The Characters of Christmas

Advent 22

BUCK RUN BAPTIST CHURCH

The Characters Of Christmas

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A Buck Run Advent Devotional

The Christmas stories of the Bible introduce us to a wide variety of characters whose lives teach us about God's plan of salvation. Join us this Advent season as we peer into the lives of the Characters of Christmas. These people's roles in the story and their responses to the Savior help us reflect on God's plan for redemption through Jesus.

This resource contains three devotions for each week leading up to Christmas, each focusing on a different Character of Christmas. We encourage you and your family to read these reflections together and to consider the significance of each character by talking through the Family Reflection Questions provided.

Week 1

Mary | **Heather Wilkes**

Herod | **Dr. Hershael York**

Wise Men | **Will Morris**

Week 2

Joseph | **Dave Brown**

Zechariah | **Hannah Parrish**

Simeon | **Dr. Wesley Noss**

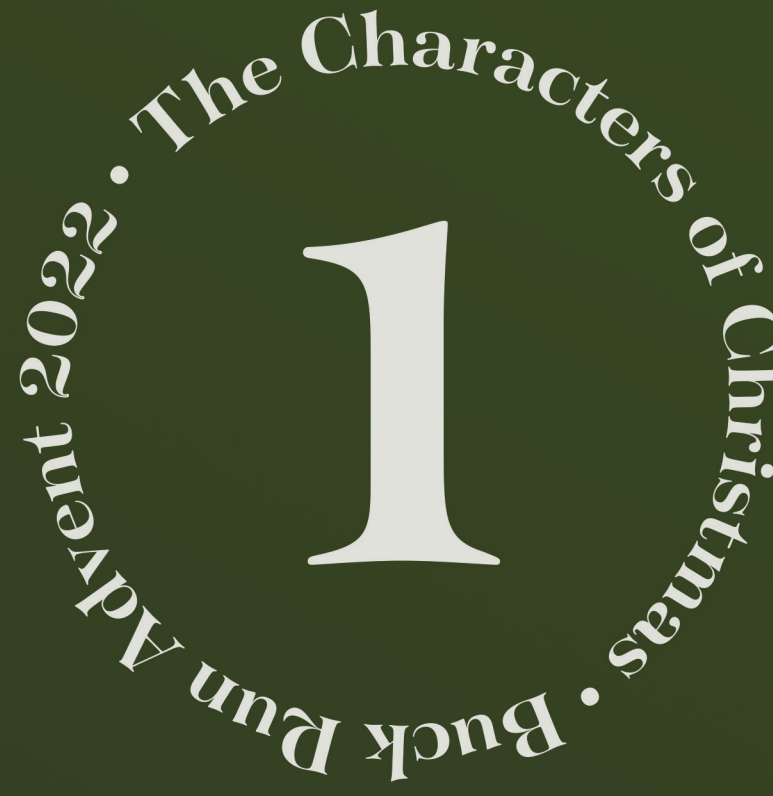
Week 3

Shepherds | **Ben Pinkston**

Anna | **Nancy Farley**

Jesus | **Dr. Chris Parrish**

Week One



Mary

Heather Wilkes

Read: *Luke 1:26-38, 46-55*

We first meet Mary as an angel of the Lord announces that she is to give birth to a son in a manner that will come at a great cost to her. This will risk her reputation, as well as that of her fiancé, and her life is to take an unexpected turn.

Mary closes the conversation with the angel by answering, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38)

Mary was not privy to the details of what the Lord's full plan would entail. She was, however, deeply familiar with the history of her people, God's people, and how the Lord had shown unending faithfulness throughout the course of history. Mary's humble response was one marked by trust in the Lord and submission to His good plans.

As we read Mary's song of praise, her Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), we see how saturated Mary's life was in God's Word as she references many accounts of God's faithfulness to His people. She could not fully comprehend God's plan, but her biblical view of His character gave her a basis to trust Him even in this season.

This Advent season, may we commit to knowing and loving the Lord by saturating our lives in His Word so that the overflow of our hearts may be responses of praise and obedience in every season.

Family Discussion Questions

- How does faith in God's plan help us in difficult times?
- How does knowing God's word give us strength to obey Him?
- What part is God calling you to play in His plan to display His glory to the nations?

Herod

Dr. Hershael York

Read: *Matthew 2:1-18*

He was one of the greatest warriors in the world, but he could not conquer his own fears. He was appointed to rule as King, but he could not govern his own heart. He made men tremble, but he could not make his nation love him. One of the most accomplished architects and builders the world has ever known, the legacy he left remembers him far more for what he destroyed. An Idumean by birth who converted to Judaism, he nonetheless became a maniacal despot who disregarded God's law, killing his wife, his sons, and his closest advisors for fear they would usurp his throne, prompting Augustus Caesar to say of him, "I would rather be Herod's pig than his son." Increasingly suspicious of anyone that might have a greater claim to the kingdom and threaten his rule, he descended into ever deeper psychoses and paranoia, often putting thousands to death for little reason. When the Magi from the East traversed the great Arabian desert and arrived in Jerusalem, making their way to Herod's palace, they could not have imagined that the question they posed to Herod struck the greatest fear into his heart. "Where is he who is born King of the Jews?"

Family Discussion Questions

• How can our personal ambitions threaten how we view God's plan?

• How does the Kingship of Jesus threaten the ambitions of the world?

• What can we do to submit our lives to the Kingship of Jesus?

Magi
Will Morris

Read: *Matthew 2:1-12*

When news of Jesus' birth breaks in Matthew 2, there are plenty of characters we might expect to come and worship the promised Messiah, the prophesied King. The illegitimate king Herod could have laid down his crown. The religious leaders of Jerusalem could have welcomed the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets that they studied so carefully. The Jewish people could have bowed to the Son of David, that long-awaited Messiah.

But in Matthew 2, none of these offer the Christ anything but hostility. Jesus came to the people who should have known Him, but all they saw was a threat.

Joy-filled worship comes from an unexpected source in Matthew 2. Magi from the east ride into the picture with gifts for the king of the Jews. These pagan gentiles who live far from the city of David receive the Messiah. Here at the beginning of Jesus' earthly life, the nations come to bow down in worship.

The Magi are an early hint at God's heart to gather people from all over the world to be called His own. At the end of Matthew's gospel account Jesus sends his followers out to make disciples of all nations. The worship of King Jesus has been spreading to the ends of the earth ever since. This is how the gospel came to us and now we must go ourselves to spread the word of Jesus.

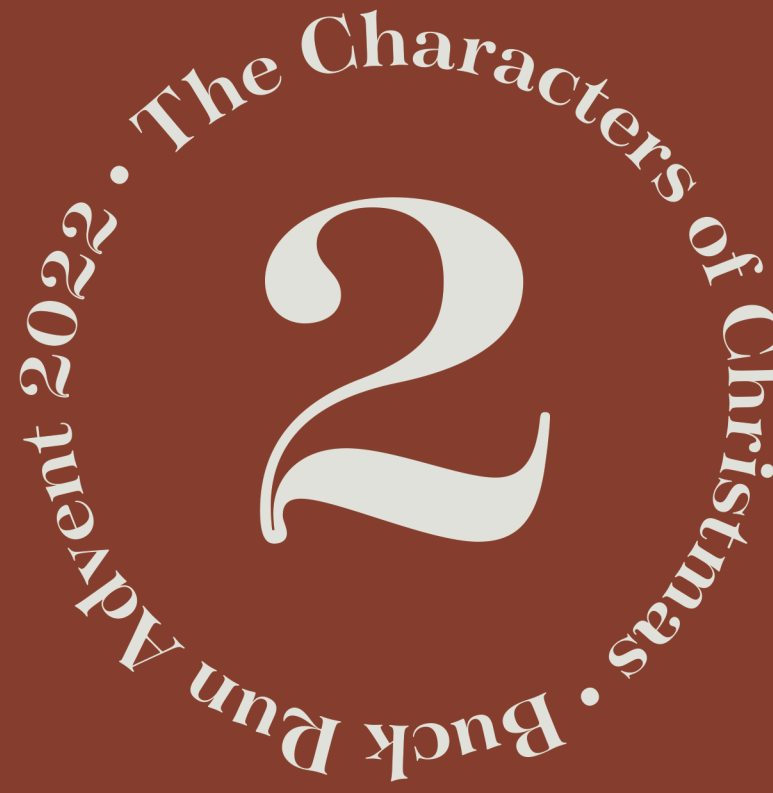
Family Discussion Questions

• What part is God calling you and your family to play in advancing the good news of Jesus to the nations?

• What does it teach us about God that He wants the good news to be preached to people all over the world?

• How should we be challenged by the fact that the people who should have known the Messiah rejected Him when He came?

Week Two



Joseph

Dave Brown

Read: *Matthew 1:1-25*

Obedience to God is often difficult and costly. It is always right and rewarding.

Who are some biblical examples of obedience? What did it cost them to obey? How were they rewarded? Matthew 1:24 describes Joseph's obedience with the kind of simple yet profound statement that would make a good epitaph: "He did as the angel of the Lord commanded him." This is a watershed moment for Joseph, but the scripture does not indicate a prolonged internal deliberation or weighing of possible pros and cons. Joseph awakes and obeys completely, becoming the adoptive earthly father to our Lord Jesus Christ.

The reward for Joseph's obedience is the presence of God made flesh. Matthew 1 traces the line of David from Abraham through Joseph to Jesus. The conclusion of this beautifully weighty genealogy is not a biological father and son. God illustrates the completeness of adoption through Joseph's obedience, an example we can be thankful for as we consider our own adoption as sons and daughters of the Promise.

In anticipation of Christmas, pray for God to give you a heart to trust him and obey his commands as Joseph did. His reward precedes our action: God with us, effective adoption by his grace alone!

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are." *1 John 3:1*

Family Discussion Questions

- How is God calling you to obedience today?
- What are some other biblical examples of obedience?
- How can we be committed to obedience when the cost seems high.

Zechariah

Hannah Parrish

Read: *Luke 1:5-25, 57-80*

In Zechariah we see a man called out by God. He was a priest of the order of Abijah – a storied and important Hebrew family. He was also called out specifically when the Lord sent the angel Gabriel to deliver a message to him. Even though the scriptures tell us that Zechariah was "righteous before God and walking blamelessly in all commandments and statutes of the Lord," Zechariah was taken aback by the Lord's message and responded in doubt; not what we would expect from a man called righteous by God.

The Lord disciplined Zechariah by causing him to be mute until the birth of John. At first reading, this does not seem to be the story of one we should emulate. However, we see in Luke 1:57-66 that when John was born, Zechariah demonstrated his repentance and trust in the Word of the Lord by obeying what the Lord had called him to do.

This is an encouraging story of how even if we initially respond in disobedience and doubt, God can bring us back to Him in discipline and repentance. We have never out-sinned the grace of God.

We celebrate this Christmas season the coming of the ONE who makes it possible for stumblers and mistake-makers like Zechariah and us to be brought back to Him. May we be encouraged by Zechariah's example and emboldened to walk in repentance and faith in the One who calls us.

"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit." *Psalm 32*

Family Discussion Questions

• How should we respond when we recognize that we have sinned against God?

• What does it teach us about God that He offers Zechariah's speech is restored to praise God after John is born?

• How does the story of Zechariah encourage you to fix your eyes on Jesus?

Simeon

Dr. Wesley Noss

Read: *Luke 2:22-35*

Simeon was a devout man, a righteous man, a man seeking after God's consolation. Simeon most clearly understood the full meaning of Christ's birth because his entire life was devoted to God. When he encountered the Christ child, he did what was already natural: he worshiped!

Led by the Spirit, Simeon was in the Temple the day Joseph and Mary went to dedicate their firstborn, God's firstborn, to God. Upon seeing the child, Simeon worshiped, rejoicing and giving God the glory for the great things He had done. He worshiped God because salvation is a grace gift from the Lord. Simeon had lived to see the coming of the Messiah. He had trusted God's prophetic word. He had seen His Savior, and he blessed God.

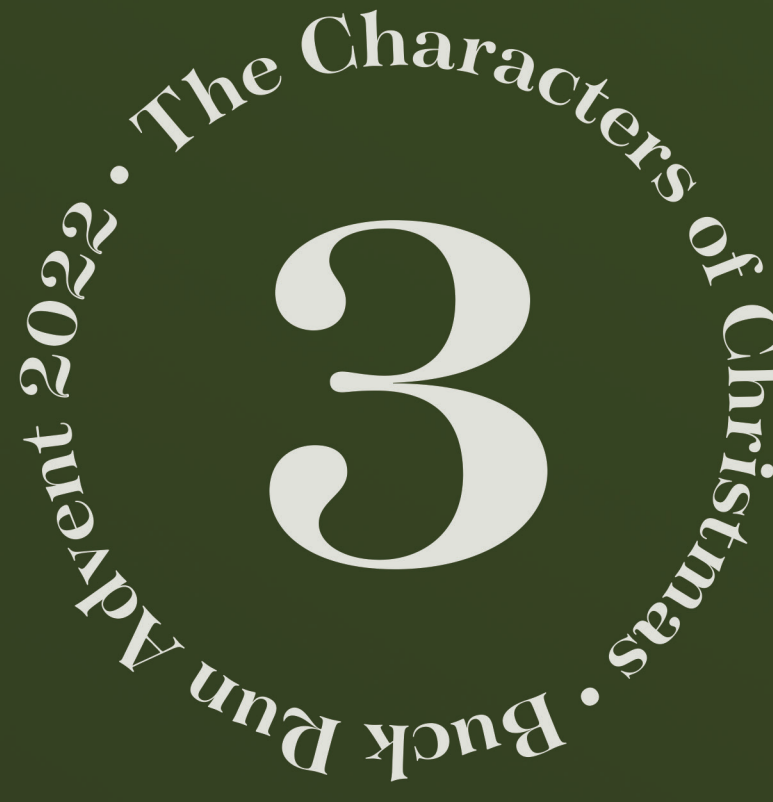
Simeon also praised God because salvation had come for mankind. Simeon warned the new parents of the coming death of their Son. The cross is never far from Christmas. The King of Heaven had come down to earth to bring salvation to broken humanity! God had provided the means of salvation for all who will be saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ made available to all, both Jews and Gentiles that are among God's elect.

Like Simeon, may our worship this Christmas come as naturally from the overflow of our hearts as it did that day in the Temple when Mary and Joseph dedicated Jesus to His Father's great work of redemption.

Family Discussion Questions

- How can you as a family use Christmas to tell people about the cross of Christ?
- How does the coming of Jesus lead us to worship God?
- How do we wait well for the salvation of the Lord like Simeon?

Week Three



Shepherds

Ben Pinkston

Read: *Luke 2:8-20*

The shepherds were preparing for a typical night of tending to their herd in the fields outside of Bethlehem (Luke 2:8). Nothing seemed to be out of the ordinary. They had experienced the sights and sounds of a night at pasture countless times. Groups of sheep bedding down in the grass. The occasional bleat from a young lamb. The night sky full of stars. The sounds of commerce coming from the nearby town. All seemed normal... until the angels appeared!

Suddenly, the hosts of heaven filled the sky, proclaiming the good news of the birth of the Savior and praising God for the work of salvation that he was bringing to pass (Luke 2:9-14). The shepherds went immediately into Bethlehem, finding the newborn Messiah "wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12), just as the angel had said. They couldn't help but worship God and tell of how he had revealed himself to them that night.

The celebrations of Christmas give followers of Jesus a special opportunity to respond to all that we have "heard and seen", just like the shepherds. Rejoice in the message of the gospel and tell of the salvation that you have found in Christ. God has chosen a group of unsuspecting shepherds to serve as examples for us. Imitate them well!

Family Discussion Questions

• How will you and your family glorify and praise God for what you have heard and seen this Christmas?

• What does it teach us about God that He revealed the coming of His Son to Shepherds in a field?

• Who in your life can you tell about the coming of Christ this Christmas?

Anna

Nancy Farley

Read: *Luke 2:36-38*

Have you ever hoped for, prayed for and longed for something for a very long time? Such was the case of a woman named Anna.

This Jewish woman was a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser. She had lived with her husband only seven years before becoming a widow after which she made her home in the temple where she served God with fastings and prayers night and day for eighty four years.

A woman of faith, Anna prayed for the Messiah to come, believing that God would honor her prayers and send this One she longed to see. Her steadfast prayers were answered when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple for dedication.

And on that day Anna came alongside Simeon, "Coming in an instant to give thanks likewise unto the Lord." After this, she spoke of Him to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

As Hannah had prayed for a son to give to God, Anna prayed for God to send a Son to give to the people. The Messiah, the Prince of Peace, has indeed arrived to bring peace and salvation to mankind.

Dear Lord, may we be like Anna. May we tell others that our redemption has been accomplished through Jesus Christ who grew into a man, went to the cross and brought salvation to all who will believe.

Family Discussion Questions

• How does consistent worship and prayer prepare us to see the plan of God working in our lives?

• In what ways can we consistently give thanks to God for His gift of salvation?

• Where is God calling you to speak about the redemption that comes through Jesus?

Jesus

Dr. Chris Parrish

Read: *Matthew 1:23*

In the beginning, God dwelt with man. He walked in the garden in the cool of the day (Gen.3:8). God was present, known, and glorified. And yet, in an instant, sin changed everything. Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden and separated from their God: this holy God could no longer dwell with sinful men.

But God, in His kindness, assured Adam and Eve He would restore the world. He promised that one day the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. One day, God's people would be freed from the power and penalty of sin and be reunited with their God.

In many ways, the Old Testament is the story of a sinful people longing for the presence of a holy God. All of the longing leads us to the angel announcement of the birth of Jesus. In Christ, we have not just another prophet or a priest like all others. In the birth of Jesus, the Lord declares, "I am with my people!"

The glory of Christmas isn't merely that our sins may be forgiven but that God dwells with us again! When we read of Immanuel, God with us, we long for the day in which we will hear the voice from the throne declaring, "Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, they will be His people, and God Himself will be their God." *Rev. 21:3*

Family Discussion Questions

• How does the presence of God with His people through Christ give you hope?

• How can you use these last days of the Christmas season to show God's presence to the world?

• How does our anticipation of the eternal presence of God help us to live faithfully now?

Luke 2:1-20 *(ESV)*

The Birth of Jesus Christ

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all
the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration
when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be
registered, each to his own town. 4 And Joseph also went up
from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of
David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house
and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed,
who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came
for her to give birth. 7 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.

The Shepherds and the Angels

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field,
keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the
Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around
them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 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. 11 For unto you is born this day
in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this
will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling
cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with
the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and
saying,

> *14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth*
> *peace among those with whom he is pleased!"*

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the
shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem
and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has
made known to us." 16 And they went with haste and found
Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when
they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told
them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered
at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all
these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds
returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and
seen, as it had been told them.

The Characters of Christmas

Thank you for making this devotional part of your family worship this Christmas season. We hope that the characters of Christmas have helped you reflect on the coming of our Savior and how we ought to respond to Him.

We would love for you to join us as we celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas morning on Sunday, December 25 at 10:00am.

For more information about Buck Run Baptist Church, visit www.buckrun.org

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