending time with family. For Christians, the main thing to focus on during Christmas is Jesus’ coming. However, if all Jesus did was “come” then it really wouldn’t be all that special. Jesus could have come, done an inspection of humanity, and said, “This stinks. I’m out.” Kind of like a food inspector that grades a restaurant’s health and safety conditions. And that would have been unfortunate for us! Instead, Jesus threw on an apron, grabbed a spatula, and got into the kitchen.

After Jesus’ baptism and the coronation of His ministry, He gets to work. He goes to Galilee, where He grew up, and preaches the Word of God to them.

During Jesus’ three-year ministry, He taught about humanity’s need to turn from our own desires and to find faith in the Son. Many Jewish people were expecting a Savior that was a little more worldly. The Savior they were looking for was more like a triumphant king who devoted himself to defeating their Roman oppressors in battle. Jesus doesn’t fit the mold because his attention is devoted to another Kingdom. He associated with sinners and healed on the Sabbath which infuriated His opponents.

Ultimately, this King died for His people in the world’s greatest act of sacrificial love. The good news is made that much sweeter by the fact that He didn’t just come and watch. He lived the life we couldn’t and died the death we deserved.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is one of your favorite stories about Jesus, and what qualities does it highlight about Him?
2. What is an act of sacrificial love you’ve performed? It could be for a family member, a friend, or even someone you didn’t even know.



# Day 16

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*“And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”-Luke 2:10*

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It's back! Luke 2:10 is going to get us set off on another adventure through the Bible, and this time, we are going to be looking at Great Joy.

For the last few days, we have been talking about the Good News of Jesus Christ. Usually, when the Church talks about the Gospel, it focuses on what Jesus has delivered us from (a.k.a., death). But believe it or not, there is so much more that comes from the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. There are things that God has given us to enjoy right now.

You may think of joy as something that you feel when you listen to your favorite song or hang out with your favorite people. But when your joy comes from the Lord, it is more than a fleeting feeling of happiness. It is a way of life that overtakes even the darkest of days.

The next few devotionals are going to give a glimpse of what great joy in the Lord looks like. Christmas is a special time to celebrate the arrival of Christ. Some people will have manger scenes in their homes or front yards. And it is really wonderful to look at the birth of Christ as a joyous occasion. But God has brought about a greater joy than this. Joy in the Lord means looking at life as more than just the “here and now.” As you read on about finding joy in God and what that looks like, you will hopefully have even more joy this Christmas season. And not just plain old everyday joy, but GREAT joy!

## QUESTIONS

1. How can you share joy with others?
2. In a few words, describe what Great Joy looks like in another person.



# Day 17

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*“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.”-Matthew 2:10-11*

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As you step outside on a clear night and look into the sky, what do you see? For some of you, there are so many stars that you cannot count them! Now imagine for a minute that you are one of the wise men or magi, who has spent their whole lives learning how to read the stars in the sky for signs about big events. As a “magoi” (the Greek word used to describe these wise men in the Bible) you might have been really confused and excited the night that you saw a star telling you the King of Kings had been born! After talking to your fellow wise men, you agree that this star means something really big, and your group decides to follow it. You are standing face-to-face with the Messiah. This is exactly what the wise men did.

The wise men looked, saw, and followed. It is through their following of the star that they were filled with the greatest joy of all. This joy caused them to worship Jesus as He sat in His mother’s arms. The wise men worshipped Jesus not only because of His birth, but also for the reason He was born. Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Savior of the world. He is the only path to a right relationship with God.

The wise men understood this truth and were willing to travel the great distance to worship Jesus. This incredible truth brought GREAT JOY to the wise men. And this truth can bring you great joy as well!

## QUESTIONS

1. How would you feel standing face-to-face with Jesus?
2. When you think about eternal life, do you have great joy? Why or why not?



# Day 18

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*“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” -1 Peter 1:8-9*

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Let's think about some things in the world that we can't see, but know are there:

- **GRAVITY**...we can't see gravity, but we know it is here because we are not floating around the earth.
- **OXYGEN**...we can't see oxygen, but we know we use it every minute because we are breathing.
- **WIND**...we can't see the wind, but we feel it as we watch the trees sway or feel our hair move.

1 Peter tells us that our joy is like these things...even though we can't see Christ, we know He is there. Even when we can't feel Christ, we know He is with us. The truth of His presence can bring GREAT JOY to our life. 1 Peter 1:6-7 discusses trials that believers are going through but verses 8-9 tell us the result of those trials is joy and the salvation of their souls. God's desire is for us to have joy whether we are in the midst of a trial or celebrating a victory. This type of joy can only come when you are in a relationship with Jesus Christ. Apart from Christ, you cannot have the joy that the Bible talks about.

During this advent season think about your relationship with Christ. For some of you, your relationship with Christ is growing, for others, it might be stagnant, or perhaps non-existent. Jesus wants us to be in a growing relationship with Him. Think about your relationship with Christ as you answer the questions below:

## QUESTIONS

1. How can you have great joy in Christ even though you can't see Him?
2. As you look around the world, what has God created that brings you joy?



# Day 19

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*“More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”-Romans 5:11*

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Have you ever had a fight with your best friend or someone on your sports team? Do you remember what it was about? A lot of times we have arguments and disagreements with our friends and family, and it feels like the end of the world. And then a few weeks later, we can barely remember what the fight was about.

Every person born on planet Earth has a broken relationship with God. We have all sinned (except for Jesus of course)! And sin causes a separation from God. But praise God that He sent Jesus, to make a way for us to be in a right relationship with Him. Reconciliation began with Jesus being born without sin to a virgin mother. He then lived a perfect life that would allow Him to die a criminal's death, and then rise on the third day so that you and I could spend eternity with God.

This gift of reconciliation should stir something in our hearts. It should cause us to have GREAT JOY because of the work that Christ has done. If you think about it...there isn't much we have to do to spend eternity with Christ. He did the hard part...a perfect life, death, resurrection. Our job is to repent (or to turn from the things that cause sin in our life) and obey. And God was even gracious enough to leave us His Word, the Bible, so we would know exactly how to live. We don't even have to guess at when and how to obey...thank goodness!

## QUESTIONS

1. How do you know if you have been reconciled in your relationship with Christ?
2. Imagine you are having a conversation with a friend, and Christ comes up. You have an opportunity to explain reconciliation. What do you say to them?



# Day 20

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*“These I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, ‘I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.’ -Isaiah 56:7-8*

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Think about the group of friends that you spend the most time with. Whose house do you like going to the most? Why do you like going there? Maybe your house is the cool house to hang out at! You might be the one in your friend group that has a pool, or even a pool table.

Now let’s think about the house that Isaiah is talking about in chapter 56. Israel was God’s chosen people, and only they were allowed to gather in the house of prayer (the temple). But Isaiah tells us of a day when all peoples would be allowed to gather at the house of prayer... including you!

You see, unless you are of Jewish decent, you are considered a Gentile. Gentiles could become a part of the Jewish community, but they were not allowed to have ‘insider access’ to the temple and all of the benefits. But all of this changed on the night that Jesus was born. Jesus would make a way for all people from all nations to gather at the house of prayer.

Jesus would not only allow all people to gather at the house of prayer, but through His birth, death, and resurrection, He would leave the Holy Spirit on earth to help guide us. Once you become a believer (follower of Christ) you actually become a house of prayer yourself. That might sound strange, but as a believer, your body is a temple where the Spirit of God dwells. Can you believe it? The Holy Spirit is with you all the time! This invitation for all peoples to gather with God through Jesus brings GREAT JOY to the hearts of those that love Him.

## QUESTIONS

1. What are some ways that you can honor the fact that your body is a temple to the Holy Spirit?
2. We have looked at the Great Joy that comes from knowing God is always with us. What are some ways that you can celebrate “Immanuel” (that means God With Us) all year round?





# Day 21

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*“And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”-Luke 2:10*

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We are in the home stretch. This is the fifth and final time that you are going to look at our theme verse, Luke 2:10.

This last section of the devotional is going to address one of the most shocking elements of the Gospel. When the Messiah (Jesus) came to Earth as a helpless baby, He was born to a certain people group that God set aside for Himself (the Israelites). However, through Jesus, the WHOLE world would have an opportunity to know God.

In Luke 2:10, the angels preface the announcement of Jesus’ birth with the different elements we have talked about in this devotional. Fear not, Behold, Good News, Great Joy, and For All the People. This final inclusion is the first of many hints in the book of Luke that Jesus was not here for only one certain group of people, but for ALL PEOPLE! This is even displayed in the people that God chose to receive the angel’s message.

Shepherds were in a very humble position during this time. Some people who have studied the culture of this period believe that shepherds were even considered outcasts. And yet, these people who had few connections and even less money, were the very people that God revealed Himself to in the earliest days of His earthly ministry.

The angel did not appear to the ‘righteous’ Pharisees or rich Jewish leaders. Instead, God began His plan to share His love and grace with all people by appearing to the humble and lowly. Not the famous and haughty. The Gospel is meant to be accessible to all people, not guarded by a selected few. As you get closer to Christmas, keep this in mind when you are sharing meals with your family or gifts with your friends. The Gospel can impact every single person in your life!

## QUESTIONS

1. Think of all the different people groups in the world today. What are some ways that the Church can share Jesus with them?
2. When you think about the Gospel being Good News for ALL, does that feel wrong or unfair? Why or Why Not?



# Day 22

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*“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”-Romans 6:23*

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Gifts and presents are wonderfully exciting – especially when they are just what we are hoping to receive. Think of the biggest gift you’ve ever gotten. What if you were told there was an even bigger gift waiting for you? We are talking about Jesus’ sacrifice for us on the cross, which is the biggest gift ever, and a huge deal! Because of Jesus’ sacrifice for us on the cross, we are offered the free gift of eternal life with God. This is a gift we desperately need. We might not even realize our desperation for this gift until we hear things like “the wages of sin is death.”

When Adam and Eve first sinned against God (or dishonored Him), their consequence was removal from His presence and ultimately, a life that ends in death. Every generation since has experienced this curse. We are born into a sinful world, and we each choose our own ways to dishonor God. Without the coming of a sinless Savior, humankind would be stuck in a never ending pattern of sin and death. This is why the arrival of Jesus is so important. It is His life, ministry, death, and resurrection that have made a way for us to be free from this cycle. And the way to accept this gift? By having faith in Jesus Christ!

As you continue to prepare your heart to celebrate Christmas, reflect on the biggest gift given to the world: Jesus. Think about how long people waited for this gift, and the significance of this gift for you and for all people. Take some time to thank God for giving us such a wonderful gift: His Son paying our debts.

## QUESTIONS

1. How can you thank God today for loving you and all people everywhere so much that He would send His Son to give us the biggest gift ever?
2. How can you share your excitement about Jesus’ gift of salvation with someone else this Christmas season?



# Day 23

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*“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”-Galatians 3:28*

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Imagine you are invited to go to a concert by your favorite band or singer; how thrilling would that be?! Now imagine this includes two all-access backstage passes for you and a friend; how much more thrilling is that? Those passes make you a V.I.P. and give you special access to be in certain areas and around certain people, including the band themselves. We are talking about access not everyone gets!

For hundreds of years, God’s people were the Israelites only. It wasn’t until Jesus came along that everyone, no matter their background, was given access to become one of God’s children. This is a REALLY BIG DEAL. Jesus came down to earth as a baby and then grew up to serve God and die for our sins on the cross. As a result, everyone has the chance to get a V.I.P. all-access pass to join God’s kingdom and be a part of His people.

There is no discrimination at the foot of the cross. Everyone is welcome. It’s so easy for people to discriminate against each other for a wide variety of reasons, from gender to culture to not liking someone because of the way they act or vote or dress. If you’ve been discriminated against for any reason, know that the God of the Universe welcomes you with open arms. If you’ve fallen into the trap of discriminating against someone else for any reason (if we are all honest, we have probably done this at least once), remember God loves everyone and wants ALL PEOPLE to receive His free gift of salvation and to live life following His example.

## QUESTIONS

1. Why is it such a big deal that Jesus died to give everyone an opportunity to accept salvation?
2. Do you need to repent from discriminating against others? Ask God for forgiveness and pray for God to empower you to show His love to all people (even those whom it’s harder for you to get along with).



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*“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”-Ephesians 3:6*

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Do you like mysteries? Have you ever enjoyed the revealing of a good mystery in a book or movie? A good mystery is often something you don't expect or see coming. Since the beginning of time, God knew He would reveal a great mystery that many would not see coming.

Yesterday we talked about how in Old Testament times, only the Israelites were a part of God's people. As a part of God's people, they were given a special inheritance from God. An inheritance is usually passed down from parent to child. So to receive an inheritance, usually you have to be family. Gentiles, or those not born Jewish, were on the outside looking in. With such a huge social divide between the Gentiles and the Jews, who would've seen the surprising twist of Jesus, a Jewish person, dying to offer salvation to the Gentiles? But because God's great love for ALL PEOPLE, He sent His beloved only Son, Jesus, to do just that! Sinless Jesus took all of your sin (past, present, and future) on Himself and paid the debt of that sin for you by taking your place on the cross.

Now people of every tribe and every nation on the planet have access to salvation and to becoming a part of God's people. All because of Jesus. This is GREAT news! This is worth the BEST celebration ever!

As you go about your Christmas Eve, dance for joy because Jesus opened the door to the best life ever for us. Let's get excited about the great mystery of God loving us. Let's celebrate the true meaning of Christmas!

## QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to you that you (if you are a believer) are an heir of God?
2. What does it say about Jesus that He would die for the Gentiles, even when they put His people through so much suffering?
3. What does it mean for you that Jesus would die for you, even before you believed or followed Him?



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*“All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.” -Psalm 86:9*

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Jesus came to offer the free gift of salvation to everyone everywhere. Best Christmas present ever! People of all nations are invited to believe in Jesus, receive salvation as their inheritance, and celebrate Him!

Psalm 86:9 encourages us to worship and glorify God. You may not hear the words “worship” and “glorify” much outside of the Bible or talking with believers. So you may be wondering what they mean. Often, we associate these things with singing praise songs or reading Scripture together. But there are more ways than that to worship and glorify God! To glorify is to bestow honor, praise, or admiration. That means that anything we do to give God honor, praise, respect, or devotion will glorify Him. We can sing praise and worship songs, share His love with others with simple acts of kindness, or tell someone about the Gospel and His love. It’s exciting to think of how many different ways we can worship and glorify God.

Christmas may still seem fresh and exciting to you each year or you may have grown tired of celebrating Christmas and certain traditions year after year. Wherever you are, remember the real reason we celebrate Christmas: to worship God and give thanks for Jesus coming to bring us peace, hope, and life. Let this freshen your outlook on Christmas this season!

When we take time to actively choose to worship God and glorify Him, we are not only living out God’s Word, but we are also engaging with one of our life’s biggest purposes. We were created to worship God, glorify Him, and celebrate Him. How cool is that? When we celebrate Christmas, we are actively engaging in part of God’s deep purpose on the earth. God’s Word not only encourages us to praise Him but to also spread the good news of Jesus so that people from all nations can come to know and glorify Him.

## QUESTIONS

1. What are the different ways people worship God and glorify His name throughout the Christmas season?
2. Are there any new traditions you or your family or friends could add to your holidays that worship God and glorify His name? Feel free to be creative and try doing something new that spreads joy in Jesus’ name this year.





# MERRY CHRISTMAS & A SPECIAL THANK YOU

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TO THOSE WHO HAD A HAND IN CREATING THIS DEVOTIONAL

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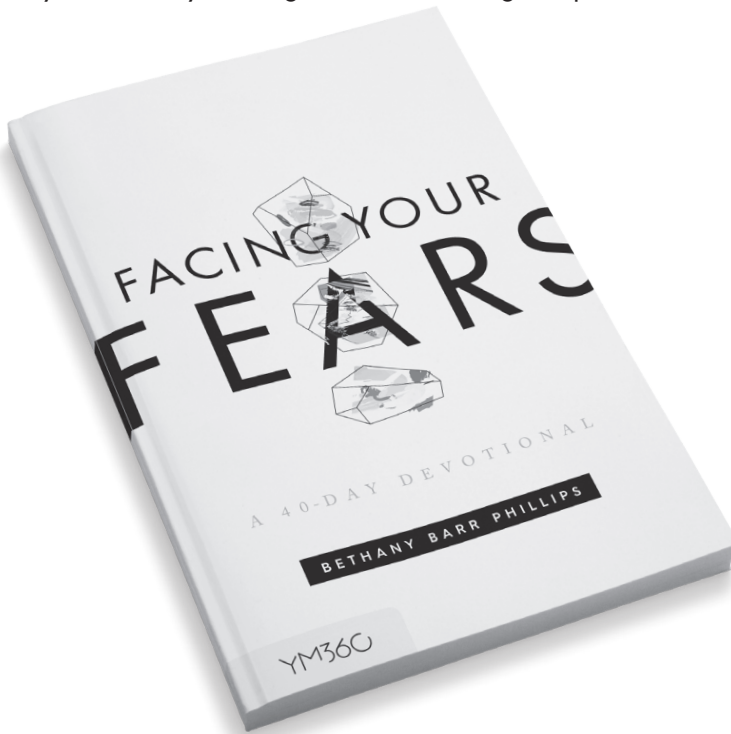
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